

Digital Cues with Immersive Vignettes: Pioneering AI-Generated Video Reels to Study Barriers to Knowledge Flow

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This study investigates how psychological constructs impact a social dynamic of exclusion by pioneering the experimental usage of AI-generated video reels. Exclusion can be a critical barrier in knowledge flow within organizations, thus impairing information sharing and learning. In our 2x2 study, analysis found 172 graduate students were at increased propensity to feel ostracized based on a mindset and an elicited social schema/axiom (belief system). Results provide a preliminary explanation link (via exclusion) between bottom-line mentality (BLM) and knowledge hiding/concealment practices that can disrupt information flows at individual and group levels. Our experimental technique is the first of its kind.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, bottom-line mentality, zero-sum belief, ostracism, experimental

INTRODUCTION

The flow of knowledge is a necessary requirement for success in any organization. Whether the setting is professional or educational the willingness of individuals to engage in meaningful exchanges with others is necessary. Unfortunately, a growing trend of these exchanges has changed in that people are becoming less personable, and to some extent, exclusionary. Research in the field of knowledge management has begun to explore the outcomes of exclusionary behavior. Specifically exploring links between organizational culture, employee ostracism, and knowledge sharing/withholding (Bilginoğlu, 2019; Zhao & Xia, 2017) Extant research indicates that ostracized employees tend to avoid socialization, and refrain from knowledge sharing (Wu et al., 2016). This can become troubling as organizations today face pressure from market competition, which trickles in the organizations culture causing them to emphasize bottom-line results over social dynamics (Deloitte, 2023). Despite a push for organizational initiatives to be more inclusive, addressing social interaction dynamics remains a challenge. One plausible explanation is this heightened focus on business results. This focus can trigger a bottom-line mentality (BLM). This mindset involves prioritizing immediate business goals, often at the expense of other equally important priorities (Greenbaum et al., 2012). An emphasis on results can create interpersonal barriers that impede knowledge

exchange and transfer between individuals and groups. Thus, exploration of the social dynamics and cognitive mindsets that can impede the sharing of information is of utmost importance.

In response to evolving workplace dynamics, organizations must be effective in managing how knowledge is created, shared, transferred amongst social relationships, while at the same time mitigating it be hidden and concealed. Recent literature highlights a growing concerns about inclusivity and belongingness in such settings (Gehrisch & Süß, 2023; Palmer & Johnson, 2023). Based on the social dynamics of this research, progressing societal norms (e.g., gender identification, racial equality, and religious freedoms) along with technological integrations (e.g., remote/hybrid work arrangements and generative AI), knowledge is fundamentally being changed in how individuals share or transfer it. To remain competitive, organizations must not only achieve business results but also address belongingness and inclusion as complementary factors that facilitate exchanges (Chung & Kim, 2017). Otherwise, knowledge flows may become restricted as social barriers emerge from exclusionary practices and mindsets.

Bottom-line mentality is sometimes described as “tunnel vision.” It also may dehumanize interpersonal work relationships. A reason for this is social relationships may be reframed as inferior to business outcomes. Phrases such as, “Don’t take this personally, but it’s a business decision” may be indicative of a BLM. The extant research shows that increased BLM is associated with decreased psychological safety (Bonner, 2013), increased unethical behavior (Resick et al., 2023), excessive competition (Xie et al., 2022), and increased insomnia. Castille et al. (2018) found BLM to be related to amoral manipulation, desire for control, desire for status, and distrust of others. These psychological and behavioral outcomes signal a potential indirect relationship between BLM and work ostracism, a psychological experience (Williams, 2009). Psychological experiences encompass cognitive, emotional, and perceptual aspects of a contextual situation (Okon-Singer et al., 2015). Importantly, a sole focus on business priorities underscores a departure from social connectedness, thus likely setting up a path toward exclusion for individuals amongst their peers.

While emerging research has clearly identified a link between BLM and knowledge hiding/concealment (Chen et al., 2023; Li & Cheng, 2022; Tan et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2021), these studies focus primarily on deliberate behavioral choices to withhold information. The field has paid less attention to how BLM might shape employees' perceptions and experiences of social exclusion in the workplace. Knowledge hiding represents an active choice, whereas feeling ostracized reflects a distinct psychological experience that arises from how employees interpret their social environment via cues. Importantly, several conversations are taking place concerning the topic at hand i.e. ostracism related to knowledge hoarding (Dash et al., 2023; Khalid et al., 2020), to knowledge concealing (Al-Jubouri & Fleifal, 2020), and to knowledge hiding (Alnaimi & Rjoub, 2021; Chen et al., 2023; Islam et al., 2024). Thus, while literature acknowledges connections between knowledge behaviors and ostracism, we still know little about how an individual's bottom-line focused mindset might contribute to their experience of feeling excluded.

As societies evolve, fundamental belief systems - known as social axioms - tend to shift as well. Of particular interest in this research is something called zero-sum beliefs (ZSB). It involves a one-sided view of success in response to competition and limited resources. ZSB is considered a worldview, and can vary in magnitude based on collectivist vs. individualist national cultures (Różycka-Tran et al., 2015). Our review of the literature has yet to fully explore the interplay between this belief and BLM to influence feelings of exclusion among workers. Historically, both concepts have been used synonymously in research. Based on different origins of ZSB and BLM, we argue some misapplications have likely occurred. As such, our work starts a necessary conversation to reexamine the differences between the two concepts.

Our research makes several contributions to literature. First, drawing on both, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1989, 2001) and social information processing theory work by Salancik and Pfeffer (1978); (Walther, 1992) and we explore how a context/situational specific BLM can be activated by immersive media cues to elicit response reasoning. This expands upon and addresses a call for investigation by Greenbaum et al. (2023). Second, we respond to Howard et al.'s (2020) and Quade et al.'s (2019) calls for more research on contextual predictors and moderators of ostracism. Thus, we evaluate ZSB, at the individual level to advance the relational basis concerning ostracism, a concept that remains underexplored in research. Although BLM frequently cross-references ZSB (Babalola et al., 2020; Babalola et al., 2022;

Greenbaum et al., 2023), we provide evidence to differentiate the two concepts. Third, we integrate an innovative application of artificial intelligence (AI) in a 2x2 scenario experiment, demonstrating how technology can offer applied insights into cognitive frameworks. Importantly, our contribution and technique address several direct calls for exploring AI in experimental research (see Arsenyan & Piepenbrink, 2023; Leavitt et al., 2021; Philip, 2022). Fourth and finally, we feel this study provides a solid foundation for future research to investigate the role BLM and ostracism play on knowledge systems and management (e.g. sharing, transferring, creation, hiding, etc.).

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Understanding Social Exclusion

When an employee believes they are intentionally being excluded or ignored by others at work, they may experience felt ostracism (Ferris et al., 2008, p. 1348). Felt ostracism can result in a myriad of negative psychological outcomes including anxiety, loneliness, and reduced well-being (Williams, 2007). Further, ostracism is known to decrease job satisfaction and engagement (Ferris et al., 2017). Given these negative outcomes and their implication for performance, understanding factors that lead to workplace ostracism is critical. This is especially true considering research that has substantiated negative impacts on the mental health of individual employees and indirectly the organization.

Work by Howard et al. (2019) has also called for a better understanding of the contextual instances that contribute to ostracism. One area yet to be fully explored is the cognitive frameworks that are grounded situations that serve as antecedents of ostracism. Of particular interest to us is the influence that bottom-line mentality (BLM) may be an antecedent to feeling excluded. Additionally, how does the related construction of zero-sum beliefs interact to impact felt ostracism?

A bottom-Line mentality (BLM) is a concept that concerns prioritizing specific immediate goals, along the lines of "tunnel" vision. It is something adoptable by employees in organizations (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). In the literature, the research streams often study how this mentality is influenced by supervisors with BLM, thus influencing the employee (Babalola et al., 2021; Farasat et al., 2021; Greenbaum et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). Understandably, an employee observing their leaders' behaviors is likely to shape their perception and identification with BLM (Bandura, 1977; Sims Jr & Manz, 1982). Zero-sum beliefs (ZSB) is defined by Crocker and Canevello (2008) as individuals' psychological understanding of wins and losses. This construct is commonly described as a social axiom or deep-rooted belief system (Różycka-Tran *et al.*, 2015). Such beliefs are not typically acquired from an organization or supervisor but rather culturally.

Consider this, if an employee spends their time immersed in business priorities at the expense of interpersonal relationships or social cohesive (Greenbaum et al., 2012), are they likely to create distance between themselves and colleagues? Importantly, prior studies evidence BLM's effects on unethical behavior and decreased psychological safety (Bonner, 2013; Castille et al., 2018); however, less is known about conditions for which BLM impacts interpersonal outcomes such as ostracism. To understand how both mindsets and beliefs influence feelings of exclusion, we draw on two complementary theories: social information processing theory and social cognitive theory. Each theory helps explain different aspects of how people come to feel ostracized when they prioritize results over relationships.

A Dual Theory Approach

Social Information Processing Theory

Social information processing theory (SIP) (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Walther, 1992) explains how people interpret and respond to social cues in organizational settings from a processing standpoint. Specifically, it helps explain how different cognitive frameworks influence how individuals interpret signals in their environment. In the context of bottom-line mentality, individuals will interpret their environment and relationships through lens of "results" or "performance." This might result in the belief that building social relationships in the workplace would hinder rather than help one's performance. Another lens individuals might employ is a zero-sum belief lens, when this lens is shaping one's

environmental view and relationships that person will view all outcomes as “win or lose,” specifically they are likely to see others' “win” as a loss for themselves. This might lead an individual to view team-based work as more competitive than collaborative, thus creating tension. Both high levels of bottom-line mentality and zero-sum beliefs are theorized below to increase an individual's level of felt isolation or ostracism in organizations and groups. Mindsets such as BLM, and ZSB place blinders on cognitive system, meaning they will only process information through the lens of that belief system, this then directly impacts how that individual sees, seeks, uses, and shares information.

Social Cognitive Theory

While SIP theory helps us understand how people interpret social cues, social cognitive theory (SCT) shows us how these interpretations become acquired through watching others and interacting with their environment. Specifically, SCT helps explain how the mindset transmits across the organization to become shared culturally. Specifically, SCT argues that individuals learn by observing others in their environment and understanding expected norms on how to act and think in organizations (Bandura, 1986). SCT suggests that individuals recognize others behaviors, skills training, perceived social support, persuasion, and environmental context to play an important role in shaping them to behave in a certain way (Martin et al., 2014; Otaye-Ebede et al., 2020). Thus, if ends justify the means mentality is adopted, those who withhold information are the ones who reap the most rewards, such behaviors will be learned throughout the organization. By exploring the conditional relationship of how a culturally derived belief of success relates to a contextual mindset, more can be learned about individuals to potentially be predisposed to feel excluded, especially in BLM-oriented environments.

The principles of SCT can be applied to understand perceptions and mindsets of on employees (Cherian and Jacob (2013). SCT highlights the mutual relationship between individuals and their environments (Bandura, 1986). In other words, individuals can be influenced by the context of environments, which could involve an organization and one's culture (collectivist or individualist derived). SCT can help us understand the dynamics within this space and interplay of employees' attitudes towards a mindset rooted in the bottom line. This is important as individuals consistently regulate their behavior by comparing their own standard of conduct (via social axioms) with situational circumstances (Bandura, 1986; Domino et al., 2015). The impact of SCT can be seen across all organizational group dynamics from teams, school, to business behavior. For example, if a student in a business school notice faculty and administration emphasizing grades, rankings, and graduation rates, students may start focusing on those outcomes rather than developing deeper business knowledge. Additionally, in the context of both teams, school groups and the workplace if leaders/faculty reward only those with the top performance (without respect to how it was achieved), observes might develop behaviors that mitigate workplace relationship and group harmony and prioritize individual level achievements only.

Bottom-line Mentality and Ostracism

Research suggest that individuals with high BLMs focus on their priority alignment relative to personal success, whether it be tied to organizational results, the business environment, achieving praise, or specific career goals (Greenbaum et al., 2012). BLMs among employees involve a focus on priority allocation relative to objectives deem important for success (bottom-line outcomes). This mindset is likely to overshadow other equally important priority considerations (Eissa et al., 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2012). Additionally, employees with high BLMs are likely to ignore individuals in the workplace, which undermines their colleague's respect and places a strain on social and interpersonal relationships (Riisla et al., 2021).

Beyond one's performance impact, an increased individual BLM affects interpersonal relationships within an organization too. When employees focus primarily on tasks and cognitive resource allocation to benefit their individual success, they may inadvertently create a work dynamic prone to being ostracized by their colleagues. Research suggests that employees with a high BLM might engage in behaviors that can lead to feelings of alienation and social undermining and experience intensified feelings of shame among their colleagues (Bonner et al., 2017; Greenbaum et al., 2012; Riisla et al., 2021). Kahlid et al., (2020) find

a positive relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge hoarding. Evans et al. (2015) argue that this is because ostracized employees feel that controlling more knowledge increases to increase personal bargaining power, thus giving said employee more power, and that it is how they deal with the negative feelings associated with ostracism.

Arguably, when employees have a biased or cynical way of putting certain priorities first but at the disregard of other equally important tasks, it is reasonable to hypothesize divisiveness will result between themselves and relationships at work, especially peers and colleagues. For example, consider an employee driven by a BLM that misaligns with coworkers or their supervisor, over the course of time, we submit this individual will likely experience feelings of exclusion. We argue the reason for this is due to self-interest of an individual, thus misjudging how to bring value that resonates in appeal to others. Babalola et al. (2020) found that in work environments dominated by a BLM, employees reported having increased self-interest cognitions and mental preoccupation thoughts. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Bottom-line mentality will be positively related to ostracism.

Zero-Sum Beliefs and Employee Ostracism

From a SCT lens, these beliefs are learned over time. For instance, those with a high ZSB hold that there are finite resources and that there is only one winner and one loser. Zero-sum beliefs can have important interpersonal and societal consequences in organizations. When individuals have high ZSB, they place their own needs first and are not concerned with the needs of their co-workers. Individuals work to maximize their gains, and if they help others in their organization, it comes from a place of self-interest (Crocker & Canevello, 2015). In general, the more employees view situations as a zero-sum, the more individual employees will try to stifle other's progress (Andrews-Fearon & Davidai, 2023; Wilkins et al., 2015). High ZSBs are associated with reduced trust between employees (Różycka-Tran et al., 2015), a general cynicism about society (Zaki et al., 2021), diminished well-being, increased prejudice, and a tendency to attribute hostile intentions to other employees' behavior (Andrews-Fearon & Davidai, 2023; Chernyak-Hai & Davidai, 2022; Fearon et al., 2021). Because ZSB creates a lens of the self versus the other it can motivate those with high ZSB to people to remove or ostracism themselves from social interactions which can ultimately lead to feelings of loneliness and negative affect (Borawski, 2018; Shin & Kim, 2018). Additionally, Davidai (2025), find that those who adopt ZSB mindsets are less likely to seek help or information from others, thus stifling the transmission of knowledge across people and the organization as a whole.

Hypothesis 2: Zero-sum belief will be positively related to ostracism.

The Moderating Effects of Generalized Zero-Sum Belief Thinking

Research by (Riisla et al., 2021) provides evidence that leaders with high BLMs can influence an employee's approach to their work, emphasizing individual success and outcomes over team-oriented goals because of their preoccupation with achieving bottom-line results rather than fostering interpersonal relationships. This could discourage collaboration as employees may be more focused on their individual tasks and outcomes, potentially fostering a competitive rather than cooperative environment (Eissa et al., 2020). Importantly, employees with high BLMs may have an overemphasis on business-first outcomes, to the exclusion of other considerations. While not entirely clear, it is speculated such individuals prioritize their own success above all else and view organizational outcomes as a zero-sum game (Greenbaum et al., 2012; Riisla et al., 2021).

Building on the previous hypotheses, we propose that ZSB may directly influence ostracism and also moderate the relationship between BLM and ostracism. Specifically, individuals with high ZSB are likely to see their BLM-driven behaviors reinforced by their belief that success is a zero-sum game, leading to even stronger feelings of ostracism. Conversely, those with low ZSB may not experience the same degree of exclusion, even if they exhibit a high BLM. In other words, employees with high ZSB will likely translate their beliefs to BLM and lower levels of ostracism. In contrast, employees with low zero-sum beliefs and

low BLMs will feel ostracized in their organization. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: *Zero-sum belief will moderate the positive relationship between bottom-line mentality and ostracism, such that it will be stronger for individuals with higher (versus lower) zero-sum beliefs.*

BLM and ZSB: Distinct but Link

Our research indicates BLM and ZSB constructs are distinct but can function in unique capacities via cognitive frameworks, thus explaining a person to feel excluded. BLM focuses on prioritization of goals and objectives that a person determines important for personal or organizational success (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). BLM is described as an individual mindset that may result from socialization in a work climate, supervisor, or a colleague. In contrast, ZSB is a social axiom of cultural beliefs rooted in an interpretation of success. Individualist national cultures over collectivist are more likely to subscribe this system of cognitive adaption (Meegan, 2010). ZSB can be described as “something good is something bad for someone else” (Ross, 2018, p. 763). In their 37-Nation cultural study, Różycka-Tran *et al.* (2015) linked ZSB to personality via self-esteem, such that higher self-esteem resulted in lower ZSB. Thirdly, BLM has distinctness based on the psychological nature of priority alignment that considers successful outcomes, which can be shaped by one of the influences previously mentioned.

Employees with high BLMs prioritize decisions to align with their cognitions as to things of importance, which complement/align with success. Eissa *et al.* (2020) suggest BLM involve making decisions and acting in ways that align with important priorities (Callahan, 2007; Wolfe, 1988). Employees with high BLMs prioritize their individual or the organization’s success. Establishing the distinctiveness of constructs is essential for understanding their unique and combined effects on workplace and educational dynamics, especially given the terms are used synonymously in literature while in fact they come from different origins in the psychological process. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4: *Bottom-line mentality and zero-sum belief are distinct constructs.*

METHODS

Participants and Procedures

We recruited 206 graduate business students from a university in the Midwest of the United States to participate in this study in exchange for extra credit. The response rate was 92% (190 / 206). Our study was described as seeking to understand college student perspectives about importance and success. We recruited prospective participants by email. One hundred and seventy-nine participants completed the survey. A final sample of 172 was used for data analysis after removing participants who progressed through the study too quickly or slowly (Meade and Craig (2012). Participants were 35% female, with an average age of 27.79 years (SD = 3.97). A *priori* analysis based on three predictors (substantive and interaction) with a small-to-medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.08$) and power at 0.80, suggests that our sample size was appropriate. This study (WSU 5599) was approved by the lead author’s institutional review board (IRB) and participant’s informed consent was obtained.

Experimental Design

We designed a 2x2 scenario experiment in which we manipulated BLM and ZSB. Participants were assigned to one of out of four possible conditions by a randomizer feature within Qualtrics. Each condition involved participants watching two short videos that were approximately 1 minute and 20 seconds in length. We used AI technology developed by <https://ai.invideo.io> to build and integrate iStock (royalty-free) pictures and videos based on our self-developed scripts for the movies or reels. AI technology was chosen to ensure consistency in our delivery of experimental stimuli. Furthermore, this allowed for a highly controlled manipulation environment. The four different scripts were based validated construct items of BLM by Greenbaum *et al.* (2012) and ZSB as developed by Crocker and Canevello (2008). Each script had

a corresponding video that was launched via YouTube and accessible from within our Qualtrics survey. Our scripts and the video were based on the context of college business school graduate students thinking of themselves in a hypothetical way, specifically as the video depicted them.

We chose college as a context to base on our targeted sample, as can be used to closely resemble an employee in a work environment, in that they are working toward something of significant importance. Research by Guay et al. (2003) makes a strong case to support our decision for sampling within a context, to be similar in the work environment. In other words, an academic environment has characteristics that mirror competitive settings where BLM and ZSB are likely to emerge naturally. As such, our findings are generalizable to organizational and institution contexts.

Importantly, our use of AI-generated video scenarios aligns with Walther's (1992) social information processing theory understanding, which suggests that individuals can effectively process social cues through mediated channels. While Walther focused on computer-mediated communication, we extended this to AI-generated content, demonstrating that participants can meaningfully process social information about mindsets and beliefs through technologically mediated scenarios. To our knowledge, this study is one of the first if not the first to use AI technology to dynamically connect survey items with a media narrative to enhance participant engagement and attentiveness, especially in a research capacity.

Measures

Manipulation Checks

After participants completed the randomly assigned BLM condition and wrote about themselves hypothetically, we asked them to rate three BLM items that served as our manipulation check, using a 7-point Likert scale. The sample item was, "To what extent did the reel (video) emphasize focusing solely on a college degree completion as most important, and NOT balancing social/extracurricular activities" ($\alpha = .89$). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed participants in the low BLM condition ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.41$) identified their BLM as being significantly lower than those in the high BLM condition ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.70$), $F(1,170) = 134.56$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.77$. This evidenced our BLM manipulation was effective.

We followed the same process to check the manipulation for the ZSB condition. A sample item was, "To what extent did the reel (video) emphasize being successful is about one person winning and others losing" ($\alpha = .85$). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed participants in the low ZSB condition ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.38$) identified their ZSB as being significantly lower than those in the ZSB BLM condition ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.90$), $F(1,170) = 85.38$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.41$, thus supporting our ZSB manipulation was effective.

Validated BLM and ZSB items

Immediately after asking for manipulation check items, we administered the validated scales of BLM and ZSB. We adapted Greenbaum et al.'s (2012) 4-item scale for academic context. Example items include "I treat my college degree as more important than anything else" and "I only care about academic outcomes." For the ZSB scale, we did not adapt it because of being a generalized personality-based measure. We used Crocker & Canevello's (2008) 6-item scale. Example items include: "One person's success depends on another person's failure" and "An accomplishment is only really meaningful if it is rare." The items for both of these scales were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of each construct ($\alpha = .95$ for BLM and $\alpha = .91$ for ZSB).

Ostracism

We adapted Ferris et al.'s (2008) 10-item scale for the college and student context and measured the participant's ostracism. Example items include "I would feel ignored in my classes," "I would notice others do not look at me in class," and "Others would refuse to talk to me in class." ($\alpha = .97$).

RESULTS

Construct Validity

We evaluated the convergent and discriminant validity of constructs. The results of these assessments are in Table 1. The composite reliability (CR) is greater than 0.7 for each construct, which indicates internal consistency and reliability (Hair et al., 2009). The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was above 0.5, thus supporting convergent validity.

We examined the discriminant validity among variables with two assessments, the Fornell Larcker criterion (see Fornell and Larcker (1981) and the HTMT ratio of correlations (see Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2015). As shown in Table 1, the square-rooted AVE exceeds the correlation coefficients of comparative constructs, thus supporting distinctiveness. We used the HTMT ratio because it has increased sensitivity for detecting discriminant validity, whereas the Fornell Larcker criterion has potential issues (Voorhees et al., 2016). Using the cutoff ratio of 0.85, all constructs are below the threshold, thus affirming support for discriminant validity. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study variables are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, COMPOSITE RELIABILITY, AVERAGE VARIANCE
EXTRACTED, CORRELATIONS AND HETEROTRAIT-MONOTRAIT (HTMT)
RATIO OF CORRELATIONS

Variable	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1. BLM_mc	3.72	2.08	.90	.75	.86	.84	.39	.28	.50
2. BLM	4.01	2.02	.95	.83	.80	.91	.36	.36	.40
3. ZSB_mc	3.32	2.02	.85	.65	.35	.33	.80	.83	.51
4. ZSB	3.68	1.76	.91	.64	.27	.34	.74	.80	.38
5. Ostracism	2.03	1.42	.97	.74	.48	.39	.47	.39	.86

Source: Authors' own work

Notes: CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted, square root of average variance extracted for the constructs are reported in the diagonal (in bold). Values below the diagonal line are correlation coefficients between variables. Values above the diagonal line are HTMT values. BLM_mc and ZSB_mc = manipulation checks, all other variables adapted and based on validated constructs.

Model Comparison and CFA Results

To examine the distinctness of our study variables, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using maximum-likelihood estimation. We compared the three-factor model to a two-factor model (load BLM and ZSB items on same factor) and a single factor. The three-factor model provided an adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2(101) = 187.07$, $p < .001$; CFI = .97; SRMR = .04). This model was significantly better than the two-factor model ($\chi^2(103) = 398.85$, $p < .001$; CFI = .88; SRMR = .13); $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 211.78$.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicted that bottom-line mentality is positively related to ostracism. The results support this hypothesis ($b = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 2 predicted that zero-sum belief is positively related to ostracism. The results support this hypothesis ($b = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 3 predicted that ZSB moderates the positive relationship between BLM and ostracism, such that this relationship is positive when ZSB is high rather than low. The results support this hypothesis ($b = 0.08$, $p < 0.01$). See Table 2 for our reporting of results to both hypotheses. To further assess support for Hypothesis 3 we examined the

interaction by testing the statistical significance of the four conditions. The results shown in Figure 1 indicate a positive change in work ostracism when moving from low to high BLM, especially under the high ZSB condition. Table 3 further confirms the mean for the high BLM/high ZSB condition was statistically and significantly different from the low BLM/high ZSB condition ($p = .002$). Hypothesis 4 predicted construct differences between BLM and ZSB. To evaluate factor loads of the items in addition to our discriminant analyses, we performed an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation. ZSB items had factor loadings ranging from .72 to .85; whereas BLM had loadings ranging from .86 to .95. There were no cross-loadings, thus indicating separation between the two factors and symbiosis to not be a concern. Considering multiple analyses to test this hypothesis, with robustness, we conclude Hypothesis 4 is supported.

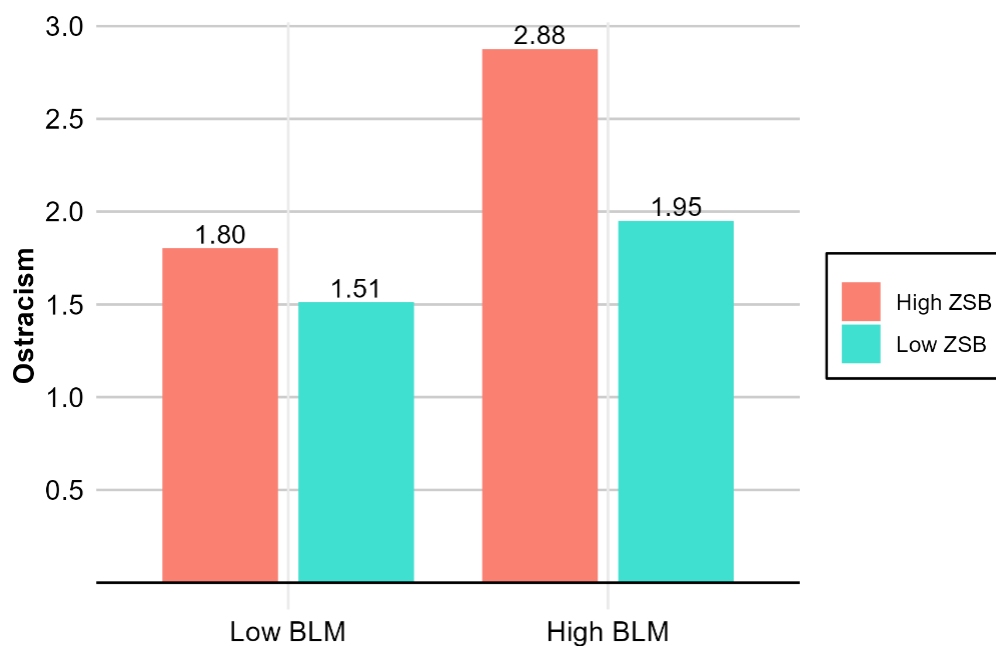
TABLE 2
REGRESSION RESULTS

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Outcome variable: Ostracism					.28
Constant	1.93	0.10	19.86	.000	
Bottom-line Mentality	0.20	0.05	4.07	.000	
Zero-sum Belief	0.21	0.06	3.69	.000	
Bottom-line Mentality x Zero-sum Belief	0.08	0.02	3.71	.001	

Source: Authors' own work

Notes: $n = 172$. Unstandardized regression estimates are reported. BLM = Bottom-line mentality. Bottom-line mentality and zero-sum beliefs were mean centered prior to analysis. LLCI = lower limit confidence interval, ULCI = upper limit confidence interval.

FIGURE 1
INTERACTION OF BOTTOM-LINE MENTALITY AND ZERO-SUM BELIEF ON OSTRACISM



Source: Authors' own work

TABLE 3
COMPARISONS AMONG GROUPS ACCOMPANYING ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

Condition	Comparison condition	Mean difference	SE	p-Value significance
High BLM, High ZSB	Low BLM, High ZSB	1.074	0.293	0.002
	Low BLM, Low ZSB	1.365	0.289	0.001
	High BLM, Low ZSB	0.926	0.289	0.009

Source: Authors' own work

Notes: $n = 172$. BLM = Bottom-line mentality; ZSB = Zero-sum belief.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we found that BLM and ZSB interact to predict a participant's level of feeling ostracized, especially when an imposing influence on the participant is within a specific context. A focus on the bottom-line can create misaligned priorities. This is different than an individual or employee seeing one person's success as another person's loss, a ZSB. Results of this study suggest individual-level beliefs can lead to ostracism. Furthermore, the more one focuses on organizational outcomes or financial ends to the benefit of self-interest, the individual is more likely to identify with increased levels of alienation from others in their environment. Interestingly, high BLM only increases perceptions of ostracism if the one believes one person's gain would be another person's loss (ZSB). In situations in which one doesn't have high levels of ZSB, perceptions of BLM don't influence perceptions of ostracism.

Theoretical Implications

This study expands our knowledge in the areas of SIP, SCT, and workplace ostracism by examining how a BLM in conjunction with and an individual's ZSB predicts feelings of ostracism. We contribute to BLM theorizing SIP and SCT as approaches to understanding how priority selection and success perspectives potentially shape negative psychological experiences. Under SCT, there are four sources of influence that impact how people learn from their own and others' experiences: personal factors, behavioral factors, environmental factors, and cognitive factors (Greenbaum et al., 2012). Furthermore, individuals consistently regulate their behavior by comparing their own standard of conduct with environmental circumstances (Bandura, 1986; Domino et al., 2015). Aligned with SCT we identified two factors (BLM and ZSB) that are cognitive in nature but considered personal factors per theory. ZSB is generally described as a social axiom involving cultural beliefs, thus there is justification. While Greenbaum et al. (2021) found a positive correlation between BLM and ZSB, meaning that people who have a high BLM are more likely to have a high ZSB, differentiation has not formally been explored prior this study. Results of this research suggest the relationship between BLM and ZSB is more nuanced, and SIP and SCT may work in tandem to impact feelings of ostracism. Specifically, despite a high BLM, pre-existing individual differences (ZSB) influence how employees view and ultimately response to the organizational environment.

While our study focuses primarily on BLM and ZSB as it predicts perceived ostracism/exclusion, the results of the research have implications for both theories and the field of knowledge management vis a vis understanding knowledge sharing within organizations. Previous research suggests that ostracism can lead to knowledge hiding, knowledge hoarding, and failure to seek knowledge from others. While we find that both high BLM and high ZSB are positively related to ostracism, BLM only increases felt ostracism with ZSB is. Thus, the lens through which you look through (SIP), shapes behavior and feelings, however this can be mitigated by adjusting a contextual mindset (aka low ZSB). In other words, our findings suggest that future research should not ignore the distinctness and interaction of performance based and competitive based mind sets on individual behavior when exploring knowledge transfer and its antecedents.

Methodological and Practical Implications

Our study provides a practical understanding of a contextual mindset (BLM) to play a role in negative psychological experience outcomes. It is important to understand how an individual or employee not only prioritizes tasks of importance but also how they define success. Organizations and institutions should consider such individuals may be prone to increased perceptions of feeling excluded if they have a fixation on something, which causes them to disregard other more important tasks. This could cost them social relationships, thus leading to a host of counterproductive outcomes e.g., reduced sharing and transferring of information. Individuals who identify with a "winner takes all" belief (ZSB) are especially at risk of ostracism if they exemplify a high BLM. Ostracism can lead to negative consequences such as diminished well-being, poor work performance, and more destructive behavior for employees and organizations alike (Bedi, 2021; Howard et al., 2020; Sharma & Dhar, 2022). Therefore, organizations should act at the business unit and potentially departmental levels to understand and potentially redesign work to mitigate BLM-type thinking, i.e., fixation on immediate outcomes. At a minimum, finding ways to balance this mindset should be something considered because it typically being of a contextual nature.

Importantly, our use of AI in a scenario experiment for video production opens the door for continued advancement as a tool to dynamically enhance how participants connect with research studies. Further, the use of AI-generated content SIP theory, in that, it was originally discussed only in the context of computer-mediated communication. The use of AI to generate content and media, blurring the lines of reality, has become common place, thus it is a natural extension to Walther's (1992) original work.

We believe the current and rapidly evolving technology of AI is ripe for integration into management research in ways that are novel yet feasible for other researchers. Thus, we tested this approach to make a compelling argument for inferential causality in this study. Per our supplementary analyses (see our OSR link at the end of the manuscript), we evidence support that a study like ours was well received by survey respondents. Considering the evolving technological changes, integrating short media reels appeals with today's participants in the 21st century. We address this because times are shifting and changing; thus, integrating technology as we have done in management research provides new ways to use experimental scenarios beyond reading passages.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is our sample is graduate students in a business school. This being so, we chose an educational situational context to closely emulate a work environment for inference purposes. By using educational degree pursuit as context and literature support by Guay et al. (2003), we feel the study is realistic to a work-based situation. Arguably, a future research opportunity is now paved to further test our research findings on workers in their environment with either experimental or confirmatory studies.

A second limitation of this study is the potential for unmeasured influences of an individual's BLM. In the workplace, a source could be from the supervisor, a colleague or the climate of the organization. Our research does not directly examine these predictor areas. Our primary focus was to isolate the individual in context. To minimize confounding and/or respondent cognitive load, we took steps to reduce complexity of the study by avoiding additional predictors. Importantly if one were to expand our study, they could directly examine how the interaction between BLM and ZSB affects specific knowledge management outcomes such as knowledge sharing, hiding, and transfer behaviors. Additionally, researchers might explore how AI-enhanced experimental methods could be used to study knowledge flow barriers in digital environments.

CONCLUSION

Our study makes several important contributions to understanding how contextual mindsets and belief systems influence social barriers in organizations. This is important for recognizing how knowledge is exchanged amongst individuals and opens the door for additional research that is interdisciplinary with organizational behavior, knowledge management, and social psychology. We examined a deep-rooted belief system to be parsimonious and different than typically described relative to a mindset and then tested

the variables to interact. Arguably, organizations will grapple and be challenged with balancing performance demands and knowledge sharing needs. This being so, advancing how mindsets interact with belief systems is important for understanding influences that occur as antecedents to knowledge management outcomes. Our findings suggest that addressing these barriers requires different strategies for situational thinking versus fundamental beliefs. The methodological research contribution we offer provides new ways to study complex social dynamics.

In addition, we demonstrate that mindsets and beliefs derived from AI-based reels have high ecological validity for digital immersion to cue outcomes, in our case, the perception of feeling excluded. Furthermore, our innovative use of AI-generated video in scenarios advances experimental methodology by opening up new, highly realistic contexts for studying complex social dynamics in contemporary workplaces.

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APPENDIX

Experimental Materials, Survey Items, and Supplementary Analyses

For access to the experimental vignettes/media, full survey items, and supplementary analyses, please visit our project page on the Open Science Framework (OSF) at <https://osf.io/zgv6n/>.