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Development and validation of the anger rumination scale

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Abstract

The Anger Rumination Scale was constructed to measure the tendency to focus attention on angry moods, recall past anger experiences, and think about the causes and consequences of anger episodes. Principal axis analysis demonstrated a four factor structure of the scale, which was also supported with a subsequent confirmatory factor analysis. The Anger Rumination Scale was demonstrated to have adequate internal consistency and one month test-retest reliability. The convergent and discriminant validity of the scale were supported by an expected pattern of correlations between the Anger Rumination Scale and the measures of anger experience, anger expression, negative affectivity, emotional attention, satisfaction with life, and social desirability. Normative data is provided for a sample of 408 college-age men and women. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Anger is a basic emotion (Oatley, 1992) that can be defined as a negative feeling state associated with specific cognitive appraisals, physiological changes and action tendencies (Kassinove & Sukhodolsky, 1995). It has been distinguished from related concepts of hostility and aggression (Friedman, 1992; Spielberger, Reheiser & Sydeman, 1995) and a substantial body of literature has been accumulated which necessitates a distinction between anger and anger rumination. Conceptualization of the anger rumination was influenced by the social-constructivist (Averill, 1983) and factor-analytical (Spielberger, 1988) models of anger. Anger rumination is considered as a relatively independent component within the sequence of broader anger phenomenology. Generally, if anger is viewed as an emotion, anger rumination can be defined as thinking about this emotion.

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The Anger Rumination Scale (ARS) was developed to assess cognitive processes that unfold after the emotion of anger has been triggered or generated. Deffenbacher (1999) explicated the difference between internal and external triggers of anger. External anger eliciting events include identifiable circumstances such as being cut off in traffic. Internal events that may trigger anger include thoughts and memories of prior anger-provoking events such as thinking about an ex-spouse. Anger experiences are further shaped by cognitive appraisals, specifically those of unfairness, blameworthiness, and intentionality (Kassinove & Sukhodolsky, 1995). Spielberger (1988) labeled the phenomenology of anger experience as state-anger, which was defined as a transient psychobiological feeling that varies in intensity from mild irritation to fury and involves the concomitant activation of the autonomic nervous system. Correspondingly, an individual's tendency to experience state-anger with higher frequency and in response to a wider range of situations is referred to as trait-anger. We propose that anger generation and anger experience processes are intertwined with anger ruminative processes, which can be responsible for sustaining and augmenting anger.

This paper is concerned with anger rumination, unintentional and recurrent cognitive processes that emerge during and continue after an episode of anger experience. In addition to anger literature, research on ruminative thoughts (Martin & Tesser, 1996; Trapnell & Campbell, 1999), self-focused attention (Ingram, 1990), emotion regulation (Gross, 1998), and counterfactual thinking (Roese, 1997) was reviewed during the stage of construct clarification (DeVellis, 1991). As a result, the construct of anger rumination was theoretically derived to include three different processes: memories of past anger experiences, attention to immediate anger experiences, and counterfactual thoughts about anger experience. To illustrate these dimensions, consider an inner monologue that might unfold in a person's head after being stood up by a date. The person might be thinking: "I can not believe I got stood up by this #\$\$@%! I am really mad now (i.e. attention to current experience). This is just the kind of thing my ex used to do (i.e. memories of similar anger provoking episodes). I could have been home watching television instead of waiting out here (i.e., counterfactual thinking)." Subsequently, it is suggested that memories of past anger episodes can trigger new episodes of state-anger, attention to anger experience can lead to amplification of its intensity and duration, and counterfactual thoughts may be related to action tendencies towards resolution or retaliation.

Based on subjective reports, anger is a frequently experienced and an easily identifiable emotion. On average, anger is experienced several times a week and typically lasts for half an hour (Averill, 1983; Kassinove, Sukhodolsky, Tsytsarev & Soloveyva, 1997). The relationship of anger to elevated blood pressure (Suls, Wan & Costa, 1995), social maladjustment (Deffenbacher, 1992), and aggressive behavior (Berkowitz, 1993) demonstrates the clinical utility of anger research. While anger has been connected to clearly detrimental outcomes, ruminative thoughts do not easily present with the obvious negative implications of the same caliber. However, ruminative thoughts were named as major contributors to unhappiness (McIntosh & Martin, 1992), depression (e.g. Beck, 1982), and the ability to solve problems (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989). Clearly, reoccurring thoughts of anger episodes would negatively contribute to subjective well-being and, therefore, merit investigation.

A plethora of anger measures is available in research literature. A recent review counted 63 published measurement instruments (Miller, Smith, Turner, Guijarro & Hallet, 1996). The present conceptualization of anger rumination suggests that it is related to the duration of anger experience

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