

EFFECT OF DISTRACTION ON RUMINATION AND NEGATIVE MOOD
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Abstract

Previous research mostly studied rumination and distraction independently. Only two studies investigated the sequential effect of rumination and distraction and they both reported that distraction counteracted the effect of rumination, alleviating negative mood after rumination induction. Building on the findings that distraction eliminated mood-related thoughts, this study explored the possibility that rumination can be modified and reduced by effective distraction.

It was hypothesized that there will be differential effects of distraction on negative mood and rumination level. Effective distraction, which is engaging and leaves people with little cognitive capacity for rumination, will lead to significant reduction of rumination level and negative mood. On the other hand, ineffective distraction will have little, if any, effect on rumination level and negative mood when the activity is simple, as the working memory still has room for rumination.

Sixty-three university students were recruited in the experiment. They were randomly assigned into two conditions, where they engaged in simple or difficult math tasks respectively as distraction after mood and rumination inductions. Contrary to the hypothesis, it was found that both experimental and control groups reported significant increase in happiness ratings, significant decrease in sadness ratings and lower rumination ratings, suggesting distraction is effective in alleviating negative mood and modifying rumination regardless of the nature of distraction tasks.

KEYWORDS: Rumination, Distraction, Negative mood