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Recalling an attachment event moderates distress after ostracism

Erez Yaakobi¹ and Kipling D Williams²¹Ono Academic College, Israel²Purdue University, USA

Ostracism is known to cause psychological distress. Studies have indicated that immediate distress is resistant to individual differences and situational factors, but delayed reactions are more sensitive to moderation. Because attachment orientation is inextricably tied to rejection and inclusion, we hypothesized that attachment orientation would moderate both immediate and delayed ostracism effects and that recalling an attachment event compatible with a person's attachment internal working model would moderate the distress of a laboratory ostracism experience. In two experiments, 158 individualistic (secular Jewish) and 190 collectivistic (ultra-Orthodox Jewish) participants played Cyberball with two other ostensible in-group players. Distress was measured immediately after the game and 30 minutes later. The results showed that less anxious and more avoidant individualistic but not collectivistic participants were less distressed by ostracism. After the delay, recall of an attachment event compatible with the participants' internal working model eliminated distress in both individualistic and collectivistic ostracized participants as measured on the needs satisfaction scale. Among individualistic participants, avoidants, who are known to avoid meaningful attachments, were less distressed by ostracism; anxious participants, who seek proximity, were more distressed. Recalling a compatible attachment event may be a mechanism that reduces individuals' perceptions of threats to their fundamental needs.

Biography

Erez Yaakobi is an expert in attachment theory, ostracism and terror management theory and conducts research examining their effects on psychological outcomes including health and wellbeing. He has published peer review papers in leading journals and written three books on these topics. He is a Senior Lecturer and teaches psychological research methods and statistical courses at several academic institutions, leads academic programs, and is an Organizational Psychologist serving as a Consultant for organizations in public and private sectors.

dr.yaakobi@ono.ac.il

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