ADULT ATTACHMENT STYLE, SOCIAL EXCLUSION, AND PERCEPTION OF PAIN FROM EMOTIONAL BULLYING

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Objective: Izaki and Taniguchi (2013) conducted an experimental study using Cyberball (Williams et al., 2000) and found that social exclusion and adult attachment style have interactional effects on the negative feelings of participants. Social exclusion through Cyberball is known not only to induce negative feelings in participants, but also to heighten their estimation of the other persons’ pain experiences, as socially distressing events (Nordgren et al., 2011). This study examined whether social exclusion and adult attachment style have interactional effects on perceived pain evoked by emotional bullying at school.

Methods: Participants were undergraduate students (N = 93). First, they completed the ECR-GO (Nakao & Kato, 2004), which assesses two dimensions of adult attachment style, anxiety and avoidance. Second, they played Cyberball (Williams et al., 2000) on the Internet, in which the program randomly assigned the participants to either an inclusion, or exclusion condition. Third, participants read a scenario involving emotional bullying at school and estimated the severity of the bullying using the Face Pain Scale (Bieri et al., 1990).

Results: Two-way ANOVAs were conducted with game condition and attachment style (anxiety and avoidance) as independent variables and the severity of bullying (by many classmates or by a specific student that bullied severely) as dependent variables. There was a marginally significant interaction between the game condition and avoidance on the severity of bullying by a specific student. In the inclusion condition, high avoidant participants estimated the bullying to be less severe than low avoidant participants, but in the exclusion condition, high and low avoidant participants did not differ in their assessment of the severity of bullying. These results are consistent with the study by Izaki and Taniguchi (2013) and suggest that avoidant defenses inhibit emotional reactions to bullying, when it is activated in the face of positive relational behavior of other players in the inclusion condition.

Keywords: adult attachment style, social exclusion, emotional bullying