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Coping with social restrictions

Applying Social Psychology

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The social implications of lockdown

Different people have different experiences of lockdown and for some it may feel a bit like being socially excluded or left out, even though we know measures are important for safety.

Social psychologists have researched this when looking at the effect of ostracism and what can help us recover



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Potential overlap with ostracism effects

Being left out negatively affects our mood because our 'fundamental needs' are threatened; our need to belong, our need for self-esteem, a sense of control and that we have a meaningful existence. There is lots of research to support this (Williams 2007).

Research shows that even when participants knew they were being left out of a game by a computer, (rather than by a real person), they still felt threatened needs (Zadro, Williams and Richardson, 2004).


This suggests that the reaction is automatic. Applying this to the lockdown; even though we know that social distancing and social isolation measures are very important and in no way a personal attack on us, we may still feel low mood, and low sense of belonging, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence.

Beware: Ostracism can lead to increased aggression (Twenge et al, 2001)

Longer term effects; depression, isolation and helplessness.

Pancani et al (work in progress)- has applied this framework to lockdown in Italy.

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What to do?

Research on ostracism recovery may help..

At a very basic level, consider ways to lift mood and fortify your fundamental needs?

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In all cases, you will know what best works for you.

Need	Suggested boost
Mood	Music, exercise, games, comedy
Belonging	Connect with a friend or family member. Set up an online book or tv club where you each watch/read the same episode/chapter then discuss it
Self-esteem	Do something you are good at. Consider your strengths.
Control	Do something creative, play a computer game
Meaningful existence	Do something to help someone else. Think about your values

More details on the positive psychology and exercise sections

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Children and Adolescents

Abrams et al 2010 have shown ostracism effects children too, for younger children (8-9) this impacts their self-esteem the most, for teenagers (13-14) it most strongly impacted the sense of belonging.

During adolescents, more time is spent with peers and friendships grow more intimate. Consider how we can maintain this safely during lockdown?

Maunder & Monks (2018) have shown how important friendship is for wellbeing in children aged between 7-11. Friendship reciprocity was an important factor. Again, consider how we can safely enable children to maintain their friendships?

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Connecting with Others


Twenge et al (2007)- social connection following can reduce aggression. A friendly experimenter, or focusing on ones friends, family or favourite celeb all reduced aggression.

Dogs!

Aydin, Krueger, Fischer, Hahn, Kastenmüller, Fischer and Frey (2012) found that following exclusion participants expressed higher self-esteem, life satisfaction, meaning and general feelings of social acceptance when in the presence of a dog.

Interact with your pets or perhaps look at YouTube clips

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Spirituality


Aydin, Fischer and Frey (2010) ostracism can lead to an increase in religiosity, this may be a coping strategy.

Hales, Wesselmann and Williams (2016) found that prayer, self-affirmations and distraction all helped needs to recover after ostracism.

Why? Stops us ruminating. Wesselmann, Donging, Swim and Williams (2013) showed ruminating about ostracism increases distress.

How does this apply to the lock down? Thinking obsessively about it? Checking media continuously?

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Computer games

Lots of people enjoy computer games and they have been shown to help us recover from ostracism (Tamplin-Wilson, Smith, Morgan & Maras, 2019)

They can potentially give us a sense of belonging if we play with others, we can win, which boosts our self-esteem and control. Some games have even been designed to be meaningful.

Free rice
<https://freerice.com/categories/english-vocabulary>

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Computer games


Self-esteem boosting games
Grow your own chi
<https://selfesteemgames.mcgill.ca/games/chigame.htm>

But commercial games also good
What to pick? Think mood and distraction, what will be fun?

Research on *flow* suggests games that balance the level of challenge with the skill of the player will be best at lifting mood, (Lazaros, Emili, & Xun, 2018)

You are in control

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Other games and activities?


Underlying principles ; aim to lift mood, sense of belonging, self-esteem, control and meaning, and even distraction.

Boardgames or cards with family and housemates
Online game apps

They could be educational
Enjoy a maths puzzle? <https://www.think-maths.co.uk/maths-puzzles>

Reading? Comedy? Theatre?

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Social Media

Social media can foster resilience in people during disasters, as it allows us to share and gather information, solve problems collectively and share coping strategies. (Jurgens & Helsloot 2018)

Pancani et al (in progress) online social contact can reduce impact of social restriction on depression


But consider how you use social media- it can also be detrimental

Ostracism on social media also hurts (Covert and Stephanone, 2018)

And perhaps more when you are relying on it (Smith, Morgan and Monks 2016)

People's expectations differ, regarding how immediate their replies should be (Mai, Freudenthaler, Vorder & Schneider, 2015). Consider how this may increase stress?

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