A Multiple Method Longitudinal Study of Gifted Adolescents’ Communication of and about Ostracism and Social Exclusion

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This dissertation titled
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Abstract

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A Multiple Method Longitudinal Study of Gifted Adolescents’ Communication of and about Ostracism and Social Exclusion

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Ostracism is a subtle communicative phenomenon that leaves others feeling ignored, rejected, and left out. Through acts of ostracism, we create the human, alone: the marginalized, stigmatized, and rejected other. Ostracism is a form of social rejection less visible than bullying and harassment, but deeply painful. Ostracism during adolescence can be particularly devastating because of the strong need for group belonging in childhood. Intellectually gifted adolescent might experience additional challenges to peer acceptance due to their advanced intellect and asynchronous development. The current dissertation project takes a social construction perspective to investigate intellectually gifted adolescents’ experiences of ostracism and social exclusion. I invited 45 gifted adolescents, ages 10-18, to keep an electronic journal for at least a month about their experiences as targets, sources, and observers of ostracism.

I used the theoretical frameworks of coordinated management of meaning and problematic integration theory to provide scaffolding for a model of ostracism. In Chapter Three, I discuss the dual privileged and marginalized status of my participants. In Chapter Four, I discuss six social objectives of ostracism: ostracism is used to defer dealing with difference, (re)produces power, punish others for transgressions, define our groups, protect us from harm, and avoid awkward interactions. In chapter Five, I describe ostracism processes. Micro-level processes include passive, active, and
aggressive ostracism acts –utterances at one moment in time that communicate exile. Meso-level processes involve ostracism practices –patterns of interaction resulting in ostracism. These include total ostracism practices where the target of ostracism is completely ignored, partial ostracism with additional rejection (POR) practices where the target sometimes is ignored and sometimes bullied, and partial ostracism with inclusion (POI) practices where the target sometimes is ignored and sometimes included. Macro-level processes include ostracism episodes –habituated ostracism routines. These fall on a continuum from ritualistic ostracism episodes –well-known and rehearsed routines, to enigmatic ostracism episodes –improvised and ambiguous routines. In Chapter Six, I discuss participants’ coping strategies for surviving ostracism, including cognitive and behavioral responses, acceptance and resistance responses, and anti-social and pro-social responses. Additionally, I describe the transformative potential ostracism held for some participants as it helped them to find motivation, gain deeper insights, recognize alternate possibilities, find radical freedom, and accept themselves. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I discuss the study’s impact on participants and implications of findings.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my participants. Thank you for sharing a moment of your life with me.
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I have never truly achieved anything alone; my successes come from the mentorship, support, and guidance of others. Isaac Newton said, “If I have seen further than others, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” I have been blessed to stand on some inspirational and sturdy shoulders throughout my life. I would like to thank several individuals who have always supported me, and left eternal footprints in my heart.

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Chapter 1: Broken Heartstrings and Isolated Intellectuals

I’m not the only kid who grew up this way, surrounded by people who used to say that rhyme about sticks and stones, as if broken bones hurt more than the names we got called, and we got called them all. So we grew up believing no one would ever fall in love with us, that we’d be lonely forever, that we’d never meet someone to make us feel like the sun was something they built for us in their toolshed. So broken heartstrings bled the blues, and we tried to empty ourselves so we’d feel nothing. Don’t tell me that hurt less than a broken bone, that an ingrown life is something surgeons can cut away, that there’s no way for it to metastasize; it does.

-Shane Koyczan, 2013

Humanity’s dual nature affords us the amazing potential for magnanimous acts of compassion and the dark possibility for equally malevolent acts of cruelty. Adolescent peer groups, in particular, manifest cruelty through social rejection and exclusion (Sunwolf, 2008). Through acts of ostracism, we create the human, alone: the marginalized, stigmatized, ostracized other. Few events in life are more painful than feeling invisible to those from whom we seek acceptance. During adolescence, peer acceptance is especially salient (Rawlins, 1992; Sunwolf, 2008; Zettergren, 2005), and childhood peer victimization is a devastating social phenomenon (Rosen, Milich & Harris, 2009). Intellectually gifted adolescents are particularly sensitive to the nuances of ostracism and exclusion (Chan, 2005; Edmunds & Edmunds, 2005), and might experience additional challenges to peer acceptance (Cassady & Cross, 2006; Gross, 1989; Swaitek, 1995; Swaitek & Cross, 2007; Swaitek & Dorr, 1998; Vanderbrook, 2006; Wellisch & Brown, 2012). Some gifted adolescents feel ostracized from meaningful social participation daily, and the lonely genius is a common cultural trope.

Scholars particularly attend to visible forms of social rejection. However, invisible social rejection is also damaging. Ostracism is a communicative phenomenon often less visible than bullying and harassment; perhaps because of its relative subtlety,
scholars have studied ostracism less than more visible forms of social rejection. Analyses of abusive social rejection that treat emotional abuse, mistreatment, victimization, bullying, and mobbing, as synonymous (e.g., Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie, & Namie, 2009) obscure the subtleties of ostracism. Often, scholars explicitly subsume ostracism within broader forms of social rejection. For example, Lutgen-Sandvik’s (2008) definition of bullying included ostracism. Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen (1992) categorized ostracism as a type of social exclusion inherent in indirect bullying. Crick, Casas, and Moshier (1997) subordinated ostracism under relational aggression, and Galen and Underwood (1997) treated ostracism as a form of social aggression.

Ostracism remains eclipsed by more obvious forms of social rejection. Profusions of studies exist about social rejection in the forms of bullying, teasing, ridicule, and peer victimization (Harris, 2009; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefooghe, 2002); however, comparatively few discuss the phenomenon of ostracism. For instance, Sunwolf (2008) lamented the suffering of adolescents at the hands of peers, but often discussed peer rejection as bullying and teasing. Harris (2009) suggested the seriousness of bullying incites many schools to communicate their intolerance of bullying, prompting some schools to spend vast resources creating anti-bullying programs (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross & Isava, 2008; Olweus, 1978; 1993; Smith et al., 2002). Scholars, teachers, parents, and school administrators take bullying seriously. Bullying is obvious; we can see it. However, ostracism remains hidden, silent. Although bullying is certainly painful, ostracism’s ambiguity might be even more painful and consequential (McLaughlin-Volpe, Aron, Wright, & Lewandowski, 2005).
In contrast to the preceding analyses, this project argues that fundamental differences exist between visible and invisible forms of social rejection. Ostracism is conceptually distinct. Fundamentally, ostracism is social rejection in the form of disconfirmation (Laing, 1961). Williams (2001) defined ostracism as an experience “of feeling invisible, of being excluded from the social interactions of those around you” (p. 2) and Kort (1986) suggested it is “involuntary exit” (p. 367) from a social order. Ostracism can occur when a group excludes one (or more) individual(s) or it can occur when one individual ignores another in a dyadic setting (Williams, 2001, 2009, 2010). A lack of verbal communication often defines ostracism. Therefore, ostracism cannot be ridicule, teasing, bullying, or verbal aggression because these forms of social rejection involve the acknowledgement of another. Scholars must study and treat ostracism as a unique social phenomenon with its own processes, patterns, and constructions.

Adolescent peer ostracism is a phenomenon demanding communication scholars’ attention because it is ubiquitous, harmful, under-studied, and under-theorized. Adolescents might experience stronger negative repercussions of ostracism than might adults (Pharo, Gross, Richardson, & Hayne, 2011; Sebastian, Viding, Williams, & Blakemore, 2010), and gifted adolescents are particularly prone to exclusion by non-gifted peers (Swaitek & Cross, 2007; Swaitek & Dorr, 1998; Vanderbrook, 2006; Williams & Gerber, 2005). Despite the prevalence of ostracism during adolescence, few studies have explored the phenomenon (Coyne, Gundersen, Nelson, & Stockdale, 2011; Hawes et al., 2012; Pharo et al., 2011) and none, to my knowledge, have studied gifted adolescents’ ostracism experiences.
Most ostracism studies adopt a psychological perspective, exploring the minds of targets and sources of ostracism rather than their interactions. Additionally, previous research has embraced post-positivist approaches, presenting sociometric and psychometric analyses examining variables associated with ostracism. Little work has actually explored the communicative process of ostracism or its social construction. Fundamentally a communicative act, ostracism is created, sustained, and terminated through communication. I hope this dissertation succeeds in presenting a communication perspective that demonstrates that ostracism is a socially negotiated and constructed process. A communication perspective will demystify the process of ostracism, and a social constructionist approach will create a richer understanding of the phenomenon.

My dissertation project takes a social constructionist perspective to investigate intellectually gifted adolescents’ experiences of ostracism and social exclusion. I explored gifted adolescents experiences of ostracism and social exclusion, attending particularly to less visible exclusive phenomena, by inviting 45 adolescents to keep an electronic journal about their experiences of ostracism for at least a month. The current chapter discusses literature about ostracism and gifted adolescents and introduces the theoretical frameworks of coordinated management of meaning (CMM) and problematic integration (PI) theory to provide insights for understanding the communicative processes that socially construct ostracism. Future chapters detail my methodological choices for studying gifted adolescents’ experiences of ostracism and analysis of adolescent discourses.
Ostracism: Ubiquitous and Painful

Ostracism is a devastating act, potentially creating lifelong repercussions. Yet, ostracism is ubiquitous. Nezlek, Wesselman, Wheeler, and Williams (2012) found that adults in their study experienced some form of ostracism daily. Adolescent ostracism is as ubiquitous. For instance, Sunwolf (2008) argued, “every minute of every day” (p. 74) a child experiences rejection from a peer group. Unfortunately, “a hidden culture of social cruelty exists in childhood peer groups” (Sunwolf, 2008, p. 73; Sunwolf & Leets, 2004, p. 196) and ostracism is commonplace during childhood and adolescence (Hawes et al., 2012; Hawker & Boulton, 2001; Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco, & Baumeister, 2001). Similarly, Sullivan, Farrell, and Kliewer (2006) found that 25% of the adolescents in their study experienced ostracism in the past 30 days. Ostracism and social rejection are so powerful, and so common, that many children carry these experiences with them into adulthood (Sunwolf, 2008).

Alienation from peers is emotionally and psychologically harmful. The threat of ostracism is terrifying because we need others to realize ourselves (Mead, 1934; Rawlins, 1992, 2009) and to escape the fear of isolation (Becker, 1973). Therefore, the worst experiences in life are the breaking of social bonds (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2005; Scheff, 1990). Ostracism causes vast psychological pain that harms our well-being (Crowley, Wu, Moldese, & Mayes 2010) by promoting loneliness and decreasing our social abilities (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2005). Williams (2001) suggested that prolonged ostracism creates hopelessness and despair. Our brains process the social pain of isolation similarly to physical pain (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2005; MacDonald,
Kingsbury, & Shaw, 2005), and ostracism registers as physical neurological symptoms in the brain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; Onoda et al., 2010). Van Beest and Williams (2006) found that ostracism was painful even when researchers rewarded participants with money for experiencing ostracism. According to Gonsalkorale and Williams (2007), exclusion from a despised group, the KKK, still caused psychological pain for participants. Ostracism is harmful to adults, but studies have found that it affects children more than adults (Abrams, Weick, Thomas, Colbe, & Franklin, 2011; Pharo et al., 2011), in part, because the adolescent mind cannot regulate the distress of ostracism as well as the adult mind (Sebastian et al., 2010).

The Ostracized Child

For children, ostracism is particularly devastating because humans need close social relationships (Diener, 2005; Kerr & Levine, 2008), and group belonging is strongest during childhood and adolescence (Pharo et al., 2011; Rawlins, 1992; Sunwolf, 2008; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Zettergren, 2005). A primary adolescent desire is to find social acceptance by identifying with a peer group (Sullivan, et al., 2006). Sunwolf (2008) characterized childhood as a time of group formation, and Sunwolf and Leets (2004) suggested, “childhood is embedded in groups” (p. 196). Because the social focus of adolescence centers on peers, children need to feel accepted by peer groups in order to live well-adjusted lives (Sullivan et al., 2006). Group acceptance offers children the opportunity to develop a sense of identity (Eisner, 1965; Ojala & Nesdale, 2004; Puch & Hart, 1999; Rawlins, 1992; Stokholm, 2009; Sunwolf & Leets, 2004; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2002), self-worth (Nesdale & Flesser, 2001; Onoda et al., 2010; Rawlins,
1992; Stokholm, 2009; Voci, 2006), and validation (Obrien & Biermann, 1988; Rawlins, 1992). Even toddlers have a rudimentary grasp of friendship (Rawlins, 1992). Peer acceptance is salient as early as preschool (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Sokolowski, Bost, & Wainwright, 2005) and by the age of seven children begin to understand the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion ( Abrams, Rutland, Pelletier, & Ferrell, 2009).

Children experience such a strong need for peer acceptance that group exclusion yields severe consequences. Academically, exclusion can lead to poor academic performance (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997), underachievement, and disengagement from class participation and school (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006). Hawes and colleagues (2012) found that adolescents age 8-12 experienced disruptions to their cognitive processes, specifically to their working memory, after ostracism. Evidence also suggests ostracism impairs adolescents’ judgments and ability to effectively evaluate and respond to situations ( Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartles, 2007; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), and hinders self-regulation and self-control processes in the brain (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005). Ostracism appears to negatively affect the functioning of children’s brains.

Ostracism, as a type of peer victimization, is also a major public health problem for youth (Rosen et al., 2009; Pharo et al., 2011). For example, ostracism might have negative physical effects. Ostracized adolescents tend to experience more illness than their included counterparts (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Sunwolf, 2008). Salvy, Bowker, Nitecki, Kluczynski, Germeroth, and Roemmich (2011) found that ostracized adolescents were more motivated to eat snack food, suggesting a correlation between unhealthy
eating and ostracism. Additionally, chronic victimization can cause long-term mental health issues. Chronic victims of social rejection have both internalized and externalized disorders, increased thoughts about suicide (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Sunwolf, 2008), lower self-esteem (Gross, 2009; Pharo et al., 2009; Zadro, Bolland, & Richardson, 2006; Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004), and more instances of depression (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; DeWall, Gilman, Sharif, Carboni, & Rice, 2012). Repeated social rejection can create a victim schema whereby children begin to expect victimization and act the part of a victim (Rosen et al., 2009). Thus, ostracism negatively affects children’s physical, emotional, and psychological health.

In addition to causing potential cognitive impairments and health risks, ostracism can further harm adolescents socially. Ostracized youth might de-value peer relationships (Leary, 2001), become socially withdrawn (Wood, Cowan, & Baker, 2002), and exhibit lower prosocial behavior. For example, Twenge and colleagues (2007) found that ostracized adolescents were less likely to give to charity; similarly, Coyne and colleagues (2011) found that ostracized youth aged 16 to 17 were less likely than included youth to give money to partners in a laboratory experiment. Social effects of ostracism can negatively affect adolescents’ relationships even into adulthood (Buhs & Ladd, 2001). Thus, evidence suggests ostracism negatively affects future social interactions.

The ostracized child, herself, might not be the only individual to experience negative consequences from her exclusion. Evidence also suggests ostracism can create a chain reaction of anti-social behavior. Ostracized adolescents experience increased
feelings of anger (Pharo et al., 2011) and exhibit more aggression (Chow, Tiedens, & Govan, 2008; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003; McDougal, Hymel, Vaillancourt, & Mercer, 2001) than included peers. Social rejection can lead youth to turn to drugs, crime (MacDonald, 2006), or violence (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Philips, 2003; Matthews, 1996; Williams & Wesselman, 2011). Sullivan and colleagues (2006) found that exclusion positively correlated with delinquent behavior, such as stealing, property damage, cutting school, and alcohol and cigarette use. Alarmingly, shooters in 12 of 15 United States school shootings from 1995-2001 experienced chronic peer ostracism during adolescence (Leary et al., 2003). Whether the excluded adolescent or those around her suffer the consequences, ostracism can be damaging to youth.

**The Intellectually Gifted Child**

Ostracism is clearly ubiquitous and harmful, especially for adolescents. However, intellectually gifted adolescents appear to be more susceptible to social exclusion than their non-gifted peers (Silverman, 1997; Swaitek & Cross, 2007; Swaitek & Dorr, 1998; Vanderbrook, 2006), and thus more at-risk for ostracism. Before explaining what I mean by “intellectually gifted,” I must pause in reflection. Giftedness, like other social categories, is a construction. McCollin (2011) suggested that societal interest in individuals with advanced intellect extends as far back as 3000 BCE, with modern western notions of giftedness arising in the late 1800s. Therefore, constructions of giftedness have a long history, typically crafting giftedness as an objective category. For many, giftedness is something people possess, rather than a social construction. However, the characteristics we ascribe to the label of “gifted” likely react back on those

For the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to continue using the terms “gifted” and “gifted adolescent.” I recognize three problematics of my use of these terms. (1) My use reproduces cultural meanings already associated with “gifted.” (2) My discussions sometimes appear to refer to a concrete category, rather than a social construction. (3) The term “gifted adolescents” might give the impression that giftedness is an innate quality, rather than a construction we overly on identities. Gergen (1999) reminds us of the difficulties of speaking as constructionists in a way that brings awareness of multiple perspectives. Gergen asked, “how can you reduce the complex, ever changing flow of consciousness to a single word?” (p. 20). For Gergen, the nature of language is problematic for constructionists because, “all you have is the hand-me-down vocabulary available within the culture” (p. 20). Throughout this dissertation, although I claim to approach the topic as a social constructionist, the reader might notice that I sometimes refer to “gifted adolescents” in seemingly non-constructionist ways. I had to make an editorial choice about language, and I chose to use familiar language around the social concept of “giftedness.” I recognize that I could have done more to dismantle the constructed nature of giftedness, such as using the phrase “adolescents labeled as gifted,” but that is not the point of this dissertation. This dissertation is about adolescents who happen to be labeled as gifted by someone (their parents, their school, their teachers, or an external gifted program), often because this someone observed the adolescent exhibiting greater intellectual abilities in some areas than their same-age
peers, and who also happen to experience ostracism and social exclusion. I have opted not to use qualifiers every time I use the term “gifted,” and instead acknowledge the shortcomings of language here.

In presenting literature on scholarship about gifted individuals, I recognize that I am participating in the reproduction of “giftedness.” Of most concern is the possibility that “giftedness” is a construction that benefits and perpetuates the privilege of white males from high socio-economic backgrounds. In other words, as an institution, gifted education under-represents women, people of color, and those from lower socio-economic classes (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Frey, 2002; Grantham, 2003; Meredith, 2009; Moon & Brighton, 2008; Worrell, 2009; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native-Americans are particularly under-represented in gifted education (Carman, 2011; Subotnik et al., 2012) and African-Americans admitted into a gifted program are often underserved by those programs (Winsler, Karkhanis, Kim, & Levitt, 2013). Males disproportionately over-populate gifted programs, possibly because females are less likely to accept invitations into these programs (Meredith, 2009). Teachers are also more likely to nominate children for gifted testing if they demonstrate characteristics from higher socioeconomic statuses (Carman, 2011). Although it is beyond the scope of this study to fully explore gifted education as an institution of privilege, I do offer a continued discussion of these issues in Chapter Three. Despite privilege associated with the institution of gifted education, much evidence attests to the trials of those we have labeled as “intellectually gifted.”
Regardless of concerns about race, gender, and class, gifted adolescents seem to experience a particular type of suffering.

No universally agreed upon definition of intellectual giftedness exists (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2005; McCollin, 2011; Pierce, Adams, Spiers-Neumeister, Cassady, Dixon, & Cross, 2007; Robinson, 2002). The federal definition of giftedness, first proposed in 1972, purposely left the definition broad (McCollin, 2011), allowing states to individually define giftedness (NAGC, 2010). The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC; 2008) defines individuals scoring within the intellectual top 10% of the population as gifted. Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests are currently the only widely accepted tool to identify gifted adolescents (Vaivre-Douret, 2011); typically children with IQs above 125 are considered gifted, and those with IQs above 150 are highly gifted. However, experts question the reliability and validity of IQ tests, and even consider them outdated (Rimm, 2002). Many experts advocate using alternative methods of identification (Kwang-Han & Porath, 2005; NAGC, 2008; Rimm, 2002; Silverman, 1997; Wellisch & Brown, 2012).

Rather than defining giftedness with an IQ score, many experts offer a set of characteristics shared by gifted adolescents. Individual gifted adolescents might not possess all of these characteristics, and the list is not exhaustive; certainly, gifted children comprise a diverse group of individuals and possess “an almost unlimited range of personal characteristics” (Robinson, 2002, p. xi). Nonetheless, gifted adolescents quickly acquire, retain, conceptualize, synthesize, and apply new information (McCollins, 2011); they often enjoy learning and exhibit an intense need for mental stimulation (Robinson & Campbell, 2010), frequently becoming self-regulated learners (Dresel & Haugwitz,
2005). They demonstrate the ability to connect ideas rapidly (McCollins, 2011), think and reason abstractly (Lovecky, 1994), and formulate advanced conceptual frameworks (Clark, 1997). Gifted adolescents tend to possess unusual intellectual curiosity (Kaufman, 2009; Kwang-Han & Porath, 2005; Robinson & Campbell, 2010), vivid imaginations and creativity (Kaufman, 2009; Kwang-Han & Porath, 2005; McCollin, 2011), superior problem-solving skills (McCollins, 2011), and advanced linguistic abilities and vocabularies (McCollin, 2011; Silverman, Chitwood, & Waters, 1986). To gifted adolescents, the complex becomes simple and the simple becomes complex (Desel & Haugwitz, 2005; Lovecky, 1994).

Advanced cognitive complexity places gifted adolescents in a vulnerable societal position. Segregating the gifted into special programs risks privileging gifted adolescents above other students; alternately, failing to provide gifted education could harm these adolescents (Silverman, 1997). Gifted students typically find conventional instruction less motivating, less interesting, and less challenging (McCollins, 2011). Gifted children not enrolled in gifted programs tend to exhibit higher levels of anxiety, stress, behavioral, psychological, and social disorders, and underachievement than those in gifted programs (Vaivre-Douret, 2011). Conversely, gifted children placed with gifted peers have enhanced feelings of acceptance (Rinn, 2006), form strong bonds of friendship (Vanderbrook, 2006), and experience more positive self-concepts (Reis & Renzulli, 2004). Gross (2002), suggested, “ability grouping is an essential interventive response for the highly gifted” (p. 25), particularly for preventing social isolation. Loneliness and social isolation disappear for exceptionally gifted children, those with IQs above 160,
placed in programs with intellectual peers (Hollingworth, 1942). Ultimately, gifted children might constitute a group that is simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged, conditions likely to produce some measure of ambivalence.

Ambivalent feelings are also likely the effect of society’s mixed reactions about gifted education. Gifted individuals’ ambivalent feelings and society’s mixed reactions may interact to further amplify the group’s vulnerable social position. The mid-19th century witnessed the first public gifted programs in the United States, and federal funding for gifted programs often relied on idealistic notions that special education for the gifted would make America stronger (McCollins, 2011); however, interest in this population has waxed and waned over the years. Silverman (1997) suggested the gifted are “victims of a political ping-pong match – alternately mined as a national resource, then attacked or ignored in the name of egalitarianism” (p. 38). Negative public opinions exist towards gifted education (Lukash, 2005), and many individuals believe the gifted have an easier time in life (Coleman & Cross, 2005; Lukash, 2005). Silverman (1997) argued that gifted individuals face many difficulties that require special attention, stating,

To have the mental maturity of a 14-year old and the physical body of an 8-year-old poses a unique set of challenges analogous to those that face the child with a 14-year-old body and an 8-year-old mind…only one of those conditions receives societal recognition, sympathy, and public support: Gifted children and their parents must deal with their concerns alone. (p. 37)

Lukash (2005) and Robinson (2002) suggested the needs of gifted children often go unrecognized and unmet, thus making them an under-resourced group. Mixed public
support for gifted education is only one facet of a multitude of difficulties experienced by gifted adolescents.

**Unique challenges.** Gifted children, like most adolescents, are highly complex. Silverman (1997) described the observations of Hollingworth, one of the first gifted child psychologists; in gifted adolescents, Hollingworth witnessed,

> Loneliness, their need for precision and fairness, their impatience with superficiality and foolishness, their desire to find like minds, their love of beauty, their early grappling with good and evil, their fledgling attempts to build a philosophy of life, their search for their place in the universe. (p. 43)

Although advanced intellect might appear to advantage gifted adolescents, they must contend with all the typical complexities of adolescent life and additional challenges posed by their advanced intellectual abilities.

Thus, some gifted children face a unique set of challenges. In 2004, the national report, *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students*, detailed schools’ failure to effectively address the academic, psychological, emotional, and social needs of gifted students (McCollin, 2011; the report can be downloaded from the Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration, n.d.). Scholars consider gifted adolescents an at-risk population (Piechowski & Miller, 1995; Reis & Renzulli, 2004; Seeley, 2004; Silverman, 1997) because they experience greater academic, psychological, and social problems than other same-age peers. Academically, some gifted adolescents are prone to underachievement (Birdsell & Correa, 2007; Reis & Renzulli, 2004; Renzulli & Park, 2002; Seeley, 2004) and dropping out of school (Hansen & Toso, 2007;
Piechowski & Miller, 1995; Reis & Renzulli, 2004; Robertson, 1991). Reis and McCoach (2002) suggested that one cause of underachievement is loneliness and social isolation. Hansen and Toso (2007) found that gifted males are particularly prone to dropping out, and some students in their study reported leaving school because of a perceived school culture disrespecting giftedness.

Research about the psychological and social lives of gifted children presents mixed results. Some scholars argue that gifted adolescents exhibit better development in these domains, while others disagree (Bailey, 2011). For instance, McCollin (2011) stressed that most gifted adolescents are well-adjusted and stable, asserting that a lack of social or emotional competence is a misconception. Zeider and Shani-Zinovich (2011) found that gifted and non-gifted adolescents did not differ from non-gifted peers on mental health or distress levels. However, Robinson (2002) advanced that, although gifted students are as well-adjusted as any other group of students, they face unique social and emotional challenges, often exacerbated by unsupportive social environments and an anti-intellectual society.

Conversely, other scholars have found evidence suggesting gifted adolescents might experience greater psychological or emotional troubles than their non-gifted peers. For example, Harrison and Haneghan’s (2012) confirmed that some gifted adolescents experience more death-anxiety, fear of the unknown, and insomnia than same-age peers. Other research suggested that some gifted adolescents might have lower self-esteem and self-confidence (Abelman, 2007), higher rates of depression (Baker, 1995; Piechowski & Miller, 1995; Reis & Renzulli, 2004), lower levels of psychological well-being, and
contemplate suicide (Cross, Cassady, & Miller, 2006; Hyatt, 2010) more than non-gifted peers. According to Neihart (2002), gifted children under the age of 10 who do not have access to intellectual peers are more prone to depression caused by social isolation. Cross and colleagues’ (2006) results indicated that gifted females are more prone to depression and suicidal thoughts than gifted males. Lovecky (1995) found that the higher a child’s IQ score, the lower her social and emotional adjustment score. Bailey (2011) found that, while many gifted students in her study were well adjusted, some demonstrated significantly less emotional and social development than peers. Gifted adolescents have a heightened capacity for intense emotions, sensitivity, and compassion, but often lack the maturity to cope effectively with these emotions (Bailey, 2011; Robinson, 2002; Silverman, 1997).

**Social challenges.** Despite the myriad academic, psychological, or emotional challenges faced by some gifted adolescents, social issues tend to be the most troubling, potentially contributing to the aforementioned challenges. Williams and Gerber (2005) reported, “gifted children often complain that their worst obstacle is dealing with being ostracized by other children in their classroom” (p. 364). The social lives of gifted adolescents can be complex, although their experience of social acceptance “varies with children’s ages, specific school environments, and the extent of their giftedness…yet [they] almost always realize that giftedness exacts a social price” (Rimm, 2002, p. 13). Socially, some gifted adolescents are prone to intense isolation (Cassady & Cross, 2006; Gross, 1998), partially because they live with social stigmas attached to giftedness (Bain, Choate, & Bliss, 2006; Cross, Coleman, & Terhaar-Yonkers, 1991; Lukash, 2005; Reis &
Gifted adolescents experience many social challenges because of stigmas surrounding giftedness and intellectualism (Bain et al., 2006; Cross et al., 1991; Lukash, 2005; Reis & Renzulli, 2004; Swaitek & Dorr, 1998; Vanderbrook, 2006). Excellence often has a price: loneliness. A gifted adolescent who committed suicide wrote in a poem, “a winner, alone, consists never of two. To know I’m the best, to know that I’ve won, then I have to be in a group of just one” (Hyatt, 2010, p. 524). Posner (1979), the first scholar to theorize “the stigma of excellence” (p. 141), suggested that exceptionality is isolating and humans often desire “to be merely human – not less than human but not more than human either” (p. 142; italics in original). For Posner, although societies reward exceptionality, they also stigmatize individuals who deviate from normality. Peers often stereotype the gifted as “nerds” and alienate them from meaningful social participation (Swaitek & Dorr, 1998; Vanderbrook, 2006). Media portray skewed views of the gifted as the “dorky misfit” (Reis & Renzulli, 2004, p. 119) with social and emotional problems (Bain et al., 2006). Modern society disrespects the gifted and devalues intellectualism (Hansen & Toso, 2007; Lukash, 2005; Robinson, 2002), and adolescent culture is particularly prone to stigmatizing intellectuals (Frank & McBee, 2003; Hansen & Toso, 2007).
So intense is the stigma associated with giftedness, that many gifted adolescents develop coping strategies to manage their identity as gifted individuals. Several coping strategies identified by Swiatek and colleagues (Cross & Swiatek, 2009; Reis & Renzulli, 2004; Swiatek, 1995; Swiatek, 1998; Swiatek & Dorr, 1998) include denying or hiding intellect, denying the importance of fitting in with peers, or overemphasizing the importance of fitting in with peers by conforming to mimic non-gifted peers. Essentially, many gifted youth attempt to decrease the probability of ostracism, or change the value they place on fitting in with peers. Gifted girls, in particular, fear the stigma of intellectualism and social isolation that accompanies success, sometimes choosing to “play dumb” rather than risking identification as intelligent (Reis, 2002, p. 130).

According to Glenison (2003), many gifted individuals hide their abilities to adapt socially, often becoming trapped in a process of self-denial. Few adolescents enjoy feeling different from peers, and the experience of “differentness” can influence feelings of isolation.

Gifted adolescents often have a heightened awareness of their differences (Bailey, 2011) and report feeling uncomfortably different from their peers (Glenison, 2003; Rinn, 2006; Silverman, 1997; Swaitek & Dorr, 1998; Wellisch & Brown, 2012), regardless of whether or not they were labeled as gifted (Robinson, 2002). Glenison (2003) articulated, “differentness is a fundamental constituent of giftedness…the experiences of those children who do not fall within the average distribution will result in a narrative about being different” (p. 119). Adolescence is a time of conformity to peer groups and norms (Rawlins, 1992), so feelings of differentness and incongruity with social norms is
especially disturbing (Silverman, 2002). Gifted children see the world differently (Bailey, 2011) think differently (Bailey, 2011; Silverman, 1994), and even act differently (Swain, 1998; Wellisch & Brown, 2012) than others.

For instance, Wellisch and Brown (2002) argued that gifted children might communicate differently, making some gifted students seem odd to their peers (Wellisch & Brown, 2012). Gifted adolescents with advanced verbal skills tend to experiences more exclusion than other gifted children, suggesting such advancement is a “visual” marker of difference (Glenison, 2003). Torrance (1963) observed, “frequently, their ideas are so far ahead of those of their classmates and even their teachers that they have given up hopes of communicating” (p. 20). For Hébert (2002), gifted adolescents, particularly males, even display different gender roles than non-gifted peers; psychological androgyny, or the ability to simultaneous exhibit masculine and feminine traits (e.g. being simultaneously aggressive and nurturing, sensitive and rigid, etc.), is a trait often possessed by the gifted. Additionally, society, peers, parents, and educators often perceive the gifted as different (Gross, 1998; Lukash, 2005; Niehoff, 1983; Rinn, 2006), and even expect them to be different (Gates, 2010).

Expectations of differentness might be more than an unsupported stereotype. Developmentally, evidence suggests that gifted adolescents are different from their same-aged peers. Gifted adolescents experience asynchronous development (Bailey, 2011; Glenison, 2003; Silverman, 1997; Wellisch & Brown, 2012), a “universal characteristic of giftedness” (Bailey, 2011, p. 211), meaning disparities in development across various cognitive, psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, emotional, moral, and social domains.
(Bailey, 2011; Glenison, 2003; Silverman, 2002; Silverman, 1997). For instance, some
gifted adolescents might experience asynchronous ego development (Bailey, 2011) or
[gifted] child is an amalgam of many developmental ages” (p. 40). Educators and parents
tend to focus on gifted adolescents’ cognitive abilities (Bailey, 2011); however,
asynchrony is a developmental challenge making the gifted prone to social exclusion
(Bailey, 2011) because their cognitive development is, sometimes, more advanced than
their social development (Silverman, 1997).

Asynchronous development also suggests that gifted adolescents develop the
aforementioned domains at different times than their same-age peers. Glenison (2003)
suggested some gifted students experience the “tyranny of age” (p. 120), or feeling
trapped in their age group because their development and their peers’ development are so
divergent. One developmental asynchrony that could separate gifted adolescents from
other same-age peers is that intellectual ability appears to influence different conceptions
of friendship (Gross, 2002). As Rawlins (1992) explained, adolescent notions of
friendship advance in four stages. Rawlins recognized that the different stages of
friendship “demand a certain degree of cognitive, moral, and communicative
development” (p. 26) and the stages occur at different rates for different children. From
three to seven, most children experience the “momentary physicalistic playmates” stage
of friendship, whereby they simply seek physically close individuals with whom to play.
From six to nine, children exhibit the “activity and opportunity” stage and have a cost-
benefit view of friendship. The “equality and reciprocity” stage, from age eight to
twelve, involves picking friends based on psychological similarities. Finally, the “mutuality and understanding” stage begins between eleven and fourteen, and Rawlins characterizes it as the development of intimate friendships. Here, deeper notions of friendship, like loyalty and egalitarianism, develop; children share personal thoughts and feelings and seek deep connections. According to Gross (2002), when most children are simply looking for playmates, adolescents with advanced intellect are often searching for much deeper friendships four or five years earlier than their same-age peers. Conceivably, a gifted peer might be ready for the “mutuality and understanding” phase of friendship, while her classmates are at the “momentary physicalistic playmates” stage. This developmental asynchrony might deter the gifted child from finding peer acceptance, and hasten her social exclusion.

In the current project, I am not trying to essentialize gifted adolescents by suggesting they all exhibit asynchronous development, feelings of differentness, or fears about stigmas attached to intellectualism. I am not advocating that, simply because a child is gifted, she will experience social exclusion. Nor am I trying to privilege gifted children by claiming that they are “better” or deserve “better” educational experiences than their non-gifted peers. As Silverman (1997) noted, “placement on an IQ continuum does not assign relative worth or value to the human being” (51). I am not condoning or advocating for their segregation or labeling. I am not suggesting giftedness is anything more than a social construction. Rather, I am positing that gifted children’s’ advanced intellect offers a unique set of challenges. Because these adolescents tend to think differently than peers, they might experience different social realities than same-age
classmates. The complexity of gifted adolescents’ experiences with peers, the unique challenges to social inclusion they might face, compounded with the negative consequences of ostracism for adolescents, merit further study of gifted adolescents’ social experiences.

Although gifted children might experience developmental differences, struggle with feelings of differentness, and cope with social stigmas, many of their unique challenges emerge from the communicative constructions surrounding adolescent peer acceptance and giftedness. Gross (2002) stressed, “the problems of social isolation, peer rejection, loneliness, and alienation that afflict many extremely gifted children arise not out of their exceptional intellectual abilities, but as a result of society’s responses to them” (p. 25). Therefore, this population offers an ideal context to adopt a social constructionist approach and explore gifted children’s discursive construction of ostracism. One theory of ostracism has emerged from social psychology, and the majority of ostracism studies are filtered through its lens.

**Williams’ Model of Ostracism**

Ostracism scholars traditionally conceptualized ostracism as the experience of feeling ignored, left out, or excluded from meaningful social participation. Williams (2001) described ostracism as being treated “like you didn’t exist” (p. 1), an experience of “feeling invisible, of being excluded from the social interactions of those around you” (p. 2), and “the simple act of being ignored” (p. 3). Williams emphasizes that ostracism, though often imagined as occurring in a group setting, occurs in both groups and dyads. According to Williams (2010), “one of the most common interpersonally aversive
behaviors is the silent treatment, a dyadic form of ostracism” (p. 271-272). Williams’ (2009, 2010) research suggests that ostracism from a group and ostracism from just one other individual yields the same psychological effects. I want to share an astute quote from one of my study participants (whom I will more fully introduce in future chapters) echoing Williams sentiment. Sixteen-year-old Marie, who attends a boarding school for intellectually gifted high school students, wrote,

There is a stigma surrounding social inclusion valuing quantity over quality. The same goes for social exclusion. If you just picture either one of them in your mind, you'll probably envision a group accepting or ignoring the one, but I challenge you to think otherwise. I know that, had my best friend kept his mental and emotional distance from me, had he chosen not to speak to me at all, it would have hurt far worse than being ignored by the group of four that surrounded me on Saturday night, or by the entire junior class of seventy that lives in this building.

Marie and Williams both recognize that ostracism from just one individual can be as devastating as ostracism from a large group. Therefore, in the current study, I have elected to treat ostracism as a phenomenon under the auspices of both group and interpersonal communication. Although participants often shared examples of group ostracism, some participants also shared deeply painful experiences of interpersonal ostracism.

In addition to offering definitions of ostracism, Williams’ (2001) also posed the prevailing model of ostracism, focusing on types and effects of ostracism. Williams’ five
taxonomic dimensions of ostracism include ambiguity (the subtleness of the ostracism), visibility (the severing of social and/or physical ties), quantity (complete or partial exclusion), causal clarity (knowledge about the cause of ostracism), and motive (presumed reasons for ostracism). Williams theorized five motives a target of ostracism might ascribe to a source of ostracism. The first three attributed motives have little impact on targets of ostracism. Non-ostracism describes the psychological rationalization that I just imagined ostracism and the source exhibited no ostracism intentions. Role-prescribed ostracism suggests a social norm dictates the appropriateness of ostracism in a situation. For example, social actors typically ignore each other when in elevators together, therefore, the motive for ostracism arises from a social norm. Defensive ostracism denotes one individual preemptively ostracizing another to avoid ostracism herself. While these first three ostracism motives rarely deeply affect individuals, the final two motives are devastating. Punitive ostracism occurs when a group punishes an individual for undesirable behavior, and oblivious ostracism occurs when an individual feels ostracized because they are unnoticed or inconsequential to a person or group.

Ostracism’s main effect is in threatening four basic human needs, argued Williams (2001). First, ostracism jeopardizes our sense of belonging because others send the message that we are unwanted group members. Additionally, ostracism threatens our sense of self-esteem because it creates negative self-evaluations by prompting us to question our worth as relational partners. Ostracism also stymies our need for control. During ostracism episodes, the excluding social group controls the interaction, thus robbing us of our narrative voice (Striley, 2011). Finally, ostracism threatens our need
for meaningful existence. Humans must believe our lives are worthwhile (Frankl, 2006), but ostracism can make us feel worthless.

Williams (2001) classified reactions to ostracism in three temporal stages. Immediately after ostracism, a target feels intense pain and rejection (Williams, 2001; Williams & Gerber, 2005), which actually registers as physical neurological symptoms in the brain (Eisenberger et al., 2003; Onoda et al., 2010). The short-term effects of ostracism will drive targets to replenish lost needs (Williams, 2001; Williams & Gerber, 2005; Wirth & Williams, 2009; Zadro & Williams, 2006). For instance, a threat to belonging might lead a target to forge new friendships, or attempt to participate more in the group that has ostracized her (Williams & Sommer, 1997). Finally, if ostracism continues, the target will reach a long-term stage, where she might become hopeless, full of despair, or believe she belongs nowhere.

Research indicates that this model of ostracism applies to both children and adults, suggesting that ostracism functions similarly, regardless of age. In laboratory experiments, children from age eight to fourteen (Abrams et al., 2011), eight to twelve (Hawes et al., 2012), and thirteen to seventeen (Pharo et al., 2011) ostracized in the experiment experienced the same threatened needs for belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence as adults. Similarly, Masten and colleagues (2009) found that ostracized adolescents exhibit the same patterns of neural activation as ostracized adults. The only difference appears to be of degree; Abrams and colleagues (2011) found that children age eight to nine demonstrated greater threats to self-esteem needs than older
children or adults, and thirteen to fourteen year olds experienced greater threats to belonging needs than younger children or adults.

**Challenging Williams’ theory.** Although significant research supports Williams’ theory, the proposed model of ostracism and the methods it has inspired remain incomplete. Williams’ work and subsequent work supporting the model exist in a post-positivist, psychological paradigm, despite Williams’ (2001) call for scholars not to be “restricted by a single paradigm” (p. 44). Thus, most recent work exploring ostracism has relied on variable analytic methods and laboratory experiments. The dominant method is having participants experience ostracism during a game of cyberball (for full overview, see Williams, 2001; 2006; Zadro et al., 2004) in a laboratory setting. Essentially, the cyberball experiment involves deceiving participants to believe they are playing an online game of ball toss with other participants in different laboratories; in reality, the participant is playing with computer characters. In some conditions, the participant is tossed the ball during the game (the non-ostracism condition), and in other treatments the participant is not tossed the ball in the computer simulation (the ostracism condition).

Laboratory experiments allow for greater control and establishment of causality, but they are limiting. While evidence does suggest that ostracism during cyberball negatively affects participants (Williams, 2001; Zadro et al., 2004), studying realistic ostracism in naturalistic settings would likely better illuminate the inner-workings of the phenomenon. Surely, ostracism in individuals’ daily lives is more consequential and complex than playing a game whereby a computer character refuses to pass a ball.
Particularly if we construct the meaning of ostracism within relationships, then the artificiality of simulations with unknown others is likely to provide limited, and perhaps distorted, insight into the phenomenon. Lived experiences of ostracism are probably qualitatively different from laboratory experiences.

Nezlek and colleagues (2012) recently published one of the first studies to explore ostracism in individuals’ daily lives; the researchers asked Australian adults to keep a diary of ostracism events for two weeks. However, rather than journaling about ostracism experiences, participants completed a standardized assessment testing Williams’ model every time they experienced ostracism. Therefore, the study provided little knowledge about qualitative daily experiences of participants. To gain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of ostracism’s construction, scholars must use a variety of methodological approaches, especially ones exploring meaning-making in less restrictive terms.

Additionally, current studies of ostracism present a deterministic view of human nature and often situate ostracism in an evolutionary context. For example, scholars stress that social inclusion was a matter of survival for early humans and exclusion meant certain death (Vandevelde & Miyahara, 2005). Therefore, ostracism detection offers adaptive evolutionary advantages (Wesselman, Nairne, & Williams, 2012), and humans evolved to detect even the most subtle exclusionary cues (Gruter & Masters, 1986; Kerr & Levine, 2008; Kurzban & Leary, 2001; Williams, 2009). Williams (2007) suggested that the threats to needs experienced during ostracism episodes are ingrained into the human psyche because the evolutionary advantage of the social group drives us to seek
inclusion. While I do not dispute the possible evolutionary aspect of inclusion and exclusion, ostracism is a social process. We socially negotiate inclusion and exclusion, and we make sense of ostracism within a social context. In other words, whatever its biological constituents, ostracism is a social accomplishment. Therefore, paradigms more suited to understanding the social emergence of inclusion and exclusion merit use when studying ostracism.

Williams’ theory also offers a pessimistic view of ostracism. Nezlek and colleagues (2012) called ostracism a “social weapon” (p. 100), conjuring images of ostracism as a nefarious weapon of social control. However, individuals sometimes use ostracism as a nonviolent corrective measure. For instance, putting children in “time-out” for misbehaving, boycotting a business with questionable practices, or ignoring someone telling an inappropriate joke, are all forms of ostracism designed to positively modify behavior. Cavallo (1977) observed Chicago youth organized into a series of playground games designed to establish a peer group morality. Cavallo noticed, “the ultimate weapon used by peers against the recalcitrant youth was one play organizers felt he most feared, ostracism” (p. 92). Ostracism was the only sanction that successfully motivated misbehaving peers to act morally. As a personal example, in third grade I moved away from my hometown; in my new school I was initially bossy, demanding, and selfish. I was used to being in charge. However, my new classmates refused to concede to me. They ostracized me, and I realized I needed to change the way I treated others. Within a matter of months I became a nicer person, and quite popular. Although
painful, individuals can learn from ostracism experiences (Abelman, 2007; Piechowski & Miller, 1995; Thompson & Grace, 2001).

Scholars utilizing Williams’ theory of ostracism tend to view it as a painful event with lasting negative repercussions. However, ostracism could have positive effects on individuals. In addition to instigating prosocial behavioral changes mentioned above, ostracism could help adolescents develop their identities. For instance, a child ostracized from the “popular” crowd might realize she does not share the group’s values and seek another group with whom she has more in common. Additionally, ostracism can be freeing. Peer acceptance often requires giving up freedom and abiding by certain social norms. An excluded individual need not worry about following social norms with which she disagrees or conforming to peers to avoid rejection because she is already rejected. In rejection lies the freedom to act unencumbered by others’ judgments.

Another shortcoming of Williams’ theory is its tendency to focus on the target of ostracism, rather than the source of ostracism. Williams’ theory of ostracism is one-sided. Because ostracism is a social act requiring two parties, it demands dual perspectives (Poulsen & Kashy, 2011). Few studies have examined the perspectives of those instigating ostracism. Ciarocco, Sommer, and Baumeister (2001) and Poulsen and Kashy (2011) found that sources of ostracism do report negative affect after ostracizing others, although sources were able to establish stronger in-group bonds after excluding others from their group (Poulsen & Kashy, 2011). Although little research has explored gifted adolescents as instigators of ostracism, Striley (2010) found that some gifted adolescent peer groups exclude non-gifted high-achievers for a perceived lack of
intellect. Therefore, in the current study, I will remain open to experiences from participants as both the targets and sources of ostracism.

Finally, the biggest flaw in Williams’ theory is its failure to explain the process of ostracism. Although I have cited myriad ostracism studies in the preceding literature review, our understanding of the concept remains limited. Missing from our knowledge of ostracism is the process by which it is created, sustained, resisted, terminated, and transformed, as well as the sensemaking and communication process of all individuals involved in ostracism episodes and patterns. A communication perspective exploring ostracism’s construction has yet to be articulated. For a social constructionist, curiosity about a phenomenon will “not be satisfied by a list of its attributes”; rather, we seek “a description of how, in the to-and-fro interactions of real people in real situations, [the phenomenon] is made and of the consequences of having made” it (Pearce, 1989, p. 35-36). According to Pearce (2005), when scholars ask “why?,” they often answer in terms of psychological traits. Certainly, this is true of ostracism scholarship, thus far. However, Pearce suggested we more appropriately answer in terms of communication. To study the construction of ostracism is to understand how it is accomplished and to gain insights about how it might be countered. To understand ostracism fully, we must utilize other theoretical lenses that move us beyond Williams’ framework. In the current project, I utilize two social constructionist theories to understand the communication process of ostracism: Coordinated management of meaning (CMM) (Cronen & Pearce, 1981; Pearce, 1976, 1989; Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Pearce & Pearce, 2000a), and problematic integration (PI) theory (Babrow, 1992, 2007).
Coordinated Management of Meaning

Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen articulated one of the first social constructionist theories of communication, progressively developing it over a number of years (Cronen, 1991; 1995; Cronen & Pearce, 1981; 1992; Pearce, 1976, 1989; Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Pearce & Pearce, 2000a, 2000b). Working from pragmatism and dialogue paradigms (Pearce, 2005), and building on speech act theory (see Searle, 1969), they posited that everyday talk creates the social environments in which we live. As we live in our constructions, we struggle to align our actions and make sense of the objects and events before us. Pearce’s work greatly extended their original theory. Coordinated management of meaning radically foregrounds communication (Pearce, 1995; Pearce & Pearce, 2004) by making apparent the production and reproduction of social environments through reoccurring patterns of human communication. Communication is the stuff of dreams and reality; it actualizes entire worlds. Therefore, communication scholars must look at communication, not through it (Pearce, 2007; Pearce & Pearce, 2004).

To say that a world is socially constructed is not to say it is imaginary. It is a world of imagination, but not imaginary. Through communication, together we imagine consequential social worlds into existence. Humans see events and objects in the world as textures of communication (Pearce & Pearce, 2004). Dynamic, flexible patterns of communication constitute social worlds, and these patterns express and (re)create resources and guide our communication practices (Pearce, 1989). Berger and Luckmann (1967) asserted, “men [sic] together produce a human environment” (p. 49) and
“language realizes a world, in the double sense of apprehending and producing it” (p. 153). De-mystifying the communication process of ostracism might help us to apprehend how humans produce exclusion. Coordinated management of meaning primarily asks what are we making together (Pearce, 2005)? What identities, episodes, cultures, or relationships does our communication construct? In the context of ostracism, we must ask, how is ostracism accomplished through communication and to what effect? What kind of world is realized when we ostracize (or are ostracized)? How do adolescent peer groups make ostracism?

Ostracism, as a communicative process, is an attempt by one person or group to actualize a world without another person or group. Ostracism is a communicative event, and like other forms of communication, it is an inherently imperfect process of conjoint interpretation and action. Our experiences affect our engagement in and reaction to ostracism, and ostracism reflexively shapes our experiences. It influences a range of permissible and non-permissible communication patterns. Pearce (1989) reminded scholars that communication always happens in relation and in time—we are to, for, or against someone, before or after their actions. Episodes of ostracism occur as a response to someone, and elicit future responses. Ostracism constructs particular identities and relationships; the content of an exclusionary message affects the relationships and self-concepts of all involved actors, both the excluder and the excluded.

Pearce and Pearce (2004) said, “there are clouds of philosophy in drops of grammar” (p. 44); similarly, worlds of meaning exist in even the smallest gesture of exclusion. Ostracism is consequential and communicative; it is an attempt to negate
someone’s existence. Several concepts from CMM appear relevant to the process by which ostracism accomplishes this negation. According to CMM (Pearce, 1989), through communication, all humans coordinate meanings and, together, call certain realities into being, interpret social worlds (coherence), and view their lives as manifestations of something greater (mystery).

**Coordination.** Pearce (1989) said, “human beings are caught between worlds” (p. 49): the imaginative and the social. Berger and Luckmann (1967) explained that communication allows us to objectivate our subjective thoughts (the imaginative) by transforming them from immaterial, mental processes, into material forms such as sounds, gestures, and actions. Thus, communication permits intersubjectivity by creating a way for humans to share thoughts (the social). For instance, if a group of adolescents dislikes a classmate, they might think of some pretext and refuse to let her sit with them at lunch. The pretext and the act of refusal objectivates their feelings of dislike. Once manifested in the world, these feelings might be taken as real features of the world existing independent of the acts that produced them. For example, if, having refused the girl a seat at the lunch table, the group is called to account for their behavior, they will likely point to the pretext and the rejection as evidence that something is problematic about the girl. This circular reasoning appears to members of the group to point to independent evidence of their reason for rejecting the girl, as if they encountered it in the world, existing independent of their actions, rather than produced by their own actions. They, thus, create an intersubjective space where the girl recognizes she is unwanted at this table, and must find a new seat.
To make these social worlds, we coordinate our actions together; thus, coordination is fundamentally social (Pearce & Pearce, 2004). Coordination is the set of practices we enact to call good and desirable worlds into being, and to prevent bad or obstructive worlds from being realized (Pearce, 1989). During ostracism, the ostracizers desire to construct a world without the ostracized individual; they coordinate their communication patterns to actualize this desire. We are physical entities, occupying shared space and time, responding to and eliciting responses from others, and coordination is our attempt to align our actions together (Pearce & Pearce, 2004).

However, whose world is realized during coordination? Surely, this is not the excluded individual’s vision of a good and desirable world. How is it that the excluded comes to exist in this undesirable reality?

Presumably, during an episode of ostracism, the excluders try to call forth a desirable world. They must work out, whether in advance, in situ, or afterwards, whom to ostracize, why, and how. How do groups decide who has the right to exist and who does not? How do they know that ostracism will achieve the desired world they seek to actualize? During the ostracism episode, must sources unanimously communicate exile, and after the initial exile, must sources enact continued exclusion? How do groups sustain the communication of exclusion? How does the initial exile compare to continued exile? Additionally, coordination also must occur between sources and targets of ostracism. The source must successfully communicate that the target is unwanted. How is this accomplished? What exclusionary cues do groups utilize? How do targets recognize exclusionary cues? During this encounter, the target and source likely compete
for control of coordination. What does this competition look like? In ostracism, both the
target and source attempt to thwart the other’s vision of a good world. How does one
group, ultimately, thwart the other? Is ostracism, then, a fight over coordination?
Finally, if multiple ostracized individuals exist, then they must coordinate action before,
during, and perhaps after ostracism occurs; they must determine the reason for exclusion,
and decide how to react and what their reactions will mean to them.

The process of coordination is fallible and imperfect (Pearce, 1989). Coordination does not presume our constructions resemble our intentions, or that
coordinating partners understand or agree with each other. In the process of ostracism, it
is unlikely that the ostracized individual agrees with her banishment, but she engages in a
pattern of interaction with the sources of ostracism. Thus, the question is not whether
coordination occurs, but how and what form it takes. Coordination is difficult because,
according to Pearce (1989), humans “so often are able to produce only faint shadows of
blazing visions, to bring into being only flawed versions of our image of what is good,
true, and beautiful” (p. 66). In short, coordination is a process significantly less complex
than human capabilities and experiences. Coordination is value-laden because we desire
some realities over others and uncertain because we never know what we are producing
together until our communication is complete. Pearce, however, offers no suggestions
for managing our desires and uncertainties about social worlds. As we coordinate
actions, we attempt to construct coherent understandings of the patterns we produce.

Coherence. Humans are the meaning-makers, Pearce (1989) reminded us.
Something physically and biologically happens in the world—we are born, we live, we
die—but what does it mean? Humans are simultaneously physical entities and symbolic entities. The same mechanical, earthly processes confine humans and all other matter in the universe, but only we live lives of moral significance; we are never simply biological events. As humans coordinate action, we must make sense of our actions and our worlds. If coordination is the action we make together, coherence is the sense we make individually and collectively. Coordination and coherence do not agree necessarily; we often think we are accomplishing some act, when we are actually accomplishing something else. Coherence designates human activity as a meaning-making endeavor (Pearce & Pearce, 2004).

Coordinated management of meaning theorists contend that meaning often takes the form of stories (Pearce & Pearce, 2004). Humans are storytellers, “immersed in linguistic webs they did not spin and busily weaving webs in which to immerse others” (Pearce, 1989, p. 68). Therefore, we are characters and authors of our sense making stories. Coherence is particularly difficult for excluded individuals because, often, they do not understand why they have been ostracized. Their exile generally indicates communication between the excluded and the excluder has terminated (or, at least decreased). An ostracized individual, then, must sometimes make sense of the social world with only sparse communication from coordinating partners (e.g., silence). How do we make sense of unpleasant emerging coherence?

Our patterns of interactions often anchor us to particular meanings. For instance, say the girl I mentioned above attempts to sit down with a group of peers at lunch and they tell her, “sorry, we’re saving that seat for someone.” What sense is she to make of
this? Maybe they are really saving the seat. However, if they also refused to let her play at recess and moved their desks away from her during class, then the pattern of interaction would seem to constrain her to tell a story of exclusion. Additionally, the excluders must make sense of the ostracism episode without the input of the excluded individual. Their way of coordinating leaves little scope for coordination. They, by definition, have little or no access to meanings experienced by the ostracized; therefore, they possess an impoverished stock of materials by which to build coherence. However, coherence does not address why we believe some meanings are more likely than other meanings, or how we come to prefer some meanings and dread others. For hints at these answers, we turn to the construction of moral orders.

Logical force and the moral order. Coordinated management of meaning explains how humans come to create entire symbolic universes with senses of right and wrong. Through our communicative practices and attempts at coordination, we create and express resources (Pearce, 1989). Resources are anything we utilize to make our worlds coherent, including, stories, concepts, perceptions, and memories. We tell stories in order to make sense of reality, and all stories have prescriptive and prohibited meanings about action. My communication at the present moment is guided by resources, and my memory of the present moment will become a resource for future communication moments. Resources come to define what is expected, obligatory, or prohibited in a situation; in other words, they form a logic of meaning and action that informs our sense of “oughtness.”
Pearce (1989) termed this sense of oughtness logical force; it impels us to interpret or respond to events in specific ways. Often, we define human aggregates as cultures, groups, or publics because they share some similar logic of meaning and action. Pearce identified four logical forces. Prefigurative force is our sense of obligation derived from events occurring before our action; it is the “I did this because” motive (we ostracized her because she is nerdy). Practical force is our sense of obligation that occurs after our action; the “I did this in order to” motive (we ostracized her in order to change her behavior). Contextual force is our sense of obligation derived from self-definitions, relationships, and situations; the “a person like me, in a situation like this, must…” (e.g., at school, a popular person like me should not be seen with a bookworm like her). Finally, implicative force is our sense of obligation derived from anticipated future effects our actions will have on our self, relationships, and the situation. Coordination often develops its own logic, which acts back on our patterned practices.

Our construction of logical force produces a sense of human morality. During the back-and-forth movement of communication, our sense of oughtness shifts from intrapersonal to interpersonal (Pearce, 2005); in other words, we objectivate our subjective thoughts about “right” and “wrong” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Pearce (1989) calls morality-promoting sets of practices and resources moral orders. According to Pearce and Littlejohn (1997), a moral order “denotes the pattern of one’s compulsory and permissions to act in certain ways and one’s prohibitions against acting in other ways” (p. 54). Actors in social worlds create elaborate rituals and activities to demonstrate morality (Pearce, 1989). We judge others, objects, and events, as good or
bad, moral or immoral. We make moral commentaries to describe, prescribe, and evaluate conduct. For instance, if adolescents judge a peer as bad, or behaving badly, they might opt to exile her from their reality. We police others’ actions in order to maintain our symbolic worlds (Berger & Luckmann, 1967); thus, anyone threatening our reality is subject to expulsion. Our actions and ideas are reflexive; “actions create ideas, and ideas constrain actions” (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 54). Therefore, moral orders create accepted boundaries for human action. Every moment confronts us with the question, “what ought I do?,” and our moral orders allow us to answer the question. However, sometimes what one group believes they ought to do creates an oppressive reality for another individual or group.

**Mystery and promises of liberation.** CMM’s concept of mystery offers hope that we might escape negative social worlds and create new realities in their place. Pearce (1989) suggested that the social construction of reality is liberating in two ways. First, social construction liberates us from “mere facticity”; in other words, we are freed from viewing life as merely a collection of biological facts devoid of symbolic meaning. Existence without language is “sensation without significance” (p. 72). Because of language, we never experience a fact by itself; rather, we imbue patterns of facts with meaning. If someone sneezes, we ask are they sick? Will I get sick, too? If someone averts eye contact with us, we wonder is she mad at me? Did I do something wrong? Liberation from mere facticity requires the suspension of disbelief—we must accept our symbolic world as real. We agree to treat representations as if they are that for which they stand. Pearce terms the suspension of disbelief and acceptance of our stories as
reality, enmeshment. When we exist in states of deep enmeshment, the liberating power of stories entrenches us and blinds us to the possibility of alternative worlds. Our liberation from mere facticity becomes our new imprisonment; “in the process of liberating us from mere facticity, language ensnares us in the social world that it constructs” (p. 82).

However, we are not imprisoned. The second liberation is freedom from the snares of language. Coordinated management of meaning’s concept of mystery is the reminder that lines drawn by language are, ultimately, arbitrary constructions (Pearce, 1989; Pearce & Pearce, 2004); nothing inherent in reality requires us to understand it in any particular way (Gergen, 1999). When we suspend disbelief, we necessarily overlook the fabrication of social worlds. As Berger and Luckmann (1967) articulated, we create, and then forget our role in the creation. When we speak, language seduces us to forget all the other words and stories that might have been spoken (Pearce, 1989; Pearce & Pearce, 2004). Within communication lie the twin powers of creation and destruction. At any moment, we can only make one of many potential acts real; therefore, “each momentary action destroys a myriad of potential social worlds” (Pearce & Pearce, 2004, p. 54). Mystery reminds us that the worlds we live in are only some of the worlds that could have been or might yet be.

Mystery is an awareness of our worlds’ perpetual motion; the world exists in the process of creation. As long as we communicate, creation is never complete (Pearce, 1989). Communication can illuminate or eclipse mystery and the emergent nature of reality. Often, as communication enmeshes us, we perceive our world as fixed. Because
language gives humans a strong sense of continuity, we often experience the world as static and tend to recreate patterns in the same way. For instance, chronically ostracized adolescents might feel “stuck” in a pattern of exclusion; they might even begin to expect loneliness and seek out patterns of exclusion (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2005; Rosen et al., 2009). For Pearce, the natural human condition is to live deeply enmeshed in social worlds so that we might easily achieve coordination and coherence. However, multiple interpretations of events are possible. We are anything but fixed. Mystery is a recognition that every story must leave something out. Everything we think we know could be otherwise (Pearce & Pearce, 2004). Mystery is the nexus of emancipation from particular social worlds.

Coordinated management of meaning offers an excellent explanation of the construction of social worlds. Patterned human communication produces and reproduces realities; we coordinate our actions within these worlds, make sense of our worlds, and live deeply enmeshed lives ignoring other possible constructions. However, ostracism gives rise to highly troubling constructions, fraught with challenges for the excluded and the excluders, who inherently deny the reality and good of another human being. Problematic integration theory offers additional tools to examine the dynamics involved in constructing these troubling meanings.

**Problematic Integration Theory**

Problematic integration theory suggests that we weave the fabric of reality out of both probabilistic and evaluative understandings. In addition, the theory posits the reciprocal interplay between communication, these forms of understanding, and the
integration of these understandings (Babrow, 1992). Probabilistic orientations are beliefs, expectations, and assumptions about reality, whereas evaluative orientations are our desires and values of good, bad, right, and wrong. Probability and evaluation are interdependent (Babrow, 1992; 1995); our probability estimates affect value assessments, and evaluations affect judgments of likeliness. For instance, an ostracized adolescent might initially feel deeply hurt by the ejection from her peer group. She desires to fit in, but realizes the peer group is unlikely to restore her membership status. Therefore, she shifts her desires and says, “I didn’t want to be friends with them anyway,” as she forms new friendships with more accepting peers. Alternatively, an adolescent might highly desire acceptance into a “popular” crowd, so she engages in wishful thinking and believes that if she dresses and speaks like them she will become popular, too. According to PI theory, humans must integrate probabilistic and evaluative understandings in our ongoing experiences (Babrow, 1992, 1995, 2001).

Integration of probabilistic and evaluative orientations is often troublesome (Babrow, 1992, 1995). Probability and evaluation might destabilize each other, making it difficult to orient oneself cognitively, affectively, or behaviorally (Babrow, 1995). For example, uncertainty about whether or not a peer group will accept me might make my choice of action difficult. How do we achieve coherence or coordinate actions with others when our orientations are in flux? Our integration of these orientations is not always seamless. Babrow labels the difficulties associated with assimilating probabilistic and evaluative orientations problematic integration (PI). Problematic integration theory
is applicable to past, present, and future oriented thinking; we integrate our orientations in order to make sense of past occurrences, present happenings, and future potentialities.

**Forms of PI.** Babrow (1992, 1995) originally conceived of four forms of PI; divergence, ambiguity (uncertainty), ambivalence, and impossibility (certainty). Divergence is the discrepancy between what an individual believes will happen and what she wants to happen. For instance, the unlikely happiness of finding acceptance among an exclusive peer group, or the likely sorrow of rejection from this group would indicate divergent PI.

Uncertainty (Babrow, 2001, 2007; Babrow, Kasch, & Ford, 1998) occurs when either the probability of or desire for an occurrence is unclear. For instance, an adolescent who is complicit in a classmate’s rejection might be unsure whether the rejected classmate really wanted acceptance or even whether the rejection is harmful.

Ambivalence is the presence of equally positive or negative, mutually exclusive situations, or a single person/object/situation that evokes contradictory responses. For instance, an adolescent might simultaneously recognize the cruelty of ostracizing a peer, but also seek continued acceptance in an exclusive group. Therefore, she experiences ambivalence, as she must decide whether to conform and exclude, or stand up, alone, for the ostracized individual.

Finally, impossibility is the certainty that something will not occur. Impossibility becomes problematic when there is a perceived 0% chance of a desired outcome, or a perceived 100% chance of a dreaded outcome. For instance, a child who believes she faces the certainty of peer exclusion at school tomorrow, and the impossibility of
acceptance among this group of peers. According to PI theory, impossibility (certainty) creates its own set of challenges that make it distinguishable from diverging expectation and desire. This is not to say, however, that impossibility and divergence do not shade into one another. Indeed, PI is dynamic, and its forms and reformulations through time are profoundly dependent on communication.

**Communication and PI.** Through communicative acts, we continually constitute and reconstitute probabilistic orientations, evaluative orientations, their integration, and PI (Babrow, 1992; 2001). For example, if a child is ostracized from a peer group, her parents might offer her several responses as consolation. They might suggest, “Maybe, if you are nice to them, they’ll let you play tomorrow.” Here, the parents encourage the child to value group inclusion and congeniality, while simultaneously decreasing her uncertainty about group acceptance. Alternately, the parents might say, “If they do not like you as you are, they are not good friends and you don’t need them.” Here, the parents encourage her to de-value acceptance and value authenticity; if she shifts her evaluation, divergence decreases and the unlikeliness of peer acceptance is less painful. In both examples, communication potentially relieves integrative challenges and fosters a more comfortable coherence. Communication is also a source of reframing, whereby troublesome probability and value are reconceived according to a more holistic favorable construction (e.g., social rejection by the non-gifted is confirmation of one’s superiority). Communication, therefore, is central to PI (Babrow 1992, 1995, 2001, 2007).

Communication is a source, medium, and resource in PI processes (Babrow, 1995). Babrow (2001) argued, “communication content, structures, and processes create,
shape, clarify, obscure, challenge, and transform probabilistic and evaluative orientations and the PI they so often occasion” (p. 555). Knowledge about probabilities and evaluations is expressed and shared through communicative acts; therefore, communication helps individuals to determine probabilities and evaluations. This process occurs on the level of social interaction, and public discourse (Babrow, 1995). For instance, during daily social interactions at a school, it might become apparent that a child chronically ostracized from peer groups is an unwanted friend. These interactions might make the ostracized individual certain of her lack of acceptance from all peer groups at the school. It might make onlookers de-value her as a friend, or even learn from her example and alter their own behavior to ensure her fate is not theirs. Alternatively, the public discourse of the community or society in which the school is enmeshed might create a rhetoric that certain traits, like advanced intellect, are undesirable. The adolescents in school then draw upon these notions and create a culture of anti-intellectualism. Communication and PI are reflexive and language determines if we view something as merely routine or if we conceptualize it as problematic (Babrow, 1992). Ultimately, PI theory offers a vocabulary to discuss our experiences when we must manage undesired or even despised meanings.

**Research Questions**

Problematic integration theory and CMM describe the reflexive motion between communication and the construction of social worlds. Coordinated management of meaning offers an explanation of the production and reproduction of social worlds through coordination, coherence, and mystery, while PI theory presents additional
concepts for understanding the dynamics of meanings as humans struggle to make sense of uncertain, unpleasant, realities.

I have posed many questions about the phenomenon of ostracism in the preceding sections of this chapter. However, I hesitate to offer broad, fundamental research questions because Zimmerman (1977) suggested researchers construct specific research questions after collecting data, contending that the wise researcher, “only partially knows what particulars of conduct he [sic] is looking for before they are encountered, but upon seeing them, he or she knows that they are what have been sought ‘all along’” (p. 491). Similarly, Lindlof and Taylor (2003) recognized that researchers must remain open for “unexpected discovery,” (p. 5). Therefore, I propose a series of very broad research questions that have guided my inquiry throughout the discourse collection and analysis in the current project: (a) When is exclusion problematic for intellectually gifted adolescents? (b) How is ostracism discursively accomplished, maintained, resisted, and transformed through adolescent communication? (c) How do intellectually gifted adolescents communicatively cope with their experiences of ostracism? Essentially, I am curious about a very basic archetype of questions: Who ostracizes? Why? When? How? To what effect?

The remainder of this tome is a testament to my temporary excursion into the lives of 45 intellectually gifted adolescents as I attempted to make visible their trials and triumphs surrounding experiences of ostracism and social exclusion. These adolescents became very dear to me as I followed their social experiences, in some cases for months. Chapter Two details my methodological choices for study design, introduces
amalgamated information about participants, and describes study procedures and details. Chapter Three describes the privilege and marginalization experienced by these gifted adolescents, particularly emphasizing the blessing and curse of giftedness and the intense mistreatment some of these individuals suffered at the hands of both peers and teachers because of their advanced intellect. Chapters Four through Six utilize sensitizing concepts from CMM and PI theory to address questions posed throughout the current chapter. Chapter Four addresses the question, “when is exclusion problematic for intellectually gifted adolescents” by exploring who engages in ostracism and the types of relational ostracism that are most hurtful. This chapter also addresses the social utility of ostracism used by individuals and groups, essentially addressing why and when ostracism occurs. Chapter Five describes the poetics of ostracism by addressing how ostracism is discursively accomplished as micro-, meso-, and macro-level social processes. Chapter Six explores how hearts are broken and mended by discussing the effect ostracism and how participants have learned to cope with exclusion. Finally, Chapter Seven offers theoretical and practical implications of dissertation findings.
Chapter 2: Methodology and Analysis of Discourse

The nature of the proposed questions guiding my project suggests a qualitative research design, and the theories of CMM and PI are well suited for interpretive studies. Using the lenses of coordinated management of meaning and problematic integration theory, I will explore the social construction of ostracism as a communication phenomenon. Specifically, I seek to gain a deeper understanding of intellectually gifted adolescents’ experiences creating, sustaining, terminating, and coping with ostracism during several developmental stages.

In order to provide in-depth accounts of my participants’ experiences as both instigators and targets of ostracism, I will employ multiple qualitative methods. Qualitative researchers often use a variety of data collection methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), and Flick (2002) suggested qualitative research is an inherently multi-method endeavor. Qualitative researchers act as detectives and storytellers (Goodall, 1994), weaving together representations of complex situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) to make realities visible. Researchers’ representations of others are “inextricably bound up with the way data are collected” (Markham, 2005, p. 803) and analyzed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

To make the worlds of excluded adolescents visible, I utilized electronic journaling and interviewing techniques. During the initial study phase, I conducted a telephone interview with the participant’s parents (all parents were mothers, except for one ather), followed by a telephone interview with the participant. This initial parent interview allowed me to understand the parents’ perception of her/his child’s social
experiences and social histories; the initial participant interview allowed me to understand the participant’s perspective of her social experiences and histories and explain technical aspects of the study. During the second study phase, I asked participants to keep an electronic journal about their experiences of ostracism for a minimum of four weeks. Journals gave me insight into the lived experience of ostracism in these adolescents’ daily lives and offered a view of ostracism unfolding over time. During the journaling phase, I contacted participants weekly either via telephone, text message, or email (based on the participant’s preference) to answer any participants’ questions as they arose, to address any issues needing immediate attention (for instance, if a participant reported being in immediate and eminent danger), and ensure journaling was proceeding smoothly. During the final study phase, I conducted in-depth interviews with participants regarding the content of their journal entries. Interviews allowed me to understand participants’ subjective feelings, attitudes, thoughts, and experiences of ostracism, and allowed me to probe issues surfacing in journal entries. Ultimately, I hope that by employing multiple qualitative methods I gained a deep understanding of the ways in which intellectually gifted adolescents create, sustain, terminate, and cope with experiences of ostracism. The current chapter provides a detailed description of my methodology and study design.

Participants

Recruitment. I recruited participants in several ways. I posted a call for participants to join my study on listserves for parents of gifted adolescents. These listserves included: TAGFAM (a listserve for parents of talented and gifted adolescents),
TAGPDQ (a listserve for parents of profoundly gifted adolescents), GT-Families (a listserve for parents and family members of gifted adolescents), GT-Special (a listserve for parents of gifted adolescents with special concerns or needs), and GT-Talk (a listserve for discussions about gifted education). I selected these listserves because several online gifted resources list them as national resources for parents of gifted adolescents. An example listserve call for participants is available in Appendix A.1. Several parents voluntarily shared my call for participants with additional listserves, Facebook groups, and with other parents of gifted adolescents.

I also worked with national gifted organizations and gifted education specialists to recruit participants. These organizations and professionals acted as gatekeepers to help me connect with parents, as suggested by Lindlof and Taylor (2002). The national organization Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) helped me to connect with gifted education specialists and professionals, such as gifted child psychologists, therapists, and counselors. The Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa (http://www2.education.uiowa.edu/belinblank/aboutus/) and the Davidson Institute (http://www.davidsongifted.org/) also helped me to connect with parents, educators, and professionals. Once these organizations advertised my study, I connected with numerous gifted education specialists or professionals who then contacted parents of gifted adolescents on my behalf. An example call for study participants sent to parents on my behalf is available in Appendix A.2. Several gifted education specialists and professionals voluntarily shared my call for participants with other professionals or organizations, as well.
Parents who read a call for participants and believed their child would be interested in the study contacted me by phone or email for more information. All the parents were mothers, with the exception of one father. Parents and I arranged a time to speak on the phone, when I explained the study specifics and answered their questions. These initial phone conversations lasted around 20 minutes and were not included in study data analysis. After discussing the study with me, if the parent gave consent for their child to participate in the study, then they signed a parental consent form and returned it via email or US postal mail. Parent consent forms are available in Appendix B.1. A total of 60 parents contacted me to seek more information about the study; 41 of those parents both had children interested in participating and consented to their child’s participation. One adolescent contacted me himself about his interest in participating; therefore, I contacted his mother at his request. Two parents had multiple children (2 children) desiring to participate in the study. Once receiving parental consent, I arranged a time to speak on the phone to both the parent and the adolescent. During this phone call, I explained the study to the adolescent, answered their questions, and provided them with a minor consent form. All adolescents who I spoke with agreed to participate in the study. Minor consent forms are available in Appendix B.2.

**Description and demographics.** Participants included 45 intellectually gifted adolescents in middle school or high school, ages 10-18. To ensure all participants were considered intellectually gifted in their state or school district, I asked parents to provide me with the child’s IQ score or the name of the gifted program in which the child participated. There were 22 female participants and 23 male participants. A total of 25
middle school and 20 high school students participated. The number of participants in each grade was relatively evenly represented: participants included three 5th graders, nine 6th graders, six 7th graders, seven 8th graders, five 9th graders, six 10th graders, four 11th graders, and five 12th graders. The majority of participants self-identified as Caucasian (39 participants); two individuals identified as Hispanic, one individual identified as Native American, one individual identified as African American, and one individual identified as Asian. One participant preferred not to disclose racial or ethnic identity.

Participants came from diverse physical locations and social environments. Participants were geographically diverse, coming from 4 different countries (United States, Colombia, Germany, and Canada), and 18 different U.S. states (Arizona, Alabama, California, Florida, Iowa, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin). Participants’ social environments also differed. All participants had attended a gifted school program, gifted summer camp, or accelerated learning classes at some point in their lives. During the study, 16 participants were not enrolled in any gifted program because their school offered no such program; 15 participants were enrolled in a gifted “pull out” program where the student either attended a special class for gifted children once a day or was pulled out of school once a week to participate in an entire day of gifted classes; 8 participants attended a full-time gifted program housed within a larger school so that most of their classes were taken with other gifted adolescents; 4 participants were homeschooled; and 2 participants attended a school for gifted adolescents and had no school-related contact with non-gifted individuals.
Additionally, 12 participants had skipped at least one grade in school, and thus were the youngest student in their grade. Fourteen students had changed schools at least three times either because of issues related to social exclusion or because their school did not challenge their intellect. Although only 4 students were homeschooled at the time of the study, 7 participants had been homeschooled at some point in their lives (including the 4 currently in homeschool). Finally, 3 participants mentioned that they were currently in counseling specifically because of their experiences of intense social exclusion in the past. It is possible that other participants had attended counseling at some point the past but did not reveal this information. The study was timed so that all participants began participating in the study at the start of their 2013-2014 academic school year because Pharo and colleagues (2011) suggested that individuals are more susceptible to ostracism after major social transitions, such as starting a new school year or transitioning from one school to another.

**Procedures**

**Counseling services.** Due to the nature of my study and its possibility to stir up uncomfortable emotions for participants, I provided all participants with contact information for a counselor who specializes in gifted child and adolescent counseling services. This counselor agreed to provide a free counseling session for participants and/or help them find permanent free counseling in their area. No participants requested counseling services during or after their participation in the project. However, three participant’s parents asked me to help connect them with a counselor before participation in the study. Within 24 hours, the above-mentioned counselor and I were able to connect
all three participants with counselors in their area. One participant liked the initial counselor so much that she elected to both participate in Skype counseling with him and attend in-person counseling with a counselor in her area.

**Preliminary interviews.** Once parents and interested adolescents had enrolled in the study by completing consent forms, I scheduled a telephone interview with the contacting parent and their child. Interviews are one of the oldest qualitative methods (Morgan, 2002); they are guided conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Warren, 2002) that elicit thick descriptions from participants when the method is open-ended or depth interviewing (Warren, 2002). Depth interviews allow researchers access to participants’ subjective experiences, thoughts, and attitudes (Peräkyä, 2008). Initial interviews with parents allowed me to establish rapport and create trust with the contacting parent, as well as gain a parent’s holistic understanding of their adolescent’s social life. Initial interviews with adolescents also allowed me to establish rapport and create trust with the participants themselves, helped me to get to know them before they began journaling, gave me insight into their perceptions of their own social experiences and social environment, and ensured the adolescent fully understood the journaling process and technical navigation of the study website.

**Parent interviews.** The parent interview immediately preceded the adolescent interview; in other words, I spoke with the mother and then asked her to hand the phone to her child. The parent interviews averaged around 40 minutes; the shortest interview with a mother lasted 15 minutes and the longest interview lasted 60 minutes. I asked the mothers three questions: (a) what is your child’s IQ? OR what gifted programs has she
participated in over the course of her lifetime? I utilized this question to ensure their child qualified for participation in the current study. Every adolescent qualified for the study. (b) Please tell me about your child’s schooling history, starting from kindergarten. I utilized this question to ascertain a timeline for the adolescent and understand the types of school environments she had experienced. Parents talked me through their child’s school history from kindergarten until their current grade; often I asked probing questions to clarify information. (c) Please tell me about your child’s social history. I intended this question to gain an understanding of their child’s past experiences with social exclusion and social inclusion, understand their primary friendship groups, and learn about their typical peer interactions from the perspective of their parent. Ultimately, I found parents to be talkative, excited to be included in the study, and enthusiastic about sharing information about their child’s experiences.

**Adolescent interviews.** The adolescent interview immediately succeeded the parent interview. The average length was also about 50 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 30 minutes, while the longest lasted 120 minutes. An approximation of the script I used for the initial adolescent interview is available in Appendix C. I did not read directly from the script because I wanted the interviews to feel personable and comfortable rather than sterile and rehearsed. I began the interview by asking adolescents questions about their social lives and demographics; I asked all adolescents the same questions, listed in Appendix C. I ended the interview by helping the adolescents set up their account for the study website and explaining how all aspects of the website function. The initial interview seemed to legitimize the study for participants
and familiarize them with me and with the study website. All adolescents seemed excited to answer my questions and willing to speak with me about their social experiences.

**Online journaling.** After participants completed the initial study interview, they began keeping online journals about their experiences of social exclusion for at least one month. Students created journal entries using a website created specifically for the current study (see www.projectexperience.strileyconsulting.com). This website allowed students to privately journal about their experiences of social exclusion. Only I was able to read their journal entries. All participants wrote in their journals for a minimum of one month. Nine participants chose to write longer than one month; five wrote for two months, three wrote for three months, and one participant wrote for five months. Participants averaged writing three to four journal entries a week. Some participants wrote an entry every day, a few participants wrote multiple entries a day, and some participants wrote as little as once a week. The majority of participants wrote several times a week. Journals varied considerably on length. Some participants wrote a short paragraph about one experience, while other participants wrote several pages about one experience. The average length was 300 words per entry, but this means little given the considerable variability among entries. Journals allowed for participants to record experiences closer in time to those experiences than would have been possible with interviews occurring only occasionally and at times determined or influenced by the researcher: times uncoordinated with experiences with ostracism. In addition, journaling permitted depth and reflection, provided a view of ostracism over time, and minimized
recall distortions. I will now discuss electronic journaling as a method before further discussing specifics of journaling in the current study.

**The diary method.** Journaling on the website offered a modern twist to the diary method of data collection. In the diary method, researchers ask participants to record specific daily experiences in a journal (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). Diarists serve as “adjunct ethnographers of their own circumstances” (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977, p. 484), thus making it one of the rare methods whereby participants determine the data’s nature (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Diary methods work particularly well for phenomena or situations that are difficult to observe, occur infrequently, or are secretive (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). Sanstrom and Cillessen (2003) contended that the diary method is opportune for exploring socially rejected children since children tend to suppress undesirable behavior, like social rejection, when observed. Additionally, because ostracism is often a lack of communication, perhaps only detectable as an elusive aversion of the eyes or a covert glance elsewhere, a researcher observing natural interaction could easily overlook its subtleties.

Diaries offer a number of benefits for data collection. Although some researchers relegate diaries to a secondary status, Starks and Lee (2010) argue that diaries provide a strong primary data-gathering technique. Diaries capture intimate descriptions of naturally occurring daily experiences (Bolger et al., 2003; Flook & Fuligni, 2008; Lämsä et al., 2012; Nicholl, 2010), provide insights into mundane or easily forgettable events (Lämsä et al., 2012; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977), and for these reasons are a strong research tool for analyzing social processes (Götze, Prange, & Uhrovska, 2009; Sá,
2002). As such, a variation of the diary method is appropriate for my study; it allows me to probe the complex social process of ostracism. Atkinson, Coffey, and Delemont (2003) even suggested diary methods allow researchers to better represent complex social worlds because diaries challenge conventional modes of representation. Some researchers suggest diary methods are superior to traditional qualitative methods because they reduce problems associated with recall and retroactive sense-making often occurring in interviews (Bolger et al., 2003; Flook & Fuligni, 2008; Nicholl, 2010; Suveg et al., 2010), often elicit more detailed descriptions than interviews (Palmero, Valenzuela, & Stork, 2004), and provide more complete views of children’s emotional states (Suveg et al., 2010).

Although the majority of diary studies have been conducted with adult populations (Suveg et al., 2010), researchers have successfully employed diary methods with adolescents. Researchers have utilized diary methods to study positive and negative adolescent peer interactions (Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2003), children’s decision making processes (Götze et al., 2009), classroom social processes (Sá, 2002), adolescents’ emotional states (Reynolds et al., 2000; Suveg et al., 2010), children’s perceptions of pain (Palmero, 2003), family language use (Starks & Lee, 2010), students’ experiences of family stress (Flook & Fuligni, 2008), and even children’s reactions to the events of September 11, 2001 (Whalen et al., 2004). According to Sá (2002), diary methods do not merely represent adolescents’ experiences, but might also help children develop their thought processes and ability to explore complicated experiences. Bolger and colleagues (2003) suggested diary writing might have cathartic effects for participants. Travers
(2011) contended that journals help individuals develop narrative skills and cope with difficult life events by deepening their abilities to reflect and increasing their awareness.

Many diary method variations exist. Diaries can be quantitative, standardized instruments or narrative and qualitative in nature (Thiele, Lai reiter, & Baumann, 2002). For instance, although the diary method originally developed as an extension of ethnography (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977), psychology researchers have typically used quantitative diary methods to gather statistics about changes over time (Travers, 2011).

Diary types include interval-contingent, whereby participants write at set intervals of time, signal-contingent, whereby participants write when researchers signal them to write, and event-contingent, whereby participants write when a specific event occurs (Bolger et al., 2003). Diaries may include structured questions, or an unstructured design (Nicholl, 2010). Finally, paper-and-pencil diaries are most common, but electronic diaries are gaining popularity (Bolger et al., 2003). In the current study, I utilized electronic, event-contingent, structured and unstructured qualitative narrative diaries.

According to Markham (2005), internet technologies offer qualitative researchers exciting new ways of collecting and interpreting data. The journaling website created for this study allowed my participants to keep electronic diaries. The major advantage of electronic diaries is increased compliance and participant satisfaction (Suveg et al., 2010). At the end of the study, many of my participants reported enjoying writing in their journals and acting as “social detectives.” Palmero and colleagues’ (2003) comparative study between paper-and-pencil diaries and electronic diaries found that 83% of adolescents completed the required electronic diary entries, whereas only 47% of
adolescents completed paper-and-pencil diary entries. They also found that adolescents liked electronic formats better than paper-and-pencil diaries. Whalen and colleagues (2004) found that children quickly learned the software for electronic diary programs with few errors or technical difficulties. My participants reported no technical difficulties using the website; two participants forgot their passwords and had to ask me to allow them to create a new password. Additional advantages of creating a website for electronic journals include giving students privacy and confidentiality as they reflect on the uncomfortable social experience of ostracism. I believe electronic diaries allowed my participants to honestly reflect on and report their experiences without feeling judged or embarrassed. I will now explain the journal website in more detail.

**Getting started.** To use the website, students first created a user account with a login name and password. I helped them to create these unique usernames and passwords at the end of our initial telephone interview. Students were then able to log onto the website and write their journal entries in a safe, password protected interface.

**Journaling options.** Once participants registered, I asked them to journal on the website for at least four weeks. The purpose of online journaling was to allow students to reflect about their experiences, and to record their daily experiences soon after they occur to avoid recall bias. Students could access the website on a computer, tablet, or cell phone. Several participants told me they wrote entries on their cell phones during breaks at school. The website offered both structured and unstructured journaling options, as suggested by Nicholl (2010). More specifically, participants could select up to three journaling options on the website: (a) write an autobiography of themselves, focusing on
their social lives, (b) complete an unstructured free-write about social exclusion with minimal prompts, or (c) answer pre-written structured questions.

The first journaling option was to create an “autobiography” to introduce themselves to me. According to Markham (2005), individuals must deliberately initiate the process of online identity construction; therefore, I wanted to give participants the power to textually control their self-presentation. For Markham, “online, the first step towards existence is the production of discourse” (p. 794). Participants had the freedom to write anything they wanted me to know about them, thus allowing me to get to know the participants better through information they believe is important to their identity. Participants typically told me about their friends, families, pets, and interests. The prompt for the autobiography section of the website included:

1. Welcome! I am very excited you will be participating in my project! So that I can get to know you a little better, please tell me about yourself. I would like to know anything about you that helps me get to know who you are. Feel free to write whatever comes to mind!

2. Are you having trouble thinking of something to write? Here are some ideas to help you get started. You could write about your personality or give me a brief description of yourself. You could tell me about your friendships or your peer groups. You could write about whether or not you “fit in” at school and how you feel about the social groups you hang out with at school.
The second journaling option allowed participants to free-write based on four prompts I gave them at the end of our initial interview. These prompts included: (a) Write about any instances when you, personally, feel ignored, excluded, or left out. (b) Write about any instances where you, personally, ignore, exclude, or leave someone else out. (c) Write about any instances where you observe someone else being ignored, excluded, or left out. (d) If you want to write a journal entry but did not experience the first three events, write about a memorable experience from the past where you were ignored, excluded, or left out. I also told students that they could write about their experiences and observations of social inclusion; I did this because several parents were concerned that their children would become depressed if they only focused on negative social interactions. Therefore, I asked participants to focus on both negative and positive interactions. As suggested by Zimmerman and Wieder (1977), I asked students to record who/what/when/where/why/how, and any other pertinent information about the instance.

Finally, the third journaling option included answering structured written prompts. The purpose of the structured questions was two-fold. First, participants could select the “Answer a Question” link if they wanted to write that day but could not think of anything about which to write. Second, students could answer some specific questions about ostracism potentially left uncovered in their unstructured journal entries. I told students they could answer as many or as few structured questions as they wanted. The ten structured questions appear in Appendix D. On average, participants answered five of the ten questions; however, some participants answered all ten questions. In general, participants reported more interest in writing unstructured journal entries rather than
answering the structured questions. However, some participants did mention that the questions were helpful when they did not know what they should write about that day.

**Weekly checkups.** Because online research lacks face-to-face cues, Mann and Stewart (2002) suggested participants need extra reassurances and regular confirmation that their communication is appropriate and valued and the researcher is trustworthy. Researchers must send explicit verbal assurances to online participants (Markham, 2005); “online listening needs to be expressed as words, not silence” (Mann & Stewart, 2002, p. 618). Similarly, Suveg and colleagues (2010) suggested providing feedback to participants throughout the diary project. Additionally, past studies have found that frequent contact with participants and reminders about diary entries increase compliance with study parameters (Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2003; Suveg et al., 2010; Whalen et al., 2004. Therefore, once a week I contacted participants via email, telephone, or text message (depending on their preference) to “check in” and answer any technical questions. I believe this allowed participants to feel connected to me throughout the journaling process. Sometimes these checkups turned into a miniature interview session because I would ask them clarifying questions about their journal entries from the previous week. Often, participants were excited to hear from me and had been saving something to tell me until we spoke or emailed. Several times participants contacted me before I could checkup with them that week; other times participants’ parents would contact me to tell me something interesting that they had observed about their child regarding study participation.
**Exit interviews.** Researchers often used diary methods in combination with other research procedures. Zimmerman and Wieder (1977) originally conceived of diary writing in conjunction with interviews, calling it “the diary-interview” method, and suggesting researchers use the diary as a focal point for the interview. Sandstrom and Cillessen (2003) concluded that, for adolescents, the diary method is even stronger in combination with other methods, such as adolescent interviews. Therefore, in the current study, after participants journaled on the website, I invited them to participate in in-depth interviews.

The final study interview was unlike the initial study interview. Fontana and Frey (2005) cautioned that because interviews are now the predominant qualitative data collection method, they have become ubiquitous, routine, and taken-for-granted. Therefore, Fontana and Frey advocated empathetic interviewing, where researchers communicate openly with participants, rather than engaging in highly structured, rigid interview formats. In empathetic interviewing, researchers are sensitive to participants, listen actively, and respect participant emotions (Ellis & Berger, 2002). For Kong, Mahoney, and Plummer (2002), the interview should be humanizing; empathetic interviewing adds a humanizing element to interviews by allowing the researcher to connect with participants during interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Following this line of reasoning, I tried to make the final interview a deeply humanizing process; at this point, I felt as if I knew my participants well (having read intimate details of their lives for at least a month and having spoken with them or emailed with them every week) and many of them were experiencing difficult social situations. As suggested by Zimmerman
and Wieder (1977), I used participant journals as a focal point for the interview, and as suggested by Fontana and Frey (2005), I utilized an unstructured interview format. Therefore, every participant interview was highly individualized, based on the content of their journals and the relationship the participant and I had forged.

**Compensation and incentives.** Because I asked for a significant time commitment and effort from participants, I provided small tokens of appreciation as compensation for participation. The main disadvantage to diary methods is that participants often forget about writing journal entries (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) or find writing entries is burdensome (Bolger et al., 2003; Lämsä et al., 2012; Suveg et al., 2010). Several researchers have suggested providing monetary incentives for diary participation. Zimmerman and Wieder (1977) and Palmero and colleagues (2003) offered participants $10 to keep diaries for a week. Whalen and colleagues offered students $20 each day they wrote a diary entry, and found that 94% of children completed all required diary entries. Similarly, Flook and Fuligni (2008) offered participants $30 for writing diary entries and found that 95% completed the study. Offering much less, Sandstrom and Cillessen (2003) offered students $1 for every journal entry or $10 for writing an entry every day for 7 days; they found that 100% of socially rejected children in their study wrote a diary entry for all 7 days. Conversely, Suveg and colleagues (2010) offered no incentive to participants and had only a 60% diary completion rate. Ultimately, Suveg and colleagues as well as Lämsä and colleagues (2012) concluded that offering incentives and helping students feel committed to the project are the biggest predictors of diary completion.
As an incentive in the current study, every week while participants were journaling, I had a drawing for a $10 gift card to a store of the participant’s choice. Every time a student journaled, I entered her name into the drawing for that week. For instance, if a participant journaled three times during the week, I entered her name into the drawing three times. Once a participant exceeded 8 weeks of study participation, she was no longer eligible to be entered into the drawing. I had 12 weekly drawings for participants; most participants asked for gift cards to Amazon or Barnes and Noble. At the end of the study, I had one final drawing for a $100. I did not tell participants about the drawings until after they agreed to participate so that no one based their decision on monetary gain. Although I intended the weekly drawings to serve as an incentive, many participants did not remember the weekly drawing. Three participants even requested that I take their name out of the drawing, stating that they were participating purely out of their interest in the study. Ultimately, the gift cards served more as a “thank you” surprise than an incentive or compensation.

**Researcher Positionality**

Before I describe my analysis of discourse, it is important to discuss how my own positionality as a researcher affected my analysis of data. Throughout this dissertation, I divulge information about my own life as a gifted adolescent. Much of this information illuminates my own positionality as I attended to participant discourses. I always felt different from my peers in school but never understood why, often caring much more about intellectual pursuits than did they. I always felt like an outsider and wanted, more than anything, to just be normal. Sometimes my peers teased or bullied me, but most
often they just ignored me for being “weird.” In elementary and middle school, I spent many recesses alone, feeling like a nonentity. My own personal experiences influenced my decision to study gifted adolescents’ experiences of ostracism, as a way to make sense of my own experiences and help adolescents who, in some small way, are like me.

When I was in middle school, I was tested for the first time to see if I qualified as “gifted.” Once I was labeled as gifted, I enrolled in a gifted summer camp and subsequently attended a gifted “pullout” program that allowed me to attend my regular school four days of the week and the gifted program one day of the week. Once I was with other gifted adolescents, I finally felt like I belonged for the first time in my life. I began making real friends for the first time (some of whom I am still in contact with even today). In high school, I participated in an International Baccalaureate program, comprised mostly of “profoundly gifted” adolescents. Most of us graduated at 16 or 17 years old. Many of my peers in this program had permanent emotional scars from peer mistreatment. Because of my experiences, although I believe giftedness as an institution is a social construction, I also believe there is a materiality to the notion of giftedness. I experienced being different from other same-age peers both before and after I was officially labeled gifted. Therefore, I believe the label of gifted is often a salient and useful social construction that can help adolescents find like-minded peers. When my school labeled me as gifted, it saved my life, and the lives of many of my friends, in very real ways. Because of my early experiences of feeling different, I am always interested in studying outsiders and underdogs, which has colored my analysis.
Although I felt different and alone at times as a child and adolescent, I always had a strong familial support system. My father is, above all other things, a positive and happy person. He is also supportive, compassionate, unconditionally loving, and affectionate. My mother is strong, does not tolerate self-pity, does not care what others think of her, and always marches to her own drums. When I was rejected by my peers, my parents provided a supportive home life that taught me to turn my sorrows into something positive, to cultivate a resiliency and strength of character, and to find internal self-worth. These traits have, undoubtedly, influenced some of my analysis. For instance, Chapter Six takes on a distinctly positive tone as I discuss the beauty of surviving exile. Ultimately, we cannot escape who we are or how we perceive the world and these elements of our identity shape our analyses.

**Analysis of Discourse**

The current study produced a multitude of qualitative discourse requiring analysis. Transcripts for initial interviews with adolescents and their parents totaled 204 single-spaced pages, transcripts for exit interviews with adolescents totaled 215 single-spaced pages, and transcripts and emails from weekly checkups totaled 83 single-spaced pages. Participants’ journal entries totaled 282 pages of text. Ultimately, taken together, participants created 784 single-spaced pages of discourse. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research produces a montage of individuals’ lived experiences, and the researcher must arrange these slices of reality during analysis. As such, they suggested, researchers should use a variety of analytical practices, because each analytical tool illuminates different realities in different ways. Similarly, Atkinson
and Delamont (2008) cautioned researchers to avoid “reductionist views that treat one type of data or one approach to analysis as being the prime source of social and cultural interpretation” (p. 288). Therefore, I used multiple techniques to make visible the worlds of excluded adolescents, to understand the processes by which adolescents create, sustain, and terminate ostracism, and to explore the functions of ostracism in adolescents’ social realities.

I utilized a four-stage analytical model that included thematic analysis, theoretical application, discourse analysis, and case study analysis. Initially, I analyzed journal and interview discourse separately. I began analysis for both sets of discourse by following steps suggested by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009), Baxter and Babbie (2004), Creswell (2003), and Lindlof and Taylor (2002). According to Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009), analysis requires “creativity in the sense of an ability to see various aspects of data; theoretical sophistication; theoretical breadth and variation; and an ability to reflect at the metatheoretical level.” I attempted to demonstrate these qualities in my phases of analysis.

**Phase I: Raw interpretation.** At the first phase of analysis, I created transcripts from participant interviews. Then, I gained an initial comprehension of the discourse by reading though transcripts and journals to make fledgling observations. This initial reading allowed for “total immersion” in the discourse (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). I created notes and commentaries to myself and reflected on my initial understandings; as Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest, these early understandings will be “tentative, and only a snapshot of what the researcher finds interesting” (p. 213). According to Alvesson and
Skoldberg (2009), I engaged in “raw interpretation” (p. 273), involving basic observations, preliminary interpretations, and formation of initial categories. Alvesson and Skoldberg state the degree of interpretation is low and unclear to the researcher at this phase. However, at this time the researcher creatively sees multiple interpretive possibilities.

As I gained a better understanding of the discourse, following Lindlof and Taylor’s (2002) advice, I also (a) began to manage discourse by reducing it into categories, and (b) marked segments to analyze in detail in future analysis phases. I categorized discourse in two ways. First, I divided discourse into four categories: (1) excerpts from the target of ostracism’s point of view, (2) excerpts from the source of ostracism’s view, (3) excerpts from an observer’s point of view, and (4) musings about exclusion. Second, I divided discourse into categories based on my initial noticings and commentaries. These initial noticings tended to align with my initial research questions regarding “who excludes? Why? How? And to what effect?” During this initial phase of analysis, I utilized the constant comparison method, although the intent was not to build grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Finally, I marked important segments of discourse for more detailed future analysis. Discourse segmentation was similar to categorization, but less explicit. Discourse segments included important exemplars that I believed were particularly rich, profound, or interesting. Segments also included particular types of excerpts. For example, I scanned journal entries for explicit examples of ostracism episodes. Thus, I created a collection of narratives describing actual examples of ostracism to analyze.
further. Baxter and Babbie (2004) describe data segmentation as unitizing, and state that units are chunks of data that provide insight to emerging questions “[arising] out of the data as the researcher attempts to make sense of them” (p. 366). My initial noticings and commentaries guided my discourse segmentation at this early phase.

**Phase II: Theoretical application.** My second phase of analysis included theoretical sophistication and iterative close readings of my discourse as I developed coding categories from my initial observations and theoretical concepts. At this point, I engaged in multiple iterative processes of reading and re-reading discourse to reduce discourse units into categories. During one cycle of reading, I refined my initial categories, created new categories, and named these categories (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Creswell, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). During another cycle, I compared similarities and differences between demographic categories (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). The creation of these categories and iterative reading of the discourse began to form the basis of what would become my analysis chapters.

Once I had read the discourse multiple times making my own observations, I applied theoretical concepts to the discourse. Therefore, during a third cycle I read the discourse while attending to CMM. Finally, during a fourth cycle I read the discourse while attending to PI theory. Although I tended to foreground one theory at a time for ease of analysis, I also attempted to contemplate the interconnections between the two theories and the discourse. Additionally, Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) suggest remaining open to multiple theoretical possibilities, as several theories might be applicable to the context. Therefore, as I read, I remained open to theoretical concepts
outside of CMM and PI theory and attempted to incorporate relevant literature and ideas into my analysis. For example, I often found myself citing Williams (2001) work on ostracism or applying Johnson’s (2006) ideas about privilege and difference. According to Baxter and Babbie (2004), “you may be exhausted by this point in the process, but it is important to repeat the whole coding exercise” (p. 368). I engaged in iterative readings until I reached a point of theoretical saturation and no longer observed additional emergent categories (and yes, I was exhausted!).

Allowing theory to guide my observations at this stage added depth to my findings, and potentially expanded theory. According to Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009), the “researcher allows the empirical material to inspire, develop and reshape theoretical ideas” (p. 273). However, for Lindlof and Taylor (2002), “a priori theory can sensitize one to what could be important, but it should not override or overshadow the meanings that the researcher discovers” (p. 215). Thus, I tried to balance my own observations with theoretical sensibilities guiding my analysis. As Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) explain, “the trick, then, is to control theories (interpretive possibilities) without letting them control you” (p. 274). The reader must judge my successes and failures.

**Phase III: Discourse analysis.** At the third phase of analysis, I moved beyond categorization and used a discursive mindset to ask “what is going on in the verbal exchange” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 217). In the current analysis, I used discourse analysis as a sensitizing concept; sometimes my analysis needed a discursive mindset, and other times a thematic or case analysis was sufficient. Therefore, I did not consistently apply discourse analysis throughout the entire analysis process. For
instance, in Chapter Four, discourse analysis was particularly helpful in explicating the six social objectives of ostracism. However, in Chapter Four, thematic analysis was most helpful in my discussion of relational dimensions that fostered participants’ desires for relational closeness and harmed participants when they experienced ostracism from these individuals.

The aggregating techniques of thematic analysis and categorization, according to Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009), often overemphasize similarities and overlook language—the medium through which we create our symbolic existences. Additionally, Atkinson and Delamont (2008) argued that discourse should be analyzed and “not just reproduced and celebrated” (p. 288). They contended that Geertz’s thick description is often misunderstood as meaning to merely provide a detailed description; in actuality, it requires attending to multiple codes and structures through which social life is experienced. For Geertz (1973), analysis requires “sorting out the structures of signification” (p. 9). As such, discourse analysis is appropriate because it allows for a deeper understanding of contexts (Gee, 2011), attends to language and signification (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2008; Gee, 2011) and is ideal for social constructionist approaches (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Potter, 1996). Using discourse analysis, I was able to address one of my research questions, “How is ostracism accomplished through communication?”

Discourse analysis examines the construction of reality through language. Specifically, language allows individuals to construct accounts, and select or reject meaning constructions (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009); chosen constructions have
consequences for individuals’ social worlds (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Gee, 2011). For discourse analysts, language does not reflect internal or external conditions; rather, it creates conditions (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2008). The analytical method of discourse analysis has many meanings and practices; in the current project, I employ Gee’s (2011) version of discourse analysis. For Gee, discourse analysis infers what a text is saying, doing, and being. Essentially, every text is always informing someone, performing an action, and enacting an identity. Gee suggested that, “we make or build things in the world through language” (p. 17). He posited that we build seven specific types of constructions: significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems/knowledge.

Communication renders some things as significant or insignificant, and we signal this (in)significance to others. The act of ostracism itself attempts to render someone insignificant. As adolescents make sense of ostracism, for some, exclusion might be so significant that it defines them; others might remain apathetic to rejection, particularly if they construct the ostracizer as unimportant. As students integrate probabilistic and evaluative orientations, they might construct the (in)significance of exclusion events differently. Next, language creates sequences of actions, often referred to as speech acts. What practices do adolescents in my study enact as they discuss ostracism? Do they normalize ostracism? Do they communicate resignation to their relational status? Third, we use language to perform various identities. For instance, a chronically ostracized student might enact the identity of victim, or conversely perform the identity of aloof loner who chooses to stay away from others. Who do these students become when they
ostracize or are ostracized? What does this mean for their identity to themselves and others?

Fourth, communication signals the types of relationships we have or want. Because ostracism communicates a lack of relationship between a target and source, I am particularly interested to explore how adolescents’ discourse constructs relationships. Who do they become to each other when ostracism occurs? Who do they want to be to each other? Fifth, language conveys a political perspective on the distribution of social goods. How does adolescents’ phrasing of ostracism implicate particular social goods? Perhaps their talk confers popularity, superiority, dignity, guilt, blame, goodness, badness. Six, communication constructs or fails to construct relevant connections. Will the adolescents in my study identify a connection between exclusion and giftedness, believing their advanced intellect separates them from peers? Or, will they connect ostracism to some other characteristic? Finally, language allows us to value certain types of knowledge and sign systems over others. How do adolescents construct belief claims about ostracism events? For instance, perhaps an individual might justify exclusion because “everyone knows” Sarah is a “loser.” Sarah might make sense of her ostracism by believing the group that rejects her is pretentious.

**Phase IV: Case analysis of individual participants.** During phases one, two, and three of data analysis, I treated journal entries and interview discourses separately. However, ultimately, the same students participated in the creation of these discourses. Therefore, I gained a holistic view of these participants as individuals by examining the same students across all three contexts. Thus, the final analysis phase involved
reconstituting the discourses and holistically following individual students as they created journal entries and answered interview questions. This final analytic phase allowed me to concretize profiles of one or more students as they gave meaning to their ostracism experiences. In this way, I hope I represented more holistically what it is like to be an adolescent ostracizer and ostracizee.

Although I analyzed journals and interview transcripts according to Gee’s discourse analysis technique and thematic analysis guidelines described by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009), Baxter and Babbie (2004), Creswell (2003), and Lindlof and Taylor (2002), ultimately, I wanted to remain close to participant discourse. Markham (2005) warned, “analysis is complicated –and impeded—by academic conventions and training” (p. 807). For Markham, a stickler for procedure risks blindness to the actual interpretive process. I hope that my analysis did justice to my context and participants, and illuminated the social construction of ostracism among adolescents. Ultimately, the adolescents in my study wrote deeply sincere and moving journal entries and allowed me to see an authentic and raw side of them. They moved me to tears and laughter, the poetry of their words amazed me, and their resilience inspired me. In the following chapters, I hope that my analysis does justice to their beauty and that I can show the reader more than a superficial glimpse into the existence of these remarkable adolescents.

I made the editorial decision not to edit participants’ journal entries or interview quotations for grammar or typographical errors. All quotations excerpted from journal entries are unedited and quotations excerpted from interviews are reproduced verbatim. Therefore, some grammatical errors and typographical mistakes in participant quotations
do appear in the following chapters. All participant names have been changed for confidentiality; additionally, names of all individuals to whom participants directly refer to by name in interviews or journals have been changed. A table with participant pseudonyms, ages, and grades appears in Appendix E.
Chapter 3: Intersections of Privilege and Marginalization

When I was a kid, I traded in homework assignments for friendship; then gave each friend a late slip for never showing up on time- and in most cases, not at all. I gave myself a hall pass to get through each broken promise.

- Shane Koyczan, 2013

As a child, I was always a little different, always marching to my own drums. In elementary school, I was wild. I never sat still or stopped talking. I was bored, and often in trouble for speaking in class. However, I was happy and got along with my classmates despite (or because of) my energy and enthusiasm. Then, I moved, and my world changed. I changed. My new Midwestern classmates teased me for having a Southern accent. They ostracized me because I wanted to talk about astronomy instead of football. They hated me because I was the only one scoring perfectly on exams. I stopped talking so much; I withdrew into books. I became depressed, even suicidal at one point. At eleven years old, I thought the world had no place for me. In the summer after seventh grade, I went to a summer camp for intellectually gifted adolescents. Here, I found my people. I became talkative and excited again. I wanted to live. In high school, I became a collector of lost souls. I attended a full-time gifted program housed within a public high school. I wanted everyone to feel as if they belonged somewhere. I saw so many scars on my new friends. They had been bullied, excluded, stigmatized, and told repeatedly, with and without words, that they were worthless. I wanted to create a new world for them, and myself, where scars healed.

This dissertation is not about me; it is about 45 amazing adolescents struggling to find their voices. However, hidden within their stories and my analysis, this dissertation cannot help but be (a little) about me because their stories are also my story. These
adolescents are me; they are also my husband, my little brother, my best friends, and even some of my school yard enemies. They reminded me of the pain and beauty of exclusion that we all face in our journey to survive adolescence and find ourselves. We do survive, most of us, and our experiences of exclusion forever shape our character, with all its flaws and graces. Many of these adolescents are the underdogs. Some of them are the quiet ones that rarely let anyone in; others talk too much because they are excited about ideas. They have all been labeled as “different” in some way. They experience typical adolescent struggles complicated by intelligence and other forms of difference. Like us all, they are just trying to figure out how to live. Throughout this chapter and those that follow, I will introduce you to these adolescents as I share their trials and triumphs.

In the current chapter, I describe the simultaneous privileging and marginalization of these gifted youth. The current chapter serves a primarily descriptive function to familiarize us with the experiences of study participants. In the following chapters, I become more analytical. In Chapter Four, I attend to why adolescents exclude as I assess reasons for and functions of exclusion. In Chapter Five, I attend to how exclusion occurs as I explore processes of exclusion and present a model. In Chapter Six, I discuss the outcomes, particularly positive outcomes, of exclusion. In Chapter Seven, I reflect on study methodology by addressing how this study changed participants’ communication with peers, meanings of engaged scholarship, and implications of study findings.

It’s Good to Be Gifted

The “gifted” label. Gifted adolescents walk a tightrope, a strange duality of simultaneously privileged and marginalized existences. The term “gifted” oozes with
privilege. To have a “gift” means one is special, better than others in some area. Lambert (2010) stressed that the label implies “distinct advantage and benefit” (p. 101) because “non-gifted” suggests a deficit. The term itself sets some adolescents above others, merely by applying the label “gifted.” For instance, Sandy, one participant’s mother, explained her own difficulty with the term “gifted” by describing her

Discomfort and hesitancy to speak out, out loud, the “G” word… I could suddenly feel the suffocating cloud of confusion over how I was to explain my son’s issues without having to say that unspeakable word…. For me, what I feared most was the jealousy and contempt others would potentially feel towards me for daring to “brag” about my gifted son…. Then, once that word broke free of my lips, I felt the uncontrollable need to apologize for or defend my use of the “G” word.

Sandy felt guilt and embarrassment when mentioning her son Robert’s giftedness, because of the implied privileged status of the term. Her need to apologize emerged from her sense that somehow disclosing Robert’s giftedness meant Sandy thought he was better than were his peers. Ultimately, Robert experienced significant academic and social challenges because of his giftedness, yet, Sandy has faced ridicule and hostility from other parents when trying to discuss these problems.

Robert is a 14-year-old boy who flunked several school subjects and was bullied and excluded by both peers and teachers so extensively that he was periodically homeschooled. According to Sandy, “there has been a lot of jealousy and kids calling him a ‘know-it-all.’” She described Robert as,
A scary smart kid who may not make the honor roll in school, who may struggle socially to find like-minded peers who understand his complex topics of conversation, who then freaks-the-hell-out when he can’t be like all the other normal kids and fears he will never fit in, ever! And neither you nor your gifted child can talk about these problems or ask for help because for sure, people will think you are shamelessly suffering from first-world problems.

For Sandy and Robert, they must suffer silently and alone because of the perceived privilege surrounding giftedness. Sandy explained that many people, including parents, teachers, and society writ large, believe attending to the needs of gifted adolescents is unnecessary. She says they think, “gifted children are already privileged with being smarter, why do they deserve to have special treatment in school?” Similarly, according to Lambert (2010) the label “gifted” forces educators to wonder, “if it is (as it sounds) a benefit, why –and how– should teachers do a great deal about it?” (p. 102). Haney (2013) lamented the relative nonexistence of federal funding for gifted education, suggesting gifted programs lack popular support because the public believes gifted adolescents have an academic advantage and need no extra educational support.

However, Sandy said many parents of gifted adolescents do not view giftedness as a benefit; when Sandy meets other parents of gifted children, the most common question they ask her is, “do you know of a good therapist that works with gifted kids?” Therefore, Sandy believed “gifted should not be a dirty word” because the presupposed privilege inherent in the term denied these adolescents the right to have their suffering acknowledged.
The privilege of giftedness. Gifted programs. Nonetheless, privilege does often accompany the gifted. Johnson (2006) defined privilege as existing “when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they’ve done or failed to do” (p. 21). However, I must note that many gifted education advocates argue that gifted programs are a need, not a privilege (e.g. NACG, 2008). Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worell (2012) stated there is a need “for all students (including the most gifted) to be challenged in their schoolwork” (p. 176). For the gifted adolescents in the current study, privilege appeared primarily in three forms. First, gifted adolescents officially labeled “gifted,” with access to gifted education programs, and choosing to attend these programs, are sometimes afforded more advanced educational experiences than are their peers. For instance, Martin, a 13-year-old 8th grader who loves “origami, chess, trumpet, and cats,” said, “being gifted has opened up possibilities that would not have been given me if I was not gifted.” Martin attended a gifted program allowing him to take accelerated classes in science and technology. Similarly, Harper, a 14-year-old 10th grader, explained because of her gifted program, “I have better friendships this way. We are all focused on the same things, like being successful.” Harper’s exposure to like-minded peers allowed her to form strong bonds, bonds potentially unavailable to non-gifted peers.

Intellect as status symbol. The second form of privilege for gifted adolescents is the sense that some adolescents view IQ as a status symbol. Liam, a 16-year-old 10th grader often writing about his observations of exclusion, described one boy in his class:
He is really smart but in a way likes to put people down. For example, when I said there was this concept I didn’t understand he rolled his eyes and shouted “Oh my God! How do you not understand this?!”

Liam’s gifted classmate used his intelligence as a status symbol by belittling others for lacking certain knowledge. Liam’s friends also used intelligence for status. He explained,

I’ve started to notice that some of my friends who are as smart or smarter than me have this very tense relationship with one another. It has to do I’m pretty sure with them competing with their grades to see who has the highest…It isn’t just asking what you got, but more of “I’m asking what you got so I can feel better about myself.”

For Liam’s friends, bragging about their high grades allowed them to rank each other hierarchically. Humans are motivated to foster positive self-images (Schmidt, Branscombe, Silvia, Garcia, & Spears, 2006) through ranking highly in social hierarchies (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, the friend with the highest grade had the most status.

Three participants expressed anger with less intelligent peers, and judged peers with lower intellectual abilities as having less status. Chad is a 12-year-old 6th grader who has been in therapy for many years, partially due to peer mistreatment. His mother said, “He lives for the day he has his gifted pullout class.” However, his mother also explained, there are “a couple boys in the gifted class who are mean to anyone who isn’t intelligent. If you don’t know the Third Dynasty Korean ruler you are stupid.” These boys used intelligence to establish status; the more intelligent an adolescent, the more
status she accumulated. Intelligence displays, such as recalling obscure historical facts, were a means to demonstrate intellect. Chad also sometimes equated intellect to worth. He wrote in one journal entry, “The ‘cool kids’ are little monsters with an IQ of 70!” Immediately after writing this sentence, he apologized and explained his frustration that the “cool kids” always exclude him from social participation. In this entry, Chad was angry and he lashed out at non-gifted peers using his strongest weapon: insulting their intellect.

Similarly, Bradly is a 14-year-old 11th grader who has changed schools frequently due to intense bullying and exclusion. He was homeschooled for the past two years and re-entered public schools at the start of the current study because his family could no longer afford to continue homeschooling. He kept a journal for four months, writing multiple times a day as he adjusted to his new classes and peers. He wrote in one of his first entries,

Well today in my first class, English, this kid wouldn’t stop disrupting the class. I was thinking I’m gonna have to test out of this class soon cuz all of except for 2 people I think are worthless and yeah. We’re learning stuff I did last year.

In an interview, Bradly clarified that by “worthless” he meant “stupid.” He believed his peers were not his intellectual equals, and his school classes were beneath him. Bradly often wrote that he was “better” than his peers, due to his intellect. He used intelligence as a barrier between himself and others, an excuse to remain distant. PI theory would suggest that both Bradly’s and Chad’s negative past mistreatment by peers has ensured
they no longer value friendships with non-gifted individuals because they believe positive interactions are unlikely.

Finally, Skyler is a 17-year-old, transgendered, homeschooled, 12th grader, often writing about her anger with traditional school systems and “traditionally-minded” people. Skyler was condescending towards individuals with average intellect, explaining in an interview that she left high school because “I didn’t get any mental stimulation from the people that wanted to hang out with me, so I didn’t want to waste my time being bored.” In a journal entry, Skyler pondered,

Do you ever just get to that point where you don’t even want people? Like, everything everyone does annoys you. I’m angry because people try to devalue my emotions and thoughts. I just, I find everyone stupid. And it makes me mad.

Similarly to Bradly and Chad, Skyler was angry about her own mistreatment causing her to vilify non-gifted individuals. All three of these participants, as well as Liam’s classmates attributed value to intellect. Thus, they ascribed a privileged status to peers displaying intelligence and rejected those that seemed “average.”

**Intellect as power.** Finally, the third type of privilege available to gifted individuals is the ability to use intelligence as power over non-gifted peers. Bradly viewed his intelligence as superiority over non-gifted individuals. In one entry, Bradly explained, “last night I joined a random group thing of teenagers because I was bored. They were annoying and ignorant and reminded me of how amazing I am.” Bradly ended the night with a sense of superiority; his intellect saved him from their banality. In another entry, he shared, “Everything is so scary to me as a teenager but it shouldn't be
because I'm smarter than everybody. If I talk to these people, I have to speak their language. But if I do, I might be viewed as one of them (stereotypical teenager). Do I want to be one of them?” Here, Bradly assumed his intellect should empower him above others and make teenage life easier. A common theme among gifted adolescents is their sense that they speak a different language than non-gifted peers due to larger vocabularies, interests in science and philosophy, attention to nuance, et cetera (Bailey, 2011; Wellisch & Brown, 2012). Bradly also believed he communicated differently, yet he assumed his intellect could allow him to change his communication patterns to speak on their level (an ability that often eludes many gifted adolescents). Bradly often referred to his classmates as “plebs,” short for plebian, despised Roman commoners. Bradly’s entries largely focused on his difficulties adjusting to his new school, the rejection he faced on a daily basis, and his inability to socialize with peers. For Bradly, the power afforded by his intellect existed largely in his mind and seemed to hinder his social experiences.

Several participants wielded a different type of power, the power of stereotyping. Lisa, a 15-year-old 9th grader experiencing chronic ostracism, commented in an interview, “If I was average intelligence I probably wouldn’t even go to college. I have developed a passion for biology and the human genome, but if I was average intelligence I would not be able to go into depth on that.” Lisa’s comment hinted that only intellectually gifted individuals are able to comprehend the depths of topics like genetics. She assumed non-gifted individuals might not have the mental fortitude even to attend college. Lisa was not intentionally attempting to insult non-gifted individuals; rather, she meant only to
explain how intelligence had shaped her own interests. However, her comment revealed
her stereotypes of non-gifted individuals and suggested they somehow lack the mental
capacity to succeed in some areas. Ginny, a 16-year-old 12th grader who suffered from
exclusion in the past but now has a strong core group of friends, explained the stereotypes
she and her gifted friends once held for non-gifted peers,

You basically have all these gifted kids in a grade and you put them together in
one tiny little lifeboat. We are forced to be friends because basically if you rock
the boat you will fall into the water with the sharks. We all heard horror stories of
the non-gifted kids. “The outside world, fear it!” We literally interacted with no
one else outside of gym, art, and music….We clung to [gifted program name] kids
because we were terrified of non-[gifted program name] kids…Then I realized the
normal people weren’t crazy. I know they are normals, but I love them very
much.

Ginny’s entry addressed early stereotypes passed down to her and her classmates in their
gifted program. Rather than stereotyping the non-gifted as stupid, Ginny suggested they
are vicious, perhaps animalistic. Her use of the term “normals” suggested a shared
stereotype; stereotyping non-gifted individuals could allow gifted adolescents to gain
control over portrayals of the non-gifted. These stereotypes are responses to PI;
therefore, gifted adolescents defensively attempt to decrease their desires to form
relationships with the non-gifted.

Other participants intentionally attempted to leverage their intellect for social
power. They endeavored to use their intellect as currency with non-gifted peers. Tris is a
12-year-old homeschooled 8th grader who attempted this feat. Her mother described her as “intense.” She is happy, relatively carefree, and according to her autobiography loves “jumping on anything that is not a trampoline, doing cartwheels across concrete, walking barefoot across my driveway, and singing in the shower.” However, Tris has recently begun experiencing intense social alienation. Her main social outlet is swim team, an activity Tris attended almost daily. Tris was the only homeschooled girl on the team. Her teammates completely ignored her, often failing to acknowledge her existence even when Tris spoke directly to them. In journal entries, Tris began questioning her self-worth due to exclusion. She also became excited for any chance of interaction with teammates. One day, her family drove one of the swim team girls, Amber, home after practice and the topic turned to school.

It was really funny in the car ride yesterday, we were talking about how [Amber] was failing math and she was saying she was in Algebra and I said I could help her maybe and she said that they were into equations and stuff so I wouldn't be able to and [Carlie] (my little sister) blurted out, "[Tris] is past Algebra 2!" and [Amber] went "What the heck?!" and we all started laughing. I was able to explain that I was in pre-calculus and that was kinda fun :P

Tris attempted to bond with Amber by offering her help in school. Tris hoped her intelligence could benefit Amber, and they might become friends; thus, ending Tris’ alienation. Swaitek and Dorr (1998) classified the desire to help peers academically as a common social coping technique of gifted adolescents.
Other participants have also tried to leverage their intelligence for friendship, often feeling used and friendless. For instance, Liam said during an interview, “Being gifted has made me stand out in a positive way because people ask me a lot of stuff having to do with school and homework.” Initially, Liam viewed his intelligence and willingness to help others as a social advantage. However, as he reflected on his social experiences, he wrote,

Sometimes I feel as though people only talk to me when they need me to do something for them that's related to school... Other than these times they need something from me (which is almost always homework answers) they never seem the pay attention to me. And not that I care, but if you're going to try and get something from me, at least try to have some sort of interaction with me to show you might actually view me as a real person because in these cases, I feel as though I'm stereotyped.

Like Tris, Liam attempted to make friends by offering help. However, he concluded that peers used him for his gift, and failed to treat him as an equal or offer him the basic respect afforded to any human being. By writing, “not that I care,” he tried to manage PI and demonstrate that he did not want to be their friends anyway. Another participant, Sarah, an 11-year-old 7th grader with few friends and diagnosed with “existential depression,” succinctly explained, “It all started with the popular kids wanting me to help them with their homework, then once I helped them they stopped including me.” In short, several participants attempted to use intellect as power over their peers, but some failed.
It’s Not so Good to be Gifted

Although I have described privilege associated with giftedness, this privilege has some strings attached. Intelligence can complicate adolescent experiences. When intelligence is constructed as desirable, adolescents can use intellect as a status symbol. A common phrase many gifted adolescents used when describing their intellect is “a blessing and a curse.” For instance, Sandy, Robert’s mother, remarked, “having a high IQ sounds like a curse, and being gifted does not seem to be a gift at all.” Similarly, Juan, a 17-year-old 12th grader from Colombia, wrote,

I call this heightened perception a suffering. It is true. Giftedness, with whatever perks that it might appear to carry, is more of a burden than an advantage… When confronted with reality, you will feel like you don't truly belong to this world. Sandy’s son Robert, Juan, and other participants frequently reflected on the pains sometimes associated with intellect. They experienced physiological, emotional, and social problems. They must live with typical adolescent growing pains, overactive minds, and consequently, complicated social interactions.

**Overactive minds.** The gifted adolescents in the current study often complained about overactive brains causing them to become bored in school and overwhelmed by thoughts; they required constant mental stimulation, and felt pressured to be perfect. In an interview, Ina, Andy’s mother, explained 10-year-old Andy’s boredom in school,

He acted up at school because he was bored. The principal said he was rude, obnoxious, a problem child, and needed to be socialized. But, come to find out, [Andy] was reading and writing at a very advanced level and it was bothering the
teacher. [Andy] would scream about going to school; he would cry and his stomach would hurt. He started getting sick and the doctor suggested he go to another school because he was getting physically sick from stress.

Another participant, Wayne, a 16-year-old 12th grader, said in an interview, “In middle school is where things got weird. I was bored out of my living mind.” Other participants discussed their intense need for mental stimulation. For instance, Martin said in an interview,

> To us gifted kids, a lack of brain intensity can be boring and even void you of your willingness to live. It gets depressing after a little while. I had a suicidal/existentialist crisis at 9 years of age, when my mom went nuts about prohibiting the PC for me, which gave me a lack of brain stimulation.

All three of these participants experienced boredom and a lack of mental stimulation as a form of suffering, a common pattern among other participants as well. Andy, Wayne, and Martin have all changed schools multiple times seeking stimulating mental environments. Over-thinking threatened to overwhelm other participants. Juan often wrote about the paralysis of information overload. In one entry, he said, “Sometimes thoughts are so overwhelming that they are paralyzing. And this, I resolved, is undesirable; it is like overheating your motor without having processor space left for the action.” He had to train himself to shut down his brain sometimes; he used to over-analyze every minute detail of his life, which often annoyed his relational partners and caused him emotional pain. Other participants also discussed feeling paralysis from recognizing so many
nuances in the world, and even experiencing insomnia because their brains would not shut down at night. Insomnia is a common problem for the gifted (Lamont, 2012).

Another common side effect of overactive minds is a propensity to feel pressure to be perfect, a dangerous asymptotic goal (Babrow, 1992), often resulting in intense anxiety. Gifted adolescents have a propensity towards perfectionism (Wang, Fu, Rice, 2012). Mikhail, a 13-year-old 8th grader, said in an interview that giftedness means, “I have to be more perfect about things. Like I feel like it drives me to feel like I have to do good at everything or I am letting people down.” Coleman and Cross (2014) said, “the academically gifted are expected to do everything well, and when they don’t, they are rebuked” (p. 7). Many participants shared this sentiment. Some participants also discussed intense episodes of anxiety from pressures to be perfect. Chad delayed participating in the study for six weeks because of a severe onset of anxiety lasting weeks. Guignard, Jacquet, and Lubart (2012) found a correlation between perfectionism and anxiety in gifted adolescents.

**Underactive and toxic social worlds.** Although the gifted adolescents in the current study experienced physiological distress from overactive minds, their most painful distress resulted from social problems. In earlier sections of the current chapter, I suggested some gifted adolescents demonstrated negative attitudes towards less intelligent peers and even attempted to use their intelligence as a form of power over others. However, participants demonstrating this attitude and behavior tended to do so in response to past peer mistreatment. Many of them have deep wounds from chronic peer rejection and, consequently, react angrily towards their peers. Their reaction is a
response to PI; they recognized their peers were unlikely to accept them, so they placated themselves by rejecting their peers. Many participants have experienced difficulties connecting with peers, hidden their intelligence, accomplishments, or identities as gifted individuals, and felt stereotyped and stigmatized for their intellect.

**Difficulty connecting with peers.** Gifted adolescents often report feeling disconnected from their peers, partially because they claim to communicate differently, such as having larger vocabularies, more abstract thought processes, and different interests (Bailey, 2011; Wellisch & Brown, 2012). Xavier, a 16-year-old, chronically excluded 12th grader whose “life has been consumed by the desire to learn,” said in an interview, “I don’t understand normal people conversations…often I find it easier to communicate with adults.” Ginny also sometimes failed to understand conversations. When she reflected on her elementary school and middle school days during one interview, she remembered, “I had a very hard time understanding non-gifted people. I just thought they were weird, their interests were strange.” Like Xavier, Dylan, a 12-year-old 6th grader who recently transitioned from homeschool to public school, communicated better with adults than same-age peers. Dylan’s mother explained,

> He converses easier with adults than he does with other children….From the gifted standpoint, there is just the awkwardness because his mind is way ahead of where their minds are. So sometimes he’ll say something, even his sense of humor is beyond them, so they kind of look at him funny.

Even Dylan’s sense of humor was somehow different from his peers, creating a barrier to potential friendships. Bergen (2009) found that gifted adolescents have more advanced
senses of humor than do their same-age peers, and Howrigan and MacDonald (2008) found a positive correlation between IQ and the ability to understand and produce humor. Dijkstra, Barelds, Ronner, and Nauta (2011) explained this correlation by suggesting that interpreting something as funny requires the intellectual ability to understand the humorous nature of a given situation.

Similar to Dylan, other participants felt disconnected from non-gifted peers because peers failed to understand their communication style or interests. Lisa explained in an interview,

> It is hard to have conversations with non-gifted kids because they often don’t know what I am talking about. If you aren’t average intelligence, most people aren’t going to get you. Well it’s like, for gifted people you will start talking about something that is really complex and interests you and people just don’t understand you, so you can’t carry out a conversation with them.

Lisa did not believe her peers understand her communication; therefore, carrying out conversations was challenging. Similarly, Phillip’s mother described him as “super talkative and happy, then he became reclusive in second grade. He just didn’t connect with others at that point. Things he talked about were a couple years advanced. He was more interested in intellectual pursuits than they were.” Phillip is an 11-year-old 6th grader who was once so anxious about peer interactions that he began sleepwalking from stress. At his physician’s suggestion, his parents enrolled him in a private gifted school. Phillip is currently transitioning from that school to public school. Phillips explained in an interview that his botched peer interactions were
Because I was so smart that no one understood and they were like “what the heck, what are you trying to say, why are you telling us stuff that we don’t understand.”

Then they started ignoring me because of that fact.

Phillip’s seemingly odd conversation topics excluded him from meaningful social interactions with same-age peers. Xavier, Ginny, Dylan, Lisa, and Phillip’s fantastic brains, which privileged them in many ways, served to marginalize them from classmates. They became enigmas to others, and, consequently, unlikely candidates for friendship.

While many participants’ communication was misunderstood, another participant felt intensely isolated from the entire world. I have previously mentioned Juan, a 17-year-old 12th grader living in Colombia. Juan has struggled extensively to find like-minded peers, often experiencing bouts of depression from loneliness. Juan said he is actually quite popular at school, and his classmates admire his friendliness and intellect. Yet, their company often only served to remind him of his differences. Juan has no access to gifted programs. He struggled daily, feeling misunderstood, disconnected, and alone. In an interview, he described his feelings of disconnect as,

It is extremely hurtful to the point where you would say “oh my god I was born in the wrong world.” It is lonely. No one shares your thought process. You feel you are not in frequency with anyone. When you are around a lot of people you feel even lonelier. It is worse than being alone because you are not on the same frequency.
Although peers often surround Juan, he felt misunderstood. He was searching for others like him, an intellectual companion, an equal. Then, Juan met Isabella, she was “smarter than most…the only girl that I wanted.” He was in love. However, Juan wrote a journal entry about a date with Isabella, where he had a realization. Isabella and Juan sat together at a park, listening to music until night fell. Then, Juan attempted to discuss a topic of “metaphysical elevation,” yet, to Juan’s dismay, Isabella did not understand him. He wrote,

And at that moment, I experienced the bitterest, most penetrating sensation of isolation…It was suddenly very clear that all of that complexity and nuance I thought about was only inside my head. It did not really exist. You could live on without it…She did love me, with all my weird quirks. But I, sooner or later, understood that I was a being residing in a different world. I was trapped within my own thoughts. We were separated by a dream barrier that encased me. Only me. She could only look in from the outside. It was only me…I am alone, all alone, all alone…She is now my ex-girlfriend. Now it is me, again, alone, looking for answers.

Juan’s realization ultimately led to their eventual breakup, as he realized he was as disconnected from her as he was from others. Juan’s entry contains (perhaps typical) teen angst, complicated by intellect. Although his peers accepted him and his girlfriend loved him, his world was lonely without intellectual equals.

**Peer troubles.** While many participants felt mentally disconnected from their peers, other participants felt disconnected because their peers mistreated them due to their
intellect. Andy wrote that in PE class, his peers play a game where, “one of the cool kids runs away from all the real ‘nerds.’ (Which is a very a mean stereotype that is insulting to me.)” In an interview he clarified that his peers walk up to an intelligent person, scream “NERD” and run away as fast as they can, laughing. Andy also described a situation where a gifted classmate was denied participation in a peer group, writing, “I saw someone doing math equations online and another person walked up to them and said that they were to [sic] ‘geeky’ to join them.” In both cases, students perceived as intelligent at Andy’s school became objects of ridicule and exclusion. Assigning labels of “nerd” or “geek” marked these students as undesirable social partners, exiled from their peers.

Other adolescents mistreated participants by discursively recasting the privilege of giftedness as a disadvantage. Phillip mentioned in an interview that several peers were spreading rumors about his giftedness,

There was this one time that something got around to me that they had said “he’s so smart that he must be stupid,” or that “he’s so stupid that he became smart.”

These kids were always jerks to me, and they started rumors.

Emma, a 10-year-old 6th grader recently admitted to her school’s gifted program, had experiences similar to Phillip. Several of Emma’s non-gifted friends have been treating her badly since she started her program. Emma said in an interview,

I basically said I don’t care about [Jane] anymore, she’s not my friend anymore. I usually ignore her because she is always making rude comments to me. Like with me being in [name of gifted program]. She says “I don’t think it is called gifted, I think it is called special ed.”
Emma and Phillip’s classmates morphed the privilege of advanced intellect into an undesirable ability consequently relegating Emma and Phillip to the social margins of their school. Striley (2014) posited that perceived superiority and inferiority often exist in a dialectical tension, and adolescents sometimes reconstitute perceived superiority into perceived inferiority.

Another participant attended a school ripe with anti-intellectualism. Laura is a 15-year-old 10th grader who loves Shakespeare and is contemplating moving to another school because of the intense social rejection aimed at high-achieving and intelligent students. She described her school in a journal entry,

Your intelligence is the single-most significant factor that will determine the degree to which you are bullied at my school…My school is academically competitive; however, the student body is focused on sports… Academic students are isolated by the vast majority of the student body…The academic students volunteer their time to peer tutor other students, but the under-performing students don't even want to interact with us or get help. Instead, they want to engage in name calling.

In an interview, she lamented, “There were seven other intelligent students in my school at the start of the year, but within the first month, they have all left because they said they didn't want to deal with the bullying.” According to Laura, intelligent students experience her school as a battleground, violent enough that many go elsewhere. Laura described in a journal entry one interaction with her peers, whom she has concealed with fake names,
Mercutio began to complain about his English class, and, because I am interested in the subject, I asked him what he was studying. He asked why I wanted to know, so I told him that I like English. Once I stated I had an interest in English, he told Gratiano that I was weird, and every time I attempt to talk to either of them, Mercutio will interrupt to tell Gratiano that I'm weird or a freak and shouldn't be talked to.

Laura wrote several entries about Mercutio and Gratiano, who have continued to call her a “freak.” By simply sharing her love of English, she was rejected as a social partner. Mercutio even policed Gratiano to ensure he appropriately rejected Laura.

Laura shared another story of social rejection, this time aimed at her friend. Laura explained that she and her friend, “Cordelia,” were sitting at a lunch table talking to a group of girls. They asked Cordelia to leave the table and bring them bottles of water. Laura wrote,

The moment she left, the group began talking about how irritating she was, saying that she always wanted to study, which they didn't like because it both made them feel bad for not studying and because she was already really smart, so she didn't 'need to study', and that she had a weird voice and won't leave them alone at lunch because one of the other girls is nice to her (who was absent). I wasn't comfortable speaking up in the situation, which, looking back, I feel quite bad about, so their rant against Cordelia continued until she returned. Cordelia had bought the girl _two_ water bottles, instead of the one requested, and the girl
indicated she was thankful to Cordelia, and then proceeded to gather all the girls, except Cordelia and I, into a "bathroom trip," which they never returned from. Some of Cordelia’s rejection resulted from peer jealousy their painful recognition that Cordelia was better than they were in some way. Cordelia served as a reminder to the girls that they were not the best in some areas. Perhaps as a tool to cope with their own PI (i.e. the desire to make good grades but the recognition that they could never compare to Cordelia), the girls rejected Cordelia to make themselves feel better.

**Teacher troubles.** Several participants reported incidents of teacher mistreatment, in addition to peer mistreatment. For instance, Claudia’s teacher once encouraged her classmates to ostracize Claudia for an entire year. Claudia is a 13-year-old 10th grader who has suffered extensively from peer ostracism and described herself in her autobiography as, wanting “to change the world! I want to improve the world and possibly dominate it, lol.” Francesca, Claudia’s mother, explained that when Claudia was seven she read The Diary of Anne Frank, which,

> Started an existential crisis in her. She was depressed at school, and this was at a time when other children are generally very happy. The teacher encouraged the other children to exclude [Claudia] in activities because she wasn’t happy and smiling. She started saying, “Mommy, I just don’t belong in this world.”

After this incident, Francesca began homeschooling Claudia to avoid negative teacher and peer mistreatment. At the start of the current study, Claudia had just re-entered public school. In an interview, Claudia explained that teachers do not seem to like her. She said,
I stand out because I talk a lot more in class than anyone else. I am also pretty bold when it comes to answering questions…I am really loud and I talk a lot. Teachers see it as a bad thing…I have some teachers that don’t want me to answer. Usually I just want to answer every question.

Claudia explained that when she raised her hand to answer questions teachers avoided eye contact with her, and even refused to meet with her before and after class. In Claudia’s first scenario, she was different from other children because she was not as happy or carefree; while her peers were thinking of The Power Rangers and My Little Pony, she was thinking about the horrors of World War II concentration camps. Her teacher likely failed to understand how to handle Claudia’s depression and did not want Claudia’s mood to spread to other children. In Claudia’s second scenario, her teachers must balance Claudia’s desire to answer questions with allowing all her classmates to speak, as well. Teachers might become annoyed at Claudia’s eagerness to speak in class, and Claudia must learn to let others speak. However, for now, Claudia’s perception of teacher exclusion is emotionally hurtful.

Other participants also felt excluded by teachers. Luke, an 11-year-old 6th grader, wrote, “My day begins in math class where I felt the teacher called on everybody else more than me. My suspicions grew more and more solid, but were never confirmed.” In an interview, he explained that the teacher seemed to look past him when he raised his hand. His mother interjected, suggesting the teacher was trying to include the entire class rather than calling on him every time he raised his hand, “because he wanted to answer everything.” Luke’s teacher, perhaps, was trying to include all students in class
discussions; however, to do so she must partially exclude Luke or he would dominate the conversation. Currently, Luke failed to understand how this perceived exclusion was fair to him; he failed to consider his classmates’ perspectives. Delia and colleagues have consistently found that children’s ability to take the perspective of another increases with age (Clark & Delia, 1976; 1977; Hale & Delia, 1976).

Luke and Claudia’s experiences with teachers demonstrated a teacher’s role in attending to the entire class, rather than focusing on one student. Their teachers might need to temporarily exclude one individual so others feel included and welcomed. However, other participants experienced significantly more negative teacher interactions. Sometimes, teachers might not understand how to handle advanced learners. For instance, Andy had a negative experience with a substitute teacher; he wrote,

My best friend and I usually finish in 10 mins. or less for math, for instance yesterday we both had two pages of subtraction and finished before our teacher was done talking. (She said we could go on if we knew how to do it.) Suddenly she yelled at us and we didn't know what for until she pointed at the books we were reading and said that we had to do our math first, so we said that we were finished and she said “prove it!” so we handed in our pages and kept reading. Andy’s teacher assumed he and his friend were shirking their math homework; she failed to realize they had completed it very quickly. Teachers likely face tremendous difficulties teaching students at different intellectual ability levels. Kimberly, Harper’s mother recalled getting into an argument with Harper’s kindergarten teacher because Harper had already taught herself to read. Kimberly described the teacher as exasperatedly saying
“she had kids who didn’t know the alphabet, how could she handle a kid who can already read?” The school’s response was to jump Harper ahead a grade, rather than attempt to teach to her level.

While some teachers do not understand how to accommodate gifted adolescents, other teachers might feel threatened by highly intelligent children. Robert’s mother, Sandy, asked me to write about teachers mistreating gifted adolescents because Robert has had to change schools due to teacher bullying and exclusion in the past. Sandy remarked, “some teachers even felt threatened by him because he asked a question in class they couldn’t answer or inadvertently questioned their competence.” Several participants wrote journal entries about teachers yelling at and, in one case, even hitting adolescents for their intelligence. Mikhail wrote,

Today I felt excluded and ostracized by my teacher and I feel that the fact that I am gifted played [a] role in this event. I asked a nosy question and was responded to with: “are you writing a book?” He then approached my desk and proceeded to tell me that this is his classroom and he “Damn sure won't tolerate it in his class.”

Mikhail explained that his teacher classified his question as “nosy;” thus, Mikhail came to believe he had behaved inappropriately and promised to stop being “nosy” in the future. However, others would classify Mikhail’s question as critical thinking, as he was asking an advanced question regarding the topic of lecture in class. Rather than develop Mikhail’s critical thinking abilities, the teacher expected him to engage in rote learning and became angry when he wanted to pursue a classroom topic farther than the textbook explanation. In an interview with Mikhail about this incident, he believed the teacher
was correct, and although the teacher’s reaction shocked Mikhail, he said he would stop asking “nosy” questions. Perhaps interactions such as this explain why college professors criticize college students for an inability to think critically.

Another participant’s teacher became increasingly threatened by the participant’s intellect. Andy’s substitute math teacher, whom I previously discussed, became increasingly frustrated with Andy and his friend over several weeks. Several of Andy’s journal entries focused on interactions with this teacher, until her frustration led to violence. Andy wrote,

Today my friend [John] asked the teacher if she could explain something to him, so she walked up to him and bopped him on the head with her fist. She also got something wrong in math, but, instead of admitting that she was wrong when I pointed it out she yelled at me saying I was wrong in front of the whole class. She is making me feel a little bit afraid of going back to school.

I followed up with Andy about this incident and he decided to tell his mother, his teacher, and his principal. Andy did not know if the school decided to discipline the teacher, and she continued to substitute in his class while his teacher was absent.

**Stigma of giftedness.** In addition to experiencing feelings of disconnection, peer mistreatment, and complicated relationships with teachers, participants in the current study also reported feeling stigmatized and stereotyped by their intellect. Demonstrating clear ambivalence in an interview, Malcolm, a 14-year-old 9th grader, mentioned, “I go back and forth between wanting to be gifted and not wanting to be gifted. I have never liked the stigma that comes along with being gifted. I want to prove people wrong.”
Malcolm’s ambivalence towards his classification as gifted resulted from the stigmatizing social repercussions of advanced intellect that separated him from his peers. Angela, a 14-year-old 9th grader, wrote that the adolescents in her gifted program “are weird. So you get a label tagged on when you are [name of gifted program] kids. It makes it pretty hard if you are trying to make friends with normal people.” The word choice of “weird” and “normal” clearly marked the gifted as abnormal. Major and Eccleston (2005) stressed the intimate connection between stigma and social rejection: stigmatized individuals are socially rejected. Mikhail explained in an interview, “I am referred to as a ‘nerd’ along with a lot of my gifted friends, and that’s why I am excluded.” Mikhail believed he and his friends were excluded because of the stigma his classmates reproduce surrounding gifted adolescents. According to Leary and Schreindorfer (1998), stigmas are socially constructed categories that rationalize disassociation from members of these categories. Angela, Mikhail and Malcolm experienced the social rejection that accompanies stigmatized identities. In this sense, they did not experience giftedness as a privilege.

**Stuck in stereotypes.** Many participants felt “stuck” in unfair and untrue stereotypes resulting from stigmas of giftedness. Mikhail explained in an interview, “Gifted is misunderstood, people always think that being gifted means you get good grades. Because they assume we are smarter than everyone and we are different.” Mikhail stressed that many stereotypes of gifted adolescents are incorrect. Liam wrote, I feel as though I’m stereotyped. And I’m not that way at all. I’m smart, but I also have a life outside of school…. Those who are smart are portrayed as just walking
zits who are so focused on the future that by the time they get there they won't know it. Why is it that these stereotypes can never be broken?

Both Liam and Mikhail express feeling confined by rigid stereotypes of giftedness. They did not believe they fit these stereotypes, yet others continued to judge and reject them as relational partners. According to Posner (1979), assumptions that “average” people make about the superiority of others can be painfully stigmatizing. Coleman and Cross (2014) argued that a gifted adolescent “recognizes that knowledge by others of her ‘tainted’ gifted characteristics are potentially discrediting because they disrupt the full social acceptance she wants” (p. 7). For many study participants, once classmates realized they had advanced intellect, they often excluded them from meaningful social participation.

Stereotypes of gifted adolescents are often associated with signifiers of intellect. One of Emma’s classmates called upon these signifiers as a source of ridicule. Emma described the classmate as saying, “Hey [Emma], you are fat, you are smart, you have braces, all you need is glasses and you’ll be a full nerd!” Jennifer, a boy-crazy, 13-year-old, 7th grader who loves to run in the rain because “whenever you’re thirsty you can just open your mouth,” tacitly accepted “nerd” signifiers. Her school has “Nerd Day” every year, and she described her outfit.

I was wearing really stupid pants, and long knee high socks. They were toe socks, so I was also wearing flip flops. The best part was my face. I was wearing my hair in two braids, the hair tucked behind my ear all idiot like, and I was wearing sun glasses with the lens popped out and masking tape on the middle. It was so fun! A
lot of people said they almost didn't recognize me, which I guess is a good thing since I was dressing like a nerd. ;)

According to Jennifer and Emma’s classmate, signifiers of “nerdiness” included non-ideal body types, glasses, braces, and unfashionable clothing. While these signifiers deeply troubled Emma, Jennifer was happy to dress up as a nerd for one day every year.

While peers easily identified some participants, like Emma, as “nerds,” not all participants possessed these signifiers. For example, Angela said many students at her school did not realize she was in the gifted program, partially because she was so social. She recalled a classmate’s reaction upon realizing she attended the school gifted program. The classmate exclaimed, “Wait, you’re in [name of gifted program]?!? But you are not a freak!” However, some participants suffered for failing to possess stereotypical signifiers of intellect. Bradly is a very attractive adolescent, with a handsome face and an athletic build. Since Bradly was the new student at school, classmates initially approached him thinking he was bound to become popular, due to his appearance. However, he did not understand typical adolescent patterns of communication and he only enjoyed discussing deeply intellectual subjects. Therefore, classmates would approach him expecting to discuss fashion, popular culture, or sports and he would attempt to engage them in conversations about particle physics and existentialism. This earned him the nickname, “freak.” Because he did not possess the stereotypical signifiers of intelligence, his peers were unprepared and surprised during their interactions. He wrote about one classmate’s reaction, “upon realizing that I was in science club, he asked, ‘why don’t you wear glasses, nerd!’ then shoved me against a locker.”
Bradly’s school, peers ignored or ridiculed gifted adolescents adhering to rigid “nerd” stereotypes, but Bradly’s deviation from these stereotypes elevated his classmate’s interaction to a level of violence as he forcibly put Bradly in his place. Bradly was a trickster to his peers, trying to pass as normal.

**Hiding.** Stigmas and stereotypes of giftedness coerce many gifted adolescents to hide their true selves from others. Many participants described the need to hide their intellect or their achievements from peers, a common social coping strategy found by Swaitek and Dorr (1998), as well. Asher, a 16-year-old 12th grader, explained in an interview,

> People with higher IQs are usually more introverted, quiet, and don’t have common ground with normal people. They get louder when they find out they’re just like me, gifted. These people don’t’ talk as much when around non gifted people.

Exemplifying Asher’s assertion, Bradley explained in an interview how he hides his intelligence,

> I try to never let it out. If I’m on a new baseball team I won’t tell anybody that I am gifted, I will keep quiet so they can’t tell by the way I talk, I won’t use big vocabulary words or talk about nuances in ideas. They will treat me differently, negatively, if they know I am gifted. They will think they shouldn’t socialize with me….One time these people were talking on my team and I corrected someone and they made fun of me because I was smart. When people find you are gifted
they think you think you are better than them, like you should be in college or something.

Bradly is the type of person Asher has observed, making an effort to stay quiet around non-gifted peers. Bradly has adopted this pattern of communication as a protective strategy; in the past, his communication style has betrayed his intellect, resulting in social marginalization.

Other participants hid their accomplishments and ideas from others. Martin wrote in his autobiography, “I do not like showing off my achievements about myself.” Coleman and Cross (2014) found that gifted adolescents learn at an early age not to brag about themselves. Martin is never proud of his accomplishments; instead, he hides them and hopes no one finds out. Juan learned to hide his ideas from others. He said in an interview, “I don’t like sharing what was inside my mind. I always thought they wouldn’t really appreciate my thoughts.” During Claudia’s interview, she keep reiterating, “Please don’t think I’m bragging. I don’t want you to think I think I am better than anyone else.” Like Martin, she was very careful to hide her achievements from others, and like Juan, she revealed she also hid her ideas. Similarly, Coleman and Cross (2014) noticed when they interviewed gifted adolescents, “Every positive statement about themselves was always followed by a qualifying statement which attempted to neutralize the prior statement” (p. 15). Many participants appeared highly aware that their intellect and accomplishments jeopardized their social status.

**Defying stereotypes.** Many participants refused to hide themselves or passively accept the stigma of giftedness. Phillip decided to take pride in his “nerdiness.” He said
in an interview, “people thought I was so smart that I was such a nerd. Then I looked up that definition, and so now when someone calls me a nerd I say thank you.” Catherine, 15-year-old 10th grader, also learned to take pride in her intellect. Like Jennifer, Catherine’s school also has “Nerd Day” every year right before homecoming (they do not attend the same school). Catherine wrote about her reaction to this day,

This week is Homecoming Week, and Thursday will be Nerd Day. One of my friends asked me how I was going to dress up that day. I said I was going to dress up as myself. I heard a couple jocky boys behind me who heard me laughing... I didn't mind them laughing- I kind of pride myself on being book-nerd-ish sometimes…I'm not afraid to just look like myself that day, because I don't think that being a "nerd" is really anything offensive. It means that I'm not afraid to hide what I love. Also, they should see that being a "nerd" doesn't mean wearing big glasses with tape in the middle, suspenders, and pants hiked up unnaturally high. Catherine both took pride in her gifted identity and attempted to dispel stereotypes. Orbe (1998) suggested that members of co-cultural groups who routinely experience marginalization adopt communication practices to cope with their status. One common practice is to dispel stereotypes and educate the public about the inaccuracies of such stereotypes. Interestingly, from Catherine’s and Jennifer’s descriptions, “Nerd Day” seems like a school-sanctioned celebration of nerd stereotypes. Catherine mentioned in an interview the discomfort she felt surrounding the day. In part, her anger over “Nerd Day” compelled her to actively dispel these stereotypes.
Interconnectedness of Privilege and Marginalization

Thus far, I have discussed that giftedness is both a privilege and a disadvantage. I have argued that the term “gifted” confers privilege and marks all non-gifted individuals with a deficit, intelligence is constructed almost as a tangible object of desire that adolescents use to secure status, and gifted adolescents can use their intelligence as power over others. However, I have also suggested that many aspects of giftedness are disadvantageous. Participants often experienced difficulties connecting with non-gifted peers, experienced mistreatment and rejection from both peers and teachers, and were stereotyped and stigmatized. In previous sections, I have alluded to an interconnection between privilege and marginalization for gifted participants. At this point, I fully attend to the dialectical relationship between the privileging and marginalizing of gifted adolescents.

Gifted adolescents as a threat. Many participants might have experienced social disadvantages of giftedness because of the privilege that accompanies advanced intellect. Striley (2014) proposed the dialectic of (perceived) inferiority and superiority, suggesting that perceptions of superiority and inferiority exist together in tension; thus, gifted adolescents’ social stigma might arise because peers perceive them as intellectual superiors. For example, Phillip wrote, “In math class on Friday I kept proving [Tyson] wrong. (He's just someone in the class.) Then whenever I talked he yelled at me for being annoying...He kept yelling ‘Shut up,’ to me and slamming down his books.” Several of Phillip’s entries discussed the increasing torment Phillip suffered from Tyson. Eventually, Tyson began shooting spitballs and hitting Phillip in the head. When Phillip
complained to the teacher, Phillip got in trouble. I encouraged Phillip to speak to his mom about Tyson. Once she was involved, the school moved Tyson to another math class. Posner (1979) argued it is a cultural myth that we reward superiority; instead, superiority exacts a social toll. Phillip appeared to be the object of bullying and social rejection due to high performance in class.

**Jealousy.** Non-gifted adolescents might feel threatened by gifted peers; thus, they react by excluding and rejecting those making intelligence displays. According to Elliott and Altman (1984), “stigma emerges from the socially damaged relationship that is implied between the possessor of the attribute and others” (p. 280). In essence, when individuals believe there is no hope of achieving normal relationships with a group of people, that group might become stigmatized. One manifestation of a damaged relationship dynamic is jealousy: gifted adolescents’ high classroom performance threatens non-gifted peers. Therefore, they become jealous of their achievements, as we observed with Phillip. Haley is a 12-year-old 7th grader who recently started attending a gifted program at her school. Her new label as “gifted” caused discord among her non-gifted friends. One friend, in particular, began acting meanly towards Haley because Haley out-performs her in algebra class. Haley wrote, “[Raine] thinks she has to get everything right and she was so mad at me just because I got it right and she didn’t and she held a grudge on me because I got it right.” For Haley, Raine’s anger, and subsequent negative treatment, arose because of a grade discrepancy. If Raine earned higher or equally high algebra grades as Haley, Haley believed Raine would treat her well.
According to Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory, we compare ourselves to others in order to evaluate our own abilities. Non-gifted peers comparing themselves to gifted counterparts likely assess their own intellectual abilities as worse than the abilities of their gifted peers. To view ourselves more positively, we prefer to make downward comparisons by observing those who perform worse than we do in a valued domain (Wills 1981). Therefore, to enhance our self-esteem, we have a tendency to become prejudiced against those whom we secretly believe are better than us in some area with evaluative implications (Crocker, Thompson, & McGraw, 1987; Wills, 1981). Peer jealousy about academic abilities is an understandable outgrowth of social comparisons. For example, Andy commented, “Everyone hated me for a short time because I read so fast.” Robert said, “There was one boy that was jealous of me because I got all the answers right in Math and he didn't, so he tried to get everyone else to exclude me.” Marie explained in an interview, “People wouldn’t want to be around me or they would be talking about homework or tests and they left me out of conversations because they knew I got a better grade than them.” Andy, Robert, and Marie attributed their social rejection to peer jealousy surrounding school performance. Of course, these were gifted adolescents’ perceptions of motives behind their classmates’ actions. To truly understand their peers’ exclusive behavior we would need their peers’ perspectives. Nonetheless, participants felt that non-gifted peers tried to deny the perceived superiority of gifted adolescents by excluding them and harassing them for receiving high grades.

**Insecurity.** Another manifestation of relational threat is the potential to feel intellectually insecure around gifted adolescents. Related to feeling threatened by gifted
adolescents’ classroom performance, some adolescents might feel threatened by their gifted counterparts’ general intellectual abilities. Thus, their intellect creates profound feelings of insecurity. For example, Catherine wrote about this potential insecurity in a journal entry,

I have a friend that wears his intelligence like an article of clothing. He talks so much about how intelligent he is. He doesn’t water it down, he’s just downright honest: “I am very intelligent,” he will simply say…He talks with a bit of arrogance, as if he knows better than everyone else. But sometimes I wonder if this is why people sometimes exclude the gifted. Maybe sometimes it’s not because they dislike us, or because they’re jealous, or because we’re different. Maybe it’s because they feel pressured when around us. They don’t feel free—they’re afraid to sound stupid, afraid of not being good enough.

Catherine addressed a fundamental and profound human fear, the fear of not being good enough. Similarly, Emma said in an interview, “maybe non-gifted kids think they [gifted adolescents] don’t have time for them, or they think the gifted kids will make fun of them for not being gifted.” Again, Emma’s comment suggests an element of insecurity behind peer mistreatment of the gifted.

Potentially, gifted adolescents’ classroom performance and intelligence displays actualize deep feelings of insecurity and fears of imperfection in their peers. Perhaps, their peers’ self-esteem was damaged by comparisons to gifted peers. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals are motivated to maintain high self-esteem by constructing their social group as “the best.” Conceivably, non-gifted
students feel threatened when compared to gifted students who might earn higher grades, receive teacher praise, or accept invitations to gifted programs. If adolescents are generally motivated to feel positively about themselves, if they are continually evaluating themselves as measuring up to some standard, and if they encounter evidence suggesting they are not as good as others in a domain made salient by the context, then they are likely to feel PI in the form of divergence. Therefore, adolescents will attempt to derogate those with apparent superior abilities in an attempt to alleviate their own feelings of divergence. Ultimately, some non-gifted adolescents participate in a rhetoric designed to revalence what it means to be superior: social standing becomes valued and intellectualism becomes de-valued.

**Uncertainty.** A third manifestation of gifted adolescents as relational threats to their peers results not from somehow making their peers feel worse about themselves, but from the uncertainty gifted adolescents can elicit during peer interactions. Although I will more fully explicate this topic in the next chapter through a discussion of uncertainty, difference, and social exclusion, some preliminary observations add texture to the current survey of issues related to privilege. For example, Wayne explained in an interview, “Gifted people are weird, no one knows how to react to us.” Many study participants shared this sentiment. Xavier wrote, “When you’re gifted, people have two reactions: 1) they think you are being arrogant and so they don’t like you, or 2) they think you are a freak and don’t know how to talk to you.” Lisa explained, “If you aren’t average, most people won’t get you. You will start talking about something that is really complex and interests you and people just don’t understand you and so you can’t carry out a
conversation with them.” Wayne, Xavier, and Lisa believed their peers’ uncertainty was a barrier to interaction.

Uncertainty about topics of conversation or vocabulary use when interacting with gifted adolescents could explain why some individuals distance themselves from the gifted. According to Knobloch, Satterlee, and DiDomenico (2010), individuals with higher levels of relational uncertainty towards another appraise that individual’s messages as more threatening. Essentially, non-gifted peers might experience relational uncertainty around gifted counterparts because gifted adolescents tend to communicate differently, discuss intellectual topics, and think more abstractly and with more nuance. Their communication seems odd, and non-gifted peers are uncertain how to interact with gifted adolescents. Therefore, one potential uncertainty management technique might be to reject the gifted to avoid the fear of uncertainty in interactions.

**Cycles of competition and rejection.** As I have discussed the dual privilege and marginalization experienced by gifted adolescents, a clear pattern of interaction emerged. Some participants appeared stuck in cycles of competition and rejection. Non-gifted adolescents stereotyped the gifted as “nerds” and “geeks,” while the gifted retorted with stereotypes of “plebs” and “normals.” In some cases these cycles began with the gifted rejecting the non-gifted, and in other cases the non-gifted first rejected the gifted. At some point, some participants and their peers began to see themselves as two separate groups in competition with each other for academic and social performance. Each group made a power play to maintain positive face in their schools. Blanz, Mummendey, Mielke, and Klink (1998) suggested individuals with similar social identities cluster
together and view themselves in competition with others possessing different social identities. These groups sometimes engaged in collective identity management strategies to bolster the status of their entire group. For some participants, a cyclical process was particularly evident.

For some, the cycle began when something marked an adolescent as possessing advanced intellect. Often, this was official recognition as “gifted” by the school and subsequent placement in a gifted program. Recall that Haley recently enrolled in her school’s gifted program, which caused rifts within her friendship groups. Others did not attend official gifted programs, but their general performance in school or communication patterns leaked their intelligence. For instance, Bradly explained his desire to stay quiet around non-gifted peers because they recognized his intellect once he spoke. Next, non-gifted adolescents viewed the gifted as privileged. Perhaps they observed their attendance in special gifted programs, maybe teachers or parents acted proud of the gifted, or gifted adolescents themselves acted arrogant or bragged about their accomplishments. Recall that Liam’s friends bragged about grades to each other. The perceived privilege of advanced intellect could pose a threat to non-gifted counterparts. Therefore, third, non-gifted adolescents reacted by excluding the gifted. For example, when Emma recently joined her school’s gifted program, her ex-friend, Jane, referred to it as “special ed” rather than “gifted” education. Emma and Jane are no longer friends because Jane now treats Emma badly. Finally, gifted adolescents developed coping strategies, like hiding their intellect or insulting the intellect of the non-gifted. In a future chapter, I will fully discuss both positive and negative reactions to exclusion.
Many participants existed in school systems with ongoing, predetermined cycles. For instance, Ginny mentioned that when she entered her gifted program gifted peers told her to “fear” the outside world, and she became “terrified” of non-gifted adolescents. Ginny’s gifted classmates had often experienced social rejection from non-gifted peers and consequently held condescending attitudes towards the non-gifted; thus, Ginny became immersed in an ongoing narrative of mutual distrust between groups. Emma shared in an interview that once she joined her gifted program, her new gifted friend, Susan explained to her,

[Jane] and the other girls had excluded them in the past, so [Susan] didn’t want me to be friends with [Jane]. I went over to talk to [Jane] but she gave me the cold shoulder because I was in the gifted program. So I just moved on. Now I am friends with [Susan].

Ginny, Emma, and their peers reproduced interactions that further reinforced cycles of social rejection between gifted and non-gifted individuals. Sarah’s mother, Molly, shared her insights and sense of helplessness as she reflected on this cycle,

I guess I had never really considered her excluding others and so in turn they exclude her, hence the difficulty in finding and maintaining a friendship…I have long suspected that pg [profoundly gifted] kids are generally as intolerant of others as others are of them. I have just never figured out what the cause of this difficulty was in my child and how to break that cycle.

Molly had a realization that Sarah and her non-gifted peers were in stuck cycles of mutual intolerance. Sarah’s early journal entries initially focused on her intolerance of
non-gifted peers and her own loneliness at school (Sarah’s own realization of this cycle and attempt to change her communication pattern as a result of this study will be discussed in Chapter Seven). Molly felt helpless to end the cycle. Sarah, Ginny and Emma serve as just three examples of the already-established cyclical pattern of interaction between gifted and non-gifted adolescents at their schools.

Other participants shared stories illuminating various aspects of this cycle. For example, Juan discussed in an interview his past mistreatment of peers,

I was horrible. I was pretty much isolating myself based on my judgments of other people. I had come to the conclusion that they weren’t really thinking very much and they never had. People do not have enough critical thinking, complex thought processes, or creativity. They were just fed facts, but never thought. I remember that when I entered into my school five years ago they said I was arrogant, that I was better than everyone. And that takes you away from people. So they would often think of me as the arrogant fellow that they didn’t want to be with. I was giving off this feeling that made them not want to be with me. But also, I wouldn’t want to be with anyone that wasn’t at least as smart as I considered myself to be… I agree with them, I was being arrogant. You can be really smart, but you can still be humble.

Juan explained that his belief in his own superiority led to his dislike. He exemplified this cycle in a journal entry about a past interaction with two classmates. In this story, Juan had become excited in science class about the chemical composition of a rock he found on the playground. He attempted to show a classmate his rock and speak to her
about its molecular structure. To his dismay, her understanding of the subject was insufficient for Juan. He wrote,

I didn't like the way she talked so much and at the same time said so little. So I said to her: “Wise people talk little.” I had come down from being hyped up to nearly cynical. She slapped me in the face. I stared into nothingness. I had offended her. She yelled: “Stop acting like a know-it-all! You're just unbearable!”… It was my words that cut through her. I was rather sorry. I didn't like making people feel like that. My cheek hurt. I felt hated. I looked over at another girl in class who was fond of me. I tried to explain myself, she said back to me: “Wise people say little.”… I walked away and sat alone, and stared at my rock.

Juan felt superior to his peers due to his intellect, so he acted arrogantly, which hurt their self-esteem. Consequently, his peers reacted negatively towards him. He eventually recognized that his own attitude and perceived privilege caused his exclusion; he also realized he was being mean. Therefore, he changed his behavior, and today he has many friends (though still feels intellectually alone, as I have discussed earlier).

Although Juan’s situation had a positive resolution, Bradly participated in a similar cycle with a different resolution. Bradly experienced such intense bullying and social rejection as a young child that he became intolerant of non-gifted peers and reclusive, rarely speaking to others. According to Williams (2001), chronic peer rejection depletes our self-esteem and we must develop coping mechanisms to rebuild our self-esteem. For Bradly, his defense mechanism was his presumed intellectual
superiority; he believed he was better than were his non-gifted counterparts. However, his self-imposed superiority over non-gifted peers caused him increased social rejection. Bradly reflected to himself in a journal entry about his own cycle of exclusion:

I just came into the room acting and thinking I'm better than everybody. But later on I want friends and I can't talk to them because I realize I don't have any friends and lose my sense of superiority. And because I have no friends, I think other people know and other people see me as a weirdo. And normal people don't like talking to weirdos because they don't have any time for that. So why should I talk to them? The answer is to never talk to anybody.

Quit bitching about how your teenage life is complicated. It's not them, it's you. Even when you talk to people, you whisper and ramble and don't move your lips like a retarded bitch. I should practice yelling and spitting. Then people would hear me!

Whereas Juan’s cycle of exclusion appeared to start with his own arrogance, Bradly’s began with others treating him badly for being “odd.” Ultimately, Bradly responded by intensely disliking his peers and hiding from the world, which led to more exclusion and feelings of isolation. Bradly also sometimes wrote about his own self-dislike, as he reflected on ways to make friends at his new school. In the above excerpt, he blamed himself and his quiet persona. Perhaps he felt that acting like his tormentors, by “yelling and spitting,” would earn him friends.

Although Abby, Juan, and Bradly’s arrogance and intolerance for less intelligent individuals might have been the source of their own exclusion at some point, I must
mention that many other participants seemed very humble and never demonstrated any tendencies in the past or present towards arrogance or intolerance. These participants often felt their peers had treated them unfairly simply for being “smart.”

**Structural Privilege in Gifted Education**

The majority of the privileges and disadvantages discussed thus far have largely existed at individualistic, interpersonal levels for participants. They have affected participants with and without access to gifted education programs. Some participants cited in this chapter have attended fulltime-gifted programs, others attended an accelerated class once a week or one class period a day, some were homeschooled, others had no access to gifted programs (many having been skipped ahead a grade or two). The mere perception of these adolescents as “smart,” regardless of official enrollment in a gifted program, led to their social marginalization.

However, I have not yet addressed the structural privilege inherent within gifted education. Earlier, I cited Johnson’s (2006) definition of privilege as “when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they’ve done or failed to do” (p. 21). However, Lambert (2010) stressed that giftedness is connected with choices gifted adolescents and their families have made. Lambert suggested giftedness often results because gifted children “have worked harder, had more parental support, enjoyed a stimulating environment or had competent teachers,” adding that in modern conceptions of giftedness “bias is very much towards nature, rather than nurture” (p. 101). While there is strong evidence that intelligence is genetic (e.g. Dreary, Spinath, & Bates, 2006; Plomin &
Spinath, 2004), many aspects of giftedness are also environmental. As such, critics of gifted programs decry their structural biases.

Giftedness as an institution is sexed, raced, and classed. For decades, critics have censured gifted education for under-representing women, racial minorities, and those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Frey, 2002; Grantham, 2003; Meredith, 2009; Moon & Brighton, 2008; Worrell, 2009; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). For instance, evidence suggests teacher nominations are the most common method of recognizing gifted adolescents; however, Carman (2011) found that teachers are more likely to nominate children for gifted testing if their parents were married and educated, they demonstrated advantaged socioeconomic characteristics, they were white, and male. Carman also found that 85% of pre-service teachers in the sample imagined gifted adolescents as white. Moon and Brighton (2008) found that 25% of teachers in their sample believed socioeconomic status was a predictor of giftedness. Minority underrepresentation in gifted programs is connected to larger structural issues of achievement gaps. According to Subotnik et al. (2012) and Miller (2004), minorities are underrepresented in the top 10% on virtually all achievement measures.

From participants in the current study, it is clear that advanced intellect often disadvantaged many adolescents; thus, the main advantage of intellect was official recognition as “gifted” so schools could meet their educational needs. Ultimately, minority groups might not receive this advantage due to a failure to be recognized as “gifted” or a failure to be in the top 10% for achievement. The inherent sexism, racism, and classism within gifted education did not emerge as a topic of discussion for any
participants in this study, likely because these structural barriers operate invisibly. Several participants discussed gender, race, and socio-economic status in connection to their personal exclusion (discussed in the next chapter), but none addressed these issues in relation to gifted education.

**Gifted education as sexed.** Boys tend to outnumber girls in gifted programs, possibly because American culture tells girls be “beautiful,” not smart (Meredith, 2009). Boys have intelligent cultural role models, like Bill Gates and Steve Wozniak. For males, “nerdy” has become “sexy,” in part because most intelligent male role models are billionaires. Intelligent boys can aspire to use their intellect to become rich, and marry a beautiful woman. However, intelligent girls have few role models. Even television shows that popularize “nerdiness,” like The Big Bang Theory, feature no intelligent female main characters. Initially, the only female main character is a beautiful blonde-haired woman who dates one of the intelligent males. Later in the series, two intelligent women are introduced as romantic partners for the lead male characters.

As I recruited participants for the current study, many individuals (including my colleagues, parents of participants, and gifted education specialists) expressed concerns that my study design would over-represent girls because of the stereotypical view that women tend to excel at writing. However, my sample is 51% male, perhaps a testament to the overrepresentation of males in gifted education programs. In naming participants to maintain their confidentiality, I was again reminded of gender-bias and intellect. Initially, I tried to name participants after famous fictional and non-fictional intellectuals, but had tremendous difficulty naming female participants. When searching for famous
intellectuals, I was able to find a plethora of famous male intellectuals. However, it was difficult to find famous female intellectuals. Googling “smartest people of all time” and “top 100 public intellectuals” returned virtually no results for women, and “famous intelligent women” returned multiple lists of “beautiful and smart women,” most of whom were Hollywood celebrities that happened to have college degrees. These failed searches could attest to the lack of intellectual female role models for young girls. Ultimately, I abandoned my attempts to name participants after famous intellectuals.

**Gifted education as raced.** The vast majority of officially-labeled gifted adolescents are white, while African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native-Americans are historically underrepresented in gifted programs (Carman, 2011; Subotnik et al., 2012). African-Americans are the least likely to be admitted to gifted programs, and once admitted, they are often underserved (Winsler, Karkhanis, Kim, & Levitt, 2013). While it is difficult to assess the national racial diversity of students labeled “gifted,” several regional case studies make this point clear. For example, according to Smith and Brandon (2013), in the 2008-2009 school year, the racial diversity in the public schools of Virginia were 57% white, 26% African-American, 9% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 2% “other.” However, the gifted students enrolled in gifted programs were 68% white, 12% African-American, 5% Hispanic, 11% Asian, and 4% “other.”

One participant in the current study did address the issue of race in her school’s gifted program. Laura’s school has a small Asian population, however, a large number of Asians are labeled “gifted.” She explained that out of the six National Merit Scholars at
her school, five of them are Asian. One of Laura’s best friends is Asian, and race became
the subject of several of Laura’s journal entries. In one entry, Laura wrote,

I have recently noticed that a lot of the teachers engage in inappropriate
discussions about cultural categories and intelligence levels. This has posed two
problems for me: (1) an increasing awareness that bullying is both promoted and
tolerated among people who are older, even while they denounce it to us, and (2)
the uncomfortable feeling I encounter when being placed in group settings where
this happens. At least two of my teachers continue to discuss how Asian students
are smarter. There is a common saying about the university near here, "It's a great
place, if you're part of the Asian race." These teachers will repeat that statement
and indicate that much of our student body won't be able to go to college because,
"The Asians take all of the spots." They have also labeled their involvement as
"Part of the Asian problem."

Here, Laura’s teachers model racist behavior to students consequently making Laura both
aware of their hypocrisy and ethically uncomfortable. Parents of students at Laura’s
school also model racist behavior. In another entry, Laura described an event recounted
to her by her mother,

On the field trip that we went on, my parent experienced an event in which the
other moms started talking about the "uptight Asians" that go to the school and
skew the numbers and workload for everyone… Their conversation started with
them describing a child (my best friend at the school) who began college at 10
and will graduate with both her high school diploma and an Associate's Degree. I
also started college at 10, so we have a lot in common… The mothers talked about how there is a new girl in school who is "even worse" than my friend and who has an "evil mother" who transferred in with even more college units. Without knowing it, they were talking about me, and hence, my mother. Since I am not Asian, they felt that my family is "even worse" because we shouldn't attempt to be like Asians.

Parents and teachers at Laura’s school were prejudiced against Asians because many Asian students at the school demonstrated advanced intellect. For these parents, whites should be the most intelligent race, and Asian students’ advanced intellect threatened white children’s potential. Intellect became an excuse for teachers and parents to reinforce White Privilege. They tacitly sent students the message that both racism and anti-intellectualism were tolerated.

Unsurprisingly, racist attitudes appeared in the actions of students at Laura’s school. Laura mentioned that several students said Laura was “being made an ‘honorary Asian’ due to my interests (Math).” These students have racialized subjects in school, assuming an interest in math was a characteristic of Asians. Additionally, these interests became demonized and unacceptable. Laura also described a heart-wrenching incident in which unknown assailants physically assaulted her best friend, an Asian girl. She wrote,

I found my friend in a classroom wiping something off of her arm. She would not say who was responsible for holding her down and writing in permanent marker: "Made in China". She was trying to get it off and didn't want me to read it. The mix of shame and frustration still makes me want to cry. She is such a great
person, and I honestly don't think she knows that she is, due to the actions that others take against her.

These overtly racist displays were commonplace at Laura’s school. Teachers and parents encouraged racism, and did little to stop these hateful acts. The hatred of Asians appeared linked to intelligence; teachers, parents, and students seemed unable to accept a category (intelligence) in which whites might not reign supreme. Thus, the school was a haven of racist comments and actions. Laura was stuck in a war zone of hatred, a perverted intermixing of racism and anti-intellectualism.

**Giftedness as classed.** The majority of adolescents in gifted programs are also upper class and upper-middle class individuals, in part, because these school districts can typically afford gifted education programs. According to Hart (2006), gifted adolescents are equally represented across all demographic groups in early elementary, but 44% of low-income students testing into gifted programs in 1st grade no longer qualify for the programs by 5th grade. Thus, the field of gifted education is “riddled with charges of elitism and inegalitarianism” (Ford, 2012, as cited by Lovett, 2013, p. 136). The needs of gifted adolescents from low-income families are often unmet, as schools fail to identify many low-income students as gifted or lack the resources to help these students.

One participant in the current study did discuss socioeconomic status. Marie is a 16-year-old 11th grader attending “a private residential highschool” for gifted 11th and 12th grade adolescents. The school is very expensive, and Marie attends on a need-based scholarship, as her family is low-income. Initially, upon entering the school, Marie felt elated to be around intellectual peers. She experienced substantial social rejection at her
old school. However, as the year progressed, she became increasingly aware of exclusion due to her income level. She wrote,

Katie, before I came to [Program name], I thought that intelligence was the only factor that set me apart from my peers. That, because of my grades, I felt, and was, irreconcilably other. But I'm learning that's not true. Because here, we're all "smart." And we all make good grades. And we all can recite the quadratic formula on a whim. But we come from wildly different socioeconomic backgrounds, and when the other girls talk about buying dresses for winter formal that are well over $500, I'm cringing in my hand-me-down sweatpants. There are some of us who can afford to spend their money at Starbucks, and others, like myself, who have to save that money for toothpaste. Or those of us from broken homes, who return home during breaks to minor abuse. No matter how "smart" you are, you won't know what that's like until you experience it. And you can't imagine the toll it takes when your only sunshine in the day is the remembrance that you have a therapy session at 2:30. And these ruts and blemishes in our lives, they set us worlds apart sometimes….So yes, I get left out because I'm poor and poorly sheltered. But I leave others out because they're rich and blind to struggle. Mutual exclusion I guess, a definite social barrier, and I wish that I could switch my side.

Marie’s classmates were, largely, exceedingly wealthy, whereas Marie’s family has significant financial struggles. She experienced emotional and physical abuse in her past, and currently lives with her Taekwondo instructor, rather than her parents, when she
returns home from school. She assured me she no longer experiences abuse because her instructor and his family have unofficially adopted her. Marie’s experiences illuminate the additional struggles of gifted adolescents from low-income families. Marie’s financial circumstances now separate her from peers as much as her intellect and achievement once separated her.

My purpose in writing this section was not to fully explicate the structural privileges inherent within gifted education, but rather to acknowledge that gifted education is sexed, raced, and classed. Lovett (2013) stressed that mainstream gifted scholarship now attends to discussions of underrepresentation in gifted programs, and gifted educators are actively attempting to increase minority enrollment in programs. Gifted education, like other institutions, is a social construction with material consequences, and we define a child’s intellectual level through human measurement. However, this dissertation is not about gifted education, it is about the lived experiences of adolescents with advanced intellect. As previously discussed, these adolescents come from various educational backgrounds, and some do not even attend gifted education programs. Nonetheless, sexism, racism, and classism effects their lived experiences, whether they are the benefactors or receivers of such prejudice, and this reminder is important. Cross and Borland (2013) stressed that gifted education should not be better education; rather all adolescents should receive excellent education appropriate to their intellectual level. Despite Marie’s feelings of isolation due to her socioeconomic status, attending her gifted program changed her life. She wrote,
From the time I was in pre-school until I was in about sixth-grade, the idea of having friends that stayed around for more than a week was an imagined one… I was relatively content with my solitude. Then, in sixth grade I found a friend group that accepted me--truly accepted me… When I entered high school, my friend group and I split up… So for the first time in several years, I found myself almost entirely alone… The experience was devastating. Being alone as a kid was one thing; I didn't know of any other way of living. But after I had seen friendship and inside jokes and slumber parties, dropping all of them at once was quite the shock… I was always on the wrong side of things, tolerated at most but never truly liked, sometimes because of my grades. Because I wasn't struggling on the math tests like everyone else, I wasn't included in conversations centered around them… I was the outsider… but here at [Program Name] I have found unparalleled acceptance among nearly all of my peers. Academic excellence is no longer an issue but rather something we strive for together. And yes, there are times when the volleyball players only want to be with other volleyball players or the preformance nerd cliques refuse to let anyone else in. But overall, this is the best social experience of my life.

Every human deserves to feel this kind of inclusion.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I have addressed the privileges and disadvantages associated with gifted adolescents in the current study. Privilege is inherent within the term “gifted,” as it marks others as “non-gifted,” and therefore deficient. Gifted
adolescents often have the privilege of attending special gifted programs, which provide
enriching learning environments and peer interaction. Other privileges afforded to all
intellectually advanced youth, not solely those in gifted programs, include using
intelligence as a status symbol and power over others. Additionally, structural privileges
exist within gifted education. However, gifted adolescents also experience
marginalization and disadvantages associated with their intellect. Physiologically, they
may be overwhelmed by intense thoughts, require constant mental stimulation,
experience trouble sleeping, and are prone to perfectionism and anxiety. Socially, they
might feel disconnected from peers, stereotyped, ridiculed, bullied, excluded from
meaningful social interaction, and stigmatized for their intellect. Their teachers might not
understand their special needs, expect rote learning instead of critical thinking, or even
react violently towards them. Privilege and marginalization are intricately connected in
the lives of gifted adolescents. The perceived privilege associated with advanced intellect
is often the source of these adolescents’ marginalization.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a sense of the context within which
many participants existed. They are complicated individuals, and their circumstances are
equally intricate. Their intellect neither solely privileged nor solely marginalized them,
but a strange mixture of both. Above all, they are adolescents, with all the typical
adolescent struggles and triumphs. They are trying to live their lives as well as they are
able, stumbling and dancing along the way. At times, I felt this project was not a study of
gifted adolescents as much as a study of adolescents. Most participants felt excluded by
peers simply because they were different; however, few saw their difference as
intellectual. They were different because they were in band, they were not athletic, or they were transgender. I learned a lot more about difference than I learned about intelligence. Intellect was but one facet of difference. Participants happened to be gifted; they happened to be many other things, as well. Advanced intellect was just one of many aspects of their identities.

In the next chapter, I address difference and its relationship to exclusion. In the following chapters, I turn my attention to the process and functions of social exclusion. We will see that these intellectually gifted adolescents are both targets of exclusion and sources of exclusion. Their interpersonal interactions create, maintain, and terminate exclusion, and their communication represents microcosms where systems of privileged are (re)produced, challenged, and dismantled.
Chapter 4: The Objectives of Ostracism and Social Exclusion

We were expected to define ourselves at such an early age, and if we didn’t do it, others did it for us. Geek. Fatty. Slut. Fag... To this day, kids are still being called names... if a kid breaks in a school and no one around chooses to hear, do they make a sound? Are they just background noise from a soundtrack stuck on repeat when people say things like, “Kids can be cruel.” Every school was a big top circus tent, and the pecking order went from acrobats to lion tamers, from clowns to carnies, all of these miles ahead of who we were. We were freaks — lobster claw boys and bearded ladies, oddities juggling depression and loneliness, playing solitaire, spin the bottle, trying to kiss the wounded parts of ourselves and heal, but at night, while the others slept, we kept walking the tightrope. It was practice, and yes, some of us fell.

- Shane Koyczan, 2013

This dissertation is about more than gifted adolescents. It is about people who are different in the world; it is about the underdogs. It is about the cruel things we do to each other and our amazing capacity to keep on living, despite the cruelty. It is about how cruelty can be intentional and unintentional, and even serves a social function, at times. This dissertation is about communication that makes people feel broken, unwanted, and alone. I am writing about the beauty in us all that exists through the pain, despite the pain, and sometimes because of the pain. I am also writing about the darkness that overtakes us when we fail to see that beauty.

In the current chapter, and those that follow, I utilize sensitizing concepts from CMM and PI theory to illuminate adolescent ostracism and social rejection. I attempt to answer the questions, who, why, how, and to what effect ostracism is accomplished. In the current chapter, I address who excludes and why. Therefore, I will first discuss relational dimensions that fostered participants’ desires for relational closeness and led to divergence, impossibility, and resignation. Next, I will discuss ways in which ostracism seemed to function for participants. I originally intended to explore only the
phenomenon of ostracism and instructed participants to write solely about their feelings of being “ignored and left out.” However, my analysis suggests that in the daily experiences of participants, ostracism and other forms of social rejection were inextricably interconnected. Adolescents possess an entire arsenal of strategies to exclude peers. Where possible, I still attempt to focus on ostracism, but I also discuss other forms of social rejection reported by participants. Recall from Chapter Two, I asked participants to discuss their experiences as excludees, excluders, and observers of exclusion. Based on their experiences in these three roles, I have attempted to construct a multifaceted account of adolescent peer rejection.

**Assumptions on Human Nature**

During initial interviews, I asked participants to describe the types of people that typically exclude others. Most participants said the “popular,” “mean,” and “insecure” people. For example, Juan said, “Those who don't believe in themselves too much and lack empathy.” Chad stated, “the popular kids. Oh, good lord, I do not even know where to start with them.” These individuals viewed social exclusion as a phenomenon that is always negative, and always perpetrated with malicious intent. Many of them also adamantly contended, at least at this early stage in the project, that they never excluded others (in my final chapter, I explore participant realizations about their own communication resulting from study participation).

However, a few participants argued that human nature is exclusive; thus we are all guilty of exclusion. For instance, Haley, a 12-year-old 7th grader who is very social and participates in soccer, swimming, and cheerleading, yet does not feel she truly belongs at
school, said, “everyone leaves people out, it is just part of human nature. There are clicks with most girls, the popular girls, the sporty girls.” For Haley, exclusion is about group definition; she assumed similar people cluster together. In a journal entry, she wrote,

So today I just wanted to say that I feel like being ignored is kind of a way that people just are and I don’t think anyone can change that. I know it sounds sad that there is nothing we can do about it but I guess that is just life.

Similarly, Asher, also discussing the inevitability of exclusion, wrote, “I must say this is how the human brain has always been and always will be.” Both Haley and Asher assumed exclusion is a fixed part of human nature. These two are enmeshed in their social worlds, unable to imagine otherwise. They both attended schools with numerous clearly defined cliques of similar students, so, for them, this scenario represented the only option for human organization. Haley’s comment, “I know it sounds sad,” demonstrated resignation about the realization that all humans are exclusive. She shared in several journal entries feelings of exclusion from most social groups at her school and powerlessness to change her environment.

Other participants discussed exclusion as unavoidable, suggesting we are all capable of excluding others. Meg, a 15-year-old 10th grader who generally feels included at school and often writes about her troubles evenly dividing her time among friends so no one feels excluded, wrote about lunch period one day,

[Jessica], [Rachel] and I (best friends) arrived to lunch after most people, and in the full lunchroom, seats were extremely limited. While the three of us wanted to stick together, we were torn on where to turn. We could easily find show choir
friends to eat with, or choose one of the many tables of the different groups our
gifted program students had split up to. [Jane] could have gone and sat with her
non-gifted program boyfriend.

Ultimately, the trio split up, and Meg sat with her “math/sci” friends. She continued,

After a couple minutes, though, my show choir friends came and said I should sit
with the show choir table. Eventually, after feeling very torn, I stayed with my
math/sci friends… I don't want to be exclusive to show choir, and the people I
was sitting with today I wanted to get to know better. So I stayed, and will of
course sit at the "show choir table" tomorrow.

Meg felt the situation forced her to exclude her show choir friends, Jessica and Rachel,
from her lunchtime interactions. Although Meg tried to be inclusive, she recognized that
every choice is exclusionary. Participants’ experiences suggest that a variety of
motivations exist for exclusive behaviors and humans must regularly make exclusive
decisions. As Burke (1935) reminds us, the minute we look at something, we exclude all
else from our vision. In life, we must make choices, which requires including some
elements in our decisions and excluding much more. Meg’s conundrum and Haley and
Asher’s observations of the human tendency to break into groups demonstrates that we
are all capable of exclusion.

**Determinants of Relational Desirability**

Juan, Chad, Haley, and Meg’s responses exemplify that exclusion is not always
malicious, negative, or limited to the “popular,” “mean,” or “insecure” individuals.

Therefore, the real question becomes, when is exclusion problematic? Consistent with PI
theory, participants experienced the pains of exclusion and the problem of integration when they faced the possibility of exclusion from desirable relational partners or groups. Several relational dimensions determined the desirability of a partner or group. The desirability for connections with certain others but the perception of disconnection from these others often served as sources of divergence, impossibility, wishful thinking, and resignation.

**Importance of relationship.** The first determinant of the desire for relational closeness was importance of the relational partner. When those whom we hold dear exclude us, we are deeply hurt because our desire for inclusion from these individuals is so great. For instance, several participants discussed the pain of exclusion from friends, family, and romantic partners. Recall that Williams (2009; 2010) argued ostracism occurs in group settings and among dyads; furthermore, Williams suggested that dyadic ostracism yields the same effects on an individual as does ostracism from a group. As an example, in Chapter Three I noted that Juan was once dating Isabella. Despite their breakup, Juan wanted to remain friends because he cared deeply for her; however, she responded by completely ostracizing him. He wrote several entries about the profound sadness her exclusion has caused him. For weeks, Isabella ignored Juan’s texts and calls and made no eye contact with him in school. Williams (2001) stressed that the silent treatment, one form of dyadic ostracism, is often devastating to individuals. As a last resort to connect with Isabella, Juan mailed her a postcard and then texted her best friend to see if she received the card. He wrote,
[The best friend] texted, “Yes, she read the postcard, but she does not want to see you. I'm sorry I cannot tell you any more.” This filled me with rage to no end…I got depressed for maybe a week, before today, because of that remark.

Isabella’s importance to Juan made her exclusion more painful because of Juan’s great desire to connect with Isabella. Her exclusion served as a reminder of the seeming impossibility of Isabella’s presence in his life. Juan discussed his depression with me several times, as he struggled with Isabella’s reaction.

Other participants discussed the pain of exclusion from a trusted friend. For instance, Meg, said in an interview that her most memorable exclusion experience was the time her best friend ignored her for several months in middle school. Meg said, “nothing has ever or will ever be more painful than my childhood best friend ignoring me.” According to many participants, the importance of their relational partner affected their reaction to exclusion. While rejection from anyone, even a despised individual or group, will likely cause some pain (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007), it hurts more when someone important to us excludes us. We desire to interact with individuals important to us, and we often hope these individuals will reciprocate our feelings and desire to be around us, as well. Therefore, according to PI theory, rejection from important others particularly embodies divergence. Juan and Meg experienced troubling PI as they realized they could not actualize the desired realities where their relational partners valued Juan and Meg as much as Juan and Meg valued them.

While Juan and Meg’s ostracism by beloved individuals highlighted their interpersonal disconnections, Haley’s ostracism by a friend elicited PI by highlighting
both her disconnection from an important individual and her disconnection from an important group. Haley felt excluded by the “popular” crowd at school and they often teased her about her intellect. Haley’s good friend, Stacey, began ignoring Haley when Stacey was around the “popular” crowd at school. Haley wrote,

So today, we were lining up for an assembly in school and my so called "best friend" [Stacey] and I were lining up together and without saying anything she walked to the back of the line and was just talking to the "popular" girls in our class…It is very painful because she says we’re best friends, and then she just ignores me and leaves the next minute.

Many of Haley’s entries focused on Stacey’s exclusion, particularly when Stacey socialized with popular students. Stacey was not simply disassociating from Haley; rather, Stacey’s ostracism of Haley represented Haley’s own exclusion from the popular crowd. Thus, Stacey was dissociating in a way that linked Stacey to group in which Haley desired to belong but realized she likely never would belong. Haley’s exclusion created the recognition of two undesirable realities: a reality of exclusion from Stacey and a reality of exclusion from the popular crowd.

**Familiarity.** A second determinant of participants’ desire for relational closeness was the level of familiarity between relational partners. Participants had different reactions to exclusion from strangers, acquaintances, friends, and family members. Several participants expressed surprise by exclusion from individuals with whom they had known for a long time or had familial connections. For example, Tris described
exclusion from her church youth group, of which she has known many members for her entire life,

At dinner, I saved a seat for my BFF [best friend forever]. When she came in, she grabbed a chair and went to the table the others were sitting at. I yelled over to her and pointed at the seat beside me. She shook her head stubbornly and went back to talking to the others. I grabbed a chair and asked the people to schooch over where it seemed the biggest space was, but they wouldn’t move for me.

Later that night, several youth group members sat together on the couch, Tris wrote,

The couch all the girls were sitting on was full so I sat on some cushions on the floor. I can’t believe I've known these girls my whole life and they can’t even make room for me at the table or on the couch.

Tris was incredulous that people she has known for so long would exclude her from meaningful social participation. For Tris, the exclusion reinforced an undesirable reality: the reality that, despite a lifetime of familiarity, Tris still existed on the group’s periphery. Tris expected individuals with whom she had a lifelong connection to treat her with more respect.

Other participants expressed bewilderment and pain about exclusion by family members. Haley wrote about her frustration and shock feeling about exclusion during a family activity,

Today, I didn't really feel included in my own family! We did a walk for mental health today with my mom, her boyfreind adn his daughter. They were kind of walking in front of me and didn't talk to me. And we "had" to listen to [Mariesa]
((the boyfriend’s) daughter) because she just kept complaining and we didn't get to finnish because [Mariesa’s] feet were hurting…UGH! It just really gets on my nerves.

Here, Haley was astonished and hurt that her mother ignored her to spend time with her boyfriend, and that Mariesa’s needs were more important than Haley’s needs.

Another participant expressed ambivalence about her exclusion by a family member. Laura wrote about her uncle’s refusal even to wish her a happy birthday. She explained that her uncle “friended” her on Facebook and then her mother confronted him about posting comments unsuitable for the eyes of a teenager. Laura’s uncle “became so upset by this that he ‘de-friended’ me.” She tried to rekindle a connection with her uncle on her birthday, but

He indicated that the only way he would have said “Happy Birthday” was via Facebook, and since we were “de-friended” he would no longer be wishing me well on that day. He has not had any contact with me for three years. My birthday ends up, invariably, becoming a reminder of the fact that I no longer have extended family members present in my life. I can't help feeling as though this is my fault because I was the one who brought his comments to their attention…While I can cognitively understand, my birthday has passed again this year, and I can't help but think about how much I just wish this had never happened to begin with.

The familial connection to Laura’s uncle made his exclusion unexpected and painful.

Laura explained that for the past three years, rather than experiencing complete
excitement on her birthday, Laura’s first thought on her birthday was of the emptiness left by her uncle’s communicative absence. Like Haley in the proceeding section, her uncle’s exclusion represented Laura’s broader exclusion from her own family. Laura rarely interacted with her mother’s family and sometimes wished she were closer to them. Therefore, her uncle’s refusal to wish her a happy birthday served as a symbolic reminder of Laura’s exclusion from her extended family group, as well.

**Social status.** The final salient factor determining relational desirability for participants was the perceived status of the relational partner. Adolescents are in the process of forming identities and making judgments about themselves and others (Rawlins, 1992; Sunwolf, 2008). Adolescents likely want to be perceived and perceive themselves as desirable; therefore, they might wish to associate with desirable others, which could confer desirability by association. Perceived social status becomes particularly salient because status is a marker of desirability. Participants perceived potential relational partners as superior, inferior, or equal to them in social status, and thus affecting attitudes towards exclusion. Generally, exclusion from those perceived as superior or equal in status often distressed participants, whereas exclusion from individuals perceived as inferior in status barely registered to participants.

Participants only minimally considered their own impact on others with perceived inferior social status. Both Johnson (2006) and Allen (2004) contend that individuals with high social statuses are often oblivious to their impact on those with less perceived status. For example, in an interview, Jonas, a 13-year-old 8th grader, explained, “at school, most people’s goal is to move up the hierarchy. So, they want to be included in
the popular groups and they want to distance themselves from the losers.” When I asked how his peers would react to exclusion from a group of “losers,” he explained, “they probably wouldn’t even notice. Losers are invisible to popular people, except as targets of teasing.” Many participants discussed their own exclusion due to possessing low status at their school. For instance, Mikhail said in an interview, “I have a group of friends that slowly conglomerated... We all sit together at lunch and stuff. Now three of the girls became really popular and stopped talking to us. They got new friends, who were hot guys.” The “hot guys,” presumably, were more desirable relational partners than Mikhail because of their appearance and popularity.

While some participants discussed the perils of low status, others addressed the advantages of high status or their desire for acceptance by high status individuals. Simone, a 12-year-old 7th grader who described herself as “unpopular, bullied, and excluded,” wrote, “the popular people don't even know what being left out feels like. They are so popular, they don't feel it once in their life.” For Simone, high status ensured perpetual inclusion; peers habitually desired the company of high status individuals. The most common response to the interview question, “who typically excludes people at your school?” was “popular people,” demonstrating that exclusion from those perceived as having high social status is memorable.

Other participants desperately sought inclusion from high status peers. Sarah wrote, “I know I shouldn’t want to be popular, but why can’t I be popular for just one day? PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE!” Here, we see a poignant example of PI in Sarah’s torment as she pleads to be accepted. Sarah’s wish takes the form of a plea, which serves
as a performance of her hope for popularity. According to Gergen (2009), “expressions of love, anger, hope, desire, and so on, are typically embedded within full-blown performances…we perform the mind” (p. 99-100). For Gergen, psychological acts only become meaningful once performed. Additionally, Sarah admitted her ambivalence about her desire for popularity by recognizing that popularity should not be her desire, yet she must reconcile that it is her desire. Sarah is not yet resigned to the impossibility of relational inclusion by popular peers, but she recognizes the painfully low probability of her acceptance. As if to bargain with the universe, she asked that she be popular only for a day to experience a fleeting glimpse of acceptance.

Although some participants, like Sarah, wished for popularity, many participants did not aspire to this type of inclusion. Jennifer wrote,

I think it's funny, though, because the only people who like the 'popular crowd' are the 'popular' people. I don't think people should care what they think, but apparently their word is 'sacred'. I ignore them, though, and try to be nice to everyone.

Jennifer recognized others’ desires to placate popular individuals, but she rejected the influence of and attraction to the popular crowd. For Jennifer, popularity is exclusive; therefore, popularity is undesirable. Lisa expressed a similar sentiment when she explained in an interview,

The types of people that are left out at school are basically anyone that is not “popular” or up to the standards of that crowd. There is one popular crowd, and everyone else divides themselves up based on their interests… In all actuality,
most people hate the popular crowd…thinking about it, the popular crowd is just a small, mean group of girls that think they’re the cream of the crop when they’re not.

Like Jennifer, Lisa rejected the appeal of the popular crowd and tacitly questioned their authority. She added, “the number of regular people far outnumbers the popular crowd. If we wanted to, we could run the school except that everyone needs the approval of the popular crowd for some reason.” Lisa expressed her confusion about why the popular students have authority and social control at her school, despite being a small majority. Likely, their high status, conferred to them by the student body, motivates students to seek their approval.

Regardless of the desire to be or not to be popular, the language and mythos of “popularity” trapped participants in forms of PI. Labeling a group or individual as popular exemplifies the interdependence of probabilistic and evaluative orientations. The label “popular” confers legitimate power (Raven, 1993) because the popular adolescents are socially legitimated to assume superiority and the prerogative to determine who/what is and is not valuable. The moment an individual accepts the language and mythos of popularity, that adolescent assumes that those anointed with popularity are entitled to deference on a range of matters, even if that same adolescent rejects popularity. Insofar as an individual accepts the concept of popularity as desirable or the antithesis of rejecting popularity as desirable, then judging the self or others as popular or unpopular is both a probabilistic and evaluative judgment. For such individuals, accepting this understanding enmeshes them into a reality where the concept of popularity holds
substantial power, as they must position themselves as for or against the force of popularity. Jennifer and Lisa were still motivated to disapprove of popularity and worked to refute its desirable status; thus, the ideology of popularity still anchored their judgments because they still existed in a reality that coerced them to identify their positionality with popularity. The moment participants accepted the popularity label they automatically felt divergence or impossibility. Therefore, despite Jennifer and Lisa’s rejection of popularity, they are still entangled in the interdependence of their probabilistic and evaluative judgments that accompany the language of “popularity.”

**Interdependence of determinants and orientations.** The determinants of relational desirability thus far discussed do not exist in isolation; rather, these dimensions are mutually constituted and interdependent. All three determinants converge in a journal entry written by Rebecca, an 11-year-old 6th grader who spends most recesses with a book, loves the color pink, and enjoys robotics club. Rebecca wrote several entries about a new girl in her school, Erin. Rebecca befriended Erin the first few days of school, knowing that new students are often lonely. However, soon the popular girls befriended Erin, and Rebecca was, again, alone. She wrote,

So today, “Those Girls” were clustered around [Erin], watching her do handstands and cartwheels. While wearing a black, REALLY sparkly dress that barely covered her hips. I can't believe that [Erin] got here for her first year at [School Name] and is already in with the popular girls! And she's a year younger than them, too! I know that I shouldn’t get to worked up about it, It isn't my social life, but those girls sort of, somewhat know me! I don't pick my friends because they're
popular or pretty, but if "Those Girls" were to have a spot open for another girl, they should choose me, not the spoiled, new girl who isn't even their age!...

Sometimes I REALLY want to be popular instead of being just another face in the yearbook.

In Rebecca’s example, the interdependence of social status, familiarity, and importance of relational partners dramatically increased her desire for inclusion and her evaluation of the likelihood of inclusion. Rebecca would like to experience popularity; thus she admired the popular girls for their high social status. Her desire for popularity motivated her to seek inclusion amongst the popular girls. Therefore, their importance to Rebecca increased. She was jealous that Erin has been included in their group, and thus gained their status. Rebecca’s level of familiarity with the popular girls simply as classmates since kindergarten increased her perception that eventual inclusion in their group is likely, and thus, she remained hopeful. Therefore, Rebecca was surprised when the popular girls failed to consider her as a friend, in favor of Erin.

Again, the interdependence of these relational dimensions becomes evident in Ginny’s journal entry about a family visit; Ginny’s certainty of exclusion affected multiple relational dimensions. She wrote,

On Sunday morning we went to my Aunts house. She has four children, the youngest of whom is my age and the oldest is in her first year at college. We are not particularly close with my dads side of the family, in fact they didn't like my mom much when dad first married her. I always feel a bit shunned by my aunts and cousins on my dads side. The bagels and bacon we had there were fine,
though. I didn't say much, just listened to the conversation. Dad is hopeful that we can become closer with his family over time. It's not going to happen, but it was still nice to see them. And anyways, we still have a great relationship with Nana and Pa.

Although Ginny was visiting family, the finality and certainty of her comment, “it’s not going to happen” suggested she determined inclusion to be impossible; therefore, she minimized the importance of this familial relationship and did not desire inclusion from her Aunt’s family. Additionally, she justified her distance from her Aunt’s family by suggesting her closeness with her grandparents; thus reinforcing that she was connected to some of her father’s relatives, and implying no need to connect with all of his relatives. Ginny’s justification was a PI management strategy to rationalize her lack of desire for inclusion from her Aunt’s family.

In a journal entry from Sofia, an 11-year-old homeschooled 6th grader, we observe her changing orientations towards these relational dimensions as events unfold. Sofia has a best friend, Melanie, and a good friend, Stephanie. However, over the course of Sofia’s participation in the current study, Melanie and Stephanie began ostracizing Sofia. In her first few entries about Melanie and Stephanie, Sofia became frustrated over subtle exclusionary cues the two sent. As the cues became increasingly obvious, Sofia’s frustration increased. We see her struggle with PI in her entries. In one entry, the girls were together at choir practice, and Stephanie attempted to sit between Melanie and Sofia. Sofia wrote,
[Stephanie] walked over to us and said to me "[Sofia], could you scooch over?". I did, but how rude! Why is it so important to be in the middle all the time? How terrible would it be not to be in the middle for once? I wouldn't have minded so much except for the fact that as soon as [Stephanie] sat down she started talking to [Melanie] about something that didn't involve me! Come on [Stephanie]! It made me wonder if she likes [Melanie] more than she likes me, which would be ridiculous as she has known me for longer than she has known [Melanie] and I kind of brought the two of them together! I shouldn't be the one talking however, because [Melanie] is my best friend... I think [Melanie] values my friendship more than she values [Stephanie’s] friendship, so I didn't worry about that.

Here, we observe Sofia coping with PI elicited by Stephanie’s actions. Sofia perceived Stephanie’s exclusionary use of physical space as offensive; nonetheless, Sofia complied with her own exclusion. The thought entered and quickly left Sofia’s mind that Stephanie liked Melanie more than Sofia; she rationalized that Stephanie cannot like Melanie more than Sofia. Sofia exhibited a strong desire for inclusion from both girls, though Melanie was clearly more important to Sofia because of their status as best friends. In early entries, Stephanie was also highly important to Sofia, but Sofia thought less of Stephanie as she becomes more exclusive. In this entry, Sofia believed she was likely to be (and deserved to be) included by both Melanie and Stephanie because of their familiarity and history. Sofia placated herself by remembering that because Melanie is her best friend she will not exclude her. Sofia also reminded herself that she brought
Melanie and Stephanie together as friends, and thus they will remember this and cherish Sofia.

In another entry, Sofia wrote,

A trend continued on Saturday. I felt ignored by [Stephanie] throughout the entire rehearsal. [Stephanie] was pouring her attention into [Melanie]. I felt like the friend pushed aside. I had brought the two of them together, kind of, and [Stephanie] had known me for much longer than she had known [Melanie]… It seemed like [Melanie] wasn't trying to be mean, but had forgotten that I was there… I thought about it, and came to the conclusion that there was no one else who could really be [Melanie’s] best bud. There were plenty of people that loved [Melanie] (like [Stephanie]), and although [Melanie] liked them, she just liked them, not loved them.

Again, Sofia’s entry demonstrated interconnections between familiarity, importance, likelihood of acceptance, and desire for acceptance, though we notice several shifts. Sofia vilified Stephanie more; Stephanie was now a seductress, of sorts, pulling Melanie’s attention from Sofia. Stephanie was also marked as betraying a bond of loyalty, since Stephanie knew Sofia first (thus, should be loyal to Sofia). Sofia no longer sought acceptance from Stephanie; rather, Sofia desired acceptance only from Melanie. Again, Sofia attempted to convince herself that Melanie would never forget her.

Other participants cared little about exclusion from those whom they did not desire inclusion. For instance, Wayne said in an interview, “I guess I’m excluded by what you might call the ‘in’ crowd or the ‘cool’ people, I mean they certainly don’t
include me. But, really who cares, I don’t want to hang out with them anyway.” The popular students were unimportant to Wayne. He recognized the unlikelihood of becoming popular himself, and thus did not desire their inclusion. Consistent with PI theory, participants’ evaluative and probabilistic orientations are interdependent, changing their judgments about likelihood of and desire for acceptance. For instance, in Chapter Three, I discussed Emma’s friendship troubles as her childhood friend began excluding her once Emma joined the school gifted program. Emma remarked, “I basically said I don’t’ care about [Rebekah] anymore, she’s not my friend anymore.” Therefore, Emma’s judgment that Rebekah’s exclusion was unlikely to end changed her desire for acceptance from Rebekah and Rebekah’s importance to Emma. Ultimately, Emma made new friends and found acceptance elsewhere. Another participant’s interview comment elucidated the connection between desire for and likelihood of acceptance. Xavier said,

In 6th grade a lot of people ostracized me, or were rude to me, some of them bullied me. It made me not trustful of other people. It’s the reason I skipped 7th grade and went to 8th grade. But, they still didn’t accept me, and I realized they never would. Eventually, I realized they were all dicks and I didn’t even want them to accept me.

Wayne, Emma, and Xavier’s comments demonstrated the modification of attitudes towards inclusion and exclusion anchored in evaluative and probabilistic orientations.

The dilemma of hope and divergence. Unsurprisingly, exclusion was more painful for participants when they desired inclusion from their relational partner(s). For
instance, the majority of Tris’ journals discussed peer exclusion during swim team practice. Tris wrote, “I really, really, really, really, really want [Lindsey] and [Abbey] to become my friends! I don’t get what I ever did to them to make them ignore me!” Tris often wrote about her desire for inclusion, and subsequent pain when these girls excluded her. Participants also experienced the pain of exclusion when they believed eventual inclusion was likely, but currently experienced exclusion.

Tris remained hopeful that her swim teammates would eventually stop ostracizing her, and therefore, her continued exclusion prolonged her torment. Tris explained in her journal, “even though last year all the girls [on swim team] ignored me, I think this year will be different and I can’t wait for practice to start in TWO DAYS!!!!!!” According to Tris, the girls often failed to acknowledge her, even when she spoke directly to them. Once practice started, her teammates continued to ostracize her. Occasionally, over the six weeks she wrote in her journal, a teammate would interact with Tris, giving her hope for eventual friendship. She wrote,

[A girl] who normally didn't talk to me talked to me this week. We didn't get to talk a lot but we did communicate at least. Hopefully by the end of the swim year I will actually have some friends from swim team. YAY!!! :D:D:D I'm just glad to add one more person to my kinda sorta friends list :) Tris’ ostracism by her teammates was so extreme that the smallest communication, a brief acknowledgement of her existence, gave her immense joy. While small interactions filled Tris with hope, they also invested her in exclusive relationships. Tris’ torment is ongoing rather than retrospective. Tris’ holding onto hope also keeps her in a state of
divergence. She believes there is a chance of actualizing her desire for acceptance, which keeps hope alive but also sustains a painfully low perceived probability of realizing her desire. Teammate actions that Tris perceives as small acts of acceptance give her the ability to sustain her orientation.

Ultimately, the answer to “who excludes?” is “everyone.” Our friends, family, romantic partners, acquaintances, strangers, and enemies can all exclude us from meaningful social participation. The question, then, becomes about the relationship between the excluder and excludee. Exclusion is the most painful when those we care about purposely exclude us from their lives. However, all exclusion is painful and threatens our sense of belonging, self-esteem, meaningful existence, and control (Williams, 2001). In the next section, I explore motives for exclusion, as I address the social functions of ostracism.

The Social Utility of Ostracism

Communication actualizes some social worlds and negates others. Ostracism is an attempt by individuals to coordinate a world without another by negating their existence. For example, Laura explained in an interview, “When you are young, if someone has different beliefs than you, ignoring them allows you to just remove them from your social circle. You don’t have to deal with them or their beliefs.” However, individuals and groups do not always engage in ostracism with malicious intent. Additionally, ostracism serves a purpose; individuals or groups use ostracism as a tool for coordination and coherence, to actualize desired realities. Ostracism often can arise from PI or give rise to PI. During participant interviews, I asked, “why do you, personally
ignore, exclude, or leave out others?” and “in general, why do you believe people ignore, exclude, or leave out others?” Answers to these questions and participant journal entries revealed that exclusion served six diverse social objectives for participants.

**Defer dealing with difference.** Forty-two of the forty-five participants said the main reason people exclude is an inability to deal with difference. Many participant journals also demonstrated exclusion because of difference. Adolescence is a time of conformity (Rawlins, 1992), and many young people find it difficult to accept difference or incongruity with social norms (Silverman, 2002). Diversity is a reminder that the world is not comprised of people just like us, but rather that many visions of reality and versions of humanity share the earth. Therefore, difference is a window into CMM’s concept of mystery, a reminder that our world could be otherwise. Often, participants discussed the preference to stay enmeshed in a social world, happily blind to mystery. In this sense, ostracism is a universe maintenance strategy. For example, Skyler spoke about her peer’s seeming inability to deal with difference. She said, People have varying ideas about what is right or wrong. People are uncomfortable with outside information and with knowledge that is different from how they perceive the world. They don’t want to be proven wrong or even have to question their view of the world, so they exclude to avoid questioning.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), we seek to maintain our social worlds at all costs; thus, when definitions of our reality are challenged, we either assimilate or annihilate those who pose the threat. One objective of ostracism, then, is to defer dealing
with difference. Ostracism allows us to ignore another’s presence, thereby ignoring the threat they pose to our reality. Ostracism is a non-violent attempt to annihilate another.

One reason difference can threaten our social worlds is because it brings uncertainty. Perhaps adolescents’ process of shifting identities from family to peer groups (Kroger, 2006), where their values and confidence in those values are undergoing drastic change, presents enough uncertainty that some adolescents cling to certainty and shun uncertainty. An inability to cope with uncertainty could explain why participants noticed that many of their peers tended to engage in ethnocentric communication rather than cosmopolitan communication. According to Pearce (1994) cosmopolitan communicators comfortably interact with diverse others who hold different cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs. Cosmopolitanism likely requires considerable confidence that one will not “disappear” if open to difference. Additionally, some participants suggested that adolescents might lack the cognitive schema to account for diverse individuals or situations.

Xavier explained, “someone who is different leads people to back off. They aren't sure how to handle someone like this because they have never been in a situation like this before.” For Xavier, some humans simply do not understand how to approach diverse individuals or situations; thus they resort to ostracism. Juan explained in a journal entry, There is a slight rejection toward people who are not close to social standards because they are something new, something authentic. People will be on their guard because, naturally, they will more strongly feel like they don't know what to expect from such a person. The shorthand for avoiding trouble is simply
excluding that person. It has happened to me throughout all my life. And, as
Juanita] (a rather old friend of mine) explains, “He is great, but you have to learn
how to love [Juan]. It takes time.”

Similarly, Harper said, “Some people have their crowds that they hang out with, and if
someone is different they aren’t used to them.” For Xavier, Juan, and Harper, difference
was about PI in the form of uncertainty or threats to one’s values, and ostracism was the
easiest way to cope with difference.

Ostracizing those who are different can become a habitual way for some
adolescents to cope with difference and uncertainty. Adolescents might not have the
communicative, psychological, or social resources to effectively deal with PI; therefore,
the PI elicited by diversity might seem even more confusing. Sofia exemplified this
confusion when she explained during an interview why she excluded a girl in her
neighborhood. She said, “I just feel weird around [Sarah]. She is just a bit odd, different
from everyone. She runs around moaning and she has a weird sense of style. I just can’t
put up with her.” For Sofia, Sarah’s “oddness” elicited PI, and Sofia minimized her PI by
ostracizing Sarah. Conversely, adolescents also have a plasticity that allows them to be
more resilient and open-minded than adults. As we age, we become habituated into being
intolerant of difference. By adulthood, some have devoted their entire lives to
intolerance by affiliating narrowly. Therefore, adolescents are at the perfect age to teach
about dealing productively with diversity.

Another reason participants believed adolescents might ostracize others in order
to defer dealing with difference is that some adolescents are afraid of difference. Juan
explained in a journal entry, “The default for humanity is that we're scared of the unknown. Nevertheless, it [ostracism] is nearly always done with big enough gut feelings or instinctive, dormant rejection.” For Juan, humans have an instinct to reject difference; he normalized exclusion by suggesting it is a biological reaction. Catherine had a less deterministic and more positive attitude about difference. She explained in an interview,

Most people today are scared of different personalities…I think that they're afraid of not being good enough, not having the right attitude or personality to fit in. Things might be different if more people were willing to intermingle with different groups, and not in a forced setting. Once you get to know these different kinds of people, you realize that there are many layers to them. You realize that maybe hanging out with someone of a different personality, skill, or like/dislike than you are accustomed to is actually refreshing. You get so many new experiences and conversations. I think that people in cliques just need to get to know each other. Maybe there would be less pressure and separation.

For Catherine, the fear of difference is a fear of failing to measure up to others. She added a positive note, however, by suggesting adolescents might find value in diversity if they are exposed to it. In Chapter Six, I discuss how experiencing ostracism allowed some participants to appreciate diversity. Although Juan and Catherine stressed the human fear of diversity, Johnson (2006) argued that fear of diversity is “a cultural myth” that “justifies keeping outsiders on the outside…if we take difference and diversity as reasons for fear and occasions for trouble, it’s because we’ve learned to think about them...
in ways that make for fear and trouble” (p. 13). For Johnson, we cannot use fear as an excuse.

A final reason participants suggested individuals ostracize to defer dealing with difference is that some adolescents view difference as a threat. Difference requires a comparison. We are different in relation to others, and we define our characteristics in opposition to others (Allen, 2004; Putnam, Jahn, & Baker, 2011). We add value judgments to differences, and we use identity markers to develop hierarchies (Allen, 2004; Sen, 2006). Thus, we use difference to both distinguish and to dominate, whereby some identity markers are privileged and others marginalized. Therefore, Johnson (2006) and Allen (2006) argued that most humans typically view diversity negatively, which gives rise to prejudice and hate. Mikhail explained in an interview that exclusion occurs “because of ism words. Like rich poor, black white, etc. I think it is a mindset. People are just like ‘you can’t sit with us because you don’t have a lot of money and your clothes aren’t pretty.’” The connection between difference and prejudice combines a fear of difference, uncertainty about difference, and value judgments towards differences. Chad exemplified this by saying in an interview,

I try really hard not to do this, but if someone is different, like they talk strangely or doesn’t look normal, or has something that sets them apart I get uncomfortable. It’s hard because I am not used to seeing different things, so it’s a little scary. Like, a lot of people do racial exclusion or have slang words for skin color. I try not to do that, but it’s hard if you see someone with a different skin color and you
aren’t use to it, and you’ve heard all these people use slang words about it so you think their skin is not as good.

Chad expressed uncertainty about how to approach difference, fear because he was not used to difference, and value judgments associated with identity markers (i.e. skin color).

Chad’s comment also addressed socialization. Johnson (2006) said privilege is a “legacy we all inherited...groups are already pitted against each other by the structures of privilege that organize society as a whole” (p.12). Chad understood that prejudice is wrong, but he also recognized that he was socialized into a world that hierarchically ranks skin color. Chad inherited the legacy of racism.

Study participants addressed numerous forms of difference, including demographic differences (i.e. race, gender, age, ability status, sexual orientation, socio-economic status), as well as more nuanced differences like diverse personalities, life circumstances, clothing, attitudes, and behaviors. For instance, several participants experienced exclusion because of gender stereotypes. Maya, an 11-year-old 6th grader who moves frequently because her father is in the army and curls up on her mom’s lap to cry about being excluded, explained in her autobiography that she is excluded because,

I am not like other girls. I am a weapons girl, so I like star wars and Indiana Jones, and being outside, I have my own bow and arrow (it’s just a toy, but better than nothing) , and things boys like. I am not a girly girl.

Similarly, Emma said during an interview, “I am more of a tom boy...I feel excluded by the girls. They shove me into ant hills if I try to hang around them.” Both Maya and Emma defied gender norms and suffered the consequences of exclusion. Mikhail also
defied gender norms because he is a male dancer; peers call him “gay” on a daily basis. They question his sexual orientation because of this activity. During an interview, he mentioned that he wore a dance shirt to school and people kept saying, “why are people have sex on your shirt.” Mikhail participated in a sport often associated with women; thus, he experiences peer exclusion.

Another participant shared several stories of exclusion because of her sexual orientation. Recall from Chapter Three, Skyler is transgendered and she came out as a lesbian in middle school. In one journal entry, she wrote,

I hated middle school. I mean, everyone hates middle school. But I am amazed I made it through with minimal emotional casualties. I started ‘dating’ a girl named [Johanna] in the sixth grade… i am not quite sure how it got out but I remember specifically a kid named [Jake] would call me a dyke from the school bus window as I walked towards my bus stop. I remember going to the principal, asking if I could campaign against homophobia throughout the school. Not-so-shockingly, I remember him denying me with the words, “wait until high school, they’ll grow out of it.” I don’t think he realized that hate is not clothing you replace as you get older.

Skyler’s entry reminds us that interpersonal exclusion connects to larger social injustices. Hierarchical rankings of differences foster hatred towards perceived low-status differences. We are socialized to hate, and hatred becomes systemic; as Skyler observed, we do not often outgrow hatred. Participants writing about exclusion due to religion, race, age, gender, ability, and other differences are exemplifying microcosms of systemic
exclusion. For Johnson (2006), interpersonal interactions and social injustice are interdependent. The problem is that we live in “a world organized in ways that encourage people to use difference to include or exclude, reward or punish, credit or discredit, elevate or oppress, value or devalue” (p. 16). Interpersonal ostracism becomes a tool of oppression.

Ultimately, many study participants struggled with feelings of difference and wondered how to fit into their peer culture without losing themselves. Noam, a 13-year-old 8th grader, wrote a journal entry about a cartoon that made him reflect on exclusion. In the cartoon, a child was eating glue at school. His peers began teasing him about the glue, so he turned into a glue monster and started terrorizing his classmates until they apologized. Reflecting on the cartoon, Noam wrote,

This is just any exclusion scene with a victim who turns the table too harshly. The right thing may have been for the kid to just stop eating the glue. If you know what is getting you excluded, you may as well tackle it. But then what happens to the kids who can't change how they are? The ones who have birth defects for example? What are they supposed to do? And, if we really love eating glue, should we have to stop?

Noam’s observation is fundamental to understanding difference and exclusion. Not everyone can change, and no one should have to change to find acceptance. Differences exist. No two humans are the same. The hierarchical ranking, fear, and uncertainty surrounding differences turn human diversity into exclusive realities. Why are the lobster claw boys and bearded ladies lowest in the big top circus school pecking order?
Difference is discursive (Allen, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Putnam et al., 2011), as is the value we place on differences. It is easy to say that humans fear difference, that we will always segregate ourselves, that children outgrow cruelty, but is that just an excuse to avoid the difficulty of changing the system?

(Re)Produce power. The second objective of ostracism and social exclusion for participants was to produce and reproduce power. Many participants either discussed or exemplified ostracism as a tool of power. Ginny explained the connection she perceived between status and exclusion. She wrote,

One of the "perks" or responsibilities of being an alpha or a very high dominant is a nearly complete control over inclusion and exclusion… You aren't merely always included, you are the person who decides who is included… An omega, on the other hand, has no control whatsoever over inclusion or exclusion, and usually finds themself frequently excluded in any number of small ways.

For Ginny, exclusion is power, and those in charge control and create exclusion. Ginny’s entry supported Johnson’s (2006) argument that individuals with privileged identities are included and accepted, while those with perceived low-status identities experience “avoidance, exclusion, rejection, and devaluing” from others (p. 56).

However, Ginny treated power as unidirectional – those with high status have all of the power, others are powerless. Conversely, several scholars argue that power is reciprocal, and all social actors maintain some form of power (see for example, Allen, 2004; Deetz, 1992; Foucault, 1977). The distribution of power requires coordination from all social actors because power is given. According to Allen (2004), “members of nondominant
groups often help to perpetuate hierarchies because they believe that their group is inferior and that the dominant group is superior” (p. 15). Recall earlier, I cited Lisa as saying, “the number of regular people far outnumbers the popular crowd. If we wanted to, we could run the school except that everyone needs the approval of the popular crowd for some reason.” Lisa recognized the power in collective agency, and that classmates give the popular crowd power. Although those with high social status might coerce individuals, perhaps through peer pressure, no one is helplessly complacent.

One way participants explained and exemplified exclusion as a tool for (re)producing power was through the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies. According to Deetz (1992), children grow up in a society where people are treated as commodities, hierarchically ranked by their perceived worth. Juan explained,

> When somebody acts awkward and somewhat different from normal, there is a tacit, very slight rejection. Even more so if nothing in this person is worth NOT leaving out. When somebody is left out, I think, it is because the 'perpetrator' considers there is no good reason, either, to stay with this somebody.

For Juan, the excluder casts others away as worthless, commodities no one wants to exist. Haley explained in a journal entry, “people who are more ‘popular’ judge and then the people they do judge get ignored or bullied about that.” Ayaan, a 12-year-old 7th grader, explained in an interview an aspect of judgment at her school, she said, “certain nerdy clubs and people are excluded. Somehow the other clubs are ‘ranked’ better and cooler when in reality all clubs are unique, special, and awesome!” Ayaan recognized the constructed nature of these rankings, suggesting they are actually all equal. Once an
individual’s place in the social hierarchy is established, Angela explained, “If you are really popular you are not going to talk to the people below you.” For Juan, Haley, Ayaan, and Angela, ranking adolescents by their social worth is a common school practice, as abhorrent as it may be for them. During an interview, Emma admitted to doing this, herself. She said,

I am not proud of this at all, whatsoever, but I will tell you. I excluded a lot of people in 2nd grade because I thought I was a diva and was so high on the food change. I excluded a lot of people because I thought they weren’t cool.

Emma’s experience demonstrated Juan, Haley, Ayaan, and Angela’s perceptions of social hierarchies. Retrospectively, she felt guilt about her past actions, partially because she has now experienced exclusion herself.

According to several participants, one common social hierarchy maintenance strategy was excluding classmates for physical appearance and lack of athletic ability. Jennifer explained, “people these days are all about image and I think that people judge the outside and not the inside.” Bradly often wrote about his own ranking and exclusion of girls because of appearance. In one entry, he mentioned a girl in class who was “an ugly person who was interested in the teachers because the students didn't like her… if I was her I'd kill myself because I'm ugly and stupid.” For Bradly, his classmate’s appearance marked her life as worthless. In another entry he wrote, “This girl started looking at me and motioning for me to take out my headphones. But she was like a 6, maybe 6.5 so it wasn’t worth my time to talk to her.” Bradly ignored his classmate because she was not attractive (a 10). Asher explained in a journal entry that his
classmates at his old school excluded him for having “buckteeth,” earning him the nickname “mouse.” His classmates either ignored or ridiculed him. Amelia, a 17-year-old 11th grader, originally from the UK but currently living in Germany, was excluded for being overweight and redheaded.

Rebecca’s classmates ranked her low in the social hierarchy for her lack of athletic ability. She wrote,

I am not exactly that athletic, and in PE class the kids had been yelling at me to go and stand like a stone, they expected me to just stay put. They were pretty negatively vocal about it. One kid said, they should have the PE coach on their team because I was on their team.

For many participants, peers used social exclusion to rank each other and maintain rigid social hierarchies. Rebecca’s lack of athletic ability meant she was “worthless” as a teammate, they preferred to objectify her as a stone, rather than interact with her as a human.

Participants also used exclusion to climb the social hierarchy. Wayne explained in an interview that exclusion allowed adolescents to maintain their position as being superior. Because inside of the school ladder of popularity, however many people you can put beneath you means you are one step closer to the top…. I'm not saying that I agree with the ladder, but to most students that's how life is at school.
Wayne described popularity as a zero-sum game, a scarce commodity whereby the more I have the less you have. Although Wayne disagreed with hierarchical social rankings, he accepted the popularity “ladder” as a fact of student life. Similarly, Jennifer wrote,

People who think they are better than everyone else tend to think that when others feel bad about themselves, they will have a better reputation. I think it's all a bunch of shizzle (I wish I could say a more DESCRIPTIVE word, if you know what I mean) and that people should help pull everyone else up.

Unlike Wayne, Jennifer was less accepting of the social hierarchy. While she acknowledged it, she disagreed and proposed a new form of association.

Claudia provided an example of a time that she used exclusion to become more popular. She explained,

I think people exclude people as an act of power. They want to exert power over others. For instance, last summer I took college classes at a camp and I was with 11th and 12th graders who were 16-18 years old. Since I am only 13 (but fortunately look 15!) I had to quickly climb over someone to become more popular. I picked on one person older than me to assert my power a bit so people would respect me. It worked.

For Claudia, her peers conferred power and status on her once she derogated a fellow camper. She earned her inclusion at the expense of another.

A third use of exclusion to (re)produce power is by enacting cultural stereotypes. Although I have treated difference as one of six objectives of ostracism, difference is interwoven into power. For instance, according to Mumby (2011), difference is “both
medium and product of the relations of power” (p. vii). Children and adolescents are socialized to think of identity markers as hierarchical and natural (Allen, 2004); thus, exclusion, difference, identity, and power become interdependent and mutually constituted. Skyler explained in a journal entry,

Some people think due to social status, sexuality, gender, interests or financial stability that they are “above” other people and therefore other people are not worthy of their time or do not wish to associate with “lesser” people and bring themselves down.

For Skyler, exclusion can be a type of prefigurative and contextual logical force that upholds exclusive moral orders; some individuals believe a person like me should not associate with a person like them because they have characteristic X. This collective cultural coordination and coherence socializes adolescents into preconceived notions about diversity and worth, and impels some people to exclude certain types of others.

Exclusive moral orders and the logical forces creating perceived boundaries for human action are dehumanizing. For instance, Juan remarked,

At some point you will feel like somebody else is a bothering 'thing' and not a fellow human. At that point you have sown the seed of exclusion….They want to be with the best. If they judge you as something they don't want to be, you are worthless.

Again, the assignment of worth to identity markers objectifies and commoditizes individuals. Our assigned identities rob us of humanity, as we become objects of worth(lessness). Adolescents may or may not control how peers define them. Sen (2006)
argued, “the freedom in choosing our identity in the eyes of others can sometimes be extraordinarily limited” (p. 31). At the start of the current chapter, I quote Shane Koyczan, “We were expected to define ourselves at such an early age, and if we didn’t do it, others did it for us. Geek. Fatty. Slut. Fag.” Microcosmic interpersonal communication reflects (and creates) macrocosmic systemic exclusion. Ostracism and exclusion become ways to define others, exert power, and reinforce cultural stereotypes about the worth of certain groups.

Many participants reported exclusion episodes because an individual was a member of a marginalized population. For instance, Albert is an 11-year-old 6th grader with Asperger’s syndrome; he often wrote that his classmates called him “aspy.” Andy said in an interview that some of his classmates “use the word ‘retard’ to refer to disabled people. They think it’s funny.” Simone revealed to a classmate that she was Catholic, and the classmate responded, “the Roman Catholics were horrible and they made human sacrifices and you shouldn't be Roman Catholic.” Skyler wrote about acts of homophobia. In one entry, she recalled her friend’s father “threatening to call my parents to tell them I was a ‘fag’…[he thought] I was trying to ‘turn her gay’ and If I ever succeeded, he would lock [Sonya] in a mental hospital, [and] disown her.” Participants described multitudes of exclusive episodes surrounding those with traditionally marginalized identities.

**Social punishment and moral sanctioning.** A third objective of ostracism is to punish and sanction others. This ability is a type of coercive and reward power (Raven, 1993). Ostracism symbolizes a social death (Williams, 2001), a reminder of our frailty,
that we need others for survival. Through exclusion and inclusion, we socialize each other and express approval or disapproval. Thus, ostracism and exclusion become punitive mechanisms for social control (Bruneau, 1973; French, Jansen & Pidada, 2002; Harrington, 2004; Hogg & Reid 2006; Mills & Babrow, 2003), in which the ultimate goal is to influence group members to monitor and regulate their behavior (Wooten, 2006). Ostracism communicates to the target that she must alter herself or leave the group; therefore, exclusion is a means of socialization (Mills & Babrow, 2003). The group hopes the target will change her perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors in order to conform to group expectations (Williams, 2001). Phillip explained in an interview, “in a project if I end up folding paper wrong and the group got a lower grade because of that then the group would be mad at me and ignore me. Next time, I wouldn’t make that mistake.” Ostracism from Phillip’s group ensured he would not make the same mistake twice.

Peers also punished other participants. In an interview, Chad mentioned that his friend started telling inappropriate jokes and behaving meanly to others in order to become popular. Chad asked him to stop, but explained, “if I don’t do what mean thing he does I will be left out. I joined in originally because I thought I was going to be left out.” Chad and his friend experienced a fight over coordination; Chad tried to actualize a world where people are nice, but his friend’s use of ostracism goaded Chad into coordinating a different view of reality. Their practical logical forces collided; the friend believed ‘in order to be popular I must treat others badly,’ whereas Chad believed, ‘in order to be a nice person I must treat others nicely.’ Ultimately, Chad’s fear of exclusion coerced him into coordination with his friend. Now, Chad believed, ‘in order to keep him
as a friend, I must behave like him.’ Fear of ostracism is so effective at enforcing social norms that even those who secretly disagree often conform to avoid the pains of ostracism (Duran, 2006).

Juan had a similar experience. Juan wrote a journal entry about a party a classmate invited him to when he was 15. Juan knew the party would serve alcohol, so,

When my mother saw the invitation and I told her they would serve alcohol (although my friends told me I was supposed to not tell that), all hell broke loose. She started calling other mothers, informing them. There was drama among all of our mothers, and, the mother of the kid that was going to have his birthday, "clarified" that there would be no alcohol. I was massively rejected the days after that. The kid started to avoid talking to me. At some point they would make fun of me for being such a wuss and making such a scandal around alcohol. For years I would not be invited into parties again. The colombian equivalent to 'sweet sixteen' parties are 'los 15s' (quinces). I was maybe invited to my best female friends' parties, about 2 out of ~20 that year.

Juan’s classmates severely punished him for his actions. His peers desired to actualize a world in which underage drinking was part of their party culture, but Juan jeopardized that reality (and violated their trust). The resulting PI impelled his peers to utilize ostracism to police the boarders of their symbolic universe, and thus suppressing the vision of reality where underage drinking was wrong. Juan lost the battle over coordination, and they wrote him out of their reality. His peers’ actions also likely sent a message to other adolescents not to follow Juan’s example.
The social punishment of ostracism encourages conformity to group norms (Hogg & Reid, 2006; Ojala & Nesdale, 2004). Adolescents who follow social norms experience increased inclusion (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), whereas those deviating from norms experience exclusion (Bernheim, 1994). Like Juan, Noam learned that one social norm of adolescence is to “mind your own business.” Noam said, “I would always try to be a good kid –like people would be blatantly cheating and I would call them out on it, and that doesn’t go well with some kids. Now-a-days I don’t do that, I keep quiet.” Although Noam knew that cheating was wrong, he learned to follow adolescent social norms or suffer social consequences.

Harper gained a lesson in fashion norms from her peers. She wrote in a journal entry,

When I was in 6th grade and before then, I was an outcast. I would try and include myself in conversations but I was often unsuccessful. Sometimes [I would] wear an outfit that isn't that great. I think back to when I wore crazy outfits and was an outcast. I like to see how far I've come and all of the friendships I have made since then.

In a follow-up interview, Harper explained that she “dressed like a geek” and no one would socialize with her for this reason. She decided to change the way she dressed, and now she has friends. Whatever the intention of her peers, she modified her behavior to dress according to adolescent fashion norms. Harper’s exclusion served a dual purpose. The objectives of exclusion are not mutually exclusive, and ostracism can implicate several objectives simultaneously. Here, Harper’s ostracism served to hierarchically rank
and punish her for violating fashion norms. Harper’s peers, essentially, told her to modify her clothing choices.

Ostracism also functions as a non-violent corrective measure. Several participants discussed excluding others for inappropriate behavior. Chad explained in an interview, “I ignore people who cuss a lot. I am not a cusser, so I normally just ignore them when they are saying bad words… or racist comments. If they quit, I’ll include them again.” Adolescents might not have the communication skills to productively discuss their frustrations with another’s behavior (or, perhaps, they believe such discussions are ineffective). Therefore, sometimes their only recourse is to exclude, in order to send a message. Through exclusion, Chad alleviated the PI he experienced when interacting with peers using aggressive and inappropriate communication. Exclusion allowed Chad to exist in his desired, cuss-free, world.

Jennifer wrote a long journal entry about her decision to exclude a girl at school who always cursed and treated others rudely. Jennifer wrote,

This girl, [Nikki], is goth, and she has a big group of goth friends, but no one likes that group because they're always mean and swear in every sentence. When [Nikki] got done running around the track and came inside, she started yelling and swearing at us, "Are you f****ing idiots? Shut up!" When we were walking back to the locker rooms, I turned around and glared at [Nikki]. "What the f**** was that?" she snapped, at which I rolled my eyes and continued to head to the lockers. "Yeah, wipe that look off your face, b****!" [Clair] and I couldn't believe that she had said that!...When we were actually IN the dressing rooms and
changing, [Nikki] walked in, turned off the light, and walked out. There weren't any windows - obviously - so it was pitch black. We stood there in shock.

Jennifer decided not to acknowledge Nikki’s presence and to fill out a “bully report” about her behavior. Essentially, Jennifer’s exclusion said to Nikki, “you are not welcomed in my tribe if you continue to act this way.” However, Nikki did not seem to care about Jennifer’s exclusion; thus the objective of Jennifer’s exclusion changed from a corrective measure to simply writing Nikki out of Jennifer’s existence. If Nikki refused to change her behavior, Jennifer could exclude her and, therefore, continue to exist in a world where people are nice.

One specialized objective of ostracism is moral sanctioning. We can use ostracism as a moral weapon to maintain a particular moral order. We believe the world ought to be a certain way; we want to create the good, therefore, we exclude the bad. The difference between the utility of ostracism as a social punishment versus a moral sanction is that the second carries the added weight of the sense of morality implicated in what Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) call a moral order. CMM’s oughtness and PI theory become intricately connected during moral sanctioning. Evaluative and probabilistic orientations are resources by which we construct moral orders. Our senses of right and wrong are interwoven into our desires and uncertainties about reality. We desire to be good, and hope we can act accordingly. Like logical force, as we integrate probabilistic and evaluative orientations, we are compelled to value some behaviors rather than others. We would like to think that if we follow our sense of oughtness we fulfill our desires. However, inevitably, we encounter substantial challenges, as we frequently encounter
divergence, ambiguity, ambivalence, and impossibility. Ostracism, therefore, functions as an attempt to bring about the excluder’s perceptions of the good.

Most frequently, participants morally sanctioned those they believed were acting “meanly” in some way. For instance, Jennifer said in an interview, “I believe that sometimes there is a good reason that people exclude someone else. They might be mean, or they might be scary, or they might be a bad influence.” Jennifer elaborated,

I don't want to be a drama queen, but whenever someone is mean to me, I tend to ignore them or exclude them so I don't have to deal with their attitude. When they are nice, I include them. When they are mean, I exclude them. It actually kind of makes sense. I would expect people to exclude me if I was being mean, too.

Jennifer punished individuals she believes are attempting to actualize negative versions of reality. Jennifer preferred people to treat each other nicely; therefore, she utilized ostracism as a moral weapon to express her disapproval when individuals enacted “meanness.”

Liam described sanctioning arrogant individuals. He wrote,

Worst of all though is when people think they are so above everyone else… I do not associate with them at all, all I do is say what I really think about them to other people. Now, I do know this is somewhat backstabbing them and completely wrong, but that's just how I deal with them. I'm not sure why that is, but I have a feeling it may be because I feel that the biggest way I can make an impact to get back at that person to "put them in their place" is to I guess in a way turn
everyone else against them. I realize that this is completely wrong, and I don't do it often.

Liam described experiencing ambivalence over the decision to exclude for moral reasons. Liam wanted to be a good person, but he also wanted to punish “arrogant showoffs” for being immoral. Ultimately, he decided if he thinks someone really needs to learn a lesson, he would use exclusion as a weapon for the greater good.

Several participants used ostracism for moral sanctioning when they believed an individual had wronged someone. Mikhail explained,

There were two kids that kept picking on my brother, and I really wanted to attack them, I mean not hurt them just verbally attack them. Now I just can’t be nice to them, I can’t stand them, so I purposely exclude them because I can’t stand them because of this. I just don’t talk to them.

Mikhail used ostracism as an alternative to violence. These adolescents harmed his brother; therefore, Mikhail could no longer associate with them. Similarly, Angela excluded individuals who were mean to her friends. She said, “If I don’t like the way they treat others then I really don’t want to spend time with them. I will not stand for that because my friends come first.” For Angela, ostracism sent a message of intolerance against those who are mean to her friends; it allowed her to protect loved ones. Robert said during an interview, “If they were included before and they were mean and caused trouble to everyone else, then they would be left out the next time.” Robert demonstrated that inclusion is predicated on behaving well around others. The group exiles anyone that causes trouble.
Other participants refused to include those that had mistreated them in the past. Jennifer asked, “If they are mean to me, why should I be nice to them? I try to be nice to them, but if they are mean I ignore them completely.” Asher said in an interview that he excluded others “because they had picked on me or been mean, or did physical or emotionally harmful things to me.” Tris said she would ostracize someone “if they’d ignored or excluded me in the past and I didn’t feel like they should get my attention.” These examples suggest adolescents do not always ostracize others maliciously; sometimes they are protecting themselves, their friends, family, or morals. Sometimes they want to help their peers become nicer people. Sometimes they want to make their worlds a better place by ostracizing those whose visions of the good are incompatible with their own. The remaining three objectives of ostracism are less calculated and malicious than the functions I have thus far discussed.

**Group definition.** The fourth objective of ostracism is as an act of group definition. Ostracism can strengthen group cohesion (Goodwin, 2002; Williams, Bernieri, Faulkner, Gada-Jain, & Grahe 2000) by helping groups to define themselves (Goodwin, 2002; Sommer et al., 2001). Poulson and Kashy (2011) found that groups are able to establish stronger in-group bonds after excluding someone. Luke wrote about excluding his sisters during a LAN party (a gathering where individuals use their laptops to play computer games together). He wrote, “today i had a lan party. [Josh] and [Craig] came and my sisters were pretty much left out. we had first priority over all electronic devices, so they got none. well there's your exclusion.” By excluding his sisters, whom Luke told me did not play the same computer games, Luke and his friends were able to
solidify their bond as a group. Marie wrote about group bonding from a different perspective. She wrote,

> Sports are a common factor linking many teens around the world. Team sports are probably the most popular; everyone I know has been on a sports team of some sort at one point or another. Everyone but me…. Every Sunday night, the girls on my wing [of her dorm] play volleyball at the courts across campus, and they stopped asking me to go because they know that it's not my thing. My best friend quit inviting me to swim with her because she remembers how terrible I am at it, and when we watch collegiate soccer games, she no longer makes her comments to me because it's apparent that I won't understand… Sometimes my lack of sporting experience makes me feel completely worthless.

Marie’s friends excluded her because she lacked sports knowledge. While one interpretation is that Marie’s peers were sensitive to her disinterest and kindly allowed her to avoid sports, Marie felt that her lack of membership in a sports group fostered her exclusion. Her peers formed social groups based upon their enjoyment of particular sports, but Marie felt “worthless” and rejected as a group member. Her peer’s exclusion of Marie allowed them to form cohesive groups of volleyball players, swimmers, and soccer fans. Their exclusion was not malicious, according to Marie, but it was still painful.

Another participant’s physical inability to participate in an activity caused her exclusion. Ada was my youngest, having just turned 10-years-old, and perhaps funniest participant. Ada is in 5th grade (considered middle school in her school district), and her
mother said she has experienced exclusion so badly that her personality changed. In this entry, Ada wrote about feeling left out at cheerleading practice,

So, I do cheer 3 times a week… We have to do a competition routine. During the routine we have a whole entire tumbling segment. Thats right, you guessed it... I JUST STAND THERE NOT DOING ANYTHING THE WHOLE TIME JUST BECAUSE I CANT DO A KART WHEEL! The other girls who cant do one either do some stunting in the back. IT STINKS!!!!!!! I feel soooooooooooooooooooooo left out!

Ada’s teammates did not maliciously exclude her, and Ada typically feels relatively included on the team. However, the team is broken into girls who can and girls who cannot do tumbling. While the girls are not trying to exclude Ada, she still feels left out during tumbling routines.

Several participants wrote about individuals’ tendencies to group together by interests. Ginny often wrote about feeling included in marching band, where she and her classmates shared a love of music. In one entry, she wrote about feeling alone until fellow band members found her. She wrote,

Last night, we had a Homecoming bonfire, and the band played music for it. Afterwards, my mother couldn't get there for about half an hour, so I sat there out in front of school for a while in the dark. A bunch of other students were hanging around there in groups, talking loudly and messing around; they all went to my school, but I didn't know any of them. I was very nervous and a little freaked out, actually. I felt very alone, very isolated... up until I turned around and saw two
other band guys chilling in their band gear. I didn't know them either, except by sight, they weren't in my grade or section or friend group... but I instantly felt better anyway. I could breath better, I felt like I could relax, because I had backup. Members of my crew (or rather, my overall crew) were there, a silent support structure. Just the presence of people I felt I could, in some way, trust was enough to double or triple my confidence level.

Ginny initially felt isolated from other peer groups; she knew no one and felt nothing in common with them. However, the simple presence of her band colleagues, despite failing to knowing them, gave her a sense of belonging.

When adolescents group together by shared interests, hobbies, or sports, they might not intend to exclude others, but they do exclude. Thus, the antithesis of groupings by similar interest is the exclusion of those with dissimilar interests. Meg explained, “people just don’t understand difference. They don’t get why someone likes reading over sports…if you don’t connect with those people as well you just tend to avoid them or cut them out.” Meg identified a connection between difference and group definition. For Meg, it makes sense that adolescents would not try to force a connection with dissimilar individuals. Skyler discussed during an interview why she excluded others with different interests,

Some people get to know another person and come to find that they are just boring or hold minimal common interests…I find that I ignore people who bore me…mental stimulation is number one on my list and if you can’t discuss your
own ideas or debate on social issues, then I really don’t want to spend my time with you.

Skyler preferred not to associate with those failing to share her intellectual interests. For Skyler, disassociation is a right, and she should not have to include individuals who bore her.

The sense of belonging is a fundamental human need (e.g. Becker, 1973; Scheff, 1990; Sunwolf, 2008; Williams, 2001), but we also have a need to understand and define ourselves (e.g. Becker, 1973; Postmes & Jetten, 2006). Therefore, belonging and inclusion, at least with certain others, are not always desirable. Sharing this sentiment, Lisa wrote,

Everyone at my school has their own groups of friends, but they all have their own quirks and interests. None of these groups mix because they don't appreciate the other's company. Most of the time, it seems that "popular" people don't like the other people, such as those who are gifted or not "up to" their standards they place. It can actually go both ways, though. There are some times where I just don't feel like dealing with that type of person, so I don't associate myself with them.

According to Lisa, exclusion is sometimes valuable. An overly inclusive world, for Lisa is simply not practical. More than that, it is not necessarily desirable, either. Exclusion served a definitional function for Lisa, allowing her to find similar others and ignore those with whom she had nothing in common. Lisa actively sought exclusion from those
with different interests. In another entry, Lisa explained that, during one dive practice, her classmates were talking about topics she deemed superficial, therefore,

I stayed off to the side a little and I actually got a lot of dives in because I did not see any need to talk to anyone about the trivial matters that seemed to take up all their thoughts… I don't really like to talk about the things that other people like to talk about (eg. Boys, hair, clothes or the like).

Lisa excluded herself from interactions, and her exclusion seemed to cause no problems. Lisa preferred to be alone during dive practice then discuss uninteresting topics.

Other participants, however, did feel the pain of isolation even when they had different interests than peers. In an interview, Amelia explained that in elementary and middle school, I didn’t really have the same interest as everyone else. I was very interested in science and no one else was. They thought I was a bit weird, they just didn’t know how to relate to me…Quite honestly, I never think of myself as being particularly unusual. It seems as though others think that about me.

Although Amelia felt alone because of her interest in science, her exclusion served an objective by allowing her classmates and peers to define themselves. They were not people interested in science. According to Amelia, the sting of exclusion was as much a result of their exclusion as it was from not having peers with similar interests.

Often, participants described inclusion and exclusion based on shared interests or identity as unintentional, or at least benign. However, some participants viewed
exclusion for the purpose of group definition as oppositional and even violent. According to Xavier,

People in large groups often know and have close connections to anyone else in the group. These individuals adopt a herd mentality, and not only are hostile to outsiders and may even violently attack other individuals that are different from them. Groups hope to maintain their carefully crafted relationships and order by ignoring someone else.

For Xavier, exclusion is an act of self-definition for groups. However, he viewed this definitional act as violently oppositional. According to Hogg and Reid (2006), groups often define themselves by what they are not. However, Sen (2006) warned that oppositional identities could be deadly, sometimes causing intractable conflict, war, murder, and hate. Xavier discussed oppositional defining negatively, suggesting groups lose the ability to think critically and are prone to hostile interactions with others.

One participant experienced the intensity of oppositional defining. Many participants were several years younger than their classmates, due to skipping grades in school. Several participants were anywhere from 1 to 5 years younger than classmates. Claudia was 13, yet she was in 10th grade. Most of her classmates were 15 to 16, though she sometimes had class with peers as old as 19. Several classmates have been rude because of her age. In one entry, she described the violent opposition her classmates had to her joining their organization because of her age. She wrote,

I stayed after school for an extracurricular activity. When I entered the classroom all the people yelled at me that I was too young to participate. There were no age
limits, but I was only 13 and they were probably 15-19. One guy actually picked me up, carried me out the room, and locked the door! They were REALLY mean about my age!

Claudia’s peers were attempting to define belonging in high school to a particular age group. Claudia was “othered” because she was so young. Exclusion and ostracism delineate in-group and out-group members (Goodwin, 2002); Claudia’s age marked her as an out-group member. An “othering” process allows group boundaries to be drawn (Schucksmith, 2004), and cultivates a greater sense of what it means to be part of the group. Claudia now knows that 13-year-olds are unwelcome in that extracurricular activity.

**Protection.** The fifth social objective of ostracism serves a protective function. Sometimes we ostracize or exclude others to protect ourselves or to protect others. Examples of the protective function of ostracism might initially appear quite different from other forms of ostracism, perhaps even eliciting the response that these examples do not typify ostracism at all. However, these communication phenomena constitute an important aspect of ostracism that scholars should not discount. Individuals utilizing ostracism protectively do so for very different reasons than those utilizing ostracism to achieve other objectives. Participants viewed these encounters as types of ostracism, and sometimes even felt intense guilt about participating in these acts of exclusion. In the future, it would likely be beneficial to further explore the protective objective of ostracism and contrast this objective with other ostracism objectives.
One type of protective exclusion evident in my study is defensive ostracism, whereby we exclude others if they pose a threat to us. Williams (2001) described defensive ostracism as a taxonomic dimension of ostracism motives in which individuals pre-emptively engage to avoid being harmed by another individual. I conceive of defensive ostracism as a subset of the larger category of the protection objective of ostracism. In Chapter Three, I addressed exclusion of gifted adolescents because they sometimes pose a threat to non-gifted peers. In the current chapter, I also addressed ostracism due to the perceived threat posed by difference. Others can threaten us in many ways besides merely being different. For instance, Ginny explained in an interview that she excluded others “if I feel threatened by them, like I feel like they are going to take my friends, I really don’t like them because they make me uncomfortable.”

Chad wrote about defensively excluding classmates because they almost made him cry. One day in class, Chad finished a project early, so he began to work on something else. A classmate noted that he was no longer working on the assigned project and criticized him. Chad is a perfectionist and prone to anxiety; thus the criticism hurt him deeply. The classmate said,

You aren't doing anything. You're gonna fail…What if your parents knew that you were not doing anything? Your parents are going to be mad at you." Just then, with the mention of my parents made this whole "you aren't doing anything" situation personal, so I completely ignored all of them for the entire day.
Chad used ostracism as both a social punishment and a defense mechanism. Chad could not handle his classmate’s taunting, so he excluded the classmate from his world. Haley also ignored peers defensively and as a social punishment. She wrote,

If you try to be nice to people and they just give you a cold shoulder you aren't going to want to be near them or even be friends with them. So I think it is reasonable to ignore/disclude someone if they are doing the same to you.

Sarah’s mother, Molly, actively encouraged Sarah to defensively ostracize classmates that hurt her feelings. Molly said, “I know this is easier to say than do, but we try to tell [Sarah] to just ignore them and make new friends.” Molly’s comment exemplifies an attempt to integrate her own probabilistic evaluations and judgments about Sarah’s exclusion. As most mothers do, Molly deeply desired Sarah to be happy; however, she determined it would be an impossibility for Sarah to find happiness if she continued to associate with classmates who hurt her emotionally. Therefore, Molly suggested that Sarah alter her desire to associate with mean peers and increase her likelihood of acceptance by associating with kinder individuals. Only in this way could Sarah find social happiness, according to Molly. Molly’s suggestion also served to pass on Molly’s evaluative and probabilistic orientations to her daughter. Additionally, avoiding conflict by ignoring others is a well-established conflict style (e.g. Kim, Lee, Kim, & Hunter, 2004; Shockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1984), often taught to adolescents in anti-bullying and conflict management classes.

Participants also preemptively excluded others because they assumed the other would exclude them. In an interview, Maya said, “because popular kids have always
excluded me, when I see one of them I go ‘ewwwww!’ and walk the other way.” Maya ostracized popular individuals because of past experiences of rejection by popular students. Similarly, Skyler wrote that she does not like to associate with same-age peers because she is used to them excluding and ridiculing her. She wrote,

Due to negative experiences in the past associated with my age range, I attempt to limit my social interactions. I don’t bump into many people my age outside of my home town and my home town widely consists of white, Republican, Christian, upper-middle class homophobes. Due to this, if I see a large group of teenagers walking on the same side of the street as me, I cross the street...they terrify me. Teenagers are ruthless. Especially in packs… I always feel like they are judging me or laughing at me or going to call me something. And most of the time, I doubt they even notice my existence, but I still FEEL anxious around them.

Skyler’s past has traumatized her so badly that she fears same-age peers and avoids them for her own safety. Skyler’s refusal to interact with other teenagers demonstrates the strategic use of social rejection to allow Skyler to avoid abuse from these individuals.

Participants also used exclusion to distance themselves from others, for a variety of reasons. Marie recently discovered a friend had developed a crush on her. To avoid his advances, she began excluding him. She wrote,

There's a junior here at the Academy named [Zack]. He's actually my friend [Caleb’s] roommate. And somewhere between two and three weeks ago, [Zack] developed a crush on me… Once this crush developed he started acting funny, more awkward and uncomfortable around me, yet never choosing to leave my
side, and that wasn't what I wanted….So when he started texting me everyday, asking if I wanted to go get breakfast, then lunch, then dinner, then study together afterward, I had to find ways to politely decline…His company was beginning to be something like a nuisance…

So he would invite me out and I would say I just wanted to stay in my room. And I would actually stay in my room for that period of time, for fear of lying to an innocent kid. Eventually I wanted to spend time with my best friend, [Skyler], again. But not with [Zack] as well. So I had to try to beat around the bush and tell him that I just wanted "girl time." In reality, I think I just wanted away from him…And so all of this exclusion that I write about experiencing, I'm guilty of it too.

Marie used ostracism as a tactic to politely distance herself from Zack. She was uncertain how to handle Zack without hurting his feelings; she decided ignoring and avoiding Zack was the gentlest way to reject his advances. Additionally, she used ostracism to avoid awkward interactions (the final objective of ostracism, discussed next). Finally, although she was not using ostracism maliciously, she experienced guilt from her actions. She felt bad deceiving and excluding him, particularly after spending a month journaling about her own troubles with exclusion.

Skyler wrote several entries about the need to distance herself from others. In one entry, Skyler wrote about her relationship with Katrina. Skyler and Katrina dated one summer, then Skyler attended a gifted boarding school; when she returned, Katrina was dating a male. Skyler and Katrina attempted to spend time together, but Katrina’s
boyfriend felt threatened by Skyler. Katrina ended her friendship with Skyler, in favor of her boyfriend. One day, Skyler saw Katrina’s Facebook post discussing an upcoming picnic. Skyler wrote,

I wanted so badly to remind her to bring food. To open up some form of innocent conversation. But at the same time, I didn't want her to feel guilted in to anything. She excluded me from our plans - from her life - because a guy is scared of what I represent. And I have to respect that. Because I really do care about her.

Skyler made the decision not to reconnect with Katrina. Instead, she remained distant for Katrina and her boyfriend’s comfort. Skyler also distanced herself from Katrina because she still cared for her, and it hurt to know Katrina picked a boy over Skyler. Thus, Skyler used exclusion to write Katrina out of her life.

Finally, similar to using exclusion to distance themselves from specific individuals, some participants used ostracism for self-exclusion. Sarah explained in a journal entry,

I have always excluded others when I am working on an assignment. I just feel more comfortable when I do my work on my own when I'm working on an assignment or even a school project. It just feels more natural than sharing my ideas with others. Even if groups were an option for the science fair I would probably would choosing to work by myself rather than be in a group.

Sarah chose to self-exclude when engaging in intellectual pursuits, partially because she considered herself smarter than were her peers, and partially because peers have ridiculed her intellect. She found working in solitude easier than working with others. Perhaps,
Sarah’s experience is symptomatic of a cycle of exclusion, a topic discussed in Chapter Five.

Maya described self-exclusion when her friends discussed topics about which she cared little. Maya wrote,

I have always excluded myself from other people's conversations with each other. When my friends are talking at lunch I am always silent. I never have been interested in what they talk about. They always talk about softball and cheerleading when they talk about sports, I don't like either of those things my sport is horseback riding. I just think I would make a fool of myself if I ever tried to talk to them about softball or cheerleading because they aren't really what I like doing.

Maya still wanted to maintain her friendships, but she did not want to look foolish attempting to discuss topics for which she knew and cared little. Therefore, Maya excluded herself during those encounters.

Liam also engaged in self-exclusion around a group of friends that sometimes acted inappropriately. Liam wrote,

It isn't that others are pushing me away, but more of me pushing myself away from others in this case. Whenever I am with my friends during [cross-country] practice, we are sometimes allowed to run through neighborhoods long as we do not have any school related items on us. So, when we do go out and run I now very easily get irritated with how they act. First off, they'll go and slam street signs with their hands which is really loud and hurts my ears. Then, after they do
this they'll go "Ow! that hurt" with a few curse words thrown in, and all I can think is, "well of course it hurt dumb ass" in my head. Going back to their cursing, I don't mind a little, but they just go bizerk with them WHILE WE ARE IN PUBLIC. Worse part is, they think it's funny to go and shout sexual things in the neighborhoods while were running, especially when other people are around. Now, I'm not someone who hates others having fun, but what they deem as fun I think is just plain stupid…Lack of common sense to be vulgar and rampant is not funny, it's just plain downright the epitome of stupid. So, I've started just to separate myself from them when it all gets to much for me because I still want to be friends and not cause problems, but enough is enough

Liam used ostracism both to morally sanction his peers and exclude himself from their actions. Liam and his peers had conflicting values, and their behavior embarrassed Liam. When Liam has attempted to correct his friends in the past, they have teased him about “not being any fun.” Therefore, Liam viewed ostracism as the path of least resistance, the course of action that would cause the least problems for his friendships. He used ostracism as a conflict management style. Liam recognized that direct confrontation was ineffective, so he used an indirect method.

Avoid awkward interactions. The final objective of ostracism for participants was to avoid awkward interactions with peers. Several participants described ignoring “annoying” individuals. For instance, Neil, a 13-year-old Canadian 8th grader, wrote,
Today I found but one thing wrong with my day, Me. I excluded someone because I did not care for them, he was annoying. I snuck away from his table, I could see the disappointment in his face, after I felt genuinely bad for him.

Neil became annoyed with a peer, and rather than endure the pain of the unwanted person or creating an awkward confrontational interaction (where it would likely be difficult for Neil to even articulate the root of the annoyance), he excluded the peer. Neil felt guilty about his exclusion, but not enough to include the peer or apologize. Noam also excluded an individual for being annoying. He was acquaintances with a boy who became increasingly annoying, always talking about his ex-girlfriend, constantly seeking Noam’s approval, and acting “clingy.” Noam wrote, “I've realized that I'm ignoring him and leaving him out sometimes. He can be a little annoying and never really says many interesting things…I just don't feel like addressing him so much or talking to him.” Both Noam and Neil described their peer as “annoying,” a person they deemed inconsequential, like a fly buzzing around their heads. Yet, the individual was still trying to assert his presence in Neil and Noam’s life. Therefore, they excluded the person. Neil recognized the pain he caused, but was unwilling to alter his actions.

Neil and Noam provide the ostracizer’s perspective in the above scenarios. I suspect that some study participants were unknowingly ostracized for annoying their peers. For example, Emma’s father Scott (the only father, rather than mother, who enrolled his child in the study) confided in me that Emma sometimes acted very hyper, and he suspected “she just might have too much energy for the other kids to put up with.” Claudia’s mother Francesca suggested that some of Claudia’s classmates “become
annoyed with [Claudia] because they think she is a ‘know-it-all.’” Similarly, Sarah’s mother Molly told me in an email, “truth be told, sometimes she [Sarah] is a little overly dramatic or emotional and this could bother the other children and lead to their exclusion of her.” Therefore, one explanation of unexplained ostracism is that other adolescents are simply annoyed by the individual.

Several participants used ostracism to avoid interacting with awkward people. Malcolm said during an interview that he ostracized people when “they are hard to talk to or have a conversation with. They are awkward, or more inward than most people.” Malcolm did not like the stress of having to carry a conversation on his own, so he preferred to avoid anyone with whom he felt it difficult to interact. He reflected on introverted adolescents in a journal entry and wrote, “these kids are usually just too difficult for other people to talk to that they are not excluding them but they are no longer trying to include them.” Malcolm’s response privileged extroverts and, to some extent, marginalized introverts.

Fourteen participants identified themselves as “shy” or “introverted” and expressed feeling social exclusion for this reason. Many described society as unfairly biased towards extroverts. Marie wrote,

Exclusion: I don't think it's done on purpose. I don't. That's not to say that it can't be done on purpose, I'm positive it can, but most of the time when it happens to me, I don't think people mean for it to. I think that in a society that highly values the traits of extroverted people, introverts are sometimes forgotten. And when there's a crowd of people in a room, the ones that stand out are the ones that get
noticed, and the ones that get noticed are the ones that get spoken to and invited to things, and the ones that are quiet, like me, they're the ones that kind of get tolerated, the ones that get walked around and past-- part of the furniture, essentially. Being a piece of furniture sucks.

Marie suggested peers treat introverted adolescents as less than human; they are forgotten and fade into the background. Marie suspected introverts matter less because they do not command respect. However, Malcolm’s comment suggested they simply make interaction difficult, and, therefore, he avoided introverts. Taken together, introverted participants likely failed to command inclusion as much as did extroverts, and made their peers a little uncomfortable since the burden of conversation rested upon the extrovert.

Catherine’s journal entry suggested extroverts exclude introverts because they believe introverts are fearful of social interaction. Catherine wrote, “I completely realize that I'm quiet. But that certainly does NOT mean that I'm SCARED of people. I just don't talk too much. That's just how I am.” Then, she recalled that earlier in the day two popular girls walked up to her and said,

“Don't be scared, [Catherine].” I kind of wanted to say, "Shut up, just because I'm quiet doesn't mean I’m scared of you. Your popularity does not intimidate me at all. And if that's how you think I am, you don't know me in any way. I'm not some terrified little mouse hiding in the corner. I just. Don't. Talk. As. Much. As. You." Being the quiet person I am, I didn't say anything, but I was slightly annoyed by this. I am a person too!
Like Marie, Catherine seemed to believe that introversion took a piece of her humanity, at least in others’ eyes. In an interview, she suggested people exclude her because they did not want to scare her, and are worried about how she might react to their initiation of conversation. Thus, for Catherine, peers excluded her to avoid a potentially awkward situation for her, rather than themselves.

Other participants discussed using ostracism to avoid awkward situations. Angela and her ex-boyfriend avoided speaking to each other because their breakup was awkward and they did not want to address their past. Occasionally, her ex-boyfriend and his friends whispered about Angela. In one journal entry she explained,

The only thing that made me feel a bit excluded today was right after lunch. The boys I used to hang out with in our gifted program were talking and laughing about me. I don’t blame them, to be honest though. I made the stupid mistake of trying to date one of them in seventh grade, and I broke up with him because I felt weird and I realized how dumb it was to date in middle school. He didn’t want to break up, but he understood why. Over summer vacation between 7th and 8th grade he texted me. I didn’t really want to talk to him, so I never replied. I still feel horrible about that now, and I guess I don’t know how to approach that, so I’ve been ignoring him. It’s not the smartest way to face my problems, but it’s just so AWKWARD.

Angela and her ex-boyfriend mutually excluded each other to avoid discussing issues that would make them both uncomfortable.
Two other participants experienced exclusion because they tended to create awkward situations for their peers. Chad’s mother, Sally, mentioned that sometimes his classmates excluded him for being overly emotional. She explained,

He has always been a very sensitive child, he is more emotional than others. As the kids are becoming older, they don’t know how to handle his emotional outbursts. In his gifted classes, they will discuss politics or world issues, and he’ll get very upset and just start crying in class. Then, he’ll get embarrassed and cry even more. The kids just think he is weird and don’t know how to respond.

According to his mother, Chad is different from his peers because he is so emotional. His outbursts created a sense of awkwardness for his classmates. They would avoid eye contact with him and ignore him on days when he cried in class so that they did not have to comfort him or interact with him. Likely, his exclusion for displaying emotion also intersects with his gender.

Charles, an 11-year-old 6th grader with anxiety problems, also created awkward situations for classmates and experienced exclusion. Charles had a severe phobia of germs, for which he is in counseling. He missed a lot of school and had outbursts in class because of his fear. His classmates did not know how to react and felt awkward around him. In one entry, he described a traumatic field trip. On the bus ride back to school, one of his peers vomited. Charles wrote, “I was like ‘oh gosh, oh gosh.’ So I did the only think I could think of, I pushed open the emergency door and jumped out.” He ended up causing a huge ordeal for his classmates, teachers, and bus driver over the incident. He said some peers teased him or called him a “freak,” but others simply avoided eye contact.
and refused to speak to him. Presumably, the latter peers wanted to avoid an awkward interaction with Charles.

**Flux between Objectives**

The six objectives of ostracism interact in several ways. First, the objectives are not mutually exclusive. Often, an act of ostracism served multiple objectives. For instance, I mentioned Amelia was once rejected for having red hair and being overweight when she lived in the UK. Peers teased, ridiculed, bullied, and ostracized her because of her appearance. Their actions and her reactions implicated all six objectives of ostracism.

Her body was different from her peers’ bodies; thus ostracism allowed them to defer dealing with her different identity marker. Peers also exerted power over Amelia by hierarchically ranking her by appearance. They enacted a cultural stereotype that overweight individuals are worth less than non-overweight individuals. Amelia also believed their hatred of her hair color was a rejection of her Scottish and Irish ancestry, and thus demonstrated an ethnic prejudice. Peers’ rejection served as a social punishment (and moral sanctioning) for “allowing” herself to become overweight, also implicating the politics of blame, choice, and responsibility (Beck, 2007; Lupton, 1999). Amelia’s peer rejection motivated her to lose weight once her family decided to leave the UK and move to Germany; thus, it served a corrective function. Classmates’ ostracism of Amelia could have helped them to define themselves in opposition to her—they were not overweight Scottish-Irish individuals—thus, solidifying their bond. Some peers could have excluded her so her status did not affect their own status (i.e. guilt by association).
Second, several objectives of ostracism inherently contain aspects of other objectives. Power and difference are particularly present in other objectives. For instance, social punishment is a type of power, coercive and reward power, according to Raven (1993). The protective objective empowers individuals to defend themselves and their loved ones by using ostracism as a weapon that strips another of their power to mutually coordinate reality. The definitional objective of ostracism is often about difference since groups sometimes view themselves in opposition to different others, and group members are prone to exclude those who deviate from prototypes of idealized group members. Control over group definitions can also implicate power. Avoiding awkward interactions is inherently protective, as we seek to defend ourselves against situations and individuals around whom we feel uncomfortable. Myriad connections exist between the six objectives of ostracism, and although I present them as separate constructs, overlap is obvious.

Finally, the objective of ostracism can fluctuate during interactions based on coordination and coherence between the excluder and excludee. For example, an adolescent might intend ostracism to be corrective, but due to the diminished communication during ostracism episodes, adolescents lack the resources for coordination and coherence. Thus, rather than serving to correct a peer’s perceived misbehavior, the peer instead has no idea why they were excluded. For example, many participants expressed complete bewilderment about the cause of their exclusion. Claudia attempted to befriend one girl with whom she had many similar interests. However, the girl completely ignored Claudia and her attempts at friendship, and thus
baffling her. Claudia wondered, “did I offend her somehow?” Perhaps Claudia did offend the girl; thus her intention was punitive ostracism; however, since the girl failed to communicate her offense to Claudia, exclusion then became a function of something else (perhaps avoiding awkward interactions). When popular adolescents exclude less popular interactions, the objective of their exclusion might initially be to reinforce a social hierarchy. However, their objective might fluctuate and become definitional, and thus create a strong sense of in-group belonging amongst the popular crowd.

Conclusion

In the current chapter, I have discussed three relational dimensions of the excluder-excludee relationship and six objectives of ostracism. Participants described ostracism and social exclusion from a wide variety of others, including family, friends, romantic partners, acquaintances, and strangers. However, relational dimensions seemed particularly salient for participants. Exclusion from individuals who were important to participants was particularly painful, often fostering the most PI. Participants would write pages about exclusion from important individuals, compared to mere sentences about less importance people. Exclusion from familiar individuals was more painful than exclusion from those whom participants knew less well. Exclusion from family members was particularly memorable and troublesome. Participants were troubled by exclusion from those whom they desired inclusion. Often, participants could not stop dreaming about inclusion by these desired others. The social status of the relational partner influenced painfulness of exclusion episodes. Borrowing from PI, the desire for inclusion and the perceived likelihood of inclusion from another were mutually constituted. Some
participants remained hopeful for inclusion; thus staying invested in exclusive relationships. Most participants were mindless about exclusion from those with lower social statuses, but exclusion from high status individuals became particularly hurtful. Ultimately, exclusion from high status others created PI, and several participants stopped desiring inclusion from “popular” individuals because they recognized it was unlikely to occur. The dimensions of the excluder-excludee relationship are interdependent, one dimension often influencing others.

Ostracism served six social objectives. While it was sometimes deployed maliciously, it was also often perceived as the best option for interaction within the relational context. The first objective was to defer dealing with difference. Participants experienced and observed that difference brings uncertainty, fear, and danger to some adolescents. Thus, they exclude in order to ignore the dangers of diversity. Second, ostracism reproduces power. Participants discussed ostracism use in maintaining social hierarchies, climbing social hierarchies, and enacting cultural stereotypes. Ostracism is powerful because it allows the excluder to take narrative control of reality. Ostracism also functioned as a social punishment, allowing adolescents to sanction each other for breaking social norms or behaving inappropriately. Moral sanctioning is a specialized sub-category of punishment whereby the excluder enacted ostracism to demonstrate moral outrage towards another. The fourth objective of ostracism is definitional, in that ostracism often allows groups and individuals to define themselves and build group cohesion. This becomes particularly problematic when adolescents do not believe they fit in any social groups. Ostracism also served a protective objective, whereby participants
used ostracism to defend themselves and their loved ones. Some participants preemptively excluded others, some used exclusion to distance themselves from particular individuals, and others engaged in self-exclusion to remove themselves from an entire group or situation. The final objective of ostracism was to avoid awkward interactions. Participants reported ignoring annoying or disruptive peers, avoiding awkward individuals, or escaping awkward situations. Often, ostracism events implicated multiple objectives simultaneously.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide the beginnings of a tentative model of ostracism and social exclusion. Ostracism is a complex and nuanced coordination effort. In the following chapter, I attend to how ostracism occurs as adolescents struggle together towards coordination and coherence.
Chapter 5: Towards a Poetics of Ostracism

She was eight years old, our first day of grade three when she got called ugly. We both got moved to the back of class so we would stop getting bombarded by spitballs. But the school halls were a battleground. We found ourselves outnumbered day after wretched day. We used to stay inside for recess, because outside was worse. Outside, we’d have to rehearse running away, or learn to stay still like statues, giving no clues that we were there. In grade five, they taped a sign to the front of her desk that read, “Beware of dog.” To this day, despite a loving husband, she doesn’t think she’s beautiful because of a birthmark that takes up a little less than half her face. Kids used to say, “She looks like a wrong answer that someone tried to erase, but couldn’t quite get the job done.” And they’ll never understand that she’s raising two kids whose definition of beauty begins with the word “Mom,” because they see her heart before they see her skin, because she’s only ever always been amazing.

-Shane Koyczan, 2013

Humans exclude. We use ostracism to demonstrate power, punish wrong doers, define our social circles, protect ourselves, and avoid confrontation. We engage in ostracism maliciously, benevolently, and obliviously. We ostracize those whom we love, hate, and are indifferent. Ostracism was viscerally present, in some form, in the daily experiences of all study participants. For some, ostracism was chronic, while for others it was periodic. Ostracism was not always deeply painful or scaring, but often hurtful in small ways. The current chapter attempts to understand the creation and maintenance of ostracism; therefore, my attention shifts to processes of ostracism. Understanding the common, daily, experience of ostracism will illuminate a profoundly human communication process. Pearce (1989) suggested communication scholars should ask of human experience, how is it made?, because doing so compels us to look at communication. The fundamental question of how shifts our focus “from that which has been made to the process of making it,” moving us from pragmatics to poesis (a Greek word meaning, “to make”) (Pearce, 1989, p. 36).
In Chapter Two, I discussed two theoretical perspectives guiding this dissertation: CMM and PI theory. CMM presents a macroscopic view of human communication by explaining the role of human interaction (coordination) and sense making (coherence) in habituated patterns of interaction that enmesh us in social worlds and create symbolic universes. PI theory presents a mesoscopic view of communication allowing us to probe the substance of coordination and coherence. In the current chapter, CMM and PI theory converge to create scaffolding for understanding ostracism processes.

According to CMM, human communication involves “three universal aspects of the human condition: persons interpret their environment and their experiences [coherence]; they interact with their fellows [coordination]; and they remind themselves that there is more to life than the immediate moment [mystery]” (Pearce, 1989, p. 31). Through coordination and coherence, we (re)produce and integrate probabilistic and evaluative orientations as we attempt to actualize desired worlds. Communication builds patterns of coordination by objectivating our particular subjective probabilistic and evaluative orientations, as well as more meta-reflective understandings, which Babrow (2001) refers to as piecemeal and holistic coping (depending on whether the processes refashion one or the other orientation or the orientations together, respectively). Coordination involves ongoing efforts to develop values and beliefs because probabilistic and evaluative orientations are (re)produced and shaped during interaction.

However, ostracism attempts to substantially constrain coordination. Ostracism ends, or lessens, interaction between individuals, leaving us to make sense of our social worlds alone. As sources of ostracism, we might ostracize others because their existence
represents a despised reality; as targets of ostracism, diminished interactions might produce a despised reality. PI can compel an individual (or group) to endeavor to end coordination with another, or ending coordination can give rise to PI. Therefore, ostracism and PI are co-evolutionary: PI elicits ostracism and ostracism elicits PI. PI is inherently unstable (Babrow, 2001), and this instability requires ongoing struggles over meaning (i.e. chaining between forms of integrative dilemma), and hence ongoing efforts to coordinate and achieve coherence. Therefore, disrupting coordination efforts diminishes resources useful for integrating probabilistic and evaluative orientations for both the excluder and excludee. In the case of ostracism, it will become clear that PI “shapes and reflects mundane irritations as well as profound emotional, intellectual, and social experiences” (Babrow, 1992, p. 97).

In the following sections, I describe micro, meso, and macro-level processes of ostracism, guided by participant experiences, CMM, and PI theory. Participants were engaged in multiple ongoing narratives of ostracism, as both excluders and excludees. Because participants journaled for a minimum of a month (and some for much longer), procedural patterns became apparent in their reporting of ongoing ostracism episodes. I have attempted to produce a patch-worked procedural description of several overarching ostracism episodes apparent from these participant reports. Micro-level ostracism processes, termed ostracism acts, are communication tactics used to create ostracism episodes; they are the building blocks of larger ostracism processes. Meso-level ostracism processes, termed ostracism practices, are composed of ostracism acts that, over time, form distinct patterns of chronic ostracism and serve as a foundation for
macro-level ostracism processes. Ostracism acts and ostracism practices work together to co-create macro-level ostracism episodes; these are habituated communication routines with identifiable boundaries and rules. I claim neither that the processes presented in the current chapter are mutually exclusive or exhaustive, nor do I suggest that ostracism occurs only as I describe it in this chapter. Ostracism likely occurs in an infinite variety of ways, depending on diverse components such as relationships, identities, cultures, and contexts. In the current chapter, I merely attempt to represent my participants’ experiences.

**Micro-Level Processes: Ostracism Acts**

Participants discussed numerous tactics employed to communicate the act of ostracism. These tactics occurred as micro-level processes because they were foundational for higher order ostracism episodes. I have termed them ostracism acts to denote a subset of a speech act; these tactics are language that does something. Speech acts, according to Searle (1969), are language with a performative function, a foundational idea for CMM theory. Ostracism acts occur at one moment in time, though any interaction might contain multiple ostracism acts. Ostracism acts are small communication utterances or cues that make us feel (or intend to make us feel) “left out” of social interaction. They could be a brief aversion of eye contact, an annoyed tone, or a rude comment. I could categorize ostracism acts in any number of arbitrary ways, including concern for self versus concern for other, individual versus collective strategies, perceived goals, or other cognitive schemas. I have chosen to categorize ostracism acts on a continuum of the aggressiveness of the excluder’s communication
approach, as this distinction seemed to be obvious and a consequential concern for participants. Therefore, in the following sections I discuss passive, active, and aggressive ostracism acts.

**Passive ostracizing acts.** Passive ostracism acts involved a non-confrontational communication approach. From participant descriptions, individuals using these tactics did not actively seek to exclude, but they also did not actively seek to include others. Often, these acts were subtle and ambiguous; thus, giving rise to multiple forms of chaining PI. Participants were often unsure if they imagined passive ostracism acts or if they objectively occurred. After describing passive ostracism during an interview, Lisa even asked me, “Katie, since you study this, do you think I was being excluded?” The ambiguity of passive ostracism acts protected participants from the certainty of widely discrepant probabilistic and evaluative orientations because they could convince themselves exclusion was imagined or unintentional. These acts also protect perpetrators from attributions of malicious intent. Passive ostracism consumed several participants’ thoughts, as they devoted a great deal of time and energy into making sense of the occurrence. In general, participants tended to provide descriptions of their interactions as both targets and sources of ostracism; however, participants typically (though not always) described passive ostracism acts from only their perspective as the target of these acts. Few participants described using passive ostracism acts on others, possibly because of their relative subtlety or because they were not even aware that their actions might have been taken as ostracizing. Often, participants remarked that they were unsure whether the source of passive ostracism acts was even aware of their use.
Third wheel syndrome. The most common and prevalent form of passive ostracism acts was the third wheel syndrome, or the sense that one does not belong or is invisible despite close physical proximity. For example, Meg described feeling left out by her friends. She wrote, “I don’t know if my friends really did this purposely, I was just like someone else was more important and I was the second choice, they just weren’t going to make a point to include me.” Sofia wrote several entries about feeling like a “third wheel” among two of her friends. She wrote, “It seemed like she wasn't trying to be mean, but had forgotten that I was there.” Marie often discussed feeling passively ostracized. In an interview, she explained, “I don’t know how to describe it. I guess they tolerated me, but I wasn’t really their friend. They didn’t seem to want to be around me.” Passive ostracism acts introduced high levels of ambiguity to social interactions, thus eliciting PI. Meg, Sofia, and Marie were uncertain how to interpret events. Although they did not experience active exclusion, they did not know how to make sense of feeling left out. Each girl was hesitant to discuss the exclusion with her friends, as that would make it real. Instead, they reassured themselves in various ways. Reassurances allowed these girls to cope with PI, convincing themselves that a despised reality was probably not surfacing.

The majority of Marie’s journal entries emphasized her feelings of passive exclusion. In one entry, she described sitting in her dormitory common area watching a movie with several friends, all of whom were in relationships. She wrote,

Last night, I was in a situation that many consider social inclusion…but I did not feel "included." Here's why. I think social inclusion is more than just spending
time in close proximity with other people. There has to be mutual desire-- people not only choosing to be with each other but wanting it as well. And while I rested on the couch and conversed with my peers, I felt very much like they did not want me. That probably wasn't true, but they were pairs of children convinced that they were in love, and I was the single person that ruined the illusion. The thing that reminded them that there was a life aside from significant others. This was more social activity I'd had in a month at my old high school, but still, I felt alienated. Perhaps jealously played a hand; it's possible I saw the girls staring adoringly into their boyfriend's eyes and excluded myself from the situation mentally, but I don't think that was all of it.

In an interview, Marie described some of the specific ostracism acts that communicated exclusion: less eye contact, less warm non-verbal facial expressions (i.e. less smiling and nodding), and slower response times to Marie’s comments. Each of these small ostracism acts contributed to Marie’s sense of exclusion, despite her close physical proximity. Again, ambiguity pervaded Marie’s experience, as she was uncertain whether events were real or imagined. Perhaps, Marie’s past experiences of exclusion made her more likely to interpret events as exclusive, or perhaps her assessment was accurate. Marie ambiguanted her interpretation to cope with the PI elicited by the circumstances. As long as her interpretation remained ambiguous, the uncertainty protected her from experiencing the full force of diverging probabilistic and evaluative orientations.

Ginny also experienced feelings of exclusion because her friend paid more attention to a romantic partner than to her. Ginny’s best friend Trisha and her boyfriend
Tobias are “deeply in love.” Therefore, Ginny sometimes felt excluded around Trisha and Tobias. In one entry, Ginny wrote,

I know it's ridiculous, but the jealousy persists. I'm jealous of the time and attention that my best friend is showing to her boyfriend, because it means that whenever he's around, the rest of us disappear, for the most part. It's a very lonely feeling, knowing that somewhere along the way, I became second by a very long way down on the list of people she goes to for comfort, or fun, or advice, or secrets to trust people with, or anything. And I don't know how to fix it.

Trisha’s small nonverbal cues communicated that Tobias was more important than Ginny. Ostracism acts included smiling more around Tobias, listening more intently to Tobias, and insisting on inviting Tobias to all social functions. Ginny’s sense of loneliness around Trisha and Tobias was painful, and thus their bond actualized an undesired reality where Ginny became second to Tobias. Ginny attempted to minimize her PI by reminding herself that jealousy is even less desirable than second place. However, the exclusion was still painful and her desire to rectify the situation remained unfilled.

**Exclusion from social plans.** Other participants experienced passive ostracism acts when their friends failed to include them in plans. Chad’s best friend recently became popular, and Chad started feeling excluded from social functions. He wrote, “I have definitely felt left out or like I was tagging along, not really connected. I kind of just invite myself. And it seems that they don’t really seek me out. I normally just seek them out.” His friend failed to explicitly invite Chad to a social interaction, but also
failed to actively deny Chad participation. Consequently, Chad’s friend allowed him to
occupy the same space as his new friends, but sent small communication cues that Chad
was not completely welcomed. Liam has also recently felt uninvited and excluded by his
friends. He wrote,

Yesterday i really felt not entirely excluded but to some extent forgotten about.
Now, i dont know why because it was among my own friends but theyve started
to more frequently talk about plans they want to make with each other just to hang
out right in front of me, its as if they just dont think ill be any fun…i feel now that
people think their smarter peers are not any fun. Also, that theyre always focused
on school so that they dont think to invite them because they think theyre busy.
But, even if they were busy, it would still be polite to ask even if they knew the
answer was no!

Like others, Liam’s exclusion elicited a strong sense of ambiguity. He could not decide
if he was actually excluded and he could not understand why his friends would behave so
rudely. Liam wrote multiple journal entries about the ostracism act of his friends making
plans in front of him, and he struggled to make sense of the situation. He did not believe
the exclusion was obvious enough to directly confront his friends, and therefore he
continued in a state of ambiguity. Babrow (1992) suggested ambiguous events are often
ill-defined, and we might not seek clarifying information if that information could
confirm a despised reality. Ultimately, Liam concocted the rationalization that his friends
thought he was boring or busy, due to his intellect. However, he also did not quite
believe this was a reasonable excuse.
While Chad and Liam experienced their exclusion from friends as ambiguous, another participant viewed her ostracism as anything but ambiguous. Skyler discovered an ostracism act via text message. She described the revelation and her reaction,

[Jason] via text: Hey, what's up?
[Skyler]: Not much, you?
[Jason]: Same.
[Skyler]: What are your plans for tonight?
[Jason]: Going to [Charlie’s] flash party.
[Skyler]: Flash party?
[Jason]: Last minute party.
[Skyler]: Oh. Have fun.
[Jason]: Thanks.

Skyler reflected on this message and commented that she is closer friends with Charlie than Charlie is with Jason. Therefore, she wondered why she was not invited. She continued,

So why did [Charlie] invite [Jason], [Will], and [Chris] to a party and not ask me? Why didn't [Chris] invite me? Why didn't [Will] mention it to me? Why didn't [Jason] request I come with him? At that point in my life, it felt like my friends were my life. I lived each day so I could see them again. But the entire time it seemed like I was an accessory to them. Wear me when it's convenient to them and then throw me back in the closet when they are done.
Skyler did not wonder about the ambiguity of her friend’s actions. For Skyler, they clearly and maliciously excluded her from their party. She experienced diverging probabilistic and evaluative orientations, leaving little room for other explanations.

**Conversational exclusion.** In addition to experiencing third wheel syndrome and exclusion from social plans, others experienced conversational exclusion. For instance, Theo, a 12-year-old 7th grader, wrote,

> Today at recess some friends were talking about building their fantasy football teams, which I know a little about and wanted to know more. So I tried to put myself into the conversation. Well that didn’t work! First, they wouldn’t open up to let me stand in the circle, then I forced my way in (by making [Josh] and [Craig] move over) but when I tried to talk they only vaguely acknowledged me. I think they were just so into the discussion that they didn’t know I was there. Also, maybe they didn’t think I knew much about fantasy football (but how can I know more if they don’t talk to me about it?).

Theo’s friends excluded him from a conversation, initially with the use of physical space, then with a failure to acknowledge his conversational contribution. Again, Theo’s experience gave rise to ambiguity, and again he offered a rationalization for his lack of inclusion. Wittenbaum, Shulman, and Braz (2010) found that being partially ignored during conversations in benign group settings threatened the same basic psychological needs (control, belonging, self-esteem, and meaningful existence) as other forms of ostracism. Wittenbaum and colleagues termed this informational exclusion, as groups ostracized participants because they lacked relevant information for the conversation. I
have chosen the term conversational exclusion because not all participants excluded from conversations lacked relevant knowledge.

Maya described what she perceived as malicious conversational exclusion. She wrote, “I walked up to the group of girls and they wouldn’t make room for me in the circle. I started talking and they just kept ignoring me and kept the circle closed from me.” Maya explained in an interview that this was a daily experience for her. Initially, she said, “I couldn’t prove anything…but eventually I realized they were ostracizing me.” Jennifer also experienced conversational exclusion, writing, “During that class, I felt particularly excluded. [Ashley], [Julia], and [Kate] were standing in a group and talking, and I tried to join the group, but they didn't seem to notice me.” While Maya recognized her experience as ostracism, Jennifer remained confused and unsure. Conversely, Harper described her experience of conversational exclusion as unproblematic. She wrote, “I felt exclusion in band when my friends were talking to each other and their backs were to me, but I was pretty out of it [from being sick] so it was not such a big problem to me.”

Harper also described her observation of conversational exclusion directed at her ex-boyfriend in one journal entry. She wrote,

The only purposeful exclusion that I saw today was someone (actually my ex-boyfriend) trying to enter a conversation (of people standing in a circle) and to me, he appeared on the outside of the circle, not really included in the conversation. I felt kind of bad for him, but he’s my ex so it would be awkward to try to get him included.
Harper’s example demonstrated her own feelings of PI as she observed the coordination of an exclusive reality. Failure to allow individuals into a conversation was a common experience for many participants. Often, the subtlety of conversational exclusion left participants bewildered, confused, and experiencing ambiguity.

**Exclusive use of physical space and objects.** Some participants experienced passive ostracism acts through the use of physical space and objects. Simone wrote about a common form of exclusion: failure to have a ball tossed to her. Several ostracism experiments are conducted using variants of ball toss exclusion (e.g. Williams, 2001, 2007). Simone wrote,

Today I was in P.E., and I was excited [excited] for it to start because today was the day my small 7 kid class agreed with me that we could play volleyball instead of nukum [a variant of volleyball]. In my P.E. class before this one (a couple days ago), I got us all a volleyball to play volleyball with, and served. But they played nukum instead. I had even told them we could play volleyball, but they didn't listen. So they promised a few times that we could play volleyball at our next P.E. class. So today, they started playing, but they were playing nukum! I reminded them of their promise, hoping they had just forgot, but they just said that they didn't feel like playing volleyball today. It made me upset, but I just kept playing anyways. My friend, [Miley], stuck up for me at one point, suggesting that we play volleyball, but after they ignored her talking about it, she just kept enjoying nukum… In nukum, people never throw me the ball, but in volleyball, I can also
participate more, which makes it a LOT more fun. What's the fun of just standing there for a whole period?

Simone’s dislike of nukum germinated from her peers’ exclusive use of the ball. Her peers physically excluded Simone by not passing the ball, and communicatively excluded her by failing to listen to her request. Her peers failed to coordinate a mutually desirable reality. Days prior, they coerced Simone into mutual coordination of a nukum game with empty promises of playing volleyball; therefore, Simone also experienced PI because of the perception of injustice. Her peers’ failure to listen to Simone robbed her of a voice, their failure to pass her the ball robbed her of participation, and their broken promise added the insult of injustice.

Another common passive use of physical space to ostracize was a failure to make room for participants. In the previous chapter, I discussed Tris’ surprise that her church youth group refused to make room for her at the table or on the couch. Another participant discussed exclusive use of physical space at lunch. Maya wrote,

After I got my tray I tried to sit down and there were no chairs at the table. I asked if I could sit with them and they said sorry there is no room for you. That’s fine, but then after I walked away I looked over and they scooted over to make room for [Lina]! I couldn’t believe it!

Maya’s experience was common among participants. Simply refusing to make room for Maya was a small ostracism act. Maya commented in an interview that she likely would have accepted their exclusion with minimal hurt feelings had she not noticed their
inclusion of Lina. The group subtly communicated that Maya was not as worthy of the effort of making space as was another peer.

Other participants described their own use of physical space to exclude. Haley explained in an interview, “a common way to ignore someone is to put in your headphones when they try to talk to you.” Bradly exemplified this behavior when he wrote, “I bring headphones everywhere so I can ignore people. Sometimes I don’t even listen to music, I just pretend. That way, I don’t have to respond when they talk to me.” Bradly intentionally employed an ostracism act that allowed him to deny culpability. Babrow (1992) suggested that sometimes we want others to experience a message as ambiguous so our relational partners remain uncertain about diverging orientations. Simone wrote about a friend that habitually denied culpability. In one entry, her friend made her feel ostracized. Simone wrote that she should have confronted her friend, but, “I have never talked to her about anything that was not nice of her because she is the type of person who will deny it and just make you look bad about it even if it is true.” Had Simone confronted her friend, she likely would have been met with more ambiguity.

Harper described using physical space to exclude a peer at a dance. She wrote, At the dance, there was a girl that was very awkwardly dancing behind me I guess trying to dance in a circle with my friends and me and I did not let her into the circle. It would have been difficult I think, and she does not know many of my friends, so the entire interaction was odd. Although Harper felt conflicted watching her ex-boyfriend’s exclusion from a social circle in an earlier example, she also excluded a girl at the dance in the same manner.
However, the experience created ambivalence for Harper; she simultaneously did not want the girl to feel badly and did not want the girl to dance with her friends. To ease her ambivalence, Harper rationalized that the girl’s lack of familiarity with her friends justified exclusion. For Harper, the girl created the “odd” interaction by breaking social norms of familiarity.

The use of “scooting over” (i.e. slightly shifting our bodies away from another) to denote lack of conversational desire was also a common ostracism act. Xavier said in an interview, “sometimes I will scoot away from a person if they sit next to me or get too close to me. I do this because I don’t want to talk to them.” Mikhail wrote about his ambivalence excluding another boy.

Today in 6th period, I excluded. A kid sat down one seat down from me, I politely asked him to scoot down because i wanted to sit next to my friends. He then left the area completely. I then felt bad and worried that he was hurt by me.

Mikhail’s desire to sit with friends and the reality that he needed to create space for them motivated him to ask another boy to move. However, Mikhail’s conflicting desire not to hurt the other boy’s feelings created ambivalence about the situation. Neil’s comment during an interview suggested that witnessing someone “scoot away” from you is painful. He said, “when I sit beside someone in the classroom and they scoot away from me, I feel like they hate me or I disgust them. This is still going all every day.” For Neil, the subtle act of slightly shifting the body away from another possesses worlds of meaning, as it is a subtle way to communicate that someone is unwanted or unvalued.
Active ostracizing acts. Passive ostracism acts often elicited ambiguity and ambivalence, while allowing the excluder to deny culpability. The nuances of passive ostracism acts caused participants to secretly wonder if their exclusion was real or imagined. I devoted an extensive amount of space to describing passive acts because they are relatively harder to see. The subtleties of ostracism are most apparent in passive forms of ostracism. Nonetheless, active and aggressive ostracism acts were deeply painful because participants often could not easily cloak themselves in deniability and rationalizations. Active and aggressive ostracism often became clear instances of social rejection whereby peers obviously coordinated their actions to actualize worlds without participants, and thus eliciting experiences of diverging expectation and desire or impossibility.

Concealed exclusion. While passive ostracism acts often involved a failure to attempt to include others or the appearance of subtle exclusionary cues, active ostracism acts required excluders to make an effort to exclude. Although active ostracism acts were less ambiguous than passive acts, and often they were still subtle enough to allow for multiple interpretations. For instance, Malcolm described the active ostracism act of lying to exclude. He explained his attempt to invite himself to a social activity hosted by Molly, a girl on whom he has a crush. He wrote, “she then told me it was a ‘girls night out’ and I probably shouldn't come. Now this didn't really bug me until Monday when I found out they went with another guy friend of mine.” Perhaps, Molly’s lie was an attempt to avoid hurting Malcolm’s feelings; however, his discovery of her lie made
him doubt their friendship. Leo, a 14-year-old 9th grader, wrote several entries about his girlfriend Chloe’s exclusion of other girls. In one entry, he wrote  

[Chloe] asked [Chloe] if she had any weekend plans. [Chloe] lied and said she had a family obligation. Really, [Chloe] was having a party. When [Natalie] left, [Chloe] said she didn’t want [Natalie] to attend and telling her the truth would cause a scene.

Chloe’s lie was a deliberate and active attempt to exclude Natalie and avoid confrontation. Perhaps Chloe was well intentioned for saving Natalie from experiencing the certainty of exclusion, or perhaps Chloe selfishly sought to avoid Natalie’s wrath or the embarrassment of her reaction.

Other participants described changing the subject as an active ostracism act. Haley wrote about her own exclusive behavior,

The only thing close to excluding that I did was keeping plans about the upcoming homecoming dance quiet. It is not my place to invite others to get ready at my friend's house and when the topic came up in front of a girl who (to my knowledge) is not invited, I changed the subject.

Haley was complicit in coordinating a reality without the girl. Her use of changing the subject allowed Haley to downplay the girl's exclusion and avoid a potential conflict or awkward interaction. Another participant described her feelings on the receiving end of subject changes. Sarah explained in an interview,

Something that is really annoying and I hate is when I walk up to a group and they obviously change the subject. This happens a lot. They obviously don’t
want me involved in their talk when they do that. It is extra annoying when I walk away and hear them change the subject back.

For Sarah, abrupt topic changes were a clear sign of ostracism, a reminder that she was unwelcomed.

**Revealed exclusion.** Whereas participants described lies and subject changes as designed to hide or lessen the obviousness of exclusion, other forms of active ostracism were more obvious. For instance, whispers, weird looks, and annoyed voices signaled malicious exclusion for several participants. Sarah wrote several journal entries about her friends and peers whispering behind her back. She wrote, “my friends were whispering something and I heard my name a few times. Whenever I asked what they were talking about they just ignored me.” Although Sarah’s friends did not blatantly exclude or insult her, their whispers were a performance of exclusion. Additionally, their refusal to explain themselves (another ostracism act) caused Sarah to believe their whispers were malicious. They used silence to silence Sarah, and their refusal to communicate physically demonstrated her exclusion.

Tris often felt ostracized when her peers gave her strange looks. Frequently, girls at her swim practice ignored Tris and “look at me like I'm an alien when I try to talk!” She described one instance of receiving strange facial expressions,

It's also frustrating when a little while ago, a girl was talking about a pair of shoes or something and about how much she loved them. About three days ago, I talked about another pair of shoes I really liked. All the girls looked at me really weird.

Argh.
The girls’ subtle facial expressions betrayed their dislike of Tris and elicited feelings of ostracism. According to Kerr and Levine (2008), humans have evolved to detect even the faintest exclusionary cues from others. A strange glance or odd eye contact can have profound meanings. Tris also explained vocal tone as denoting exclusion. She wrote,

At swim team, [Lindsey] was talking to [Abbey] about something, about her swimming at her school's pool. "Four lengths?" I asked her. "Yyyeeessss," [Lindsey] said in a super annoyed tone. Five seconds later, [Abbey] asked her "Two lengths or four lengths." [Lindsey] smiled and held up four fingers. Apparently, it's okay for [Abbey] to ask if it was four lengths but not me. :( Tris’ observations of her swim teammates annoyed tones only when speaking to Tris reminded her that she was unaccepted. Tris’ and Sarah’s experiences of active ostracism acts elicited frustration, anger, and sadness, rather than the confusion and ambiguity of passive ostracism acts.

Other participants actively utilized walking away to convey exclusion. Rebecca explained in an interview how she enacted moral sanctioning, “this girl is pretty pushy and rude. We don’t ever try to be mean or exclusive but we do walk away quickly so that she gets the hint.” For Rebecca, walking away was not an attempt to maliciously ostracize, but it was intended to send a clear message of disapproval. Leo’s friends also used this approach to perform exclusion. Leo wrote,

A group of us were standing around talking after school and a girl that is really annoying started waving and walking towards us. [Chloe, his girlfriend] gave us all a look that clearly meant ‘uhoh, run!’ and we ducked behind the building. Im
sure she saw us, so now she knows we’re avoiding her. I hope she doesn’t annoy us about it.

Leo and his friends actively ostracized the girl by physically moving away from her, thus, sending a clear message of rejection.

Finally, another common form of active exclusion was exclusive language. Several participants discussed the exclusive use of terms like “retarded” or “gay” as insults. Catherine wrote, “at practice [Cody] insulted [Mike] by saying he ran like a girl. I took offense to that! I'm a girl and I can (and have!!) outrun them both!” However, here I will discuss a much more literal exclusive language. Multiple participants, all in middle school, described coordinated efforts by peers to construct exclusive languages only accessible to themselves and their friends. For instance, in middle school, all of the girls in Lisa’s class created a fake language with the sole intention of using it to talk about Lisa (I fully explicate this example in the macro-level processes section). These events were some of Lisa’s most painful experiences of ostracism in her entire life. Her mother mentioned in an interview that Lisa sought help from a counselor because of her torment.

Steve, a 13-year-old 8th grader, observed girls in his class using an exclusive language. He wrote, “Apparently some of the girls in class created their own secret language. They were talking in it at recess and they kept looking at me, saying something, then laughing. I think they were talking about me.” For Steve, the language was not particularly hurtful, but he did recognize it as an active attempt at ostracism. Sofia wrote about the secret language she and Melanie created. She said,
Yesterday at [Name of homeschooler socialization program] [Melanie] asked me if I wanted to help her come up with a secret code. I said yes, and we proceeded, taking turns writing in letters. [Melanie] asked [Eden] if she wanted to help. She said yes, if that was okay, and [Melanie] said it was okay if it was okay with me. I said fine. I really like [Eden] and thought it would be fun to have more than two people knew the code. We might have included [Crystal], but recently she spends all her time at [Name of program] with a new girl, [Tessie], and her friend, [Riley].

Sofia viewed the creation of their language as a bonding activity, a definitional act for her, Melanie, and Eden. However, it was also an active attempt to be exclusive. Although I have not consistently drawn this connection, all ostracism acts reported by participants fulfilled one the six functions I discussed in the previous chapter.

**Aggressive ostracizing acts.** Active ostracism acts were less ambiguous than passive ostracism acts for participants. Sometimes the source of the act sought to conceal their exclusion from the target (e.g. lying), and other times the source clearly revealed their intent to exclude (e.g. walking away). However, compared to passive and active acts, aggressive ostracism acts most clearly demarcated an ostracism event. Aggressive ostracism acts often interconnected with other forms of social exclusion, such as teasing, ridicule, name-calling, and bullying (discussed more in the meso and macro-level ostracism process sections of this chapter). As discussed in Chapter One, scholars have often subsumed ostracism into other forms of social rejection, often under the guise of bullying (e.g. Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2009), perhaps because of the co-occurrence of more
active forms of ostracism and other types of exclusion. For participants, three types of aggressive ostracism were particularly hurtful, aggressive, and malicious.

**Passive-aggressive performances of ostracism.** Several participants described passive-aggressive performances of ignoring. These ostracism acts often mirrored passive ostracism acts (such as exclusive eye contact or facial expressions, conversational exclusion, etc.); however, they were accomplished dramatically and obviously. Many of Tris’ interactions with her teammates fell into this category. For example, in one journal entry she wrote about a teammate so profoundly ignoring her existence that she dumped water on Tris’ feet, as if she were not there. Tris wrote,

> I asked a girl at swim team tuesday to "Please dump your water bottle down a drain and not all over the floor, [Abbey], because you just got my sneakers all wet." And did she answer? No. She ignored me. Of course.

Tris’ teammates, particularly Abbey and Lindsey, aggressively performed Tris’ invisibility. They overly exerted themselves to ensure Tris understood that she was unwelcomed. This passive-aggressive performance was particularly noticeable to Tris when she attempted to directly engage Abbey or Lindsey.

Sarah wrote about experiencing exclusion from her friends throughout her journals. She could not comprehend why her friends began excluding her, but their exclusion became increasingly noticeable and aggressive over time. Sarah began to inquire frequently into the cause of her ostracism, but her friends’ responses became aggressive. In one entry, she wrote,
Today I was excluded by some friends of mine. I simply asked if they were my friends still, and all they did was roll their eyes at me. But they did it very dramatically, like they wanted me to know they weren’t talking to me. It made me feel as if they knew something and had formed an inside joke. It made me feel like an idiot and all I wanted to do was curl up in a ball and cry. They make me feel as if I have no friends. All I want is for things to go back to normal between us.

Sarah’s ostracism by her friends was deeply troubling, partially because of the relational dimensions (e.g. high importance and familiarity). She experienced the certainty of discrepant probabilistic and evaluative orientations because she knew, without a doubt, that her friends actualized a despised reality where Sarah was inconsequential to them. This certainty was particularly painful to Sarah, as she had no other social outlet, thus increasing her evaluative orientation towards acceptance from this peer group.

Noam wrote about an obvious and aggressive ostracism act performed by his neighbors. Noam explained that he and Michael, his next-door neighbor, were once best friends. Their favorite activity was playing catch together. However, Noam and Michael had a fight and Michael convinced all of the neighborhood adolescents to ostracize Noam. Noam wrote,

So today I was playing and minding my own business. I have gotten used to the fact I will be invisible from now on to any of the three kids in that house [to Michael and his brothers]. It does still get a little bit under my skin when I see that I can be forgotten so easily. They were playing their own game, hockey, when
they decided to play catch all of a sudden. REALLY? Because I don't think I have hardly ever seen them play catch. I came to the obvious conclusion that one of them, most likely [Michael], was toying with me. That's not a huge surprise. I just kept with my own business.

For Noam, the fact that the boys began playing catch, Noam and Michael’s favorite game, the moment they realized Noam was outside was a clear indication of intentional and malicious exclusion. Michael wanted to communicate to Noam, I have replaced you. The symbolic act of obviously playing catch in front of Noam was an aggressive reminder of Noam’s faded existence.

**Vocal ostracism.** Other participants reported vocal ostracism as an aggressive ostracism act. Vocal ostracism typically involved one adolescent aggressively telling another that the group was ostracizing them. Albert explained that his peers bullied, excluded, and ostracized him daily. In an interview, he said, “One time, a kid said ‘Put your hands on the table if you hate [Albert] and don’t want him to play with us at recess.’ Every hand was on the table.” In another entry, Albert wrote, “I kept trying to play with them at recess. I guess they did not want me to because one guy yelled at me ‘GET IT THROUGH YOUR ASPY HEAD THAT WE DON’T WANT YOU HERE.’” Recall from Chapter Three, Albert had Asperger’s Syndrome and did not always immediately understand social cues. In this scenario, Albert’s classmate simultaneously relied on name-calling (a form of ridicule) and aggressive vocal ostracism to communicate Albert’s exclusion.
Steve often wrote about his observations of peer exclusion. In one entry, he described a group of girls playing four-square and excluding another. He wrote,

I was being a detective today and noticed something that counts very much as exclusion. A bunch of girls in the four-square corner were playing and another girl kept trying to join their game. They weren’t really paying attention to her, but she kept persisting to play. Finally, the lead girl very rudely shouted, “go find your own game and leave us alone!”

In Steve’s observation, the girls playing four-square ignored their classmate using passive ostracism acts, but she continued to seek inclusion. Finally, the girls resorted to aggressive verbal ostracism to clarify their exclusive communication. Sarah’s friends also used vocal ostracism to communicate her exclusion. Sarah wrote, “Today I felt like I was being excluded by one of my friends…I asked her if she was still my friend, and she said ‘Let's bail!’” Sarah’s friends ran away after she asked this question. Aggressive, vocal ostracism carried a clear denotation of exclusion and left little ambiguity for participants. When attempts to coordinate a world without the excludee failed, often because the excludee did not “get the message,” groups tended to use vocal ostracism to clarify their intent.

**Claiming territory.** Participants also described an aggressive use of physical space to exclude. While some passive ostracism acts also utilized space, aggressive use of space typically involved claiming and demarcating territory. Lisa described an encounter with two girls in PE class. Lisa and her friend were playing badminton, and
two other girls confiscated the court Lisa was on and began playing their own game, completely disregarding Lisa.

One of the girls from the other team served it and the new girls just started hitting it, even though it was our game. I thought that they were trying to do some kind of mass game and join in with us, so the next time the birdie came over the net, I hit it, which was met with the girls in the pair on our side yelling at me. Apparently we weren't good enough to them to be on the competitive side, so they took our spot we were in the middle of playing at…I personally think that this was the most outright event of bullying that has happened to me in a long time, so I guess it was a bit of a shock to me for something like this to have happened.

Lisa’s classmates aggressively took away the badminton court from Lisa and her friend, eliciting a sense of injustice and making Lisa question her abilities. The girls utilized a combination of ostracism acts and verbal aggression to perform exclusion. The classmates’ actions were so aggressive, that Lisa described the events as bullying, rather than ostracism. The use of aggressive ostracism acts often coincided with bullying events.

Throughout Leo’s participation in the current study, he realized that his girlfriend Chloe frequently and aggressively excluded others (I will address their relationship and his decision to break up with her in Chapter Seven). In one entry, Leo wrote,

Today, [Chloe], [Clair], [Sarah], me, and [Clair’s] boyfriend were talking on the front steps at school. [Janelle], this girl that the girls hate because she has no fashion, walked passed us. I think [Chloe] thought she looked at us, because
[Chloe] yelled to her, “hey dogface, this is our spot, find somewhere else to show your dogface.” The girl looked really sad. I think [Chloe] was immature and the situation was uncalled for.

In this example, we see a combination of name-calling, vocal ostracism, and claiming territory. Chloe aggressively communicated that Janelle was unwelcomed. Leo also exhibited a growing discomfort with Chloe’s behavior, as he recognized she hurt Janelle’s feelings somewhat arbitrarily (though the function of her exclusion could have been to demonstrate power or punish Janelle for a lack of fashion).

Finally, Tris described aggressive uses of space by her swim teammates. She described two instances when her teammate, Lindsey, used space to exclude. In the first entry, she wrote,

Today though, both [Lindsey] and [Kelly] got mad at me for bumping into them. They kept swimming down the middle of the pool so I couldn't go anywhere but into the other person. [Kelly] said I was going before I should, but I know for a fact I wasn't, and she got annoyed at me for going ahead of her when my coach yelled at me for letting her in front.

In this scenario, Lindsey and Kelly, who usually aggressively ignore Tris, tried to deny Tris space in the swimming lane. They used the pretext of her bumping into them to demonstrate their disliking and exclusion of Tris. However, they also, according to Tris, caused Tris to bump into them. This ostracism act was one in a series of acts designed to diminish Tris. Two days later, Tris wrote,
Friday, [Lindsey] blamed me for going all out in the warm down even though I didn't. I'm faster then her in everything except breaststroke and whenever we do a breaststroke set, [Lindsey] will go ahead of me. She takes that as a cue that she should STAY in front of me, thus leading to me hitting her feet.

Again, Lindsey caused Tris to hit her feet. By moving in front of Tris, Lindsey tried to control Tris’ speed. Perhaps, Lindsey was angry that Tris, the despised other, was faster; therefore, she began aggressively excluding Tris as a form of control and way to deal with her own PI.

**Meso-Level Processes: Ostracism Practices**

Micro-level ostracism acts occurred at one moment in time. However, Meso-level ostracism practices happened at multiple points in time, occurring as conglomerations of ostracism acts that formed a distinct pattern of coordination. Ostracism practices are mutable, emerge through interactions with others, and are an intermediary process between ostracism acts and ostracism episodes. Participant experiences comprised three distinct ostracism practices. Some participants experienced total ostracism, whereby peers completely ignored their existence and they lived in a perpetual state of ostracism. Other participants experienced partial ostracism with additional rejection (POR) practices, whereby peers sometimes completely ignored and sometimes bullied, teased, or ridiculed them. Some participants experienced partial ostracism with inclusion (POI) practices, whereby peers sometimes completely ignored and sometimes included them, thus sending conflicting messages.
Williams (2001) suggested a continuum exists between total and partial ostracism. Although this quantity continuum was one of his four taxonomic ostracism dimensions, I suggest total and partial forms of ostracism operate more specifically as procedural components of ostracism. Reduction to a quantity continuum denies the complicated relationships and tensions among ostracism, social inclusion, and social rejection. Ostracism often did not arise in isolation from other meanings; therefore, we should not study ostracism in isolation from these other social phenomena.

**Total ostracism.** Total ostracism practices were comprised of many ostracism acts, occurring over time, which ultimately resulted in the complete ostracism of an individual. Total ostracism practices entailed the complete refusal to allow individuals to participate in social interactions often using passive or passive-aggressive ostracism acts. Individuals experiencing total ostracism were typically muted and invisible to others. Peers would avoid eye contact and often failed to respond even to direct engagement from the source of ostracism. For example, in an interview, Dylan described his 5th grade year at his old elementary school. He said, “Imagine there is a lower middle and upper class in terms of popularity. All of them were ignoring and excluding me. I didn’t exist. Sometimes I was fine with it and sometimes I was pretty annoyed with it.” Dylan’s peers completely ostracized him for the entire school year. Other participants experienced less prolonged periods of total ostracism. Haley wrote,

So today, [Stacey] the mean one ignored me from 5th period to 8th period (end of day) for no reason and when I tried to talk to her she would pretend to do something and completely overlook me and what I was trying to say.
Unlike Dylan, Haley experienced total ostracism for only a short period. Haley and Stacey were once best friends, but now Stacey is attempting to become popular and has begun ignoring Haley.

Rebecca often experienced total ostracism at recess. During one recess period, she explained her desire to play with other girls. She wrote,

> When I asked them if they wanted to play four-square with me, they didn’t even respond. I interpret that to mean, quite basically, “No, why would I stoop so low as to hang out with you!?” And, though painful as it is, I have to say that I think that I interpreted that correctly. They never respond when I talk to them at recess.

Rebecca described similar events happening repeatedly during recess. Sometimes the girls failed to respond to her inquiries, other times they grunted or shook their heads. Rarely did they engage in verbal communication with her. Although Rebecca’s total exclusion appeared confined to recess, the habitual nature of her total ostracism communicated her lack of worth. She had few communication cues and few resources with which to make sense of the situation.

Sarah also experienced total ostracism during the period she wrote journal entries. As I have discussed, for a reason unknown to Sarah, her friendship group has decided to completely ostracize her. In one entry, she wrote,

> Today I was excluded by a friend of mine who walks away every time I try to talk to her. I don't know why she is ignoring me and running away from me every time I try to talk to her. I want to know why she ignores me. When she ignores me all of my other friends ignore me too, they might as well tell me that they
don't want to be my friend any more. Without them I just feel like a lost soul who is scorned and hated by everyone.

In another entry, she described their creation of an exclusive club designed to ostracize Sarah. She wrote,

Today I was excluded by some of my friends. They have created a group called KAT that uses the first letter of their names. They said that I couldn't join because it wouldn't make sense with one more letter. Personally I think that they just wanted to talk about me behind my back.

Sarah’s peers utilized compilations of small ostracism acts to create an experience of total exclusion. Additionally, they have failed to explain their reasons for her exclusion, leaving her to coordinate and construct a coherent understanding alone. While Sarah’s ostracism is not ambiguous (i.e. she clearly recognized her rejection), the reason for her ostracism was ambiguous. Although Williams (2001) argued, “The more complete the ostracism, the less ambiguous it becomes” (p. 56), targets of total ostracism practices appeared to rarely understand the cause of their exclusion. Thus, ambiguity shifted from “am I ostracized?” to “why am I ostracized?”

**Partial ostracism with additional rejection (POR) practices.** While total ostracism practices typically involved the complete ignoring of another individual, partial ostracism with additional rejection practices (hereafter referred to as POR practices) included an intermixing of periodic ignoring and periodic bullying, teasing, ridiculing, or other forms of social rejection. These POR practices often functioned dialectically by pulling individuals between ostracism and other forms of social rejection. Often, peers
engaging in POR practices heavily utilized aggressive ostracism strategies. Commonly, POR practices occurred between popular and unpopular adolescents, or when a clear in-group/out-group dynamic existed.

Several participants reported or experienced combinations of ostracism and ridicule. Laura described her observation of a student on a field trip. She wrote,

It began with a student choosing to finish his math homework on the bus. Other students (all female) started to make fun of him. The teacher became involved and told them to stop. He sat alone on the entire ride (about two hours) to the ocean. On the way back, he found someone else who had the same type of homework, and they sat together to discuss some of the problems. They were being very quiet, and they weren't interested in engaging with the other students. Yet, they were both ostracized. These two students experienced ridicule, followed by ostracism. Ridicule appeared to be peers’ preferred exclusionary tactic, until the teacher stopped them. Laura’s example demonstrated the manipulative aspect of ostracism. In order to evade detection of their exclusion, peers’ shifted from ridicule to ostracism. Their ridicule was visible to the teacher, but the subtlety of their ostracism allowed their exclusion to continue.

Bradly wrote about ridicule, name-calling, and ostracism during lunch. Jeffrey, a popular boy at school, typically ignored Bradly and used subtle exclusionary cues to communicate his dislike and exclusion of Bradly. However, one day Bradly arrived late to lunch to find no open seats except one next to Jeffrey. Bradly wrote about Jeffrey’s reaction when Bradly attempted to sit down. He said, “[Jeffrey] yelled go find your own
table freak. Then, they made fun of me and said I liked this girl Joy who is only like a 2 or 3 [i.e. an “unattractive” girl].” Jeffrey ignored Bradly until he encroached on Jeffrey’s territory, then Jeffrey resorted to clearer means of exclusion. Unlike Laura’s observation, ostracism was Jeffrey’s preferred initial strategy; he resorted to other forms of exclusion only after Bradly failed to understand. When ostracism failed, adolescents relied on other ways to send the message you are unwanted.

Other participants described combinations of ostracism and bullying. In an interview, Charles described his experience of POR practices. He said,

Sometimes people will bully me at school. Like, if I just keep my head down or don’t look directly at anyone they ignore me and I'm fine. Not that I like being ignored, but it is better than what happens next. If I look at one of the jocks, those are the athletic guys, which I guess they think is me trying to assert myself over them, they will cause me physical harm. I think being ignored slowly hurts me over time, but being assaulted hurts me immediately.

Like Bradly, Charles was ignored until he offended a classmate, and then the classmate reacted violently. Bradly and Charles’ examples suggest adolescents might possess a hierarchy of exclusive communication tools, with escalating use of more violent or obvious forms of exclusion depending on situational needs, communicator ability, or (lack of) concern for the excludee. Charles also noted that he received the pain and hurt which accompanies both visible and invisible forms of social rejection. Albert also described a mix of bullying and ostracism. He wrote,
I am not very good at soccer, but I used to try and play soccer at recess with the guys. I learned not to play soccer with them because they would purposefully kick the ball at my head and yell mean things to me. Now I just read or talk with teachers.

Again, for Albert, his peers left him out of their game and ignored him at recess until he attempted to assert his participation. Ultimately, Albert learned to exclude himself from participation. In participants’ POR practices examples it was clear that these excluders exhibited a complete disregard for the wellbeing of the excludee. When ostracism messages were unclear, there was little hesitation before escalating to other forms of rejection.

**Partial ostracism with inclusion (POI) practices.** Typically, total ostracism practices and POR practices occurred between enemies, strangers, or those with social status differences. However, ostracism practices that included partial ostracism with inclusion practices (hereafter referred to as POI practices) often occurred among friends. Essentially, the relational dynamics between excluders and excludees differed between the three ostracism practices. Participants often reported that POI practices were the most ambiguous and troubling ostracism practices.

Ayaan described her friends’ frequent use of POI practices. In one entry, she reflected on her relationship with her friendship group at school. She wrote,

My mom says girls can be catty. There’s a group of five of us and I never know where I stand with them. We are sort of friends out of necessity. Sometimes they are nice to me, sometimes they are mean to me. They are very catty to me, even
when I am included there is always the reminder that I am also kind of excluded.

At least I know they will always sit with me at lunch and play with me at recess.

The girls in Ayaan’s peer group used POI practices to relegate her to the margins of the group; she became marginalized. They never pushed her far enough away to make her leave the group, but she was never a core member. They enticed her with the hope of inclusion, never quite offering it. Ayaan’s tension between partial inclusion and partial exclusion intensified her difficulty coping with PI because she received mixed signals from her group; thus making it challenging to form stable probabilistic and evaluative orientations. Therefore, she existed in a state of flux between uncertainty and ambivalence.

The majority of participants did not experience POI practices as malicious. Generally, they attributed these experiences as unintentional. However, these experiences were quite painful because they typically served as reminders that friends did not always appreciate them. For example, Marie wrote an entry explaining that she and her friend Hunter spent all day planning a party for another friend’s birthday. Although Marie and Hunter worked equally hard to plan the party, only Hunter’s work was recognized. Marie wrote,

And all through the celebration, everyone was thanking [Hunter]. Telling her she did a great job with the cake and planning and whatever else they noticed. But no one said a word to me. Maybe it's because I'm the quiet one, the introvert in our well-balanced friendship, but all the recognition was hers while half of the effort had been mine…That's tough. And I guess that's life. You don't get what you want
and sometimes you don't get what you need, and these little things, they build up. The tiniest moments of someone forgetting my name, or bigger ones like this, when someone forgets I was part of an operation entirely. It's not the one that hurts; it's the many that break us. It takes less than a second to say, "Thank you," and when you can't get even that, when you are that nonexistent or not appreciated within a community that you wholeheartedly accepted from day one, let me tell you that you may not be shattered yet, but you are breaking at the core. And no one's listening, as chance would have it, but if they were, they'd hear you cry.

Marie’s friends did not intentionally ignore her efforts or ostracize her at the party, yet still her heart ached from the reminder that they sometimes cast her aside. Marie’s exclusion was seemingly unintentional, but that lack of directed attention was the source of her pain. At least Ayaan could clearly describe her friends as “mean,” but Marie’s only conclusion was that she must be forgettable. Ayaan could attribute the exclusion to characteristics in her friends, but Marie only attributed it to characteristics of herself. Marie viewed herself as someone living the life of a wallflower, habitually looked through but never at, and breaking on the inside.

Liam also wrote about POI practices. He felt as if he always made an effort to include his friends, but they rarely made an effort to include him. He wrote,

It has always bothered me how if I want to hang out with someone, that I am always the one who has to put it together. And even after I do put it together to maybe get the ball rolling for them to start putting stuff on as well, they never
follow through. Now, usually I would be ok with that for the most part (not completely) but then I always end up hearing about them hanging out with some of their other friends who I'm not as good of friends with, and that it was my friend that organized the get together without me. This really pisses me off because I just think to myself, "you can spend the time to do it for them, but not for me? Even after I've done stuff for you?!!"

Like Marie, Liam’s exclusion was seemingly unintentional; he could easily conclude that his friends simply forgot him. However, while Marie became diminished and broken by her friends’ forgetfulness, Liam became angry. Liam attributed his exclusion to his friends’ lack of caring, not to any fault of his own. Marie and Liam coped with their PI in very different ways, one with uneasy resignation and the other with indignation. Both Marie and Liam felt excluded from coordination with their friends, and they made sense of their circumstances alone.

Liam continued his entry, writing,

I've confronted those friends in the past about it and all they can say is nothing that can sway me. So, now I'm sick of always being the one to reach out. Now, I will keep on reaching out to others I want to keep a friendship with, but if after so long there isn't anything AT ALL in return, then I stop caring and just let them drift themselves away. All I want is just the smallest amount of knowing they care about our friendship, no matter what it is. Now, I try not to sound selfish, and whenever I think about this I always feel as though I am, I just know that I did my best to naturally keep ties together, and didn't force myself into anything fake.
Liam’s indignation led him to confront his friends about their actions, though they denied excluding him, and passively end his friendships. Liam was unwilling to continue existing in a reality where he was underappreciated.

Other participants experienced POI practices in organizations or while working on group projects. Noam wrote about his surprise at experiencing ostracism from his partner on a project. Noam and his friend Charlie were designing a diorama of a 1800s Victorian shop as a class project. However, Charlie excluded Noam from participation. Noam wrote,

I was sort of excluded in a group of only two! [Charlie] had sketched the shop while I ran around doing odd jobs to get ready for the real deal. I have not artistic value whatsoever, so I understand that. I waited, a little unhappy, for him to finish sketching it once more on the bigger paper, not allowing me to paint the top because he somehow thought it was slanted. I explained that when I painted over it, it was going to be imperfect regardless, but he had to fix it. Then we made a breakthrough: he allowed me to paint a single line on the very very top and stopped me because my stroke wasn’t right. Once I finished my line he ended up touching it up a lot and it was finally time for the next hour. How fulfilling. That is just how some exceptionally gifted kids are I guess. A little obsessed with perfection.

Charlie’s actions threatened Noam’s need for meaningful existence (Williams, 2001) by questioning his worth as a relational partner. Charlie communicated that Noam was not good enough to participate in the class project. As a protective measure to maintain his
self-esteem and cope with PI, Noam attributed his exclusion to Charlie’s obsession with perfection. Additionally, his attribution was not directed at Charlie, but rather at his as classification as gifted. In doing so, Noam saved his friendship and self-esteem by rationalizing that Charlie could not help his perfectionism because of his status as gifted.

Rebecca experienced POI practices in her robotics club. She often experienced a tension between sometimes feeling included and sometimes feeling excluded in this group. In one entry, she described her pride in a project she and her robotics teammates created. She wrote,

Today, I had robotics club. Finally, after weeks, all seven of us little gifted kids came to consensus on our invention idea to help people before, during, or after a wildfire. We are calling our robot, "The Fire Pigeon," originally meant as a joke, the idea came into form as something that really fit our invention, and wasn't something already patented. Our machine is a flying robot with a live video feed going to the firetruck, which from there streams to news centers and the fire station. It also has a weather vane that measures wind direction, then sends a message to the lookout who can then warn firefighters to get out of the building. The bot also has a thermometer that measures the temperature of the fire and a couple of other useful features for firefighters. We started making a website for our product and decided our method of presentation to the FLL judges.

In this entry, Rebecca was excited about the idea she and her teammates created together. She had a strong sense of belonging and team pride. While she often felt included in
robotics club, she also experienced exclusion from the organization. In another entry she wrote,

I felt like nobody really wanted me there. For example, [Leah] was working on the website and I asked her if I could help her because I had no other assignments at the moment, and she snapped at me that no, she didn't need any help. I really felt kind of awful at that moment. I went around to my other group members and got similar, but more kindly conveyed, messages. I was pretty upset inside after the meeting.

After investing tremendous time into conceptualizing the project as a team, her teammates now refused to allow her participation. Like Ayaan, Maire, Liam, and Noam, Rebecca was devastated by her friends’ exclusion. She struggled to make sense of this undesirable reality and hoped for future inclusion.

**Macro-Level Processes: Ostracism Episodes**

Macro-level ostracism processes present an overarching framework to understand the mutual coordination and coherence of ostracism in participants’ lives. Excludees likely disagree with their banishment, but they engage in patterns of interaction with their exclusers nonetheless. We are co-authors, not authors of our interactions (Macintyre, 1984). We have tremendous agency, but our agency is constrained by the materiality of others’ presence. Therefore, we coordinate together, not alone. Actualized realities are a synthesis of many individuals’ hopes and dreams. Just because I want to envision a world where I am included by you, does not mean it will be so unless you join my coordination efforts. Borrowing the term “episodes” from CMM terminology, I have
called macro-level processes ostracism episodes to denote habituated ostracism routines with identifiable boundaries and rules. Ostracism episodes are composed of many ostracism acts and practices and influenced by relational dimensions and functions of ostracism.

Coordination, coherence, and logical force are helpful in deciphering the procedural elements of ostracism episodes on a very basic level. As a first approximation of a model of how things might work, I will use an example from Leo of transformational ostracism. In one entry, Leo wrote,

I used to eat lunch with Killian. But, about a week ago, and you won’t believe this, he PURPOSELY sneezed on my food! It was disgusting and I have never seen such rudeness. When my friend yelled at him, he grabbed her apple and licked it! Well, you can imagine we don’t eat lunch with him anymore. I hope he learns his lesson and stops being rude. Maybe I’ll let him eat with me again if that happens. At the least he can learn to be nicer and some other group will let him eat with them. I am shuddering even remembering the situation.

According to CMM, there are several specific forms of logical force, or logics of meaning and action. We understand the meaning of any given action, in part, by what preceded it: (a) preceding acts or events (the “prefigurative force” giving rise to the current act) and (b) our understanding going into the act of the episode in which we are engaged, our relationship with the other, and our self-concept (the “contextual” forces or logics). In turn, the meaning of an action is shaped by its anticipated consequences: both (c) the expected subsequent acts and events (our act’s “practical force”) and (d) the
implications of our act for episodic and relational meanings and self-concept (our act’s “implicative force”). Collectively, these logical forces constitute the meanings that impel (though never force) us to choose certain actions.

Using Leo’s example, a triggering event occurred (i.e., Killian sneezing) that impelled Leo to ostracize. Contextual and prefigurative forces impelled Leo to interpret Killian’s actions as inappropriate and unacceptable. Implicative force impelled Leo to believe that a person such as himself would not stand for such rude behavior and disrespect for their relationship, so he had to perform some appropriate action to demonstrate disapproval. The sneeze elicited PI in Leo because he no longer existed in a desired reality. Instead, Leo experienced divergence as he realized Killian’s presence at the lunch table likely meant he would not be able to exist in a reality where individuals were polite during lunch. Therefore, to cope with his PI, prefigurative and contextual forces impelled Leo to decide to ostracize Killian because he was rude. In ostracizing Killian, Leo understood the practical force of his action; he exiled Killian in order to punish him, or help him change, or any number of other rationalizations. A diagram of the process appears in Figure 1.
We can build hypothetically on the actual example just noted to illustrate how such interactions culminate into larger interactional and relational structures. Once Leo engaged in an ostracism act with Killian, he likely continued to exclude him. We can imagine that Leo might initially have vocally ostracized Killian by asking him to leave the table. In future encounters he might have averted eye contact, ignored Killian’s conversational invitations, or given Killian annoyed glances. Leo’s continued use of ostracism acts formed ostracism practices. Perhaps he used POI practices to exclude Killian only at lunchtime, while including him in other events, or perhaps he totally ostracized Killian for several days followed by POR practices. Leo’s use of ostracism acts and practices formed habituated patterns of interaction between Leo and Killian ultimately forming ostracism episodes. These episodes began to operate with their own logical force for Leo, Killian, and their group mates, as well. For instance, perhaps Leo’s girlfriend also felt impelled to exclude Killian. Maybe she thought, “since I am Leo’s
girlfriend, I should ostracize Killian in order to show my support for Leo.” Killian also likely felt impelled to react in particular ways, perhaps with outrage, resignation, or a desire to change (reactions to ostracism are discussed in the next chapter). Thus, coordination efforts actualized an entire world where Killian no longer existed to Leo at lunchtime.

The proceeding hypothetical example, which we might term transformational ostracism because of the intent to reform, is just one possible procedural configuration of ostracism episodes. Every series of ostracism episodes will have its own particular nuances and subtleties. Because of the particularities of individual contexts and relationships, I can present no “universal” process of ostracism unless it is so general that it loses all meaning. For example, a group ostracizing with the purpose of exiling an individual will differ dramatically in their use of ostracism acts and practices than a group ostracizing with the purpose of reforming an individual. Therefore, in this section I discuss procedural elements of two general categories of ostracism episodes evident in participant descriptions: ritualistic and enigmatic ostracism episodes.

**Ritualistic ostracism episodes.** I borrowed the terms ritualistic and enigmatic from CMM. According to Pearce (1989), ritualistic episodes are “reenactments of patterns assumed to be well known and rehearsed by participants” (p. 43). By contrast, during enigmatic episodes “none of the participants can make a realistic guess about what is going to happen” (p. 43). Pearce suggested ritualistic and enigmatic episodes exist on a continuum, although no episodes are truly at the polar ends of the continuum. Ritualistic ostracism episodes and enigmatic ostracism episodes are simply specialized
types of episodes involving ostracism. Ostracism episodes falling near the ritualistic end of the continuum are highly habituated and procedural, with clear logical forces. These are, relatively, unambiguous to the excluder and the excludee. Conversely, ostracism episodes falling near the enigmatic end of the continuum are highly ambiguous, less habituated, and often imperfectly coordinated (though Pearce suggests all coordination attempts are imperfect). No clear logical force yet exists, and often both excluders and excludees are unsure of the course or meaning of their interactions.

**Processes of exile.** Ritualistic ostracism episodes were immediately evident in participants’ experiences because of their procedural and ritualistic nature. The excluder(s) in these episodes often intended to permanently exile the excludee from existence. In essence, they ritualistically performed exiling the excludee by communicating you are unwanted. Often, ritualistic ostracism episodes involved some triggering event followed by an aggressive act of ostracism or social rejection attempting to clearly communicate exile. If the individual ignored her exile and attempted to rejoin the group, then group members reacted harshly by becoming more aggressive in their rejection messages. For example, earlier I quoted Emma’s comment that the girls in her class “shove me into ant hills if I try to hang around them.” Ritualistic ostracism episodes often included a pivotal shift between forms of social rejections; excluders used visible and violent rejection (i.e. physical bullying, ridicule, aggressive ostracism acts, etc.) when excludees asserted their inclusion, and passive acts of ostracism when excluders accepted their exile. Eventually, excludees resigned their attempts at inclusion and excluders habitually relied on passive acts of ostracism.
One example of a ritualistic ostracism episode of performing exile was evident in an example discussed earlier, whereby classmates created a secret language designed to exclude Lisa. In a journal entry, Lisa described the scenario,

I accidentally called one of my other friends a name (not a swear word, but still mean). I immediately apologized and even wrote an apology note the next day, but she wouldn't accept it. Another decided to take matters into her own hands at that point. I was kicked out of the group, and then a "language" fad came up within the whole class. They all spoke "gibberish", and they would never teach it to me. On top of that, they came up with another name to talk about me right in front of my face, when the language was banned by the teachers… When I tried to tell the teacher about this girl, she did not believe me, and refused to look further into the situation. This progressed to the point where I sat and talked to the duty aide every day at recess instead of playing because I had no one else to turn to for friendship. I eventually learned to cope over the year, and I focused on my studies and math and writing contests, many of which I placed highly in, winning many certificates and even an iPod. Eventually, at the end of the year, one of the girls who was in on it from the start went to the teacher and admitted it all from the language to who was bullying me. That same girl met me later that day and said the words, "I'm sorry." No other person from that group even spoke to me besides her. The teacher's child never got in trouble, nor did any of the others for that matter, but it just made me happy that that girl finally told about what was happening and tried to do something about it, even if it was late.
Lisa’s insult was the triggering event that led to her ostracism. Therefore, her classmates used the moral sanctioning function of ostracism to punish her for the behavior. Likely, logical force impelled Lisa’s classmates to engage in ostracism as their reaction to her insult. The initial ostracism episodes were a fight for coordination and a tool of PI; Lisa and her classmates fought to actualize their disparate visions of a desired reality. As more classmates ostracized Lisa, the episode became more ritualistic and developed its own logical forces (e.g., evolving exclusionary relationships and associated self-concepts; a lengthening history of events exerting ever more powerful prefigurative force) that impelled more classmates to engage in ostracism and exclusionary acts. In an interview, Lisa explained that sometimes for weeks her classmates utilized total ostracism practices. Lisa recalled, “once, during this year, the teacher assigned a group project that lasted a week. My group didn’t look at me, or say a word to me, or listen to anything I said for the whole week.” Then, at other times, they utilized POR practices for several days. Lisa also explained, “after no one had said a word to me for about a month, suddenly they would throw kick balls and volleyballs at me every recess for a few days. I was their human punching bag.” Lisa’s classmates engaged in highly coordinated and ritualized ostracism.

The girl who finally admitted the ostracism behavior to the teacher also participated in coordinated ostracism efforts. Probably, she initially felt impelled by logical force to participate in Lisa’s coordinated exclusion. Peer pressure is a strong logical force that often coerces adolescents into exclusive behavior (e.g. Masclet, 2003). Although we cannot know this girl’s true reasons for initially complying in Lisa’s
exclusion, another participant discussed peer pressure in an interview. Marie explained that she ostracized a classmate “because other people were. I felt like I had to or they wouldn’t have accepted me. If I’d been by myself I probably wouldn’t have purposely excluded, or at least wouldn’t have chosen to make it so obvious.” Marie’s sense of logical force drove her to exclude; perhaps Lisa’s classmate experienced a similar force. However, presumably, something must have changed for Lisa’s classmate; she became compelled by a different logic, a different meaning, to admit Lisa’s mistreatment (perhaps her parents disapproved of the behavior, or she recognized that her actions were immoral according to her religious standards). Lisa’s example demonstrated a coordinated attempt to exile Lisa from the class through numerous ostracism acts and practices. Lisa’s own attempt to cope with PI involved her resignation towards the ostracism episode.

**Processes of boundary maintenance.** While Lisa was once an accepted member of her social group before facing exile, other participants were ostracized from groups into which they had never been (and likely would never be) accepted. Typically, these ostracism episodes involved popular students ostracizing unpopular students; often they were performing boundary maintenance to reinforce unpopular students’ outsider status. For example, Simone dedicated several journal entries to describing her treatment by popular peers. In one entry, she described an incident where she and her two friends attempted to sit down at lunchtime. She wrote,

[Brianna] and her huge popular group came over. “We were here first.” is what [Brianna] said. But they weren't. They were such a big group, and we didn't want
to have to deal with them right then. So we went looking for somewhere else to sit. We finally sat down, but we weren't all at the same table. We noticed that [Brianna] didn't even use the booth.

Brianna communicated that Simone and her friends were not members of the popular crowd and, therefore, should not occupy the same space. Brianna also exercised control by forcing Simone and her friends to physically leave the area. Simone explained in an interview that Brianna habitually asserted power over her and other students.

In another entry, Simone described an exclusion ritual performed by one of Brianna’s friends. Simone wrote,

My friend [Kim] will be talking to me and Sammie and she will be talking about something awesome she did over the weekend, and [Annie] will come up and say, “Nobody cares, [Kim].” Then she will walk away laughing with her friends who watch her. It happens a lot.

Annie’s comment reproduced a power dynamic between herself and Simone’s friend, further reinforcing Kim’s outsider status. Her power display was an attempt to force Kim to realize Kim’s existence was inconsequential to Annie. Annie’s aggressive ostracism act negated Kim’s existence by reinforcing Annie’s superiority and social control. Repeated occurrences of similar ostracism acts performed by Brianna and Annie towards Simone and her friends constructed highly ritualistic encounters between the two groups.

For both Simone and Lisa, excluders utilized combinations of total and partial ostracism. Often, their peers reacted violently and malevolently towards them. Simone and Lisa’s peers exerted effort to exclude. Though certainly not an ideal situation, at the
very least they could tell themselves they were important enough to elicit aggression. However, other processes of boundary maintenance included utilizing primarily total ostracism practices to perform invisibility. Tris was an outsider and typically felt invisible at swim practice. In an interview, Tris said,

The other girls on the swim team I try to hang out with them and fit into the conversation. But they don’t acknowledge my existence… With swim team it is pretty hurtful because they are not acknowledging me. They don’t even act like I exist.

Girls at her swim practice habitually utilized series of total ostracism practices to ignore Tris’ existence. Simone and Lisa’s peers communicated you are unwanted, but Tris’ peers communicated you do not exist. For more than a year, her teammates have disconfirmed her (see Laing, 1961) by rarely acknowledged her presence. In one journal entry, Tris described typical daily interactions with her teammates,

Really every time it's just the same. I talk, they ignore. For instance, during dinner at the Summer Swim Picnic, they were chatting away.

**Girl:** Oh my goodness the Black Widow was so awesome at Kennywood.

**Me:** Is the Black Widow a roller coaster or something? Oh wow, the black widow sounds so cool. I went to Cedar Point this summer, and this one ride called the Dragster? Best ride ever! You will never experience the same 17 seconds. The girls keep talking as if I didn't exist.

**Me:** I'm going to get dessert.

Really it was simply they ignored me while I tried to engage....
Tris’ teammates often looked through her, rather than at her and they failed to respond to her inquiries or engagement. Tris said she sometimes questioned her existence during and after swim practice.

Tris filled her journals with entries about total exclusion. Often, girls failed to respond even to direct inquiries. In one entry, she wrote,

I went in the shower and [Abbey] and [Kayla] were there. They were talking and in a break in the conversation I asked [Abbey] what school she went too (they had been talking about school). [Kayla] ended up having to answer me because [Abbey] wouldn't. Then I asked her something else she completely ignored, but then later I asked her a different question which she finally answered but looked at [Kayla] the entire time as if Hannah had asked the question. Oh well.

In another entry she noted, “I told [Jenny] that I would be partners with her, but she ignored me and became partners with someone else who was on the other side of the room. And I had been standing right there. :( ” Tris’ pattern of interaction with her swim teammates was clear: Tris attempted to be polite, respectful, and engaging, and they ignored her repeatedly. Tris was uncertain what triggered her initial ostracism, though she suspected it was because she is the only homeschooled girl on the team. At the start of journaling, Tris was so hopeful that girls would treat her differently this year. However, as she continued journaling, she made more comments like “oh well” and “she ignored me. Of course,” possibly demonstrating her eventual movement towards resignation and acceptance of exclusion. Her reactions were fraught with chaining PI.
Processes of disassociation. Thus far, I have discussed ritualistic ostracism episodes involving group ostracism. However, several participants described individuals performing disassociation from another individual or group. For example, Leo decided to break up with his girlfriend and disassociate from the “popular” crowd after continually observing their exclusion of others (I will discuss his decision in relation to his study participation in Chapter Seven). He wrote,

All week long I have been avoiding the gang I used to hang with when [Chloe] and I were together. They keep insisting we’re the “cool kids” and should keep hanging out even though [Chloe] and I broke up. I just can’t get behind their values, they are so mean and (I hate to say this) kind of stupid. I’d just rather be more intellectual and be around nicer people. High school just started and, despite all teenage stereotypes, I actually don’t want to be one in the popular crowd. There is more to life than fashion and you don’t have to prove your self worth by being crummy to someone else. So, when they try to approach me in school I just duck into a classroom or something. When they text I just respond with one word sentences like “k” or “later.” I’m done with them. Thye’ll get the hint. In the mean time I just hang out with my other friends.

For Leo, no definite triggering event occurred compelling him to disassociate with this group. Instead, myriad small events built into a critical mass of evidence he could not ignore. Finally and ambivalently, he ended communication. Logical force still existed within the context impelling him to interpret events a particular way. Therefore, Leo thought, a nice person like me should not associate with mean people like them because
their actions are morally reprehensible. Therefore, I will ostracize them in order to escape their mean behavior and influence.

Juan experienced the receiving end of disassociation. I discussed in the previous chapter Juan and Isabella’s breakup. Juan believed he loved Isabella and hoped she would remain in his life. However, Isabella employed total ostracism practices to completely disassociate with Juan. She no longer looked at Juan, answered his calls, or responded to his text messages. In response, Juan attempted to use Isabella’s friend as an intermediary. He wrote, “This afternoon I was chatting with my ex-girlfriend's best friend. I do not want to get close to her. I only want contact to see if my ex-girlfriend is fine.” In another entry, he stated,

I stumbled upon her best friend over chat. I told her about my depression. She, as always, did not care all that much. Nobody cares. I asked her for information about [Isabella], just anything. She told me, reluctantly, that [Isabella] had finally received the postcards I wrote to her from Japan but she would not fulfill my request to meet with me.

After repeated attempts to use intermediaries, Isabella finally contacted Juan. She asked him to leave her friends alone and clearly explained that she still felt deeply for him but could not be in his life. She consciously wrote him out of her life. In response, Juan wrote,

I had been spending much of my time trying to make a sense of all of this. I got depressed for maybe a week, before today, because of that remark. How was it possible that she felt things for me, but yet didn't want me in her life?
The situation created enormous PI for Juan. Ultimately, to cope with this highly undesirable reality without Isabella, Juan concluded she had never loved him and only used him for his mind. He said,

I recently came out with an answer. I have to remark that I have a greater insight on her than she has her own introspection… she said I was about the only person that truly understood her. And that is much likely so; because my perception on others is somewhat homed [honed]… She needed me for my skills. She needed me to understand herself. She is probably my ex-girlfriend because she needed to complete herself with my understanding.

While Juan’s experience clearly exemplified the relationship termination stage of Knapp’s (1978) relational stages model, it is also an example of an ostracism episode. Perhaps, ostracism was Isabella’s way of enacting relational termination. Juan and Isabella experienced numerous incidents leading to their breakup. The breakup served as a triggering event for Isabella to begin ostracizing Juan. Isabella’s ostracism elicited profound PI in Juan, until he finally rationalized their relationship and breakup.

**Enigmatic ostracism episodes.** Participant examples of ritualistic ostracism indicated adolescents often performed it intentionally and maliciously. The excluder appeared to have clear goals and clear coordination efforts in actualizing an exclusive reality. Ritualistic patterns of interaction emerged between excluders and excludees. Conversely, on the other continuum end, enigmatic ostracism episodes entailed more ambivalence and ambiguity. Neither the excluder nor the excludee appeared to have a clear sense of events. All relational partners seemed unsure about their goals in the
interaction and coordination was more improvisational than predictable or planned. While ritualistic ostracism episodes seemed to have apparent logical forces impelling individuals to interpret events in certain ways, enigmatic ostracism episodes had conflicting logical forces. Conflicting logical forces made coherence difficult. For instance, Malcolm wrote about his ambivalence excluding a boy at his school. He wrote,

I was thinking about if my group of friends ever really excludes anyone and I thought for a while and realized my group of friends often excludes this one kid [Matt] from activities. I do not know why my friends started excluding [Matt] but we now do it because he has no confidence in himself and he is just somewhat difficult to be around... But anyways I feel like we should stop excluding him but I don't know how to go about doing it. The problem is [Matt] has no confidence. I feel like [Matt] used to have confidence but he was excluded so often that he lost it...I do know according to other people that he was bullied a lot in 7th grade but I don't know exactly what happened. The way for [Matt] to gain confidence is by being more comfortable around other people. But when he is interacting with other people the people interacting with him get too frustrated with his lack of confidence. It just seems like a Catch-22 to me. I feel really bad for him because he is a really nice and respectful person but he isn't comfortable in being who he is. I do understand where he is coming from though. When I first moved to [Name of State] I had almost no confidence in myself because I didn't know anyone and I wasn't comfortable around anyone. But I was able to gain confidence once I was comfortable around people. I really feel like [Matt] has a lot of potential to have a
bunch of friends but I don't know how to get him to believe it though. I can't really just go up to him and say it... But even if I did have a conversation with him to try to instill confidence in him what would I say? But I know I should do something because I hate seeing him be so uncomfortable and awkward.

Competing logical forces created profound ambivalence for Malcolm. In one sense, Malcolm was compelled to act similarly to his friends, thereby ignoring Matt. However, Malcolm also wanted to be a moral person and treat Matt kindly. Additionally, Malcolm felt a connection to Matt (and engaged in perspective taking) because Malcolm understood feeling unconfident. Malcolm’s own exclusion of Matt was unintentional and lacked a goal. The ambivalence elicited by the situation frustrated Malcolm, and we observe him thinking through the process of how to rectify competing logical forces to alleviate his ambivalence. While Malcolm’s experience exemplified enigmatic ostracism episodes, several specific types of these episodes emerged from participant exemplars.

**Processes of oblivious ostracism.** Often, enigmatic ostracism episodes occurred unintentionally; this oblivious ostracism was often noticeable and painful to the excludee, but unnoticed by the excluder. Marie frequently pondered about unintentional exclusion, and her entries illuminated the processes of oblivious ostracism episodes. Recall, Marie started boarding school weeks before she began journaling for the current study. She made several friends very quickly, including her best friend Caleb. However, she wrote several entries about oblivious ostracism from her friends.

The issue I have with having friends, is that all of my friends seem to have other friends, and more than I do, at that. And so every time I find one good friend I
feel like I can "keep," he or she sticks around for a few days or weeks and then moves on to someone else. I guess I've done that to people too, but you don't feel it unless it's done to you. One of my best friends, [Caleb], and I were very close when we arrived at the Academy. And we remained close for several weeks, and then we weren't. And he started spending more and more time with a senior named [Anya] and [Caleb] and I would sometimes see each other and say hi or he would give me a hug or something, but we were no longer discussing our days or life at all, and it was strange and unsettling, but I had to accept it because in this friendship, I had been the abandonee while he was clearly the abandoner.

However, last night there was a shift. [Caleb] approached me before seminar and asked if I'd like to get dessert after seminar was over, and I said yes, and just like that I had a friend again. At the conclusion of seminar we met in the lobby and made our way across campus, and on the way there, we talked. More specifically, we talked about how we hadn't been talking recently, how he didn’t realize he’d left me out, and how much I missed him. Because even though my curriculum is some of the hardest in the nation, somehow I still found time to miss my best friend. And to look at him in a crowd of people and wonder why I wasn't in it. It's weird, because you'd think that petty things like that would be water under the bridge, but no, it's not. Watching him appreciate and include other people plain hurt. But last night, he chose to include me again…I am grateful for the new acquaintances I've made in the past few weeks but even more so for the friends that left and then returned, who turned away but are back again…in that
half hour conversation, I felt like the boy next to me wanted me to be alive, and not only alive but alive there, with him. His encouraging words dripped with the sentiment of, "I appreciate your existence."

Marie understood the true nature of inclusion, appreciating another’s existence; when Caleb obliviously ostracized her, she worried that he was apathetic to her existence. Marie valued Buber’s (1958) I-Thou relationship. Marie’s entry also illuminated the procedural element of oblivious ostracism. No triggering event impelled Caleb to exclude Marie, and Caleb did not intentionally ostracize her. Caleb merely became busier and explored relationships with others, leaving little time for Marie. Initially, Marie believed she imagined Caleb’s exclusion. She was hesitant to address the exclusion with Caleb for fear that he would deny it or become angry with her. Additionally, to address the exclusion would make it more real, and the comfort of ambiguity protected Marie from unpleasant certainty or divergence. Finally, Marie saw an opportunity to speak to Caleb about the situation, and their relationship grew stronger.

**Processes of transitional ostracism.** Oblivious ostracism is unintentional exclusion, which particularly threatened participants’ sense of meaningful existence (Williams, 2001) because they felt unimportant to the excluder. Other participants described processes of transitional ostracism, which might or might not be intentional. Transitional ostracism was exclusion that occurred when a relationship was changing, often threatening participants with feelings of replacement and ambiguity about their social bonds. Habituated communication patterns allow us to experience the world as stable and static (Berger & Luckmann, 1967); however, “apparently stable patterns of
social life are dynamically renewed, more like an eddy in a fast-moving stream than rigidly structured like a rock” (Pearce, 1989, p. 24). When our relationships change, we no longer communicatively reproduce reality in the stable patterns to which we grew accustomed. Shifting coherence and coordination resulting from relational transitions can be unsettling (Babrow, 1992; Pearce, 1984). Transitional ostracism invites mystery into our lives as we catch glimpses of the seams of social reality.

Although Marie and Caleb rekindled their friendship by discussing oblivious ostracism, Marie could not cure all her broken connections. Marie also felt unintentionally excluded and forgotten by her friends and family at home because their relationship was changing. In another entry, Marie reflected on feeling left out by her family and individuals at her Tae Kwan Do studio (a place that became a second family for her, as it afforded her refuge from an abusive home). She wrote,

On social media I've been seeing all these updates of events I can't attend and posts from people I don't know, things I would've been involved in had I just chosen to continue attending "normal" high school. And God, that hurts. Because everyone…tried to tell me that I would still find ways of being involved. But today marks five weeks since my arrival and no, I can tell you I'm not at all involved. I am the definition of disconnected, and they don't mean to leave me out but they do. And I will come home to visit this weekend but I will not understand the new inside jokes they've made, and they won't understand the struggle of my classes or how funny my new friends are, and somehow we will all be excluding each other…
And so there I was trying to remember all of the trigonometric identities while my family and friends back home were leaving me out of their lives and I did not want to leave them out of mine but it seemed they wanted no part of it… But this exclusion hurts worse than any other, because it honestly caught me blindsided. I expect my peers to forget about me, to leave me out, to purposely push me away. But you don't expect your family to. And you don't expect your safety nets of people to not think of ways to catch you, but yeah, sometimes that happens, too. I guess those bonds and those safety nets, your sanctuaries and safe havens, those things are all sacrifices. The things that hurt so much to leave. …is it worth the broken connections? Is it worth being a ghost?

Again, Marie found herself forgotten, a ghost to those back home. Small, unintentional ostracism acts, like inside jokes and social media posts, made Marie feel alone and left out from a place she thought she would always belong. Marie and those at home experienced mutual exclusion from mismatched lives; they no longer occupied the same space. In another entry, Marie described it as “nightmares of replacement.” The pain of broken connections was more hurtful to Marie than all the exclusion she faced from her old peers, because these people had been important to her and she thought their inclusion was unconditional.

In Marie’s example, her ostracism was probably unintentional; she was merely drifting away from her loved ones because they no longer shared physical experiences together. However, some transitional ostracism is intentional, though participant reports described intense feelings of ambivalence and ambiguity. Sometimes, we do not know if
we want another individual included in or excluded from our world. We imperfectly and
ambivalently coordinate exile in these cases. Sometimes, we merely seek to temporarily
exclude, like in the case of someone who has wronged us or annoyed us. Maya wrote
about exclusion from one of her best friends. She said,

I feel like I am being excluded by my best friend. Yesterday when she and I met
up she completely ignored me. She even told me to be quiet because she was
studying, but she was really video chatting another friend. I feel as if though I'm
losing her as my best friend.

In another entry, she explained,

She just runs away every time I try to talk to her. Whenever I even come near her
she just says "Uh-Oh" and runs away. I suspect that this has something to do with
me having crushed on her brother. Although I'm now over that crush she still
refuses to talk to me. I ask her today if we were still friend's and she replied “I
don't know I'll have to think about it”. It seems like she'll have a bad week and
then a few good weeks. I just don't understand why she isn't talking to me and
why she is behaving like this. I hope she and I can work things out, after all she is
one of my best friends.

Maya’s friend utilized numerous ostracism acts to exclude because Maya and her friend
were going through a transitional period of their relationship. Her friend punitively
ostracized Maya, but could not decide if it was temporary or permanent exclusion. The
friend did not know if she wanted to remain connected to Maya. The transitional
exclusion destabilized Maya’s social world because she realized this could end a relationship with her best friend.

Haley also experienced transitional ostracism because her friendship group was changing. Several of Haley’s friends recently became more popular, and started to compete for each other’s attention. Haley described their interactions in an interview as “confusing because no one really knew how to treat each other. I think we’re still friends, but a lot has changed.” Haley’s friends particularly engaged in numerous ostracism acts when around their popular peers. Exclusion from two friends, Seri and Emma, was particularly painful because they had been so close in the past. In a journal entry, Haley described her excitement at feeling included again by Emma.

Today I felt especially included. [Seri] just ignored me, but in the meantime I was hanging out with [Emma] and having a blast! Because our last names are in order next to each other we have seats next to each other in 3 classes. I thought that she had changed and was on the "exclusive girls" half of our class but she is still really cool! I am so happy and just because [Seri] was ignoring me doesn't mean that ruins my day. She though it did and I could tell she was ignoring me intentionally but hey, who needs her?

Although Haley believed Seri had purposely been excluding her, she concluded that Emma had just been interested in getting to know her new friends. Although Haley’s friendship group was still in turmoil, she was relieved to know that Emma still wanted to include her.
Processes of situational ostracism. Although sometimes we unintentionally exclude others, or exclude due to transitioning relationships, other times logical forces in the situation seem to require ostracism. Participant experiences revealed the enigmatic aspect of forced exclusion dictated by some external situation. Situational exclusion often required friends to make equally undesirable choices about which friend to exclude. Situations that typically required exclusion often involved space limitations (i.e. only fitting two people to a seat on a school bus), externally imposed group boundaries (i.e. a teacher only allowing three individuals per group), or structurally imposed exclusion (i.e. school elections). For example, Noam frequently wrote about exclusion on class fieldtrips. He said,

I don't really love field trips, but at least they are a change of pace for the school day. Field trips usually are social check ups because of the free-reign we have with which peers we speak with and follow.

Noam explained that fieldtrips required friends to pick just one of their friends above the others because they must follow a “buddy system” (where two people are paired up and tasked with ensuring each other’s safety) and can only sit two per bus seat. This arrangement was troubling for Noam because he and his two best friends, Charlie and Chet, are a group of three. He felt excluded because Charlie and Chet were always “buddies” and always sat together on the bus, thus leading them to bond over video games and form inside jokes. Then, their closeness on the bus led them to forget about Noam during the remainder of the trip. Noam wrote,
In a recent, miserable, one-hour late field trip to spots around the city, I was left behind when everybody else seemed to be always hopping from place to place and forgetting about the people they actually are friends with back at school. Perhaps I am too boring…Our first stop was the zoo where [Charlie] and [Chet] went ahead on their own and ignored me. They seem to live in their own bubble when they are talking with each other.

Charlie and Chet likely did not intend to exclude Noam; rather, the situation required them to exclude someone. Situational ostracism still elicited PI from Noam because he faced the disturbing possibility that Charlie and Chet liked each other more than they liked him. Fortunately for Noam, his fieldtrip experiences were not always negative. After dreading an upcoming fieldtrip to see a play, Noam wrote, “the fieldtrip was actually fun and they didn’t leave me in the middle of no where!...So it may have been my favorite, most included-i-est field trip in a long time.”

Several participants described situational exclusion during lunchtime, due to space limitations. For example, Noam wrote about his desire to begin excluding people from his lunch table. He said, “Our lunch table is getting really really crowded. Somehow, however, we are fitting everyone in, even though I don't exactly want to. I have about 1 foot of space for my lunch bag and food and myself!” For Noam, inclusion was impractical and inconvenient. In an interview, he explained that they would have to begin excluding people soon. Noam felt badly about the impending exclusion, but he understood that the situation demanded they force someone to leave the table. Theo’s lunch table was also overcrowded. He wrote, “Our lunch table is getting sort of crowded.
There are now so many people residing at the table that there are sort of two separate groups that speak.” For several days, Theo and his friends simply accepted an overcrowded table. However, then his peers decided to force several individuals to leave. Unfortunately, Theo was one of those asked to leave. He wrote,

Eleven people is too much for our table…The table's "leader" wants us three [Name of gifted program] kids to leave because we are behaving badly, but believe me, I nearly never behave badly! Yes, I was in a way being included (in the trouble-making group of [name of gifted program] kids) and was excluded from the table at the same time! It is almost like unfair grouping!

Another participant described her temporary solution to an overcrowded lunch table. Ada wrote about her lunch table having only one empty seat for two of her friends. She wrote,

It was a battle for the seat! Who will win? Well, I'm glad to say it was a tie. We just ate lunch with one extra person at our table. VICTORY!!!! Hee-Hee :p!...And the winner is [ADA] FOR LETTING TWO FRIENDS SIT WITH HER AT LUNCH! (Applause)"

Ada decided to let a friend share her seat; therefore, the friendship group excluded no one. Although only Theo experienced situational exclusion, Noam and Ada might need to exclude someone in the future. Ada’s solution was creative, but temporary.

Other participants described forced exclusion during classroom group work. For example, Luke explained in one entry,
We have been playing games recently in French to get ready for finals. There are five boys in the French class including me. And we usually make groups of four... So somebody else gets cut. That has been [Aaron] recently. I almost always work with him when we play two player games, but when there are four players in teams, what am I supposed to do to include him? I just don't know what to do in that situation. I feel bad for him a little.

Luke felt ambivalence. He did not want to exclude, but he saw no creative solution to include Aaron. Therefore, although he intentionally excluded Aaron due to group size limitations, he did so hesitantly and regretfully. In Luke’s example, we observe competing logical forces. Contextual force likely impelled Luke to think I have an obligation to include Aaron because we are friends. The contextual force of self-concept combined with the prefigurative force of the assessment likely created much ambivalence for Luke (i.e. the thought a nice person like me who includes his friends should include Aaron. However, the assignment instructions say I cannot include Aaron). Practical force allowed Luke to rationalize his action (i.e. the thought I excluded Aaron in order to follow the teacher’s rules that we only have groups of four).

Haley wrote about her experience as the excludee because of group size limitations. Her archeology teacher assigned a weeklong project and limited the number of group members to four. Once the teacher assigned the project, Haley said,

I immediately went to [Emma] and asked Emma to be in my group. But, [Lindsey], [Seri], and [Lily] had already asked her! [Emma] said if [Lindsey] wanted to join another group then she’d for sure let me in. But then [Lindsey] didn’t want to
join another group! We were only allowed to have up to four people so I wasn’t
going to get to be a five group with them!...i was really upset, so [Lily] said she
would join another group. But then today were were talking about the project and
[Emma] was like, “oh, you are doing it with us?” apparently [Lily] didn’t
combine with another group and there were still five of us. At that point I was
very upset. I didn’t know what to do. Then, earlier tonight, [Emma] texted and
said she was going to break off and do the project with just me, so everything was
settled now but I was very frustrated.

Haley faced the possibility of divergence because she desired to be included but the
assignment parameters did not allow a group of five. Haley’s frustration was apparent.
However, Emma, Lindsey, and Lily most likely experienced ambivalence, since they all
attempted to reach an inclusive solution. Like Luke, they likely were impelled by
competing and unclear logical forces. The competing logical forces were a source of PI.
Lindsey and Lily’s initial decisions to join other groups demonstrated their desire to
ensure inclusion for all. Emma’s ultimate decision to work in a two-person group with
Haley demonstrated her willingness to attend to Haley’s belonging needs. However,
Haley still experienced anger over the fact that the group initially excluded her.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed micro, meso, and macro level ostracism
processes. Metaphorically, these processes could be visualized as fitting together like
human DNA. Micro-level processes are individual genes; meso-level processes are
segments of genes that work together to form an identifiable section of DNA; and macro-
level processes are the holistic DNA sequences. Micro-level processes are composed of
ostracism acts, or small communication cues and utterances that make us feel left out
from meaningful social interactions. Passive ostracism acts, such as exclusion from
plans, are acts that require little effort from the excluder; often, they result from a failure
to include. Active ostracism acts, such as changing the subject when someone
approaches or walking away from an individual, require effort and intent to exclude.
Finally, aggressive ostracism acts, such as screaming, “go away,” are forceful attempts to
communicate ostracism. Ostracism acts occur in one moment in time, though coherence
of the act might require knowledge about the past and guesses about the future.
Ostracism acts are the building blocks of higher-level ostracism processes. All ostracism
processes utilize myriad combinations of ostracism acts to communicate that someone is
unwelcome in a particular reality.

Meso-level ostracism acts, termed ostracism practices, are a series of ostracism
acts that, over time, have formed a distinct pattern of chronic ostracism. Total ostracism
practices occurred when individuals experienced a series of ostracism acts that
completely excluded them from meaningful social interaction. These participants’
existences were rarely acknowledged. Partial ostracism with additional rejection
practices, or POR practices, occurred when participants sometimes experienced ostracism
and sometimes experienced bullying, teasing, ridicule, and other forms of social
rejection. Finally, partial ostracism with inclusion practices, or POI practices, occurred
when participants sometimes experienced ostracism and sometimes experienced social
inclusion. Often, this occurred among friends. Ostracism practices were an intermediary
between ostracism acts and ostracism episodes; multiple segments of ostracism practices form ostracism episodes.

Macro-level ostracism processes, referred to as ostracism episodes, offer an overarching framework to illuminate the coordination and coherence of ostracism. Ostracism episodes were habituated ostracism routines with identifiable boundaries and rules. They were composed of strands of ostracism practices, which were comprised of ostracism acts. Ostracism episodes formed a continuum between ritualistic ostracism episodes and enigmatic ostracism episodes. Ritualistic ostracism episodes involved reenactments of highly rehearsed patterns with clear logical forces that constructed distinct processes. Processes of exile were those processes that banished an individual from a group and denied her any group participation or interaction. Processes of boundary maintenance delineated in-group and out-group members. Finally, processes of disassociation ended friendships and associations between individuals. Enigmatic ostracism episodes involved high levels of ambiguity and ambivalence because neither excluders nor excludees knew what was occurring and/or what they wanted; coordination and coherence were particularly problematic and conflicting logical forces confounded meaning-making. Processes of oblivious ostracism were enigmatic ostracism episodes whereby excluders unintentionally excluded others. Processes of transitional ostracism included exclusion due to transitions in social relations. Finally, processes of situational ostracism involved instances where friends had to choose whom to include or exclude due to externally created contextual parameters.
The purpose of the current chapter was to answer the question how does ostracism occur? Rather than presenting a singular generalizable model of ostracism processes, I have explained processes for multiple types of ostracism. As individuals interact, we often cannot help but to exclude some and include others. We create our social worlds together, but sometimes we only want to create worlds with certain others. Our choices and our communication patterns are consequential; they sometimes strip us of resources needed for coordination and coherence, and they elicit and dissolve powerful PI. Once we have been written out of someone’s reality, left to coordinate and cohere on our own, we also have a choice of how to respond. We become sole authors, rather than co-authors, in a choose your own adventure book. In Chapter Six, I attend to coping mechanisms that helped participants deal with living lives as forgotten people.
Chapter 6: After the Darkness, the Sun Rises

When I was eleven, I wanted to be left alone. When I was twelve, I wanted to die. When I was thirteen, I wanted to kill a kid...One of the first lines of poetry I remember writing was in response to a world that demanded I hate myself...I want to tell them that all of this is just debris left over when we finally decide to smash all the things we thought we used to be, and if you can’t see anything beautiful about yourself, get a better mirror, look a little closer, stare a little longer, because there’s something inside you that made you keep trying despite everyone who told you to quit. You built a cast around your broken heart and signed it yourself. You signed it, “They were wrong”... We grew up learning to cheer on the underdog because we see ourselves in them. We stem from a root planted in the belief that we are not what we were called. We are not abandoned cars stalled out and sitting empty on some highway, and if in some way we are, don’t worry. We only got out to walk and get gas. We are graduating members from the class of We Made It, not the faded echoes of voices crying out, “Names will never hurt me.” Of course they did. But our lives will only ever always continue to be a balancing act that has less to do with pain and more to do with beauty.

-Shane Koyczan, 2013

In the summer after seventh grade, I received my first meaningful friendship bracelet. I attended a gifted summer camp and, for the first time, found real friends who understood and accepted me. These friends never told me I was “too intense” or to shut up because my ideas gave them a headache; they talked with me about philosophy, astronomy, and mythology until the sun rose. After an adolescence of darkness, the sun did rise for us. We were all lost and desperate, but we found hope in each other. That summer saved my life because I went from hating all of humanity to discovering the meaning of compassion. I realized that we are all stardust, created from the same cosmic fiber, and irrevocably interconnected. My friend Durie, as lost and lonely as I was when camp began, gave me a handmade friendship bracelet on the day we left. It was black, interspersed with brilliant rainbow colors. He told me the “black rainbow” symbolized our lives, that the colors would not appear as bright without the darkness. It was a lesson
I have always cherished. It has also, undoubtedly, affected my interpretation of participant discourses.

Human existence is both joy and sorrow, but we chose how to respond to each. Life goes wrong sometimes. We do not always actualize the worlds we want. Sometimes we actualize only faint echoes and distant shadows of what should have been blazing visions. Canadian spoken word poet Shane Koyczan (2014) reminds us, “We are meant to endure difficulty if for no other reason than it gives us a reference point that allows us to navigate towards something better.” Durie’s friendship, and the love I felt from (and for) so many campers that summer, helped me to envision my life more positively. Koyczan (2014) said, “Realize every dark cloud is a smoke screen meant to blind us from the truth. And the truth is, whether we see them or not, the sun and moon are still there and always there is light.” Exclusion can blind adolescents to this light. Durie’s friendship bracelet was my light, my reminder that there is life after exile. We do not merely shrivel up and die when peers write us out of their world. Somehow, we continue living. In this chapter, I explore participants’ responses to ostracism and social rejection. I propose a three-dimensional framework to understand participants’ reactions: behavioral and cognitive responses, acceptance of or resistance to exclusion messages, and prosocial and antisocial responses. Then, I discuss positive ways in which exclusion compelled participants to grow. More than anything, I want to stress that good can come from exclusion. I turned my exclusion into something positive, and many of my participants have done the same.
**Ostracism Responses**

Extensive tomes are written about the subject of coping with varieties of exclusion. According to Anzaldua (2007), rejected individuals either are beaten down and metaphorically die, or become more alive than ever; we break or we grow stronger and rebel. Orbe (1998) suggested marginalized individuals respond to their rejection by assimilating into dominant culture, separating from dominant culture, or accommodating both the dominant culture and their co-culture. For Goffman (1963), stigmatized individuals respond by hiding part of themselves and passing for normal, cognitively restructuring their perceptions, experiencing negative psychological reactions, or attempting physical solutions. Swaitek and colleagues have identified several coping responses of gifted adolescents to the stigma of giftedness (Cross & Swaitek, 2009; Swaitek, 1998; Swaitek & Dorr, 1998), including hiding giftedness, prizing conformity and mimicking non-gifted peers, restructuring cognitive beliefs about the world, and changing behavior to make friends. Blanz et al. (1998) and Mummendey et al. (1999) described responses to rejection from belonging to low-status social groups. Countless other books and articles detail coping responses to rejection.

Although Anzaldua and Orbe wrote about reactions to cultural marginalization, and Goffman, Swaitek, Blanz, Mummendey, and their colleagues wrote about reactions to stigma and perceived low social status, at the interpersonal level these phenomena are similar enough to merit comparison to ostracism reactions. In Chapter Four, I discussed ostracism’s connection to marginalization and stigma. Often, peers ostracize culturally marginalized individuals or those with stigmatized identities; conversely, ostracism can
also create marginalization and stigma. Hutchinson (1999) argued that adolescents could experience stereotypical marginalization or psycho-social marginalization. Stereotypical marginalization, Anzaldua and Orbe’s foci, emerges from “race, class, gender, and other predetermined differences” (Hutchinson, 1999, p. 36).

However, psycho-social marginalization “results when we are in relationships with others that require us to respond to them in a more personal way, yet we (consciously or not) marginalize them by not paying attention to the meaning that they are attempting to make” (Hutchinson, 1999, p. 41). According to Hutchinson, psycho-social marginalization impacts personal identity and meaning making by denying our existence and imposing meanings (of a reality without us) on our lives. It is the isolating disconfirmation (Laing, 1961) of another, which is particularly pervasive in educational systems. The exclusion I have largely described in this dissertation is akin to psycho-social marginalization. Emerging from participant experiences, PI theory, and literature on responses to exclusion; in the following sections, I present three dimensions for understanding participant responses to ostracism. These include a cognitive and behavioral dimension, an acceptance of and resistance to exclusion dimension, and a prosocial and antisocial dimension (see Figure 2). Finally, I will end the chapter by describing some particularly positive and uplifting responses to ostracism.

**Cognitive and behavioral responses.** Individuals excluded from others’ realities develop survival tactics as they struggle to resolve integrative difficulties arising from ostracism. According to PI theory, we can accept or struggle against divergence, ambiguity, and ambivalence; our orientations are malleable. Babrow (1992) discussed
piecemeal and holistic coping responses that we convey in messages when coping with divergence. Piecemeal responses involve changing either probability or value judgments. According to Babrow, “messages focused on probability or value may either encourage us to accept or to change our estimates (p. 110). For Babrow, we treat “divergence holistically by speaking to the tensions and difficulties engendered by the divergence” (p. 110). These messages may encourage acceptance of divergence or transformation of viewpoints. Participant responses to PI are examples of piecemeal and holistic coping, though they do not only apply to divergence. Piecemeal and holistic coping are relevant to all forms of PI, not merely divergence; additionally, these responses arise both in messages we convey to others and those we convey to ourselves. The first set of responses, cognitive and behavioral responses, represent piecemeal coping responses.

Figure 2. Three-dimensional representation of possible ostracism responses.
Altering probabilities. First, we can alter our cognitive or subjective probability. One reaction to PI is to engage in hopefulness or wishful thinking (Babrow, 2007; Gill & Babrow, 2007; Matthias & Babrow, 2007). The difference between these two coping strategies is a matter of connotation. PI theorists have tended to associate hope with a positive connotation. For instance, Gill and Babrow (2007) often discuss hope with concepts like empowerment and agency; they even title a section heading, “hope, a positive form of uncertainty” (p. 146). Conversely, wishful thinking is often discussed with a negative connotation. For example, Babrow (1992) sometimes dismisses wishful thinking with statements like, humans have a “tendency to make wishful adjustments of probability estimates…these simple responses may not ease some predicaments” (p. 98) and some “divergence can be resolved simply by wishful messages” (p. 104). The word choice of “simply” diminishes the credibility of wishfulness. The term wishful thinking has tended to take on a negative or less serious connotation than hopefulness. The similarity between wishful thinking and hopefulness seems to be that they both involve an individual denying some likely sorrow or clinging to some unlikely joy; the difference between the two, then, seems to be whether the writer believes the individual’s wish/hope is realistic or understandable (i.e. they are hopeful) or not (i.e. they are wishful). In the following section, I tend to utilize the terms interchangeably; although I try not to pass judgment on how likely or unlikely it is for participants’ desires to come true, my language might betray me.

Tris exhibited wishful thinking during an interview. She described the ostracism she experienced on swim team the previous school year, and then she said, “I think things
will be different on swim team this year. I think this year the girls will accept me, now that they know me a little better.” In her first journal entry, Tris wrote, “let’s just hope next week when swim team starts they won’t ignore me.” Tris’ positive attitude allowed her to find excitement in her return to swim team, despite the possibility that she will continue to experience exclusion. Without her hope that things will change, she might have given up on swimming. Unfortunately for Tris, as has been evident in previous chapters, her swim teammates continued to exclude her.

Skyler’s good friend, Charlie, recently found a new group of friends that did not approve of Skyler; therefore, he excluded Skyler from his life and the group. She described her response.

The hardest thing about a situation like this is hope…hope he fights for me. I know he won’t, but I hope…if I could just hate [Charlie], I know I could stop caring about him coming back. But I cant seem to find reason to hate him. So I hope, instead.

Although Skyler hoped Charlie would change his mind, her reaction elicited even more ambivalence as she struggled to let go of his memory. We can interpret this struggle as the cost of sustaining hope/being wishful. Skyler’s hope eased the pain of divergence, but it also sustained the value of her relationship with Charlie at a level high enough to chain into ambivalence if the relationship remains elusive. In other words, Skyler hopes/wishes for Charlie’s return, keeping probability higher than perhaps it might otherwise be “objectively” judged. Doing so keeps the relational value high. Therefore, as it becomes clearer that Charlie is not likely returning, Pheonix then has to cope with
the high value she had placed on his return, sustained by hope/wish, as she
simultaneously adds up costs and ambivalence ensues (or she moves to lower and lower
probabilities and divergence increases, or both, perhaps seesawing back and forth).

Some participants interpreted small acts of inclusion as proof that acceptance
might become more likely. Every small interaction between Tris and her teammates
filled her with hope of eventual acceptance. For example, in one journal entry Tris wrote,
“Friday [Lindsey] actually said bye to me!” Another participant discussed his happiness
with an unexpected moment of peer acceptance. Albert wrote, “Today I felt included in
science class by my group. They let me give ideas which groups I am in don’t normally
do!” In another entry, Albert said, “I played football today and felt included because
someone threw a ball to me once.” Albert and Tris responded to their chronic
experiences of ostracism by seeing the promise of every inclusive act from peers.
Rebecca wrote several extensive entries about her assessment that popularity was within
reach. In one class, Rebecca was assigned to a group project with a popular girl. She
wrote, “So I am now in a position to be frequently interacting with a popular girl,
meaning that I could possibly become one of them!” During the weeklong group project,
the popular girl ignored Rebecca and treated the group members badly. In an interview,
Rebecca said, “I realized that I didn't want to be friends with the jerks known as ‘The It
Girls’ if they behaved like [Leslie]. I'm glad I came to this conclusion.” Ultimately,
although Rebecca initially altered her probability assessment to a more hopeful level, she
ended up altering her evaluative assessment in a way that likely decreased divergence.
**Altering evaluations.** A second possible cognitive response to exclusion is to alter our evaluative assessments. For example, we could judge a likely scenario less negatively. Xavier stopped desiring peer acceptance, and thus, no longer viewed exclusion negatively. He said in an interview, “I no longer want to be liked at school because most people are painfully, stereotypically, normal. My life has been consumed by the desire to learn. I don’t need anyone for that.” Xavier altered his evaluative orientation by revalencing social acceptance as negative and valuing learning. Therefore, the likelihood that his peers would reject him no longer bothered Xavier. Instead, he read a book. Similarly, Skyler emphasized in an interview, “I don’t want any normal person my age to ever accept me.” Like Xavier, she revalenced inclusion and exclusion and actually wanted exclusion from same-age peers. Asher said in an interview that he stopped hoping for inclusion, stating instead, “I don’t really care [about being excluded] as long as I have someone to eat lunch with. That’s all I really want.” Asher’s resignation about exclusion allowed him to desire less from his peers. Marie turned to music to alter her desires. She wrote that the Lykke Li Song, Everybody but Me, is a song I often used to feel better about my social situation, as I shifted my view of the song (after close analysis of the lyrics) to make it mean that Everybody doesn’t have to include Me, similar to the Just Say No campaign about drug use, but personalized. For Marie, the song empowered her to alter her evaluative orientation towards inclusion. **Altering behavior.** Finally, a third response to integrative difficulties arising through ostracism is altering our sense of objective probability. In other words, we can
attempt to modify our behavior or circumstances, and thus (we believe) changing probabilities. For example, Rebecca deeply desired popularity and actively attempted to alter her circumstances to seek acceptance. In one journal entry, she wrote about excluding her two best friends so that their low social status would not reflect negatively on her when the popular girls walked by during lunch. She wrote,

They [the popular girls] were walking in my direction. Now, I was at a lunch table with a girl who reads too much and a girl who is too tall, and they’re my best friends, but I couldn’t be seen with them when “those girls” walked by. So, I quickly excused myself.

Rebecca strategically disassociated with her friends in the hopes that the popular girls would judge her more favorably. In an interview, Meg described changing her behavior and clothing to become more accepted. She said,

I used to bring books with me to recess and lunch and dress, well, kind of geeky. I don’t blame anyone for thinking I was weird. Now I dress much nicer and actually talk with people during lunch and breaks.

Meg believed her strategy worked, because she now has many friends and is quite social. Both Rebecca and Meg utilized behavioral changes to alter their physical reality in order to increase the probability of acceptance. In Meg’s case, she achieved her goal; in Rebecca’s case, acceptance into the popular crowd still appeared unlikely (though, she continued to hope).
While Meg and Rebecca altered their behavior around school peers, other participants actively sought out new peers. Maya’s experiences with social exclusion have prompted her to keep in touch with friends from summer camp. She wrote,

I made so many friends at camp last summer and I know a lot of people don’t keep in touch with camp friends, but I do. I mean I HAVE to because they are the only ones that like me (and I WANT to because I LOVE them). I will talk to them online (sometimes even during school) when I feel alone.

Maya’s response to exclusion was both behavioral and cognitive. She modified her behavior by seeking out her camp friends, and she cognitively changed her group belonging status. She now sought acceptance from camp friends rather than school peers because she viewed herself as part of the camper group. Williams (2001) suggested when ostracism threatens our need for belonging we find a new group with whom to belong. Several other participants sought out friends online to fulfill their needs for belonging. Juan wrote, “In those years that I was rejected socially I played online games...There was a time in which I played every day.” Juan enjoyed the sense of belonging and inclusion derived from his online acceptance in the game. Bradly was a member of several online discussion forums because “I know I won’t be beaten up there, and people might actually communicate with me.” Juan and Bradly found social support online when none existed in face-to-face interactions.

Social identity scholars have suggested we can understand reactions to social exclusion as behavioral versus cognitive responses and individual versus collective responses (Blanz et al., 1998; Mummendey et al., 1999). For instance, Blanz and
colleagues described individual mobility as an individualistic behavioral response whereby one attempts to exit a low-status group and seek acceptance in a high-status group. The above example of Rebecca attempting to leave her two best friends and gain acceptance into the popular crowd exemplified this response. Individualization is an individualistic cognitive response whereby one shifts from social to personal self-categorizations so that their low-status is no longer mentally troubling. Xavier’s above scenario of no longer valuing social acceptance (an aspect of his social identity) and, instead, valuing his ability to learn (an aspect of his personal identity) exemplified this response.

Social competition is a collectivist behavioral response whereby an entire group attempts to increase its social status. For example, Ginny explained that most schools refer to a band member as “band-geek,” and peers consider them losers. However, at her school, band parties have become so well known that being in band means you are “band-chic,” and peers consider band members fun and zany. Finally, creating a new comparison group is a cognitive collectivist response whereby a group’s concern over its low-status is abated by the comfort that they have a higher status than some other group. For instance, Steve said in an interview, “the seven gifted kids in my grade are at least happy that we aren’t the learning disabled kids, they have it rough with everyone saying they are retarded.” Although a few participants discussed collectivist coping strategies, the vast majority of participant responses were individualistic, not collectivist. As such, I have not included individualist and collectivist responses as a dimension for understanding participant reactions to ostracism. Hutchinson (1999) suggested psycho-
social marginalization is difficult because “there is no group or culture to which one may
turn to find space away from the oppressor’s gaze” (p. 53). Essentially, many
participants did not feel they were ostracized because of their group membership, because
often “giftedness” was viewed as an individual identity rather than a group identity.
Thus, they had no collective recourse.

Acceptance and resistance responses. A second dimension useful in
understanding participant responses to ostracism was their acceptance of or resistance to
their exclusion. While extensive literature on coping with exclusion exists, ostracism
scholars traditionally present a narrow description of responses to ostracism often
assuming individuals passively accept their rejection. Williams (2001) classified
responses in three temporal stages. Immediately, excludees experience hurt feelings and
physiological arousal. In the short-term, individuals are driven to replenish lost needs; in
other words, they seek to fulfill their needs for belonging, meaningful existence, self-
esteem, and control. Finally, long-term responses include despair and feelings of
helplessness. According to Williams, “lengthy exposure to continuous or repeated
episodes of ostracism will lead to detrimental psychological and health-related
consequences…the target will succumb to the lost needs and internalize the meaning that
their loss represents” (p. 64).

Many participants certainly experienced psychological pain during ostracism. For
example, during an interview, Ada described the pain of her exclusion saying, “on a scale
of 1 to 10, it would be an 82!” Simone wrote about a memory of ostracism so intense
that it was burned into her mind. She wrote, “I remember the time so clearly, as if it were

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yesterday. I even remember what the weather was like.” Skyler wrote, “Sometimes I feel excluded from things I don’t even want to attend. So why do I care?” She, then, explained that her friend Gary unfriended her on Facebook after she dropped out of school; Gary also invited everyone but Skyler to a performance of Skyler’s favorite band. Skyler wrote,

I DON’T EVEN WANT TO SEE A CONCERT WITH [GARY]. So why do I care that I was excluded from that group? Even if they were to ask, I probably would have declined and just went by myself. So them not asking skips that step of me saying no. So I shouldn’t care that I wasn’t invited. But I do. Because I suck and can’t control my emotions.

Despite Skyler’s assertion that she cared little about the concert, the pain of her exclusion disturbed her. She so personalizes the cause of her exclusion—she is flawed, not Gary, and not the world that is made uncomfortable by her difference.

Although exclusion was hurtful for participants, pain and suffering was not their only response. For Williams (2001), responses to exclusion are mechanical, a function of experiencing psychological pain and desiring to alleviate that pain; furthermore, excludees have no choice but to internalize their experiences. Williams treats excludees as passive, completely powerless to end their ostracism, and exhibiting only negative reactions to their exclusion. Relationally, however, we are not passive or powerless. Participants’ responses to ostracism were much more robust and creative than Williams’ description suggests. We control whether we accept or reject our exile.
Shades of acceptance. Participants exhibited many shades of acceptance and rejection of their exclusion. At this point, participants shifted from piecemeal to holistic coping with PI. The aforementioned cognitive and behavioral responses tended to focus on either changing probability or evaluation. Here, however, participants now begin to cope with probability and value as they come together to form painful constellations of PI. For instance, Babrow (1992) suggested holistic messages might encourage us to accept divergence or transform our interpretations of a situation. Individuals might even ascribe abstract traits to themselves, such as “dreamer” or “optimist” (p. 111) to explain their divergence of expectations and reality. As participants in the current study struggled with whether or not to accept or resist their exclusion, they often engaged in holistic coping.

Some participants internalized ostracism and believed they possessed some shortcoming, others resigned themselves to their exclusion, and still others engaged in repetitive cycles of rejection. Hutchinson (1999) suggested that one response to psychosocial marginalization is the internalization of exclusion messages. For Williams (2001), this seems the only viable response. Several participants did internalize their rejection. For instance, Charles said in an interview, “sometimes when people just ignore me, I think there is something wrong with me and that is why they don’t like me.” Charles believed others’ ostracism reflected his own shortcomings, rather than his peers’ shortcomings. Maya wrote about her internalization of exclusion in PE class. She said, I'm not the most "fit" person when it comes to running… so I sort of just try not to touch the ball and ruin it for my team during these games. This sort of makes me
feel excluded a lot of the time, as I'm not much use in very many plays except as maybe a decoy, but there really isn't anything I can do to prevent it. I just have to live with it.

Maya has internalized her rejection in PE so much that her peers no longer need to explicitly reject her because she polices herself. Bradly wrote, “I'm such a little bitch with no social skills, of course they hate me.” Bradly often wrote self-deprecating statements perhaps because peers had bullied and ostracized him severely as a young child. He often struggled to figure out what was “wrong” with him that made others seemingly despise his existence. Charles, Maya, and Bradly reacted to their chronic exclusion by assuming something was wrong with themselves.

Charles, Maya, and Bradly coped with their exclusion by accepting themselves as damaged or inferior, and thereby accepting pain as the nature of their reality. It seemingly has not occurred to them that something is wrong with a social system that judges children by their ability to play sports, that popularity is not the only viable reality, or that sometimes peers are mean or wrong; rather, these participants assume the fault is within them. They accept their reality as it is presented to them, and this reality brings persistent pain in which, perhaps, PI cannot be cured. No course of action, it seems, is adequate to release them from their PI; they are never fully free of the problem, and yet are never free to look away, either. Essentially, they are not coping with PI; they are not trying to alter their evaluations or judgments. Their PI persists, as if part of their DNA. Exclusion has damaged them in ways that remain with them and might never be resolved. Perhaps acceptance of this undesirable reality is less painful than the struggle to alter
evaluative or probabilistic judgments. Perhaps, they find a measure of peace in no longer fighting to reconcile painful PI.

Other participants resigned themselves to exclusion by accepting it as a fact of their lives. In a footnote, Babrow (2001) mentioned that the phrase “coping with” is unsatisfying because it sounds as if it excludes the acceptance of something. He argued that we often cope by either “accept[ing] matters as they are or render[ing] them meaningful in new ways” (p. 564). Resignation is the acceptance of things as they are, and sometimes the only solution that allows us to live in peace. Juan wrote in one entry that at some point,

I had to stop fighting, stop being angry, and just make peace with my situation and my peers. They excluded me, but my anger did not change them, it only hurt me…I do not suffer from ostracism anymore, or rather I have –sort of—grown accustomed to it.

Wayne described his resignation with ostracism. He said in an interview, “in 6th grade the exclusion really hurt. But by 8th grade I just stopped caring. I decided if they were going to be like this they didn’t deserve to be my friend. Also, books were my friend.” For both Juan and Wayne, resignation was an imperfect means of living with apparently irreducible PI. They both determined resistance was futile, and so they accepted their exclusion instead. Their responses were holistic coping responses because they attended to both the probability and evaluation of their situations. Although neither participant fully accepted the negative value of their ostracism, they stopped allowing their evaluation to affect them as much. They recognized the likelihood of continued
exclusion and the undesirable aspect of exclusion, but uneasily accepted their fate and no longer struggled to change events. For Juan, particularly, this acceptance allowed his mind to find peace and calm.

Several participants described becoming habituated to their rejection. Marie said in an interview, “Honestly, I just got used to it [exclusion]. Both freshman and sophomore year I had only two good friends and everyone else just sort of excluded me.” Similarly, Maya said, “I'm not sure if I'm excluding myself or if other kids are doing it to me… I'm a loner, but it’s ok because I'm used to it.” Asher explained possible responses to ostracism in a journal entry. He wrote,

You either learn not to care, care only about school, try and fail to conform, or just want to be alone. I have seen most of these and really can't do much so I learned not to care…I'm a slightly distant high schooler with only a handful of friends. I still view myself lucky, compared to others.

Marie, Maya, and Asher all described themselves as having learned to accept their social status and peer exclusion. To some extent, peers wore down these participants. Their desire to fight faded and the peace of resignation called to them.

Finally, some participants accepted their exclusion by engaging in cycles of ostracism. According to Rosen et al. (2009), chronic rejection can create a victim schema whereby adolescents come to except peer victimization and even act the part of a victim. Pearce (1989) described undesirable repetitive patterns (URPs) that take place within contextual and implicative force. We feel we have no choice but to fulfill the URP, despite the undesirable reality our actions then actualize. Noam’s experience during a
class field trip exemplified a mini-cycle of ostracism as Noam engaged in a UPR. The field trip began when Noam’s two best friends sat together on the bus, leaving Noam to find another seat alone. Noam ended up sitting by a boy who refused to acknowledge his existence and “blankly stared at me when I spoke.” He tried to gain his friend’s attention, but “they couldn’t hear me over the loud screams of everyone.” Once his class arrived at their destination, Noam’s two friends had formed several inside jokes while they played a game on the bus, making Noam feel more excluded. His friends continued to “forget about” him during the remainder of the trip. Finally, on the bus ride home, Noam’s friends, again, sat together on the bus seat and Noam, again, had to sit with a stranger. This time, “the guy I sat next to actually tried to talk to me, but I told him to stop talking. I did it because I was angry about the day.” Noam’s exclusion from his two friends worsened his mood, making him prefer not to engage in social interaction with others at the end of the field trip.

Although Noam’s cycle of exclusion occurred in one day, several participants described cycles of ostracism that formed over years of chronic exclusion. Juan wrote about the steps involved in his cycles of exclusion. He explained that he experienced cycles of depression and self-exclusion related to a larger sense of existential exclusion. He said,

Truth be told, I have been depressed and not wanting to write anything lately…My depression comes in cycles. 1. It gets better when I spend time alone and reset my brain intensity, 2. but then I feel lonely and sad and decide I need
people around, 3. I then seek out social interaction (until I realize nobody fits my needs or makes me feel accepted). So I get frustrated and sad again. 4. Repeat.

For Juan, his lack of acceptance from peers makes him introspective and antisocial. Xavier experienced exclusion for so long that he was suspicious of those who acted friendly towards him. He wrote,

> Often I ignore people who are act strangely friendly toward me…I believe that they are trying to make me irritated so they can derive some sick pleasure from my reactions, so I ignore them because I don't know what else to do.

Xavier explained in an interview that he does not trust peers who are nice to him or try to engage him in social interactions. He said, “I know my behavior is a barrier to making friends, but I also know my behavior keeps me safe. I can’t be rejected if I don’t engage. Also, I really think they are tricking me when they act friendly.” Xavier’s experience has made him wary of others; therefore, he preemptively excludes himself.

The most dramatic cycle of exclusion described by participants occurred for Bradly. He explained in an interview that his intense bullying and ostracism in elementary and middle school left him untrusting of others. He often attempted to exclude himself. He wrote,

> I never actually talk to anyone. I don't have the desire that anyone else has to really socialize. I mean I do but not in the immediate moment. I'm a interesting person, I just have nobody to vent to sometimes and it gets frustrating. I can vent to myself though with my phone and not many other people can do that. But uh, I'm sure all of this is normal.
Bradly’s mother explained in an interview that he was once social, outgoing, and happy. However, “years of rejection broke him,” she lamented. Bradly did not even like basic human contact. In another entry, he wrote, “In bio we had this group thingy where we held hands to demonstrate DNA sequences and it was horrible I didn't like touching other people's hands.” During Bradly’s first week of school, he wrote about declining a girl’s invitation at lunch.

That girl who's nice and popular was like “yo are you lonely?” across the room and I didn't say anything back because I didn't wanna yell back “YEAH I AM THANKS” and there were kids around her table so I didn't wanna come over. And she's probably too popular for me to fb [Facebook] message her lol [laugh out loud].

Bradly was so used to exclusion, that he did not recognize the girl’s invitation to join her and her friends for lunch. Instead, he remained alone at his lunch table. In an interview, he explained that he did not know how to respond to her inquiry and it did not occur to him until much later that she might have been extending an invitation. After that day, she no longer engaged him. In another entry, he explained why he often preemptively rejected peer interactions.

Like when I actually wanna do something, I think of all the stuff that could go wrong and they outweigh me actually doing anything…Nobody directly speaks to me and in the past I've gotten yelled at for inserting myself in other people's conversations.
Bradly’s response to ostracism has been a learned pattern of behavior that ensures his continued exclusion.

**Shades of resistance.** Not all participants accepted their rejection. Sometimes they fought and struggled against it. For Babrow (1992), resistance is our struggle against an undesirable world. For Hutchinson (1999), resistance is a reclamation of autonomy. Resistance allows us to define ourselves on our own terms, strengthen our will by reinforcing self-discipline, find inner satisfaction, and create our own meanings. Hutchinson argued, too “often those who dominate misjudge the resistance response” (p. 50); in other words, those in power forget that resistance is also powerful. Resistance gives us a space to try out new meanings and identities (Scott, 1990) and reject the actions of those who try to dominate us. However, Mumby (2005) cautioned against simplistic dualistic approaches to the study of resistance and control, emphasizing that they unfold discursively as “social actors attempt to ‘fix’ meanings in ways that resist and/or reproduce extant power relations” (p. 24). Ashcraft reminded us that resistance is a power play and argued, “even overt consent might constitute a form of resistance” (p. 69). Although ostracism might be an attempt to rob another of autonomy and authorship, by no means must we be passive during the encounter.

Many participants reacted to ostracism through some form of resistance. Several of the behavioral and cognitive coping strategies discussed above were acts of resistance. For instance, altering our desire for acceptance from a peer determined to ignore us is a form of resisting their influence over us. Participants’ resistance acts were passive, active, and even aggressive. Sometimes they were subtle and nuanced, other times they
were obvious and direct. For now, I will present only a small sample of resistance acts; I will discuss additional descriptions of resistance in the next major section of this chapter when I describe some positive outcomes of ostracism.

One form of resistance was to ignore the exclusion message. Several participants’ parents explained that they tell their children to ignore their peer’s cruelty. Rebecca’s mother, Hannah, said, “we tell her when someone is being mean to just ignore them. Kids are mean, but if you like yourself they can’t really hurt you.” Similarly, Maya’s mother, Jill, said,

She [Maya] comes home crying every day. She curls up in my lap and just cries and asks me why the other kids ignore her and treat her so badly. It just kills me. I tell her to ignore them back. I tell her nothing they do can hurt her.

Hannah and Jill, respectively, encouraged Rebecca and Maya to passively resist their exclusion. Other participants demonstrated ignoring their excluders. For instance, Ayaan wrote,

At lunch, I sat at a table that had nobody there and a person sat next to me and after a while, their friends started coming in. But I soon realized they did not want me to be there. They said "why don't you go to that table or that one" but I just sat there and ignored it. I ate my lunch and I didn't worry about it.

Ayaan recognized her peers’ exclusion message, but she resisted their attempt to make her leave the table. Xavier explained, “you’ve just gotta ignore them. If you don’t, it will wear you down. Besides, they are stupid and the pain of exclusion will pass.” Xavier also ignored his peers as an act of resistance; additionally, he resisted the pain of
exclusion by reminding himself that he did not want to be included by “stupid” people and the pain was only temporary.

Other participants were more active in their resistance efforts. Jonas explained that, although the popular students ostracize him and his gifted peers, he continued to attempt to carve a place for himself in school. He wrote,

For the past three years I have run for student council. I know I’ll lose, but I keep on running. I do it because we need representation from people like me and my friends. There are a lot of us that feel ostracized and we need to take control. I like to think that the fact that I am running is just a reminder that I exist and people like me exist. Even if I don’t win, it’s a statement.

Jonas’ appearance on the ballot every year is an act of resistance against groups traditionally in power at his school. Xavier said in an interview that he recognized much ostracism at his school was directed at “weird” or “strange” individuals as “an implicit message that we should change. But I won’t change myself to make vapid, superficial people happy. They are the ones that should change.” Xavier’s refusal to submit to his classmate’s rejection was his act of resistance. Both Xavier and Jonas recognized their own inherent dignity and refused to allow others to take it. Hutchinson (1999) said it is possible to have personal dignity when relational dignity (i.e. the worth others ascribe you) is damaged by reminding ourselves we are worthy and have inherent value as human beings.

Other participants directly engaged their excluders with overt acts of resistance. For instance, Liam described a boy in his class who “really likes to use the saying
‘Nobody cares about that’ to which I respond, ‘Well, I’m somebody and I care.’” Liam’s classmate used his phrase to disconfirm others’ rights to have an opinion. However, Liam refused to passively accept this disconfirmation and challenged his peer. Haley described her attempt to regain control after a group of her friends excluded her for several days. Recall from Chapter Five, Haley’s friends are attempting to become popular, and therefore, they have been excluding Haley. However, she continued to fight for a friendship with Emma, and she actively resisted Stacey’s attempts at ostracism.

Today was probably the best friday the thirteenth in history, our Social Studies teacher assigned a project and he let us pick our own partners/groups for the project. I asked [Emma] first and she right off the bat said "Yeah, sure!" That made me feel really good today, and [Stacey] was being really mean and controlling so I just went on with my life using my controller not letting [Stacey] take it.

Haley resisted Stacey’s attempt to control Haley’s relationships or write her out of existence. Haley added, “I want to confront [Stacey] about her behavior, but I know she’ll just deny it. That’s the thing, she isn’t doing anything obvious, but I KNOW she is excluding me!” Ostracism’s ambiguity makes direct displays of resistance difficult because, often, ostracism is a subtle form of control. Therefore, overt reactions against ostracism can seem aggressive and, therefore, inappropriate.

**Antisocial and prosocial responses.** A third dimension of participants’ responses to ostracism was the antisocial or prosocial outcome of their reaction. Antisocial responses created a barrier between participants and others, whereas prosocial
responses brought participants closer to others. For example, Williams and Gerber (2005) found that individuals ostracized from a group would either tend to change their behavior to reconnect with the group or retaliate against the group. The former exemplifies a prosocial response, and the later an antisocial response. These responses are not, necessarily, mutually exclusive. For example, Skyler disliked associating with “normal” same-age peers, but she had a very close group of “nonconformist” friends. Many of Skyler’s responses to ostracism involved her acting rudely towards “normal” people and seeking refuge with like others. Therefore, her interactions had both prosocial and antisocial elements. Her ostracism experiences encouraged her to reinforce her out-group status around some peers and reinforce her in-group status around others.

**Severing bonds.** Nonetheless, several participants acted in ways that were, generally, antisocial. In other words, they engaged in behaviors that tended to break social bonds with the majority of individuals during daily interactions. Researchers have found that chronic ostracism can lead some to devalue peer relationships (Leary, 2001) and engage in less prosocial behavior, like an unwillingness to give to charity or help others (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Coyne et al., 2011).

For example, as I have peripherally discussed, several participants developed a generic distrust of others. Skyler, Xavier, and Bradly were three participants that candidly acknowledged their distrust (and dislike) of others. In an interview, Xavier explained,

This [social rejection] was actually a problem in 6th grade –a lot of people didn’t like me. They were rude to me, ostracized me, and some of them bullied me. It
was quite hurtful, it’s the reason I skipped 7th grade and went back to 8th grade. It made me not trustful of other people.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed Xavier’s distrust of those attempting to act friendly towards him. His reaction to chronic exclusion has been to sever social bonds and build a metaphoric wall to keep others out of his life. Similarly, several times Skyler described her distrust of the majority of people. In an interview, she said, “when I see someone that looks normal I get a bad feeling, I just don’t trust them. I know they won’t accept me because their minds are so limited.” Skyler’s experience has taught her that her beliefs and lifestyle are so deviant that she has no hope of acceptance from mainstream society. Bradly explained in an interview that, “by default, I expect people to bully me…I try not to make eye contact with anybody…I pretty much just try to mind my business.” His expectations were so extreme that he often refused to even look at others.

Some participants reacted by feeling dislike or hatred towards peers. I have shared several examples throughout my analysis that illustrate some participants feel a general malice towards particular peers. Claudia described her dislike of peers. She said in an interview,

Because I was rejected so much, I became bitter about things. I got bullied a lot in school, so I was bitter and angry and didn’t like anyone. When I began homeschooling, I was just bitter about people.

Amelia admitted, “I hated people for a long time because of how I was treated. Now that I am at a new school and people accept me, I am getting over some of that hatred.” Both Claudia and Amelia developed a negative attitude towards their peers in response to their
own mistreatment. As a result of the current study, Claudia decided to attend therapy to overcome some of her antisocial responses to peer rejection. Liam voiced a concern about the hatred that sometimes accompanies social rejection. He said in an interview, This will probably get me into trouble, and please know that I wouldn’t ever do something like this, but I can understand the perspective of school shooters sometimes. Some of them, I think, they just can’t handle the way they were treated. If people were kinder I think they might never have become shooters.

According to a case study analysis by Leary et al. (2003), thirteen out of fifteen school shooters from 1995 to 2001 experienced chronic rejection in the form of ostracism or bullying. However, Langman (2009) warned that although ostracism and social rejection might play a part in school shooters motivations, their psychological reasons for violence are more complex than merely being prolonged victims of exclusion. Indeed, the ease with which I found participants for this study suggests that (a) ostracism is not rare, which, combined with the exceptional violent response, in turn suggests that (b) ostracism in itself is not sufficient to cause violent behavior.

Of all my participants, Bradly’s antisocial reactions and hatred of others was the most extreme. In one journal entry, he wrote,

I'm not the only one who feels lonely probably. I feel better about myself if I see other people who are worse than me. I feel sick looking at other kids' Facebooks, and laugh when other people I know have problems. This probably hurts to read to you but for now I think it's true.
Bradly was aware of his antisocial tendencies and his propensity to distance himself from others. He was also aware that his response to exclusion was potentially unhealthy, as evidenced by his comment that I might not appreciate his attitude towards others. In another entry, his ambivalence about his attitude towards others and his growing frustration over his ability to relate to others was apparent. He wrote,

Why think when you talk to other people? Treat them like property and they'll crumble under you. But that's disrespectful. Do you want to be a disrespectful teenager? Not yet. I bet other kids are just as socially aware as I am but they don't take the time to think stuff out, they'd rather do impulsive stuff. I can do that too and there is a time for that. The key is to know what to do, when. And my antisocial little teenager brain can't comprehend when to go out of my comfort zone.

In an interview following this entry, Bradly explained that he had a dual desire to treat people badly and to be respectful. He also simultaneously felt “better than” his peers (as a defense mechanism) and could not understand why his “obvious superiority” did not make them like him. He said he easily envisioned himself walking down a path where he is disrespectful and rude to everyone. However, he also hoped that he could change his attitude. He spent two weeks during the study grounded because he made a series of disrespectful comments about his peers to his mother.

Other participants became withdrawn after years of chronic ostracism. Wood et al. (2002) found that children as early as preschool sometimes responded to peer rejection
by becoming socially withdrawn. Robert’s mother, Sandy, reflected on the effect the stigma of giftedness and the ensuing peer ostracism had on her son. She said,

   My own gifted son, born bright, precocious, fun-loving and very talkative, is now a shadow of his former self. He is hardly the happy, creative and clever child he was before he entered school…his creativity, enthusiasm, love-of-learning, and confidence have been almost snuffed out by aggressive displays of jealousy, ignorance, and indifference –by society, but mostly by some in our educational system.

For Sandy, Robert’s transformation was a complicated synthesis of teacher and peer rejection and inadequate academic, social, and emotional support for gifted adolescents.

The theme of becoming socially withdrawn was apparent for many participants. Several parents mentioned a transformation in their child similar to Sandy’s description of Robert. Several participants also described their reticence for peer interaction. Phillip explained in an interview that chronic rejection specifically due to his giftedness

   Kind of made me a quiet person because normally when I try to say something I say it in a different way than someone else would say it. So when I do something or say something that no one understands they would start to ignore me. Because when I was smart I would say something except that I would I say it in such a larger detail that people would be like “really?”

Now, Phillip has resigned to being much quieter than he would like from fear of continued peer rejection. Maya, who was exceedingly talkative on the phone with me, told me during our first interview, “I know I am talking a lot to you now, but you should
know that I am very quiet when I am at school. I just feel like I don’t exist, so why bother talking?” Haley also told me during an interview, “I used to be really talkative and was so excited to talk to people. Now, I have experienced so much exclusion that I am very shy.” Wayne explained,

Usually I don’t care about exclusion because there are more important things to do than to care about socializing. I would rank socializing as a very low priority. I socialize only when it is necessary, when there is a group project. I’m perceived as shy, but really, I am prompted to be quiet because others don’t listen to me.

Phillip, Maya, Haley, and Wayne described becoming socially withdrawn as a response to peer ostracism. Wayne and Maya, particularly, were motivated to stop speaking because they did not feel heard by classmates.

Marie described herself as shy, used to social exclusion, and often preferring solitude. During our initial interview, she explained that in elementary school she was social but became increasingly withdrawn as peers repeatedly rejected and ignored her. She was not used to physical contact with others or sharing her inner thoughts and feelings. However, she noticed a change in herself once she started boarding school and found acceptance with other intellectually gifted adolescents. She wrote an entry about her surprise at becoming more social one weekend, including sharing a hug with a friend after a long conversation late at night. She said,

I spent very little time alone this weekend, and for once I was okay with that. I jumped out of my comfort zone and started conversations and tried my best to participate. But by doing so, by embracing growing pains and fear, I found a
reversal of both. While I met new people and tried to discover myself in a sea of discomfort, it became apparent that the water-level was dropping and the pressure and anxiety with it. In that hug at two in the morning I realized that it had not been easy but I was standing where I had never stood before with people I barely knew, but still I knew them well enough, and they had included me and I had included them and these arms, they don't feel awkward or strange or unnatural--they're comfortable.

Marie demonstrated the resilience of the human spirit. Although years of exclusion took its toll on her, as it had with many other participants, she survived. She found acceptance and let her walls down. The pains from her past subsided as she found acceptance with new friends. Marie’s initial antisocial reaction to peer exclusion yielded to more prosocial reactions.

**Reinforcing bonds.** While some participants’ chronic ostracism sparked antisocial behaviors that farther separated them from peers, other participants engaged in prosocial responses allowing them to form stronger bonds with others. For instance, for Marie, a lifetime of exclusion fostered a deep appreciation for inclusion and the importance of relationships. The dark, lonely moments in her life allowed her to more fully appreciate the positive moments forged by authentic human connections. In one entry, Marie wrote,

> From the time I was in pre-school until I was in about sixth-grade, the idea of having friends that stayed around for more than a week was an imagined one… I was relatively content with my solitude. Then, in sixth grade I found a friend
group that accepted me—truly accepted me… When I entered high school, my friend group and I split up… So for the first time in several years, I found myself almost entirely alone… The experience was devastating. Being alone as a kid was one thing; I didn't know of any other way of living. But after I had seen friendship and inside jokes and slumber parties, dropping all of them at once was quite the shock… I was always on the wrong side of things, tolerated at most but never truly liked. But here at [name of school], I have found unparalleled acceptance among nearly all of my peers. Academic excellence is no longer an issue but rather something we strive for together. And yes, there are times when the volleyball players only want to be with other volleyball players or the performance nerd camp cliques refuse to let anyone else in. But overall, this is the best social experience of my life.

Her newfound acceptance, when compared to a backdrop of exclusion that had been her life, made Marie value friendship in a new light. She learned the importance of having friends and making connections. The vast majority of Marie’s myriad journal entries were actually about her appreciation for the inclusion she now experienced.

In the previous chapter, I described Marie’s “nightmares of replacement” as she watched her friends and family back home post pictures and updates on Facebook and other social media. She dreaded returning home during a break from her boarding school because her lifetime of exclusion had prepared her for exile, once more. She was convinced she was forgotten. However, upon returning home for break she stayed with
her taekwondo instructors, who were like a second family, and appreciated her inclusion in their lives. She wrote,

Sometimes you don’t realize how lucky you truly are to have those things [friends, family, and acceptance] until you’ve safely backed out into the street, and you’re putting the car in drive, and you’re officially driving away. It had occurred to me many times that not everyone is so fortunate, to have people to pick them up in times of their misfortune, but it did not become real for me until right then. Until I had spent sixty-seven hours experiencing life at home with two people [her instructors] who did not need to take me in but who chose to do so because they love me.

There’s a clock on the wall at taekwondo that’s been there as long as I can remember. I had never known the clock on the wall to not work, to fail at keeping us punctual, but for the last three days it has been frozen, the hands stuck at an orientation that would suggest it is somewhere between 3:54 and 3:55 forever, as if to stop time for a few days so I could live the life I want…

I am glad I have the opportunity to move away early and study the things that interest me on a deeper level than I ever thought was possible at sixteen. But I am more grateful for what I leave behind, if that makes any sense at all. Because those people and places and things I love are still there for me when I return...even though it hurts, I will find ways to deal with the pain. And I will try to remind myself... that sometimes things change by not changing—that I have up and left but even while I’m away, the family I’ve found still chooses to care
about me and I about them, and that these relationships will continue no matter what distance separates us. That’s no longer something I believe; that’s now something I know. Coming home has been an emotional rollercoaster for me, but overall it was a pleasant one. I found peace somewhere between 3:54 and 3:55.

Unlike some participants who have become jaded, angry, and distrustful, Marie’s exclusion has taught her the importance of love and acceptance. She is grateful for the friends and family she has and she is confident in the strength of those relationships. They mean everything to her because she knows what it is like to have nothing.

Ginny’s experiences of exclusion in elementary school and middle school have helped her to be a better friend. She wrote,

My friendships and the qualities of loyalty and trust I associate with them are incredibly important to me, and because I experienced bullying and exclusion in the past, I usually try my best (with varying results) to see the best of everyone and accept them for who they are or choose to be.

Like Marie, Ginny understood the meaning of true friendship (See Aristotle, 2009; Rawlins, 2009) and acceptance because of her past rejection. In Ginny’s autobiography, she described all of her friends in great detail and said, “listing these people, I've noticed a trend: all of them tend to have hidden reservoirs of deep kindness, loyalty, and compassion.” Not only had Ginny become a better friend, but also she chose her friends wisely; she chose friends who embodied positive traits that created a foundation for strong bonds of friendship.
Ginny also tended to seek out people who had been damaged and hurt in the past and create a safe haven for them. She forged friendship groups anchored in compassion and acceptance. In one entry, she wrote about her experience at a weekend retreat for gifted adolescents. She said,

So, I've made friends among the other students here for the [name of program] thingy. Maybe it's self-centered, but I think I brought them together, actually. I befriended them one by one, had dinner with them all the first day, shook their hands and smiled at them until they got over their nerves enough to smile back...And now I have their phone numbers, tumblr addresses, book suggestions, everything. And because I'm so outgoing with them, and so much the person trying to get them all together in a group, I'm some sort of leader. It's amazing. It feels great, to be looked at like that.

In an interview, Ginny explained that she never wanted anyone to feel alone or left out, the way so many of her peers have felt in the past. Her own experiences of exclusion have motivated her to try always to be a friend to others.

Many participants described developing empathy towards others as a reaction to past exclusion. These participants remembered the pain of exclusion and vowed never to inflict that pain on others. For example, Simone explained that she would never leave someone out, “because I don't want other people to have to feel what me and my friends feel. I have been left out or bullyed a lot before.” Juan wrote an entry detailing how exclusion has led him to love everyone. He said,
I cannot expect others to know how I feel, and to which intensity. I cannot unfairly hurt people because I feel overwhelming pain. They do not know…So I respect their beliefs, their decisions, their actions. At this point you come to love everybody, as hippie as that may sound.

Exclusion awakened compassion and empathy in Simone and Juan. Because they felt pain in the past, they refused to hurt others.

Several participants used their sensitivity towards other to include lonely peers. For example, Catherine wrote,

Ever seen someone alone? Maybe they look like they're fine alone, or they don't appear unhappy, but that does NOT mean they wouldn't value your company. And to have someone come and sit by them when no one else will means a LOT. By going to sit with them, you are showing them that someone cares and that someone wants to be their friend. We have no idea how much influence that could have. Today I saw a kid sit down alone at the only empty table: all others were full. I was sitting at a full table today with lots of my friends and a couple of new students, and I watched as no one made a move to go talk to the kid. So I lifted up my tray and went to sit with him. We had a nice conversation, and were actually soon joined by others. It was great; I'm actually glad I moved.

In an interview, Catherine explained, “I know how loneliness feels and I never want to see someone lonely, not when I could have included them.” Catherine felt moved to join her peer so that he knew he was worthy of friendship. Noam explained his desire to include and befriend younger students in his school’s gifted program. He wrote, “I have
a connection to the [name of gifted program] kids, naturally. I wanted to be a friends with the young 'uns because I felt like the eighth graders of last year paid little attention to us.”

Noam did not feel included when he was younger, so he wanted to spare new students his pain. Malcolm described his desire to include a new student in school. He wrote,

So there is this new kid at my school named [Henry] who I think is pretty nice and I would like to hang out with him sometime. But I see him constantly unintentionally excluded. He is a kid who didn't go to my middle school, because of this I am very sympathetic towards him. Being the new kid last year in a very established social system I understand how hard it is to make friends.

Like Catherine and Noam, Malcolm felt compelled to include Henry to spare him the pain Malcolm once felt. Malcolm saw himself in Henry and understood the difficulty of being a new student in school.

Simone’s empathy towards others gave her the moral courage to stand up for peers. Simone wrote an entry about her and a friend overhearing several classmates gossiping about another classmate. Simone did not know the classmate, but felt the need to speak out on her behalf. She wrote,

They were spreading rumors and saying very mean things about her. I told them to stop, but I am a quiet person in my grade so they didn't hear me. Afterwards, me and [Rachel] were walking through the halls of the school, and then we decided to sit down to talk about what we heard. After a bit of talking, then we decided to tell our principal, Mr. [Smith] because in our class meeting he said to tell him about any bullying incidents we heard of, and he would never tell who
told him. We went into his office and told him. He asked us who was saying the things, and who they were saying them about. After we told him, I was relieved, because I am not good at talking to people, unlike most other kids in my whole grade. I'm glad me and [Rachel] told him; I think we did the right thing.

In an interview, Simone said she was unsure if the principle did anything about the situation because he did not consider it bullying, but she felt she acted appropriately. For many participants, it appears that exclusion compelled them to live what Buber (2002) would call the life of dialogue, whereby they were truly present for their relational partner(s). Exclusion helped some participants to become open to dialogue and genuine listening.

**The Transformative Potential of Ostracism**

Ostracism and social rejection do not always break us. Sometimes, as the scars heal, we become better, stronger than we ever could have been without the pain of exclusion. Incredible beauty can grow from the sorrow of once shattered lives. Exclusion has a transformative potential. Jonas wrote an entry titled “beauty in sorrow” about his experience watching a Ted Talk in his gifted program by spoken word poet Shane Koyczan. Koyczan writes about surviving bullying and social rejection, becoming limitless, and imagining better worlds. In the Ted Talk, Koyczan (2013) performed his poem, To This Day. Watching Koyczan stirred a powerful response in Jonas and his classmates. Jonas wrote,

Some classmates cried. I didn't cry, but I felt bad for the guy in the video and I felt bad for my friends that cried. We all related to past experiences where we
were bullied, excluded, etc. I felt true empathy for my friends that day, as their true emotions about bullying and exclusion came out that day— as well as my own— but I am now happy that we shared our experiences. I now truly know that I am not the only one who has ever experienced it, but also I know that there are people, like my friends in that classroom that day, that care for me.

Jonas and his friends became closer through the realization of their shared painful experiences. Ultimately, Jonas saw the beauty in their shared sorrow, and their potential to heal each other.

After school, Jonas listened to other spoken poems from Koyczan. Jonas quoted Koyczan’s (2014) Blueprint for a Breakthrough,

If you think for one second no one knows what you’ve been going through, be accepting of the fact that you are wrong. That the long, drawn, and heavy breasts of despair have, at times, been felt by everyone. That pain is part of the human condition, and that alone makes you a legion. We hungry underdogs, we risers of dawn, we dismissers of odds, we pressers of on…We will hold ourselves to the steady… Be forgiving. Living with the burn of anger is not living…Love and hate are beasts, and the one that grows is the one you feed. Be persistent. Be the weed growing through the cracks in the cement, beautiful because it doesn’t know it’s not supposed to grow there. .. If you are having a good day, be considerate. A simple smile could be the first aid kit that someone has been looking for. If you believe with absolute honesty that you are doing everything you can, do more. There will be bad days, times when the world weighs on you for so long it leaves
you looking for an easy way out… Instances spent pretending that everything is alright when it so clearly is not. Check your blind spot, see that love is still there. Every nightmare has a beginning, but every bad day has an end. Ignore what others have called you. I'm calling you friend. Everyone knows pain, but we are not meant to carry it forever. We were never meant to hold it so closely.

Jonas wrote that Koyczan’s words reminded him that, “healing is possible, and we have to be each other’s lights.” For Jonas, Koyczan’s words helped him to realize he could turn the memory of exclusion into something positive.

Many participants had healed and were transformed in different ways by their exclusion. Their isolation and loneliness compelled them to mindfully reflect on their lives and, often, ignited change. Babrow (1992) suggested holistic coping responses often invited transformative strategies that allowed “a broad and abstract reinterpretation of the nature of the situation” (p. 111). While many participants exhibited positive transformation, I must mention that this could be partially because giftedness could be seen as a protective measure for these adolescents. For example, no matter how badly a gifted adolescent is treated, she can always say to herself, “at least I am smarter than them.” Additionally, the participants in the current study most likely come from loving and supportive families, since participant’s parents had to care enough to read the study and exert effort to seek me out.

As discussed in the above section on prosocial change, sometimes exclusion compelled participants to become better friends; other times, they changed for the worse and fell into despair and loathing. I observed both positive and negative transformations.
Juan, Maire, and Laura wrote beautiful prose about their intense love and compassion for all humans because of their exclusion. Conversely, as Bradly wrote for five months, I watched him become more jaded and angry every day. However, Bradly was the exception, and I was consistently touched by my participants’ insights and transformations. In the following subsections, I share a few of the positive effects ostracism had on some participants. Most of the positive outcomes of exclusion involved prosocial resistance responses.

**Motivated to fight harder.** Catherine had reconciled with the exclusion in her past by the time she joined the study. She explained that peers rejected her often in the past, and sometimes they still did. However, her view of the world shifted. She stopped caring what they thought, stopped worrying about social status, and tried to be the best person she could be. At the time of her participation in the study, she had just joined the cross-country team as a way to challenge herself. After winning her first race, she reflected,

> Things I'd like to remind some of my peers: I still remember when you called me weak. I still remember when you picked me last in PE all the time…I still remember when it was my turn up to bat, and you asked, "Are you SURE you want to go?"…I don't know if you remember these things, but I do. I don't hold them against you- I forgive you. In fact, I'd like to thank you for all the times that you're hate motivated me and kept me going. Sometimes I think about you when I want to slow down while running. I don't need to impress you. This was a personal victory, and I didn't have to be mean to you to win this.
For Catherine, rejection from her peers compelled her to become more than she thought she was capable. Their exclusion gave her strength and reminded her every day to fight harder. 

**Developed deeper perceptions.** For other participants, exclusion helped them to see the world more clearly. They developed profound understandings of others and the human condition. Anzaldua (2007) argued that those who are rejected develop shifts in their perception: “this shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld” (p. 61). For instance, Juan described his ability to read people. He wrote, 

> At first, social awkwardness was my life. I was rejected all the time. This caused me to turn my intellectual attention to people, I had to perceive them better. Now, I can communicate much better than most people. I can easily capture even the slightest gestures, and make sense of it all in a matter of seconds. I use a strategic approach to people. Persuasion is a piece of cake. Making people feel what I'm feeling is also a rather easy feat. Negotiating with arguments, and, more importantly, body language and gesticulation is something that I VERY RARELY fail at. Now, You could call me a social genius.

Juan’s rejection compelled him to try to understand humans better; now, Juan used his advanced perceptions to make people like him. He continued, 

> I act very strategically around people; I utilize their social customs and body language and my broad vocabulary to "push the correct buttons" in them. From
this you can acquire a good social position…[He shared several ways of making people like him] This is an effect I am very well aware of: this one in particular is about remembering characteristics and likes of others to show that you pay attention. You are perceived as witty and caring. People with small egos are particularly drawn toward this.

In order to escape his life of rejection, Juan had to develop a survival tactic. He chose to consciously study human behavior. His perceptions about human interaction and the social world became more attuned, and eventually, he was beloved by his classmates. Taken out of context, Juan’s journal entry could sound as if he is manipulative; however, Juan often discussed his deep love for humanity and his desire to use his ability to read people as a way to make them happy. As someone who could bring happiness to others, he found acceptance.

**Attuned to mystery.** Ostracism sometimes allowed participants to recognize the constructed nature of social reality. In other words, exclusion provided a window into mystery. Mystery is the least utilized aspect of CMM (Pearce & Pearce, 2004), perhaps because its role in the social construction of realities is less tangible than coordination and coherence. However, we can understand the recognition of mystery through the lens of PI theory. According to CMM, humans in a biological world need liberation from the terror of nature; thus, language’s liberation from mere facticity is a means of coping with PI. The biological world is uncertain; we are at the whims of nature. In nature, the lone human is prey. It is only when we come together to form clans and societies that we are safe from predators in the night. Intersubjectively constructed realities allow us to feel a
sense of control over our environments and forget about the chaotic, uncontrollable, uncertain biological and physical world. Our symbolic realms calm us, as they often appear more desirable and predictable than nature.

The suspension of disbelief so that we might live enmeshed in our creations allows us to, sometimes, subvert uncomfortable PI. Humans are capable of ascribing nearly infinite meanings to any one social object or event, but our minds cannot handle the infinite. Our radical creative freedom is overwhelming (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). We cope with the uncertainty of multiple meanings and realities by forgetting the fabrication of social worlds and blinding ourselves to the overwhelming choices we could make. Mindlessness is a comforting escape. Babrow (2007) suggested that, “we act relatively mindlessly, guided by habit, to the extent that probabilistic orientations are experienced as certainties (or impossibilities), evaluative orientations are uniformly positive (or negative), and expectations and desires converge” (p. 187). When we do not experience PI, we can remain firmly enmeshed in our realities.

However, when integration of evaluative and probabilistic orientations becomes problematic, we can no longer stay mindless. When some participants found themselves in a world where their peers actively denied them, they began to question their world. For example, Amelia said in an interview,

Ostracism and exclusion made me realize that reality, at least the reality of high school and middle school is a game. We made up the game and everyday we create the game over and over. People didn’t want me to be part of the game, so
they ignored me. I just decided not to play their game anymore and create my own.

For Amelia, the PI arising from exclusion fostered mindfulness (Babrow, 2007); the recognition of life’s mystery induced her mindfulness. PI is a rupture in coherence, and possibly coordination, where we must scramble to repair our social worlds. This rupture is a moment when we might become aware of mystery. For example, Skyler said in an interview, “being gifted makes you very non-conforming. You are so used to rejection and so smart that you realize life is not ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ There is so much more to life than most people will ever see.” Sharing a similar sentiment, Juan wrote,

I was alone for so long—or I should say lonely—that I began to intimately study and think about reality. I felt like I was getting ever-closer to another reality that hides behind reality itself…This is what I call the 'different echo.' Most people are blind to this, they just live their lives asleep. I've been spending my life waking up.

Skyler, Amelia, and Juan sought comfort in mystery by realizing there is more to life than the reality at their school.

The rupture into mystery is our second liberation, where the snares of language become visible. The second liberation is another resource for dealing with PI because if we experience a negative social reality, we comfort ourselves by recognizing the myriad other realities possible. For example, Harper reminded herself that other possibilities existed. She wrote,
We chose the reality we live in. I could have chosen to be sad all day when people didn’t like me in middle school, or I could chose to make a better world. I want to make my world and other people’s world better…There is no REASON that the popular kids are on the top. Really, if we all rebelled we could create a much more fair school environment where everyone was treated equally. I think no one thinks its possible so they don’t try, BUT IT IS POSSIBLE! I love the quote that says “If you can imagine it, you can achieve it; if you can dream it, you can become it.” I think not enough people realize that.

With the realization of mystery, Harper became unfixed in the world. She was able to recognize possibilities that remained clouded to others. According to Anzaldua (2007), persecuted people develop the capacity to “see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface…[making us] excruciatingly alive to the world” (p. 60). For Anzaldua, “it’s a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between worlds, unknowingly cultivate” (p. 61). Many participants embraced mystery because the recognition of mystery was freeing.

**Radical freedom.** Connected to the discovery of mystery, exclusion also created a sense of radical freedom for some participants. They recognized that they were free to be non-conformists and to think their own thoughts. Juan described how happiness was constraining and mindless. He wrote,

I must observe that happiness often comes with, at least, two side effects: 1. Conformity. This means that not many things in the world seem worthy of change to you. If things are good, your organism prefers it that way. A funny term comes
to mind: emotional homeostasis. This will eventually render you useless. This is
why I don't pursue happiness. 2. Lack of profundity. I don't know why it
happens, but happiness kills introspective thoughts and the overall ability to
express my innermost self. It is rather boring. By this I also mean that I cannot
reflect too much on anything either. I cannot think of what I have done, not
because I am utterly incapable, but rather because I lose all motivation to do so.

Initially, Juan’s comment might appear to have little to do with radical freedom.
However, in an interview following this entry, Juan explained that sadness, particularly
from loneliness, gives us the freedom to be non-conformists. He said,

We have nothing to lose, but happiness gives us everything to lose. So, when we
are happy, we are not free. Sadness makes you introspective. To figure out what
is wrong you look inward. Sadness carries depth, urges you to fix yourself. So
sadness and loneliness make us free to act and think how we want.

For Juan, exclusion allowed him to see mystery and recognize that he had the freedom to
act without the fear of losing anything.

Sharing a similar sentiment, Robert said in an interview, “people who are always
included are followers. They always follow other people and don’t think or act for
themselves. People who are excluded think differently, don’t go with all the trends, but
go their own way and are independent.” Jennifer, Catherine, and Juan exemplified this
radical freedom expressed by Robert. Jennifer wrote in the autobiography section of her
journal,
I'm tired of caring what others think, so I don’t. They never accepted me anyway. So now, I’ll have my hair how I want it, and I will wear my clothes how I want, and if you have a problem with how I look, it sucks to be you, doesn’t it.

Exclusion gave Jennifer the strength and desire to carve her own destiny, seemingly free of the constraints that others often feel. Catherine wrote, “Go ahead and call me crazy, I will consider it a compliment. I go my own way and do what I want. It might seem crazy to you, but it is the only sane response I see to an insane world.” Like Jennifer, Catherine now felt free to act unconstrained by other’s judgments. Juan wrote, “I accept myself as somebody often deemed ‘weird’. I am different. I am not normal. I can live without being normal.” Many participants celebrated their “weirdness” and reveled in the newfound realization of freedom that sometimes accompanied exclusion. Anzaldúa (2007) also described the radical freedom we often find when we live in the borderlands. She said,

Don’t give me your tenets and your laws. Don’t give me your lukewarm gods…I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails…I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture – una cultura mestiza—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar. (p, 44)

Acceptance of selves. Another positive impact that exclusion had on some participants was the freedom to explore and develop their identities. According to Babrow, “paradoxically, problem-exacerbating responses may be necessary for long-term adaptation. These responses may precipitate alterations in basic values, such as spiritual
birth or rebirth. In short, substantial personal change requires substantial motivation” (p. 104). By embracing what would seem to be a painful separateness, difference, or acceptance of exclusion, participants found their way to a deeper and more independent sense of self. Similarly, Dabrowski’s (1964, 1966) theory of positive disintegration suggests that psychological tension and crisis are necessary for identity development. According to Dabrowski, the majority of individuals never develop to their fullest potential; they live lives guided by biology and uncritically accept social norms. These individuals act nonautonomously, never truly exerting agency because social environments constrain individual agency and creativity. However, crisis challenges our status quo and causes us to re-examine our values, thoughts, and identities. Dabrowski (1964) said, “the disintegration process, through loosening and even fragmenting the internal psychic environment, through conflicts within the internal environment and with the external environment, is the ground for the birth and development of a higher psychic structure” (p. 5-6). Sometimes, we escape crisis having developed an individualized consciousness; we gain the ability to critically evaluate the social world and develop individual autonomy. For Dabrowski, this is where true identities emerge and we create our own unique visions of life and the ability to live those visions.

For some participants, exclusion was the psychological crisis prompting them to turn inward and develop their identities. For example, Catherine described the pride she felt as she claimed her identity as a “book nerd.” She wrote,

I am, by society's definition, a book nerd… I take serious pride in my "social classification." If I take pride in it, they can't hurt me with it. If I am happy with
where I am, they can't offend me by telling me. If I am less popular than them, and I'm okay with that, positive about it, or even ENJOY it, then there is no way that I will feel harmed if they make fun of me for my lack of popularity…In the grand scheme of things, does our "social classification" really even MATTER? I've become a much happier person since I stopped being so bothered by how I'm doing socially.

Similarly, Ginny said in an interview,

Honestly, I have learned something from years of exclusion. I have had to look at myself head-on and recognize who I truly am. I had to look at myself in the mirror and realize I am a nerd. And you know what? I like that about myself. I am a nerd, and so much more than a nerd, too. I am complicated, but I know who I am. I suspect that is more than some kids can say.

Catherine and Ginny became comfortable with themselves and loved their identity, regardless of social connotations. Their strife and turmoil ultimately amounted to a deeper understanding and acceptance of their own identities. Catherine and Ginny forged a profoundly unusual identity in a profoundly unusual way. Whereas scholars typically suggest our identities are forged through a synthesis of the “looking glass self” (Cooley, 1902) and the desire to achieve social approval (Foels, 2006; Hogg & Reid, 2006; Schmidt, Branscombe, Silvia, Garcia, & Spears, 2006; Steele, 1988; Tesser, 1988), these participants seek a sense of self that is independent of how they are seen or approved of at school. Ostracism has allowed them to transcend beyond their peers’ judgments and form sustainable selves outside of societal acceptance.
Juan also learned to accept himself by realizing his identity did not need external validation from others. He explained that for many years one source of his pain and depression in life was,

The desire to have people share the same world as I, because I unconsciously had believed that my own perception of the world has no value at all if it doesn't have a witness with the same angle/capacity as me… Everything also becomes suddenly lonely, if you wrongly expect everyone to see with your own brain.

However, as Juan agonized over feeling misunderstood and unvalidated by others, he realized,

It is something everybody suffers from… What is important is to transport your inner world to the physical world. Your dreams forged through your own skills. One must ATTEMPT to COMMUNICATE those worlds…as soon as I realized this, It was like my gears changed completely. I no longer needed approval, not even in the metaphysical sense of things. I was no more nearing a depressive breakdown…I knew I was condemned, as a human, to helplessly struggle to bring dreams to reality, and for that I needed willpower and discipline. Dreams could not be transferred from person to person. Understanding could be zero, if one does not go through the task of ‘transporting to the physical world’. And instead of despair, this gave me an unexplainable, very powerful sense of peace…I realise I need nobody to understand me. Life is beautiful as long as -pay good attention to this sentence- you know yourself, and know the world around yourself. I don't necessarily need to feel lonely just because nobody feels the same as me. I have
come to realize ALL OF US are trapped within ourselves… Yes, nobody really understands me. But I love and forgive them all. I can't expect people to be like me. By accepting that I am different, I realize they aren’t guilty of anything. Juan validated his own identity and accepted himself with all his perfections and flaws. For some participants, exclusion helped them to find peace with their identities and discover their authentic selves. The introspection fostered by loneliness, the recognition of mystery, and the realization of the freedom to carve their own paths coalesced to help several participants find acceptance with themselves.

**Conclusion**

Participants exhibited a wide variety of responses to ostracism and social exclusion. In the first part of this chapter, I discussed a three-dimensional framework for understanding participant responses. Responses tended to have a cognitive or behavior dimension (examples of piecemeal coping responses), an acceptance or rejection dimension, and an antisocial or prosocial dimension (examples of holistic coping). Cognitive responses included altering probabilities and altering evaluative assessments of exclusion. Behavioral dimensions included altering behavior. Acceptance responses included internalizing exclusion messages, becoming resigned to exclusion messages, and engaging in repetitive cycles of rejection. Resistance responses included ignoring exclusion messages, actively standing up for themselves, and directly engaging excluders by aggressively resisting ostracism. Antisocial responses included severing social bonds by distrusting others, disliking or hating others, and withdrawing from social situations.
Finally, prosocial responses included developing a deep appreciation for inclusion and relationships, becoming a better friend, and developing empathy for others.

In the second part of the chapter, I celebrated positive outcomes exclusion seemed to bring to some participants. Many of these positive outcomes resulted from prosocial resistance responses and were a testament to the resiliency of many participants. Some participants were motivated to work harder and face adversity with grace. Other participants developed deeper perceptions about the world, such as learning to read others’ facial expressions and body language. Many participants became more attuned to mystery; exclusion served as a crisis forcing them to evaluate their views about reality. As a result, many recognized that their current configuration of the social world was not the only reality possible. Other participants experienced radical freedom in exclusion because they were freed from the restraints of conformity. Finally, some participants found they were able to accept themselves and craft their own identities.

In the upcoming final chapter of my dissertation, I will discuss how this project changed several of my participants and reflect on my own reactions to the project and participants. I will also provide a synopsis of my findings and discuss their implications for adolescents and communication scholars. Finally, I will address limitations, strengths, and future directions of this project.
Chapter 7: Reflections and Conclusion

I grew up in a school that said if I can’t succeed in the system that’s laid out for me then my life will be unremarkable... I was taught to believe in limitations, that I must color inside the lines, that I must connect the dots in numerical order. And that’s fine –if all you want is a picture of an octopus. But if you want a picture of an octopus that wears a human for a backpack so it can walk around on land and protest seafood restaurants, you’re gonna have to go about things a little differently...We live in a constantly changing world, and in that world systems break because they are rigid and unbending. If we spend our lives trying to adjust to something broken, we break ourselves in the process.

-Shane Koyczan, 2014

I believe in possibilities. I believe that only our imaginations limit us, and anything in the world could be otherwise if we can envision it so. We are the divine creators of our social worlds. I believed this decades before I “found” social construction. Analytically, I understand that I believe these things, in part, because of my rebellion against the limitations social actors attempted to place on me. From the moment we are born, many of us exist in limiting social systems. Ostracism and social rejection are tools of limitations. We are bombarded with limiting messages: You can’t. You shouldn’t. You mustn’t. Or else... Throughout this dissertation process, I reflected on my own past experiences and how they shaped the person I am today and my analysis of participant discourses. In this final chapter of my dissertation, I will discuss my own reactions to working with participants, participants reactions’ to the study, the ethical role of the researcher, implications of findings, and future directions for research.

Many participants in this study were mirrors into my own reality, distant memories from my past coming alive once more. When Juan recalled his frustration that no one understood him, I remembered one of my best high school friends telling me, “Katie, you will always be loved but never understood.” Her comment cut me like a
knife because it reminded me that some part of me might never find acceptance. When Bradly discussed his dislike of holding hands with others in biology class, I recalled that I also used to recoil at the idea of being touched. I felt a need to distance myself from others so that if they rejected me I remained protected, in some small way, because I had not completely shared myself. When Liam mentioned that he understood the pain of exclusion felt by school shooters, I thought back to my junior year in high school during the Columbine school shootings. A good friend of mine, a social outcast who was vocal about his hatred of mainstream culture, received three days of in-school suspension for casually saying at lunchtime, “I can see the shooters’ perspective, their classmates were probably jerks to them.”

I am not sentimental. I rarely dwell on the past because my vision is fixed on the future, on possibilities. However, I was surprised that this project acted as a (mostly welcomed) time capsule to my past. My greatest personal realization from this dissertation was recognizing how much my past exclusion shaped my character today. Just as it had for so many of my participants, the cruelty of peers challenged me to become a better person. Like Simone, I stand up for others when I see injustice, sometimes more than I should. My first year of graduate school was marked by a fight I had with a professor over (what I perceived as) the professor’s mistreatment of two of my colleagues. I will always be on the side of the underdog, the marginalized, and the invisible. Like Juan, Marie, and Laura, I try to act with compassion because too much of the world is harsh and unkind. Like Catherine and Ginny, I try to be inclusive because I remember the pain of exclusion. I feel others’ pain, too deeply sometimes. Like Juan, I
learned to read people as a survival tactic. Even my intellectual pursuits, my interest in social justice and communication’s ability to create better social worlds, are deeply personal and touched by my exclusion experiences. However, as I have said before, this dissertation is not about me, so now I turn to the effect the study had on participants.

Mindful Reflection

I was surprised to find that this study changed the communication patterns of some of my participants. Having been asked to reflect on (a) their experiences being excluded/included, (b) their experiences excluding/including others, and (c) their observations of exclusion/inclusion, some began to think of exclusion and inclusion from multiple perspectives. They also became more attuned to recognizing exclusion and inclusion in their social lives. For example, in Noam’s initial interview, he told me that he thought his school was an inclusive place. However, in Noam’s first journal entry, he wrote, “Today I first intensely opened my eyes and ears to inclusion and exclusion in the world around me. I've surprised myself and exceeded my expectations in finding many examples.” Some participants, like Noam, realized exclusion was more prevalent at their schools than they were previously aware. Other participants realized they experienced exclusion, some felt an increased desire to include their peers, some realized that they themselves excluded others, and some realized they could no longer remain bystanders to exclusion.

Realizations of their own exclusion. One of my initial fears about the project, which came true for some participants, was that participants might realize they were excluded more than they once thought. For example, Jennifer told me during our initial
phone interview that she always felt included and was concerned she would not be helpful in my study because her entries would be devoid of exclusion incidents. However, as she reflected in her journal, she wrote, “I never realized just how common exclusion really is. On a daily basis, little acts of exclusion occur all the time, and they are actually very painful when you think about them.” In a follow-up interview, she told me the study made her more attuned to her own feelings and awakened her to the commonality of exclusion.

In Chapter Three, I discussed Liam’s realization that peers excluded him. In our initial interview, he said, “being gifted has made me stand out in a positive way, people ask me a lot of stuff having to do with school and homework.” However, as he wrote journal entries, he noticed his peers used him for his intellect. He wrote in one entry, Sometimes is feel as though people only talk to me when they need me to do something for them that's related to school… Other than these times they need something from me(which is almost always homework answers) they never seem the pay attention to me. And not that I care, but if you're going to try and get something from me, at least try to have some sort of interaction with me to show you might actually view me as a real person because in these cases, I feel as though I'm stereotyped.

For Liam, participation in the study fostered a gradual realization that he might not be as accepted by his friends as he once believed. He began to reflect on the fact that they rarely invited him to social gatherings outside of school, frequently declined his social invitations, and he felt like he existed on the periphery of their group. For participants
like Jennifer and Liam, who had revelations about their own exclusion through study participation, I spoke with them several times to ensure their participation was not upsetting them. On the contrary, they often said they appreciated keeping journals because they found the experience cathartic and enlightening.

**Realizations of their desire to include others.** Many participants became more aware of their own communication patterns over the course of the study. For some, this meant they felt an increased desire to include others. For instance, Maya described her delight at being able to write an entry about inclusion. She wrote, “I saw a girl that looked lonesome today, and I thought about this study and decided to say ‘hi’ to her. Now I can write about how I was inclusive!” Noam explained during a phone interview that he was making an effort to be inclusive because of this study. He studied his own social life to determine whom he could include. He wrote,

> Last year I was good friends with one [Name of gifted program] kid… Now, this year, I've realized that I'm ignoring him and leaving him out sometimes. He can be a little annoying and never really says many interesting things… I don't know how this will turn out but i think I'll try to talk to him more and include him more just because I don't want him to feel bad.

Noam told me that, “my eyes were opened to exclusion and I am trying to make an effort to include people more now. It’s an experiment, we’ll see how it goes.” Noam especially began realizing that “exclusion can make people go crazy, and I don’t want any part of that.” He changed his communication because of his study participation and became more aware of his own ability to be inclusive.
While Maya and Noam both admitted that they rarely thought about inclusion before the study, other participants’ inclusion efforts were intensified because of the study. For example, Meg described herself as an inclusive person during her initial interview. She attended a gifted program housed within a normal high school and frequently mentored students new to her program. She was involved in many different extracurricular activities, such as math club and show choir, and always tried to act kindly towards others. In a follow-up interview, she explained that her participation in this study, “is making me hyper aware of being inclusive. I have been struggling with the realization that I can’t always include everyone, but I am trying my hardest.” Several times, she wrote about feeling torn between two groups of friends and trying to balance her time between them so everyone felt included. Similarly, Harper explained that the study had intensified her inclusive nature. She wrote, “I’ve been paying a lot of attention to whether others feel included or excluded now. So, im especially trying to include new students that don’t know anyone else at school.” Since the study began, she wrote about including several freshman girls in marching band, sitting next to students who looked lonely at lunchtime, inviting a boy that everyone thinks is “weird” to socialize with her group of friends, and including those who seem on the periphery of conversations.

Realizations that they exclude others. During initial interviews with participants, 38 of the 45 participants told me that they never excluded anyone in their daily lives. However, during the final participant interview, every participant admitted realizing that she, too, excluded others. The majority of participants wrote at least one journal entry about their own exclusion of another person. For instance, Malcolm’s
mother emailed me to express her gratitude that the study helped Malcolm to become more inclusive. She wrote,

One thing that did pop up from reflecting on excluding, he realized his own behavior was excluding a fellow student. He apologized to the boy and vowed to assist this child socially. He did all of this on his own because of this study.

In Malcolm’s journal entry about this boy, he wrote, “after observing my own behavior, I realized I had been excluding this guy named [Ralph]. I feel really bad about this and have to think about something to make up for my behavior.” Similarly, Mikhail also wrote about his guilt after excluding another classmate. He said,

Today in 6th period, I excluded. A kid sat down one seat down from me, I politely asked him to scoot down because i wanted to sit next to my friends. He then left the area completely. I then felt bad and worried that he was hurt by me.

Although Mikhail did not attempt to console the classmate, he had a new realization that his own behavior was sometimes exclusive. In an interview, he mentioned feeling badly because the study encouraged him to think more about his own actions.

One of the most radical changes in participant behavior occurred for Sarah. For the first two weeks of Sarah’s participation, she wrote multiple entries a day about exclusion from her peers. During the time of writing, Sarah’s friends and classmates extensively ostracized her. She wrote several entries about her confusion over their behavior. Intermixed with these entries, Sarah also wrote about how “stupid” her classmates acted; they always had the wrong answers in class, and she constantly had to correct their bad grammar and academic mistakes. During my first weekly check-in with
Sarah, she cried about her confusion over her classmates’ exclusion. She wondered what she did to make them dislike her. Then, in the same breath, she told me “class was hilarious today, we were doing math problems on the board and [Cathy] was completely messing up. I actually went up to the board when it wasn’t my turn and erased her work. She looked so mad.” Sarah wondered why Cathy would not play with her at recess.

After journaling for two weeks, Sarah had a realization. She wrote,

I realized over the last few days: to have friends, you need to be a friend. I think I am being excludy of my friends by being mean. I need to maybe not always correct my friends even if I want to. I thought I was being nice by correcting them, because now they know the truth. But, I think it hurt their feelings. Also, I am not going to tell people my grades anymore because I think that makes them feel like I am better than them. No one wants to be friends with someone like that.”

Sarah began to make an effort to treat people nicely. She shared her revelation with her mother, Molly. A few days after writing about her realization, Molly emailed me to thank me for allowing Sarah into the study and to share the transformation she observed in Sarah’s behavior. I already cited part of Molly’s comment in Chapter Three. Molly said,

I guess I had never really considered her excluding others and so in turn they exclude her hence the “difficulty” in finding and maintaining a friendship…I have long suspected that pg [profoundly gifted] kids are generally as intolerant of others as others are of them. I have just never figured out what the cause of this
difficulty was in my child and how to break that cycle. We have always insisted that all things have equal value and relevance in a civilized society and I guess we thought she was practicing this. I am so thankful for you and your study because it helped her to look in the mirror and see what she can do differently. I am so proud of her for her realization that “to have friends you must be a friend.” After just a few days I can really see her treatment of others improving.

Sarah’s resolve to change her own communication patterns might help her to, eventually, gain friends. At the very least, Sarah recognized that she must treat others respectfully.

Mindful Transformations

Two participants had consequential realizations about friendships because of their participation in the study. In Chapter Five, I discussed Leo’s decision to break up with his girlfriend, Chloe. At the start of the study, Leo had been dating Chloe for five weeks. In his autobiography, he described her as, “more popular than me. She’s one of those people who knows they are attractive so she usually gets what she wants. I’ll be honest, she can usually just look at me and I’ll cave.” His initial entries largely discussed his observation of Chloe’s exclusion of others. Chloe excluded classmates from parties, avoided interacting with “less popular” peers, and made others feel badly about themselves. After Leo had been writing for about three weeks, he made a decision about his relationship. He wrote,

I’ve been thinking a lot lately about how people should be treated, who I want to be as a person, and the types of people I should associate [with] to achieve these things. Basically, I decided to break up with [Chloe] on Friday. I just realized I
don’t like who I am around her, and, and now I feel bad saying this, she just isn’t
always a nice person. When I look back at the things I’ve been writing about in
these journals, I see that I mostly write about her. And I don’t write very
flattering things. She is not a nice person. I think I got caught up in being excited
that a “popular” girl liked me. I'm just starting high school and I've never been
popular, so that was kind of cool. But actually, it’s not that cool because I don’t
want to have to sell my soul to be popular. The less popular people are actually
better human beings.

In another entry, one I have previously cited in Chapter Five, he explained his thoughts
on the “popular crowd” that he now avoided. He wrote,

I just can’t get behind their values, they are so mean and (I hate to say this) kind
of stupid. I’d just rather be more intellectual and be around nicer people. High
school just started and, despite all teenage stereotypes, I actually don’t want to be
one in the popular crowd. There is more to life than fashion and you don’t have
to prove your self worth by being crummy to someone else.

Leo’s participation in the study created a moral dilemma. The study encouraged him to
think about issues of exclusion and inclusion and to recognize that Chloe was the
excluder. Eventually, he recognized his desire to be more inclusive and knew that his
association with Chloe was the antithesis of that desire.

During my weekly check-in with Leo, we discussed his decision to break up with
Chloe. He assured me that, although his participation in the study prompted his decision
to end their relationship, the relationship would have ended quickly regardless. He
complained that, in addition to her exclusive behavior, “she also made me go to the mall with her a lot, which I hate. And she made me carry her things all the time, which was just weird.” Ultimately, Leo was happy with his decision to end the relationship with Chloe and said he has many other friends with whom to associate. He appreciated that the breakup occurred early enough in the relationship that they had not developed strong feelings for each other.

Another participant also had a consequential realization during the study. Throughout the study, Laura struggled with the ubiquity and injustice of exclusion and the moral repercussions of being a bystander. In one of Laura’s first journal entries (from which I quoted in Chapter Three), she described her observation of several girls gossiping about another girl. She wrote, “I wasn't comfortable speaking up in the situation, which, looking back, I feel quite bad about, so their rant against [Cordelia] continued until she returned.” She often felt compelled to act against exclusive communication, yet, initially, she never acted. As Laura observed her social environment, she began to see exclusion everywhere. In Chapter Three, I described several of Laura’s entries as she discussed rampant racism against Asians at her school. She described her frustration and helplessness over her best friend’s assault when classmates wrote, “made in China” across the friend’s arm. She described her disgust at teachers and parents’ overtly racist comments.

As Laura became incensed over the injustice of some forms of exclusion, her moral struggle with being just an observer became increasingly apparent. In another
entry, she wrote about a trip with her parents, during which she witnessed a homeless
man’s mistreatment. She said,

I witnessed a man outside asking for assistance. There are several homeless
people who regularly congregate outside of Barnes and Noble and in other places
downtown. Many of them have signs and many of them are noticeably familiar.
This man was not someone I had ever seen before. He pressed himself against the
wall and was very meek in asking. Most of the time, it appeared as though he
would only ask if he thought the person could be of assistance. Perhaps because I
am younger, he did not ask me, but my parents are very friendly to everyone, and
when my mother looked up and smiled at him, he walked over and asked her. We
all found him to be kind and clearly in need of assistance. In the presence of at
least forty people, in the middle of the daylight, one older man walked by and
yelled, "Fuck you!" to the homeless man. The homeless man was shocked and
said, "I don't have anything; I'm homeless. I haven't done anything to you." The
man shouted at him again. It escalated, and the man attempted to become violent;
the homeless man ran away and was visibly shaken. Although this doesn't relate
to school, I'm writing about this event because it took place in the presence of
multiple adults, almost all of whom chose to do nothing about an obvious incident
of hatred directed at another person. It made me realize that if adults behave this
way and permit such behavior, then that is why I continue to see it at younger
levels…. I am still processing what it means to be a bystander.
Laura became increasingly aware of systemic exclusion practiced in interpersonal communication. She recognized that social rejection is practiced by humans of all ages and can rob others of dignity. Laura also wrote increasingly about the moral decision to act against exclusive communication.

As Laura continued to struggle with these ideas, her reflections culminated in a consequential decision. Laura was planning to attend the homecoming dance with a group of friends and her date, Edmund. Laura barely knew Edmund, but started to make an effort to socialize with him more at school so that the dance would be less awkward. One day, Edmund used the word “gay” as an insult towards another friend. At this point, Laura decided she was tired of being a bystander. She had observed others reject people for being too smart, too Asian, too poor; she was tired of doing nothing an allowing these interpersonal injustices to continue. She publically chastised Edmund for his use of the word and refused to attend the dance with him. She wrote,

One of your prompts made me think about how language can be exclusionary. Therefore, I was encouraged to intervene because of my participation in this study. I confronted the guy and said I could not be associated with someone who used such language.

She refused to speak to Edmund unless he promised to stop using the term “gay” as an insult. Her friends’ reactions surprised Laura. Her friends became angry, she wrote, “the group said my views were ‘too rigid’ and it would affect my chances of being able to have a boyfriend.” Additionally, the group uninvited her to the dance. After this experience, she had another realization. She wrote,
Prior to this journal experience, I wouldn't have thought that I do leave people out or exclude them. I have since realized that I choose not to associate with people based upon whether I think they are kind to others. I didn't view this as a form of exclusion before; rather, I saw it as a form of self-preservation. Yet, when I made it clear that I wouldn't want to go to a social dance with someone who used the term, "gay" in a derogatory fashion, it became clear that other females felt that I was unnecessarily excluding the male from my social circle. I didn't think this was wrong…I also don't want to be around people who don't share similar views with regard to the treatment of humans. I am very willing to be around people who have different political views and who have varying interests and levels of intellect, but I guess that making the decision I did falls into the category of exclusionary. Given this, I believe that people do need to make decisions for themselves about who they are willing to be around and what they can personally tolerate. I try not to be judgmental, but it is clear that in judging judgmental people, I, too, can be categorized as judgmental… Overall, I feel comfortable not changing my views, but I do see how I am dancing around a hypocrisy.

Laura finally stopped being a bystander and had the moral courage to confront Edmund. However, she also realized that she, too, was using exclusion against another. In this, she appeared to move close to a deeper realization: that neutrality in the face of what she found to be morally repugnant is less desirable than the immorality of judgment and exclusion based on superficial or morally ambiguous terms. Whether or not she came
fully to this realization, she chose to engage in moral sanctioning to demonstrate her disapproval of Edmund’s behavior.

After reading Laura’s entry, I immediately called her to discuss the scenario, feeling responsible for her friendship troubles. I expected Laura to be upset about the turn of events and her friends’ rejection of her reaction. To my surprise, Laura was proud of herself. She saw the situation as a personal victory and stood by her decision to confront Edmund. She comforted me and said,

They weren’t my good friends anyway, I was only just starting to get to know this group. I am glad this happened so early into our friendship because I wouldn’t want to stay friends with people like this for long. And, what if we went to the dance and had a good time? What if I had actually started to date [Edmund] before I realized how hateful he was? That would have been awful.

Laura was not concerned about her loss of friends; rather, she was happy that she stood up for her beliefs. Laura had a well-developed sense of her own morality before her participation in the study. However, the study gave her a vocabulary to address issues of exclusion, an opportunity to become more mindful of her social situations, and an excuse to think deeply about social rejection. However, I must also wonder if Laura was judging Edmund too hastily. Many individuals use derogatory terms without understanding how problematic those terms are for those referred to by the label. These individuals’ consciousness can sometimes be raised simply by teaching them how and why their language is hurtful. Done in ways that do not arouse defensive reactions, these exchanges of ignorant usages of derogatory terms followed by consciousness raising
speech can be supremely “teachable moments.” Perhaps Laura was premature in her reaction and unfair to assume Edmund was hateful, rather than ignorant.

**Ethical Role of the Researcher**

Despite Laura and Leo’s sense of pride about their decisions to end relationships, I still feel conflicted about their experiences. The study seemed to change them. At the very least, it helped foster moral courage and conviction. I have a responsibility to protect my participants; therefore, I am responsible for the severing of their friendships and romantic relationships. Had I never entered Laura’s life, would she be happily dating Edmund now? Would she mind that he used the term “gay” as an insult to others? Would Leo still be dating Chloe, blindly happy about his newfound popularity? Maybe I give my study too much credit and their lives were not changed primarily by participation in the project. Alternatively, perhaps their transformations were the best outcome I could have hoped for from this study, and their new awareness about language and exclusion will foster a more fulfilling consciousness in Laura and Leo.

Unlike the tradition of post-positivist scientific inquiry, where research is supposed to achieve illumination through a sort of Immaculate Conception (i.e., pure truths of reality are discovered untouched by any influence of the research act), interpretive researchers recognize that asking participants to take part in our studies can be asking them to think in a different way. New revelations always carry the chance of transformation. The act of study can thus exert great influence on the people and meanings that are the focus of inquiry. What right did I have to enter Laura and Leo’s social world and transform them? Although I, personally, believe their new level of
awareness about exclusion is inspiring, I also recognize that it was consequential to their daily lives. As scholars, we must carefully weigh the consequences of awareness because conversion shifts another’s reality. Do scholars have the right to destroy one reality and favor another? Who am I to presume I know the good? Nietzsche’s (1961) most famous character, Zarathustra, once opted not to awaken with his version of the truth a man he passed in the forest; he said, “let me go quickly that I may take nothing from you” (p. 41). Do we take something from others when we intervene?

**Creation and destruction.** Human action, however creative or well intended, is also inherently destructive. When we attempt to create something better or a new possibility for interaction, we carry the dual powers of creation and destruction (Lewin, 1997; Ricoeur, 1965). For example, when Laura began to think deeply about interpersonal exclusion, her transformation to a higher level of consciousness destroyed her previous mentality and all realities that could have existed that now conflict with her new mentality. In a sense, one version of Laura’s mind ended and another began. When Laura was finally compelled to act against Edmund’s exclusive use of language, she destroyed their relationship. Her transformation was creative because it sparked new possibilities for interaction, new insights, and the hope of a more inclusive world. However, it was also destructive because it ended a particular course of actions and changed Laura. The same duality of creation and destruction exists for researchers. Therefore, it is particularly important for researchers to understand their ethical role in the social world.
If it stands to reason that we create symbolic worlds, then it also holds true that we can destroy symbolic worlds. It is through destruction that we understand the true ethical underpinnings of scholarship. Destruction is necessary for creation, but it must be done mindfully. In Samkhya school of Hindu philosophy, three major energies organize the universe: satva gunas, rajas gunas, and tamas gunas. The Bhagavadgita outlines these processes. Rajas is expansion and activity; it is the energy of creation, through which all things come into being. Sattva is balance and equilibrium; it is the energy of preservation, through which all life is sustained. Finally, Tamas is death, decay, and inertia; it is the dark energy of destruction, through which all things must end. However, all of these energies must coexist for the possibility of life. Without destruction, creation could not occur. Thus, there is beauty even in destruction, as it makes way for new life. Destruction is the moment where potential is born. Therefore, when researchers and participants engage in destructive acts of creation they have the potential to destroy negative and oppressive social worlds and build better worlds from the ashes of destruction. They also have the potential to destroy positive aspects of reality and actually negative social worlds. Therefore, scholars must always be aware of the destructive acts of creation, whether intentional or unintentional, that they might bring to particular contexts and social worlds.

**Action and inaction.** Just as researchers must reflect on our role in creating, recreating, and disrupting social worlds, we must also reflect deeply on our decisions regarding action and inaction in our research about social worlds. One of my goals is to make better social worlds; yet, did my project accomplish this in any real sense?
Particularly in relation to Laura and Leo, I oscillate between thinking my study did too much, and thinking it did too little. My lingering post-positivist training as a researcher for five years in the fields of psychology and psychiatry echoes in my mind suggesting that I became too close to participants and caused too much change in their lives. My training preached objectivity and detachment from “research subjects.” I interfered with participants’ lives, changed their views, ended relationships, and made them realized and dwell upon their own exclusion. However, the budding engaged, perhaps even critical, scholar in me worries I did too little. My study was firmly interpretive, offering little more than description. Did I do enough to better any social world?

An ethical tension sometimes exists between acting in the world, and thinking about the world. For Said (1978), there is “a special intellectual and moral responsibility attached to what we do as scholars” (p. xxiii). McGowan (2010) argues that research should affect the world, and Deetz (2008) suggests that researchers should make a difference that matters in the social world. Becker (1967) proposed that all research does something; all research is either reinforcing or challenging the status quo. Therefore, researchers must be mindful of their actions; even the topics we choose and the standpoints we take towards those topics are types of action, according to Becker. Action is inevitable, because even inaction is a form of action (i.e. complacency, delay, withdrawal, etc.). Therefore, intervention in research settings is inevitable. My very presence in the world is intervention. The moment I communicate, I impose myself. Once we recognize that any choice we make is action –even (the illusion of) not choosing, then we understand the ethical importance of reflective action. Researchers
live in the world. We are always acting, always intervening, even when we are just describing our observations. Therefore, we must foster awareness of our actions, both subtle and large. My study could not help but affect my participants, simply because I entered their lives. Ultimately, researchers choose how subtly or overtly to act, what to see and what not to see, what to tell and what to keep to ourselves.

However, our view of the world is always partial, so we should act with the recognition that our actions, inaction, or choices might be wrong. Sometimes we will err. We should not be so arrogant as to assume we have found some brilliant answer or perspective; rather, our voice is one of many. We should not be so arrogant as to believe we actually can change the world; rather, we simply have the desire to improve one small aspect of one small corner of reality. We should not be so arrogant as to think our profession as scholars carries a responsibility different from other professions; rather, we have a responsibility to each other as humans (Appiah, 2006). In our arrogance, we sometimes believe we are so separate that we must leave our ivory towers to enter the world. We are already of the world; we merely construct the veil that separates us. There is no tower. However, if we remain open, our research just might change us (Hastings, 2010). Ultimately, I do not know if my study did too much or too little; I do not know if I fulfilled the ethic of scholarship that I purport to uphold. What I do know is that I continue to critically reflect on my actions and choices as a scholar and the effects my study has had on participants. I can only hope that some individuals’ worlds are one day made better through my research and, possibly, my interaction with them. I also
know that some parts of me, however large or small, have changed because of my interaction with participants.

**Summary and Implications**

In the following section, I turn my attention to summarizing dissertation findings and discussing their implications. My dissertation was an attempt to understand the experiences of gifted adolescents in the study and to create a descriptive communication model of ostracism. In Chapter Three, I discussed the simultaneous privilege and marginalization of gifted adolescents. Advanced intellect allowed some (but not all) gifted adolescents in the current study to attend advanced educational programs offered only to the gifted. Therefore, some participants received a different education, tailored more to their needs, than did their peers. Other participants leveraged their intelligence as power over others or believed intelligence conferred status. Additionally, giftedness as an institution is raced, classed, and sexed. However, many participants were disadvantaged and marginalized because of their minds. In addition to physiological disadvantages, such as constant boredom in school, difficulties sleeping, and perfectionist tendencies, study participants faced peer and teacher mistreatment, stigmas, and “nerd” stereotypes.

**Implications for gifted adolescents and gifted education.** My findings in Chapter Three offer several tentative implications for gifted adolescents. First, we could teach gifted adolescents that advanced intellect does not equate to higher personal worth. Rather, intellect is a type of diversity, and every human has equal worth despite intellectual abilities. Teaching gifted adolescents to become more tolerant of non-gifted
peers could foster better peer relationships. Second, we could teach gifted children and
adolescents to understand the nature of their differences from other peers. They must
realize that their advanced intellect might create difficulties for others to relate or create
feelings of jealousy when teachers return graded assignments and tests. However, their
intellectual differences do not need to set them apart from peers. Both of these aims
could be achieved by having discussions with gifted adolescents on the first day of their
gifted classes and demonstrating a mentality of tolerance and acceptance throughout the
year. Perhaps, gifted educators could even ask gifted adolescents to reflect on their
relationships with and thoughts about their peers throughout the year.

Several implications also exist for gifted and non-gifted peer relations. First,
educators could help foster pride in all adolescents—but not arrogant—for their own
individual abilities. The recognition that every person has different talents and abilities in
different situations might mitigate feelings of jealousy among peers. Second, educators
could encourage intrapersonal competition rather than interpersonal competition over
grades and academic achievement to ensure students are not measuring themselves by
another’s standards. For example, if a gifted student earns a 100% and a non-gifted
student earns a 95% on an exam, the non-gifted student might compare herself to the
gifted student and feel jealous or upset. These feelings could lead her to refuse to include
the gifted student in a game at recess. However, if educators encourage both students to
compare their scores to their own personal past exam scores or the amount of effort they
each put into studying for the exam then the non-gifted student might feel proud because
she earned an 90% on her previous exam. In this scenario, both students avoid hurt
feelings. Third, both gifted and non-gifted children could be taught to understand that people are different and, as such, have different needs. This recognition might move discourse from personal deficits or abilities to personal needs. This recognition also mitigates using the same measures of comparison for differently-abled individuals.

Findings from Chapter Three also suggest several implications for gifted education programs and school systems, as well. First, discourses about gifted education programs should try to avoid touting gifted education as better than regular educational experiences. These programs could help the public understand that they offer different educational experiences, depending on intellectual needs of the individual. The public needs to understand that many gifted children need gifted education in the same way that students with learning disabilities need special educational programs. The adolescents in the current study who participated in gifted programs seemed more optimistic and psychologically healthy than those who did not. However, school systems could try to meet the intellectual needs of all children, whether gifted or not. In this way, the public can understand that each child requires their own educational experience and this does not mark them as better or worse than others. Second, school systems could try not to make gifted adolescents feel special and non-gifted adolescents feel intellectually deficient. This might entail training teachers and administrators to utilize certain discourses over others, and clearly emphasizing a particular rhetoric about the program to parents. Third, gifted education could critically evaluate allegations of racism, classism, and sexism related to intellect. Undoubtedly, these issues are cultural and systemic, and not simply the fault of gifted programs and selection processes. Regardless, gifted
programs and gifted researchers could attempt to increase diversity in gifted programs and explore reasons why upper-middle class, white, males tend to disproportionately populate these programs.

Finally, findings also suggest implications for teachers, as well. Because children and adolescents spend so much of their day with teachers, they notice and are influenced by cues from teachers. Therefore, teachers could try to model appropriate reactions to gifted adolescents. A teacher could avoid making a gifted child feel privileged over their classmates by refraining from offering excessive public praise (i.e. announcing that the child earned a 100% on the exam, etc.). A teacher could also try to refrain from making a gifted child feel psycho-socially marginalized. Teachers could receive training and support to help them feel secure enough not to be threatened by a gifted adolescent’s intellect. For example, if the teacher answers a math problem incorrectly and a child corrects her, the teacher could use that as a teaching moment. She could mention that all humans make mistakes and demonstrate humility and wisdom to the class by admitting her mistake (if it is truly a mistake). Most likely, the class will respect the teacher more than if she pretends her answer is correct.

Gifted adolescents carry both the burden and gift of advanced intellect. However, many of them seem to become badly scarred while in school because of negative peer interactions. Therefore, future research should continue to focus on the social experiences of the gifted. Studies should examine rhetoric surrounding gifted education and gifted educational programs to determine whether this rhetoric helps or harms gifted education advocacy. Studies should consider public opinions and opinions of non-gifted
adolescents towards gifted education, and assess reasons for these opinions. Comparative studies should explore gifted adolescents enrolled in gifted programs compared to gifted adolescents not enrolled in these programs to determine differences in peer relations. For instance, do gifted programs help adolescents to improve their social abilities, or do these programs foster an even greater divide between the gifted and non-gifted? Studies should also compare school systems with permanent gifted programs to school systems with no gifted programs to determine how the mere presence of gifted programs themselves affects peer interactions. Does the presence of a gifted program make intelligence a more salient issue in a school system, thus fostering jealousy and competition? Or, does the presence of such programs foster an appreciation and understanding of giftedness?

Because several participants reported negative interactions with teachers, studies should also explore teachers and administrators’ interactions with gifted adolescents. Do teachers feel threatened by gifted adolescents? If so, what contributes to this feeling and how can it be mitigated? How could teachers more effectively interact with gifted children? How should gifted children be encouraged to interact with teachers? For instance, correcting a teacher in class could be viewed as a sign of disrespect; conversely, it could be a sign of critical thinking abilities and courage. Finally, since several of my participants shared negative attitudes towards non-gifted peers, studies should explore gifted adolescents’ attitudes towards and communication with non-gifted adolescents. To what extent do gifted adolescents alter their communication with non-gifted peers? Does this communication help or hinder peer interaction?
Implications for Privilege and Marginalization. Chapter Three findings also suggest some implications for our understandings of privilege and marginalization. Many gifted adolescents in the study were marginalized because of their perceived privilege. Therefore, marginalization and privilege might be connected in nuanced ways. Marginalization might have more to do with difference than with deficit. Rather than envisioning an invisible line whereby characteristics above the line are privileged and those below the line are deficient, scholars should envision a circle whereby an invisible center represents the cultural norm and deviations from the norm in any direction are potentially marginalizing. Evidence from my participants suggests difference, not necessarily deficit, contributes to stigmatization and marginalization. Therefore, individuals constructed as inferior and superior are subject to stigmatization. Future studies should explore interconnections between marginalization and privilege, particularly how discourse can recast something that was once perceived as a privilege into something now perceived as a deficit. For instance, how does our perception of another as either superior or inferior to us influence our decision to include or exclude them from a group?

The connection between marginalization and privilege also suggests cultures might engage in shades of acceptance and rejection. Language fails to capture gradations of acceptance and Leary (2005) theorized that cultures might accept individuals stigmatized for excellence more than individuals stigmatized for deficits. For instance, individuals might stigmatize someone with a visible skin disease, rejecting her as relational partner out of fear and disgust. However, individuals might stigmatize an
extraordinarily beautiful person, rejecting her because they cannot stand comparisons to her. Future research should explore differences between those marginalized for perceived superior or inferior traits. For example, do extraordinarily beautiful people or extraordinarily gifted athletes have similar experiences to gifted adolescents? Or, has our culture actually constructed intellect as a deficit? Collectives negotiate what it means to be normal, inferior, and superior, and shades of acceptance might depend on attributed valence of deviations from normalcy.

**Implications for ostracism scholarship.** Whereas Chapter Three focused on the context of gifted adolescents, Chapters Four through Six discussed ostracism and social exclusion. These three chapters functioned together to create a “big picture” model of ostracism. I strategically decided to keep my definition of ostracism broad, following Williams (2001) example that ostracism is “behavioral instances in which individuals (or groups) deliberately ignore and exclude other individuals (or groups)” (p. 44). Williams views ostracism as a wide class of actions; thus acknowledging a multitude of forms of ostracism. Some forms of ostracism are benign (i.e. being ignored in an elevator) and others are devastating (i.e. being ignored by one’s best friend). I suggested that ostracism must be viewed holistically before devastating individual forms of ostracism can be further understood. A future study could chronicle different forms of ostracism and narrow down the definitions of these forms. Trying to follow Pearce’s (1989) suggestion, I attempted to look at communication, rather than through it by exploring the worlds created by our symbolic acts. Therefore, across the three chapters, I tried to answer the
questions: who ostracizes? Why do they ostracize? How do they ostracize? What is the effect of their ostracism?

In Chapter Four, I discussed three determinants of relational desirability that affect the excluder-excludee relationship and six social objectives achieved when individuals and groups utilize ostracism. The three relational desirability determinants included importance, familiarity, and perceived social status. Future research should further explore these and additional relational dimensions to determine why ostracism from some individuals is devastating and from others is benign. The six reasons for ostracism included to defer dealing with difference, (re)produce power relations, social punishment and moral sanctioning, group definition, protecting oneself, and avoiding awkward interactions. Future research should continue to explore why individuals and groups employ ostracism and the benefits ostracism offers.

**Diversity and the (re)production of power.** The uses of ostracism to defer dealing with difference and (re)produce power are particularly consequential when considered together. One implication of these is that ostracism becomes a microcosm of cultural marginalization and prejudice. Many participants suggested that the main reason for ostracism was diversity. Difference is a reminder that the world could be otherwise and our configurations of reality are not inevitable, which can be threatening when adolescents do not have the tools necessary to understand and cope with diversity. Adolescents reportedly felt uncertainty and fear surrounding differences they could not understand. Prejudice often combines a fear of difference, uncertainty about difference, and value judgments about difference. Here, ostracism becomes a nonviolent attempt to
annihilate the other by exerting narrative control and stealing their voice; ostracism becomes a tool to produce and reproduce power structures by privileging some and disadvantaging others. Ostracism mirrors cultural prejudices and upholds exclusive moral orders by using logical force to make us believe a person like me should not associate with a person like them because they have characteristic X.

One implication of the connections among ostracism, diversity, and power is that our interpersonal interactions (re)produce exclusive social systems. Microscopic (i.e. ostracism) and macroscopic (i.e. marginalization) forms of exclusion are interdependent and must be understood together. Phenomena such as prejudice, stereotyping, and stigma are cultural forms of communication that are (re)produced and changed in our interpersonal encounters. According to Johnson (2006), most humans mindlessly follow paths of least resistance; in other words, we typically do what is easiest and most obvious. For instance, if our peers use the term “gay” as an insult, it is easy for us to do the same because no one will resist our communication. Every time we use “gay” as an insult, we reinforce a path of interaction that makes it easier for others to do the same. Social systems, based on habituated interpersonal interactions, make us more or less likely to engage in certain prefigured interactions. However, social systems do not control us, and we might be encouraged to find the agency to act otherwise.

If our interpersonal communication (re)produces systems of exclusion, then it can also disrupt these same systems. This is the second implication of findings relating ostracism to diversity and power. When Laura confronted Edmund and asked him to stop using “gay” as an insult, she laid a new path of interaction. Now her classmates can
envision a new communicative possibility. In Laura’s situation, her peers chose to police their familiar path of least resistance (i.e. continuing to use “gay” as an insult) by fighting against her. However, Laura planted a seed in their minds. The emancipatory potential of my dissertation findings is that it helped participants become more mindful of their communication patterns, thus offering an alternative to exclusive paths of least resistance. As discussed earlier, several participants decided to forge new paths of interaction by choosing to include others when they might not have otherwise. The study helped adolescents engage in perspective-taking, and many of them became quite empathetic to their peers. Sen (2006), argued, “the role of reasoned choice needs emphasis in resisting the ascription of singular identities and the recruitment of foot soldiers in the bloody campaign to terrorize targeted victims.” We can fight for social justice merely by serving as examples to others in our everyday encounters.

Related to the first two implications, a third implication regarding ostracism, diversity, and power, is that we must teach adolescents to understand forms of differences and appropriate responses to difference. Study participants discussed demographic forms of difference, such as race, gender, and socio-economic status, as well as more nuanced differences like diverse personalities, life circumstances, attitudes, and behaviors. Since we live in the 21st century, children generally understand that racism and sexism are wrong. However, they might not understand how to respond to more nuanced differences. For instance, in an interview, Lisa explained that sometimes she excluded others because, “I didn’t really know how to include them. They were so different from me. I didn’t know what to say or how to talk about similar issues with them.” Similarly,
in a journal Malcolm described his difficulties including a new student in school. He said,

I try to be outgoing and include [Ben] in stuff but it is just difficult. It isn’t really [Ben’s] fault and it isn’t really my fault either. We just don’t have any past experiences to grow on and haven’t really established commonalities to talk about.

Both Lisa and Malcolm desired to include their peers, but were uncertain how to interact with diverse others. Conversely, Amelia recently transferred to an international school for advanced learners who were taught to value diversity. Consequently, she explained in an interview, “I found that people at my school were much more accepting. They weren’t as close minded. They are used to having people from all over the world, people who were different.” She explained that her peers were accepting “no matter your country, skin color, language, body shape, hair color, or intelligence.” Because young people have a plasticity to their minds, they are in an ideal state to learn about things like difference and dialogue if we teach them.

In a future project, I would like to take my dissertation findings and use them to create a journaling-based diversity program for adolescents. This program would be similar to anti-bullying programs, but more holistic because it would include recognition of both obvious and subtle forms of interpersonal rejection as well as an attention to the role of diversity. I would utilize the journaling method to help adolescents reflect on issues of diversity, exclusion, and their own communication patterns. The ultimate goal would be to foster mindful awareness of exclusive communication. Students would learn
to recognize their own exclusive behaviors and to think critically about the types of worlds they want to actualize. Young people should understand that diversity is not scary. We do not have to like everyone or associate with everyone, but we should treat others respectfully. Additional future studies should continue to explore interconnections between microscopic and macroscopic forms of exclusion and the relationship of diversity to these social worlds.

**Ostracism as an alternative to violence.** One implication of Chapter Four findings is that ostracism might be the best alternative in a situation. Ostracism and social exclusion are complicated communication processes and are not merely general evils. Many study participants described positive, even pro-social reasons to exclude others. Laura decided to no longer associate with Edmund and his friends because she determined that they did not share her respect for humanity. One commonly cited reason for excluding was the moral sanctioning of others. Sometimes participants reported using ostracism as a social punishment from a moral standpoint, like refusing to communicate with a racist or mean individual. Others reported using ostracism as a social punishment to uphold social norms, like rejecting a peer because she dressed “oddly.” How are moral righteousness, diversity, and ostracism connected? What role do our moral orders play in ostracism? If there a conceptual difference between excluding an individual because she is mean to others or excluding an individual because we think her choice of clothing is offensive or wrong, what is this difference?

Ultimately, in the current study it seemed that peers punished individuals perceived to be threatening to their social orders (either by being mean or dressing oddly,
etc.). Ostracism is an effective form of social punishment because it non-violently communicates rejection. Many anti-bullying programs even advocate ignoring an individual rather than physically harming them. Therefore, future studies should explore ostracism as a conflict management technique. Is punitive ostracism as hurtful as other forms of ostracism? How do punitive ostracism and diversity interact? What happens when an individual is punished for something she cannot control (i.e. ostracized for being physically disabled)? Williams (2001) found that individuals preferred almost any alternative to ostracism. He said, “it is hard to imagine that anyone would prefer to be verbally or physically abused to being ostracized. Yet such a preference is one of the most recurrent themes in accounts by targets of long-term ostracism” (p. 23). A comparative study should explore individuals’ reactions and preferences for ostracism or other forms of social rejection. Does ostracism effectively coerce others to change themselves in order to seek acceptance? Should ostracism be used to coerce others?

**Non-malicious uses of ostracism.** Another implication of Chapter Four findings is that ostracism’s use is not necessarily always malicious and can serve a function for groups and individuals. Groups use ostracism to define their boundaries (though, sometimes this can be practiced maliciously), individuals use ostracism to protect themselves from others, and individuals and groups used ostracism to avoid awkward interactions with peers. Therefore, ostracism might be beneficial in certain circumstances. Williams (2001) stressed that because ostracism is beneficial to groups and individuals, it “undoubtedly ensures its reuse on other people in other situations” (p. 3). Future studies should examine what excluders might differentiate as malicious versus
benign forms of ostracism. Do excludees notice a difference in ostracism intended to be malicious versus ostracism intended to be benign? Are different outcomes achieved when groups or individuals believe their ostracism is malicious versus benign?

Additionally, ostracism is not always experienced as negative. Sometimes we want to be excluded; sometimes we need to exclude others. When Laura rejected Edmund, she felt a moral compulsion to stay away from him because of his prejudicial beliefs. Catherine described excluding individuals she believed were mean to her and others; she needed to get away from their hateful actions. Liam described excluding himself from a group of his friends who acted rude in public by cussing at passersby and hitting street signs. Liam did not want to associate with such rude behavior. Juan’s girlfriend, Isabella, had to distance herself from Juan to send the message that their relationship had no hope of surviving. Sometimes, these forms of ostracism are painful; Juan was in a near-constant state of depression for months because of Isabella’s refusal to allow him into her life in any form. Therefore, ostracism scholars must attend to the shades and gradations of ostracism because some ostracism disconfirms our being and makes us feel like nothing, whereas other forms of ostracism are beneficial.

**Understanding the poetics of ostracism.** In Chapter Five, I described micro, meso, and macro-level processes of ostracism. Micro-level processes of ostracism included ostracism acts, or communication cues that make us feel left out. Ostracism acts could be passive, active, or aggressive. Micro-level processes included ostracism practices, or a compilation of ostracism acts that form distinct patterns of chronic ostracism. Total ostracism practices were patterns whereby peers completely ignored the
existence of an individual. Partial ostracism with additional rejection (POR) practices were patterns whereby peers sometimes ignored and sometimes bullied, teased, or ridiculed an individual. Partial ostracism with inclusion (POI) practices were patterns whereby peers sometimes completely ignored and sometimes included individuals, sending conflicting messages. Finally, macro-level processes included ostracism episodes, or habituated ostracism routines with identifiable boundaries and rules. Ritualistic ostracism episodes were habituated, rehearsed, and procedural, with clear logical forces. Enigmatic ostracism episodes were ambiguous, often imperfectly coordinated, and ambiguous or unclear logical forces. My hope for Chapter Five was to increase our understanding of how ostracism works as a communication process. This chapter was my attempt to begin teasing out forms of ostracism.

In one sense, ostracism seems so simple. It merely requires ignoring another person. However, one implication of Chapter Five is that ostracism is a very complicated process. Ostracism is accomplished in many ways and takes many forms. So many methods of communicating ostracism exist, that I wonder if a procedural model is even very helpful. Future research should continue to add to and amend the tentative procedural model I present in Chapter Five (really, the model stretches from Chapters Four through Six). For instance, how do short-term versus long-term ostracism processes differ? How does ostracizing a group versus an individual differ? How does ostracism from a group versus just one individual affect us differently? I discuss ostracism processes from both the excluder and excludee perspectives, but how could we benefit from two different models from each perspective? Future research should also consider
how a model of ostracism might help parents and educators discuss ostracism with adolescents and help them cope with their rejection.

**Life after ostracism.** The final set of implications I will discuss emerged from Chapter Six. In Chapter Six, I discussed the outcomes of ostracism particularly emphasizing the positive potential ostracism can have for individuals. Responses to ostracism fell into several different categories. Participants responded on a cognitive and behavioral dimension, whereby individuals changed either their behavior or their mental state in response to ostracism. Participants engaged in an acceptance and resistance dimension, whereby they either accepted (and often internalized) their exclusion or rejected and fought against it. Participants also engaged in an antisocial and prosocial dimension, whereby their responses either brought them closer to or farther separated them from others. Additionally, ostracism held a transformative potential for many participants. Some participants were motivated to work harder and become better individuals. Other participants developed deeper perceptions of the world because of their ostracism experiences. Some attended to mystery by recognizing alternative possibilities for action. Others discover radical freedom as they found they no longer cared about others’ judgments. Finally, several participants were able to recognize and accept themselves after ostracism experiences.

The major implication from Chapter Six is that ostracism can have positive effects on individuals. For some, ostracism empowered them to see the world not as it is, but as it could be. Therefore, almost paradoxically, ostracism fostered resiliency, imagination, and allowed individuals to find their voice. My observations about the positive impact of
exclusion echoes major themes found in the two spoken word poems of Shane Koyczan, as well. These findings suggest that individuals are more versatile and hardy than some ostracism scholars might suggest. Williams (2001) has suggested that ostracism usually results in terrible pain and despair. However, most of my participants were well-adjusted and happy, despite years of chronic ostracism. Future studies should explore the positive side of ostracism. Why do some individuals find an unseen benefit and become better after ostracism, while others fall into depression and despair? How can we harness the positive potential of ostracism? Perhaps, findings about the positive effects of ostracism can help children and adolescents cope more effectively with exclusion. Maybe parents and educators can learn to bring out ostracism’s transformative potential in victims of exclusion. Ostracism’s apparent ability to foster mystery fascinates me. Therefore, more research should explore the connection between rejection and imagination. Does rejection create an opportunity to recognize our creative potential and the ability to forge new paths of interaction?

**Final Thoughts**

Why do we communicate? We do so to be heard, to exist, to define ourselves, and to become something more than we could be on our own. Ostracism is a ubiquitous form of human communication that primarily hinders our interactions with others. When others exclude us from meaningful social participation, they communicate that our existence is unwanted. However, paradoxically, even when we are ostracized we find ways to be heard, to exist, to define ourselves, and to become something more. Humans are capable of great love and great hatred, yet the human spirit is resilient. I hope this
dissertation presented both the fragility and resilience of participants. They lived lives of beauty and sorrow, as we all do. They excluded others and were excluded by others. Their stories of despair and hope are recorded on these pages, for whatever that is worth.

I hope I have achieved three goals in this dissertation. First, I attempted to reconstruct and analyze the meanings of ostracism so that scholars can better understand this important communication event. Ostracism is one of the most powerful and significant forms of communication, and communication scholars must understand it. Second, I hope my work helps individuals to live more healthfully with exclusion. We are not powerless; we do not have to accept our own rejection from a social world. We have agency and we can reclaim agency when others attempt to steal it away. If ostracism really can make us better people, maybe our goal should be to help navigate better ways to cope with exclusion. Maybe, the point is that exclusion is a very human experience from which we can learn a great deal. We do not need to become lost in the impulse to “get better” because, sometimes, living with the pain of ostracism makes us better. This sentiment is the heart of the Koyczan poems I have quoted throughout this dissertation. Finally, I helped participants to become more mindful of their behaviors and treat others with dignity. My hope is that we can stop using ostracism maliciously out of fear, uncertainty, or prejudice, and imagine new possibilities for interaction. As I have discussed, not all ostracism is negative or malicious, so I am not painting ostracism exclusively as a phenomenon of hate. However, I am suggesting mindful attention to our use of exclusion and the recognition of our imaginative potential to lay new paths of interaction. Can we imagine better?
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Appendix A.1: Sample Listserve Recruitment Email

Dear Parents of Gifted Adolescents,

I am a graduate student at Ohio University conducting my dissertation research on the social experiences of the gifted. I am looking to recruit intellectually gifted adolescents ages 10-18 (grades 5th-12th) to keep a journal of their social experiences for a month. I am particularly interested in their experiences of social exclusion (like feeling ignored, left out, or ostracized) and inclusion.

If your child would like to participate in the study, I will ask her/him to: (1) Keep a journal about her/his social experiences, including every time she/he experiences social exclusion/inclusion, observes social exclusion/inclusion, or socially excludes/includes others. She/he will write journals on a website designed specifically for this study and only my adviser and I will have access to their journals. (2) Participate in a phone interview where I will ask clarifying questions about her/his journal entries at the end of the project. All participant information is confidential, and participants will be given ID numbers for the study. This project has been approved by the Ohio University IRB. For more information about the study or participant privacy, feel free to visit the study website at: projectexperience.strileyconsulting.com.

Here is a little information about me: As a child, I was labeled “exceptionally gifted,” and experienced bullying and social exclusion, often because I cared more about things like astronomy and herpetology than sports or celebrities. Then, I switched schools and attended Phelps Center for the Gifted in Missouri. At Phelps, I found a lifelong group of peers and friends, and felt accepted for the first time. Today, I am passionate about helping to improve the lives of gifted adolescents. I understand that helping the gifted to flourish does not just mean attending to their intellectual and academic needs, but also their social and emotional needs.

I have been conducting research on gifted adolescents since 2007. I have had the privilege of working on a variety of projects, including multi-million dollar quantitative and qualitative grant-funded studies, quantitative survey designs, down to small projects where I simply asked gifted adolescents to share one story with me. I received my M.A. in Communication Studies from Missouri State University in 2009, and I am currently working towards a PhD at Ohio University. I also have been teaching quantitative and qualitative research methods at the college level since 2009. Several of the articles I have written about gifted adolescents have won national and regional awards, including an article that received the Donald P. Cushman Award in 2011 from the National Communication Association. My research and work with adolescents has also included creating anti-bullying programs for elementary schools, training students as peer mediators, and creating conflict resolution programs and substance abuse prevention programs for middle schools and high schools.
If you are a parent of a gifted adolescent between 10-18 (grades 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>) and think your child would like to participate in this study, please contact me at cs210209@ohio.edu or call me at 314-604-4298. I'd love to answer any questions or concerns you have about this project and I am excited about the possibility of working with you and the potential this project could have for gifted children and their families.

Sincerely,
Katie

Katie Margavio Striley, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
School of Communication Studies
Ohio University
cell: 314-604-4298
email: cs210209@ohio.edu
Appendix A.2: Sample Recruitment Letter Sent on Behalf of the Study

To: Parents of eligible gifted students

From: Dr. [NAME DELETED], Superintendent  
Dr. [NAME DELETED], Assistant Superintendent  
Ms. [NAME DELETED], Director of Title I/Gifted & Talented Programs

Re: Study participation for dissertation research on the social experiences of the gifted student

Date: August 28, 2013

A graduate student, Katie Striley, M.A., attending Ohio University, is conducting dissertation research on the social experiences of the gifted. She is requesting participants from [LOCATION DELETED] County Public Schools and is looking to recruit intellectually gifted adolescents ages 10-18 (grades 5th-12th) to keep a journal of their social experiences for a month. She is particularly interested in their experiences of social exclusion (like ostracism, bullying, teasing, etc.) and inclusion.

If your child would like to participate in the study, she will ask her/him to:

1. Keep a journal about her/his social experiences, including every time she/he experiences social exclusion/inclusion, observes social exclusion/inclusion, or socially excludes.includes others. She/he will write journals on a website designed specifically for this study and only she and her advisor will have access to the students’ journals.
2. Participate in a phone interview where she will ask clarifying questions about her/his journal entries at the end of the project. All participant information is confidential, and participants will be given ID numbers for the study. This project has been approved by the Ohio University IRB. For more information about the study or participant privacy, feel free to visit the study website at: projectexperience.strileyconsulting.com.

Here is some additional information about Ms. Striley in her own words:

“As a child, I was labeled “exceptionally gifted,” and experienced bullying and social exclusion, often because I cared more about things like astronomy and herpetology than sports or celebrities. …Today, I am passionate about helping to improve the lives of gifted adolescents. I understand that helping the gifted to flourish does not just mean attending to their intellectual and academic needs, but also their social and emotional needs.

I have been conducting research on gifted adolescents since 2007. I have had the privilege of working on a variety of projects, including multi-million dollar quantitative and qualitative grant-funded studies, quantitative survey designs,
down to small projects where I simply asked gifted adolescents to share one story with me. I received my M.A. in Communication Studies from Missouri State University in 2009, and I am currently working towards a PhD at Ohio University. I also have been teaching quantitative and qualitative research methods at the college level since 2009. Several of the articles I have written about gifted adolescents have won national and regional awards, including an article that received the Donald P. Cushman Award in 2011 from the National Communication Association. My research and work with adolescents has also included creating anti-bullying programs for elementary schools, training students as peer mediators, and creating conflict resolution programs and substance.”
Appendix B.1: Parental Consent Form

**Title of Research:** PROJECT EXPERIENCE: Gifted Adolescent’s Experiences of Ostracism

**Researchers:** Katie M. Striley and Austin S. Babrow (advisor)

You are being asked permission for your child to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want your child to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your child’s personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your child’s participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Explanation of Study**

**Purpose of the Research:**
This study aims to understand gifted adolescents’ social experiences, particularly the experience of ostracism. Specifically, we want to know how gifted children exclude and include others, how they communicate about inclusion and exclusion, and how they cope in these situations.

**Procedures to Follow:**
If you choose to allow your child to participate in this research, she/he will be asked to do two things.

1) **Complete online journals.** For a minimum of 4 weeks (and no more than 12), your child will be asked to keep a journal of every time she/he experience being ignored, excluded, or left out OR anytime that she/he observe someone else being treated this way OR anytime she/he treat someone this way.

2) **Participate in an interview.** After your child has written several journal entries, she/he will be invited to participate in an interview with Katie Striley, the head researcher for this study. During the interview, she will ask questions related to issues your child wrote about in her/his journals.

**Duration of Participation**
Each phase of the study lasts a different amount of time. Journaling times will vary and each individual can choose how much or how little time to spend journaling, though we anticipate participants will spend about 60 minutes per week writing. We anticipate interviews will last 30-60 minutes.

**Risks and Discomforts**
Participants might experience discomfort from recalling negative social experiences. Additionally, some participants might find the study therapeutic and might have difficulty coping with the study’s end. If either of these occurs, study researchers will help you or your child locate appropriate counseling services in your area. If you are
in the state of Virginia, you or your child can also find free counseling services in your area by going to: http://www.vafreeclinics.org/find-a-free-clinic.asp

Your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary, and she/he is free to (a) refuse participation in any aspect of the study and (b) withdraw participation from the study at any time.

Benefits
Individually, your child may benefit from this study by gaining deeper self-insights about her/his social relationships with others. She/he might even find that talking and writing about their experiences is fun.

This study is important to science and society because it will help researchers better understand social exclusion and inclusion. The study also might help parents and teachers better understand the experiences of gifted individuals.

Confidentiality and Records
Your child’s journal entries and responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. The website used to record journal entries is secure. As long as your child does not give out their login information to anyone, only the researchers in this study will be able to access their journals. We will ask your child to clear the browser history and close the browser after completing an entry, to further assure confidentiality. Journal entries and transcripts of interviews will be kept on a secure computer that only the researchers in this project can access. Your child will be assigned an ID number, and only ID numbers will be associated with participant information. The master file associating ID numbers with participant information will be destroyed no later than January 14, 2014.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Confidentially might be broken if evidence of child abuse or potential harm to self or others is revealed. Depending on the nature of the evidence, parents, school officials, social services, or the police could be contacted.

Compensation
As compensation for your child’s time/effort, your child will be entered into a series of weekly lottery drawings. Her/his name will be entered into the lottery once for every journal entry they write (i.e. if she/he writes 4 journal entries in a week, they are entered into the lottery 4 times), and twice when they participate in their interview
(they can only participate in one interview). Prizes each week will range in value from $10-25. The odds of winning the lottery will vary based on number of participants and frequency of journal entries written every week. However, I can approximate that if 50 students participate in the study and they each write an average of 3 times a week, the odds of winning are 1/50.

At the conclusion of the study, all participants who have completed an interview and at least one journal entry each week for a minimum of 4 weeks will be entered into a lottery for a final prize, an Amazon.com gift card for $100. Odds of winning the prize will vary based on the number of study participants. If 50 students participate, the odds of winning are 1/50.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Katie M. Striley at 314-604-4298 (cell), 804-740-1561 (home), Katie.striley@gmail.com, or Dr. Austin Babrow at 740-597-2793, babrow@ohio.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks to your child and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries your child might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your child’s participation in this research is completely voluntary
- your child may leave the study at any time. If your child decides to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to your child and he/she will not lose any benefits to which he/she is otherwise entitled.

Parent Signature________________________________________ Date____

Printed Name________________________________________________

Child’s Name__________________________________________________
Appendix B.2: Minor Consent Form

Title of Research: Gifted Adolescent’s Experiences with Social Exclusion
Researchers: Katie M. Striley and Austin S. Babrow

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

Purpose of the Research:
This study aims to understand gifted adolescents’ experiences with ostracism. By ostracism, we mean feeling ignored, excluded, or left out. Specifically, we want to know how gifted children are ostracized and ostracize others, how they communicate about this ostracism, and how they cope in these situations.

Procedures to Follow:
If you choose to participate in this research, you will be asked to do two things.
3) **Complete online journals.** For a minimum of 4 weeks (and no more than 12), you will be asked to keep a journal of every time you experience being ignored, excluded, or left out OR anytime that you observe someone else being treated this way OR anytime you treat someone this way.
4) **Participate in an interview.** After you have written several journal entries, you will be invited to participate in an interview with Katie Striley, the head researcher for this study. During the interview, she will ask you questions related to issues you wrote about in your journals.

Duration of Participation
Each phase of the study lasts a different amount of time. Journaling times will vary, you spend as much or as little time journaling as you would like. Interviews will last 30-60 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts
The current research poses minimal risks. However, you might experience discomfort from recalling negative social experiences. If this occurs, I can provide you with information about counseling services.
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are free to (a) refuse participation in any aspect of the study and (b) withdraw your participation from the study at any time.

**Benefits**
Individually, you may benefit from this study by gaining deeper self-insights about your social relationships with others. You might even find that talking and writing about your experiences is fun.

This study is important to science and society because it will help researchers better understand social exclusion. The study also might help parents and teachers better understand the experiences of gifted individuals.

**Confidentiality and Records**
Your journal entries and responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. The website used to record your journal entries is secure. As long as you do not give out your login information to anyone, only the researchers in this study will be able to access your journals. Your journal entries and transcripts of your interviews will be kept on a secure computer that only the researchers in this project can access. You will be assigned an ID number, and only ID numbers will be associated with your information.

The researcher conducting the focus group session will keep your information confidential. However, we cannot guarantee that other focus group participants will not share your information.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.
Compensation
As compensation for your time/effort, you will be entered into a series of weekly lottery drawings. Your name will be entered into the lottery once for every journal entry you write (i.e. if you write 4 journals in a week, you are entered into the lottery 4 times), and you will be entered twice into the lottery when you participate in a focus group or interview (you can only participate in one focus group or interview). Prizes each week will range in value from $10-25.

At the conclusion of the study, all participants who have completed an interview and at least one journal entry each week for a minimum of 4 weeks will be entered into a lottery for a final prize, an Amazon.com gift card for $100. Odds of winning the prize will vary based on the number of study participants. If 50 students participate, the odds of winning are 1/50.

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Katie M. Striley at 314-604-4298 (cell), 804-740-1561 (home), Katie.striley@gmail.com, or Austin Babrow at 740-597-2793, babrow@ohio.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:
• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
• you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
• you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
• you are 18 years of age or older
• your participation in this research is completely voluntary
• you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_________________________________________________________ Date_______

Printed Name______________________________________________
Appendix C: Adolescent Interview Script

Overview
- Welcome! Introduce Self.
- I want to go over the study and answer any questions you have about participating.
- Then I want to ask you a few questions about your social experiences and background
- Finally, I want to walk you through setting up your account and make sure you understand how the website works.

Questions about Social Experiences
- Please tell me a little bit about your current school situation. In other words, are you in a private or public school? Do you attend a gifted program of some sort? How would you describe your school?
- How would you describe your current social life?

Questions about being the Target of Ostracism:
- Have you experienced feeling ignored, excluded, or left out?
  - If so, who usually ignores you, excludes you, or leaves you out? Please do not use actual names, but instead, state their relationship to you. For instance, you could say “my sister and her friends often ignore me,” or “the popular girls at school never speak to me.”
- Do you still experience feeling ignored, excluded, or left out?
  - If so, how hurtful are these experiences, generally?
- When did you first begin to experience being ignored, excluded, or left out?
  - Can you tell me about the first time you remember?
- What do you think is the most common reason why you, personally, are ignored, excluded, or left out?
- How likely is it that you are ignored, excluded, or left out because you are gifted?
  - Please briefly describe how being gifted has or has not affected who you are.

Questions about Being the Source of Ostracism:
- In your lifetime, how often have you ever purposely ignored, excluded, or left someone else out?
  - If so, in general, how often have you purposely ignored, excluded, or left someone out?
- Please describe why you would typically ignore, exclude, or leave someone out.
- What do you think is the most common reason that most people are ignored, excluded, or left out?

Demographic Questions:
- In years, how old are you?
• What is your biological sex?
• What is your race or ethnicity?
• What is your grade in school?
• Is there any other information that I should know about you? (open-ended)

**Website Use**
- Walk them through registering for the website
- Explain the three areas of the website they will use
- Have them create a test entry so we can make sure it works

Ask if they have any final questions.
Thank you!
Appendix D: Structured Questions

Q: 1. What is a song, tv show, movie, website, or other multimedia that represents and reflects your experiences of being ignored, excluded, or left out? (If possible, please post a link to this item into your blog). Explain why this item reflects your experiences, or why you believe it is a realistic portrayal of being ignored, excluded, or left out.

Q: 2. Think about the most memorable time you were ignored, excluded, or left out. Now, write a script for what happened, including the communication that you remember occurring at this time. This can be a script in the form of a story, a play, or any other format you would like. Please be detailed and be sure to include the who/what/why/when/where/how of the story.

Q: 3. Have you experienced being ignored, excluded, or left out on Facebook, Twitter, an online game, or some other online website? Have you ever experienced any sort of negative communication on one of these sites? Please describe the most memorable time this occurred. How is social media like this used to ignore, exclude, or leave people out? Have you ever been ignored, excluded, or left out via text messages or cell phone use? How are cell phones or texting used to exclude?

Q: 4. What are your typical social experiences usually like with your same-age peers? Please describe the typical types of positive interactions you have with your peers. Please also describe the typical types of negative interactions you have with these peers.

Q: 5. Do students ignore, exclude, or leave each other out of social groups at your school? (a) If so, how often does this occur? What are some ways that students ignore, exclude, or leave each other out? How do you know when someone is ignoring, excluding, or leaving another person out? (b) If not, what do students at your school do to include others? How do you know students at your school are being inclusive?

Q: 6. Why do you think people are typically ignored, excluded, or left out? What is the most common reason people are excluded? What is the most common reaction?

Q: 7. What types of people are typically ignored, excluded, or left out at your school?

Q: 8. What types of people typically ignore, exclude, or leave out others? What do these people hope to gain by ignoring someone else?

Q: 9. If you have ever ignored, excluded, or left out someone, what is your typical reason for doing this?

Q: 10. Do people ever leave someone out for a good reason? Please explain your answer.
## Appendix E: Participant Information

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