Association of Reactivity of Explanatory Flexibility and Ruminative Brooding in a Mood-Prim ing Paradigm to Depressive Symptoms: Six Month Follow-Up

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INTRODUCTION

Explanatory flexibility and pessimistic brooding represent recent advancements from two well-established cognitive behavioral theories of depression. Explanatory flexibility refers to how flexible or rigid individuals are at assigning causes to events (Fresco & Craighead, 2003). Individuals who view each situation separately and contextually are regarded as flexible. Fresco and Craighead (2003) operationalized explanatory flexibility as the standard deviation of an individual's responses to the stable and global items for negative events from the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Peterson et al., 1982). A large standard deviation represents flexibility whereas a small standard deviation represents rigidity. In this way, explanatory flexibility arises from the theoretical tradition of the learned helplessness and hopelessness theories of depression (Abramson et al., 1978; 1980) and is conceptually related to but distinct from explanatory style (the tendency to see negative events arising from internal, stable and is conceptually related to depression (Fresco et al., 2004). Support for the brooding and is conceptually related to depression as the criterion and High and Low Brooding and Negative Life Events interaction between both cognitive reactivity (of explanatory flexibility and ruminative brooding) after a mood priming challenge and intervening negative life events can predict depressed mood assessed six months after the mood prime. Participants were given measures of depressive symptoms both before and after a negative mood prime that prior research has shown capable of inducing temporary negative affect (Segal et al., 1998). These same participants were then followed-up six months later and given the same measures of depressive symptoms. The interaction of the reactivity of explanatory flexibility to the mood prime and negative life events significantly predicted depressive symptoms at follow-up, and approached Cohen's (1992) convention for a large effect ($R^2 = .28)$. The interaction of the reactivity of ruminative brooding did not significantly predict depressive symptoms, however this finding corresponded to a medium effect ($F^2 = .11)$. These findings support our hypothesis that reactivity in explanatory flexibility and brooding following an emotion evocation challenge is predictive of subsequent depressive symptoms.

• Individuals who become rigid in their ability to explain causes to events in their lives in response to negative mood are more likely to develop more long-term depressive symptoms when faced with negative life events
• Individuals who tend to maladaptively ruminate in response to negative mood are also more likely to develop depressive symptoms when faced with negative life events
• Use of emotion evocation challenges may represent a psychological "stress test" useful in identifying individuals vulnerable to future emotional upheaval

DISCUSSION

Participants consisted of relatively high-functioning college students, resulting in uncertain generalizability to the general public

Attrition between the mood induction and follow-up assessment resulted in small sample size and questionable external validity

Future Studies

• Replicating the current study utilizing a more representative population

REFERENCES


