

The Role of Stress-reactive Rumination in the Genesis of Depressed Feelings:
Findings from Experimental Manipulations that Simulate Stress-reactive Rumination
among a Non-clinical Sample of Undergraduates

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Abstract

Background

Stress-reactive rumination (SRR) refers to the tendency to ruminate on negative inferences following stressful events. Previous studies indicated that SRR, in interaction with negative cognitive style, predicted the prospective onset, number and duration of major depressive episodes. Yet, it is under-researched and there is no experimental studies demonstrating its causative role in depressed mood.

Objectives

The current study aims at simulating SRR among a non-clinical sample of undergraduates and assessing its immediate effect on the genesis of depressed feelings.

Method

An experimental paradigm was adopted in which SRR was operationalized in accordance with existing conceptualizations of depression. An initial sample of 544 university students were recruited, and the final analyses included 333 of them who met various inclusion criteria. Each participant was asked to write a sad personal experience of failure and to select thought cards associated with such experience. They were then randomly assigned into one of the six experimental conditions for five minutes. In the SRR Condition, participants ruminated about their sad

experience and the associated thoughts by reading them aloud repeatedly. In the Double Rumination Condition, apart from what was required in SRR Condition, participants were asked to read aloud and think about two additional questions that capture the essence of depressive rumination. In the SRR with Unrelated Thoughts Conditions, participants ruminated on thought cards not associated with their respective experience. In the Distraction with Objects Condition, participants focused their attention on common objects. In the Distraction with Chinese Characters Salad Condition, participants read aloud chunks of Chinese characters that formed no cohesive meaning. In the Depressive Rumination Condition, participants were asked to read aloud statements depicting depressive rumination like the symptoms of depression, the causes and the meaning of depression.

Results

As predicted, participants undergoing any one of the SRR conditions reported further mood decline while those in Distraction with Objects Condition reported uplifted mood. A gender difference was found in that after undergoing the Distraction with Chinese Characters Salad Condition, female participants reported uplifted mood and less anxiety about loss of emotional control while the male participants reported more anxiety.

Discussion

Unlike previous studies who measure SRR with a self-administered

questionnaire, the current study serves to be the first attempt to operationalize stress-reactive rumination in a laboratory setting and put such construct under an experimental paradigm. Findings lend support to the cognitive attentional syndrome as postulated in Wells' S-REF model and metacognitive theory for emotional disorders, and address some inadequacies of existing conceptualization of depression (e.g., Beck's theories of depression). The adoption of an experimental paradigm provides supplementary evidence for the causal role of SRR in the genesis of depressed feelings. Implications for further research and intervention are discussed.

摘要

背景

「因壓力事件而引發的反覆思索」(stress-reactive rumination) 是指個人在經歷負性生活事件後不斷在腦海中重覆思索該事件及與該事件相連的負面個人想法。在科學文獻中，這現象初步驗證為其中一項導致情緒低落的認知誘因。

研究目的

本研究旨在透過模擬「因壓力事件而引發的反覆思索」，增加對此現象在影响情緒方面的理解。

研究方法

研究對象是三百三十三名沒有抑鬱病病徵的大學生。他們首先寫下一段他們感到情緒低落的個人失敗經歷，並揀選相關的負面思想，然後他們被隨機分成六個實驗組：第一、第二及第三組為「反覆思索實驗組」，第四、第五組為「思想轉移組」，第六組為「文獻對照組」。第一組要求研究對象在五分鐘內不斷投入地反覆誦讀該段個人經歷及相關的負面思想，以達到模擬此現象的效果。第二組要求研究對象除了反覆誦讀上述材料外，還要反問自己「為甚麼心情會弄到如此田地、再這樣持續下去的話對自己的影响」。第三組要求研究對象投入地反覆誦讀與該段個人經歷不相關的負面思想。第四組透過要求研究對象誦讀寫有實物的字咭，以達致思想轉移的效果。第五組要求研究對象誦讀不構成意義、由個別中文單字拼湊而成的中文字串，以達致思想轉移的效果。第六組參照文獻中「因覺察本身低落情緒」而引發的另一類反覆思索，研究對象誦讀相關的

提引，例如留意身體在低落情緒時的狀況，及思索低落情緒的成因、意義及影響。

研究結果

「反覆思索實驗組」的情緒顯著地較實驗前低落，並更焦慮情緒失控，這三組間並沒有明顯的區別。「實物思想轉移組」的情緒顯著地較實驗前改善，並減少對情緒失控的焦慮。在「字串思想轉移組」中，女性研究對象的情緒顯著地較實驗前改善，並減少對情緒失控的焦慮，而男性研究對象的情緒較實驗前並沒有顯著變化，但他們較實驗前更焦慮情緒失控。「文獻對照組」的情緒較實驗前並沒有顯著變化，但此組的男女研究對象較實驗前更焦慮情緒失控。

討論

此項研究初步確立用實驗形式去檢視「因壓力事件而引發的反覆思索」對低落情緒直接影響的可行性，並為相關論理提供有力的驗證。本文亦探討不同形式的「反覆思索」與抑鬱情緒之間的關係，及在臨牀治療上的應用。

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