



## Rejection sensitivity prospectively predicts increased rumination

Katherine A. Pearson\*, Edward R. Watkins, Eugene G. Mullan

Mood Disorders Centre, University of Exeter, England EX4 4QJ, UK

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 23 July 2010

Received in revised form

17 April 2011

Accepted 10 June 2011

#### Keywords:

Rumination

Depression

Interpersonal style

Submissive

Rejection sensitivity

### ABSTRACT

Converging research findings indicate that rumination is correlated with a specific maladaptive interpersonal style encapsulating submissive (overly-accommodating, non-assertive and self-sacrificing) behaviours, and an attachment orientation characterised by rejection sensitivity. This study examined the prospective longitudinal relationship between rumination, the submissive interpersonal style, and rejection sensitivity by comparing two alternative hypotheses: (a) the submissive interpersonal style and rejection sensitivity prospectively predict increased rumination; (b) rumination prospectively predicts the submissive interpersonal style and rejection sensitivity. Currently depressed ( $n = 22$ ), previously depressed ( $n = 42$ ) and never depressed ( $n = 28$ ) individuals completed self-report measures assessing depressive rumination and key psychosocial measures of interpersonal style and behaviours, at baseline and again six months later. Baseline rejection sensitivity prospectively predicted increased rumination six months later, after statistically controlling for baseline rumination, gender and depression. Baseline rumination did not predict the submissive interpersonal style or rejection sensitivity. The results provide a first step towards delineating a potential casual relationship between rejection sensitivity and rumination, and suggest the potential value of clinical assessment and intervention for both rejection sensitivity and rumination in individuals who present with either difficulty.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

Depressive rumination has been defined as repetitively focusing on the symptoms of distress and their causes and meanings (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Findings from a range of experimental and longitudinal studies have implicated depressive rumination in the onset and maintenance of depression (for reviews see Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008; Watkins, 2008). Recent analyses of rumination have distinguished between distinct factors: a maladaptive factor labelled brooding, defined as 'a passive comparison of one's current situation with some unachieved standard' (Treyner, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003, p. 256), which prospectively predicted increase in depressive symptoms, and a more adaptive reflection factor, defined as actively attempting to gain insight into problems, which did not predict prospective depression.

Nolen-Hoeksema's (1991, 2004) response styles theory (RST) defines rumination as being a stable vulnerability factor for depression, i.e., RST assumes that rumination remains elevated in people who have a vulnerability to depression even when they are

not currently depressed. Consistent with this conceptualisation of rumination as a trait characteristic, findings from several empirical studies indicate that rumination is elevated in those who have a history of depression compared to those who have never been depressed (Bagby, Rector, Bacchiochi, & McBride, 2004; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000; Roberts, Gilboa, & Gotlib, 1998).

Similarly, a maladaptive interpersonal style characterised by excessive reliance on closeness to others (i.e. dependency) has been conceptualised as a depressogenic vulnerability factor in cognitive (Beck, 1983), attachment (Bifulco, Moran, Ball, & Bernazzani, 2002), and psychodynamic (Blatt, Quinlan, Chevron, McDonald, & Zuroff, 1982) formulations of depression. Consistent with the conceptualisation of this maladaptive interpersonal style as a trait characteristic, empirical findings from a number of studies indicate that dependency is elevated in both currently depressed and formerly depressed individuals compared to those who have never been depressed (Franche & Dobson, 1992; Klein, Harding, Taylor, & Dickstein, 1988). In addition, findings from longitudinal studies indicate that cognitive-affective processing systems and behavioural strategies characteristic of dependent individuals confer vulnerability to future depression; Thus, women who tend to anxiously expect and fear interpersonal rejection (labelled "rejection sensitivity", Downey & Feldman, 1996) are more likely to experience depression following a relationship break-up (Ayduk,

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [katherine.k.pearson@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:katherine.k.pearson@kcl.ac.uk) (K.A. Pearson).

Downey, & Kim, 2001). Moreover, the tendency to seek reassurance from close others that one is loved (labelled “excessive reassurance seeking”, Davila, 2001) and submissiveness to others (Ball, Otto, Pollack, & Rosenbaum, 1994) are related behavioural factors which prospectively predict future depression.

Given that both cognitive mechanisms, such as rumination, and interpersonal behaviours are implicated in the aetiology of depression, it is theoretically plausible that they may be associated, leading to proposed integrations of cognitive and interpersonal models of depression (Joiner, 2000; Schmidt, Schmidt, & Young, 1999). Indeed, Joiner (2000, p. 211) proposed that depressive rumination might be the “cognitive motor” which fuels depressive interpersonal mechanisms. Consistent with this hypothesis, rumination was significantly correlated with a range of maladaptive interpersonal behaviours in depressed patients (Lam, Schuck, Smith, Farmer, & Checkley, 2003) and positively associated with diminished relationship satisfaction in remitted depressed patients (Kuehner & Bueger, 2005).

More specifically, converging evidence suggests the hypothesis that depressive rumination is associated with a subset of interpersonal behaviours and concerns characterised by excessive relationship concerns (Gorski & Young, 2002; Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001; Spasojević & Alloy, 2001) and fear of rejection (Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007), passivity and avoidance (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993; Moulds, Kandris, Starr, & Wong, 2007) and submissiveness (Cheung, Gilbert, & Irons, 2004). Consistent with this hypothesis, a recent cross-sectional study found that depressive rumination was specifically associated with a submissive interpersonal style (incorporating overly-accommodating, non-assertive, and self-sacrificing behaviours), and rejection sensitivity, even after controlling for depressive symptoms, gender, and other interpersonal styles (Pearson, Watkins, Mullan, & Moberly, 2010).

These cross-sectional findings raise questions about the temporal and causal nature of relationship between depressive rumination and this maladaptive submissive interpersonal style. Some research suggests a potential role of rejection sensitivity in exacerbating rumination. First, Nolen-Hoeksema and Jackson (2001) proposed and found that people who are excessively concerned with maintaining close relationships are susceptible to rumination in order to monitor how their relationships are going. Second, Saffrey and Ehrenberg (2007) proposed that individuals who are preoccupied by fears of rejection and abandonment have more difficulty adjusting following the end of a relationship, thereby leading to increased rumination about the interpersonal loss. Consistent with this hypothesis, they found that, following an interpersonal rejection, rumination was elevated in individuals with heightened fears of rejection and abandonment. Third, relative to those low in rejection sensitivity, high rejection-sensitive individuals report greater feelings of rejection following the presentation of experimentally-manipulated ambiguous feedback (Downey & Feldman, 1996), show greater depression following a relationship break-up (Ayduk et al., 2001), and show biases towards greater self-referential encoding and recall of rejection relevant material (Mor & Inbar, 2009). Since perceived rejection reflects an important unresolved goal of high personal relevance (i.e., to avoid rejection and to be in a secure relationship), and rumination is hypothesised to be activated in response to unresolved goals (Martin & Tesser, 1996; Watkins, 2008), rejection sensitivity may therefore increase vulnerability to rumination. Furthermore, increased recall and activation of negative material would lead to increased accessibility of negative memories of rejection, which may feed into repetitive and ruminative thought. Consistent with this possibility, rejection-sensitive people described ruminating in response to an ambiguous situation more

than people low in rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

Similar accounts suggest the hypothesis that submissive, overly-accommodating, non-assertive and self-sacrificing behaviours might contribute to increased rumination. First, being unassertive may lead to poorer interpersonal problem solving (Chiauzzi & Heimberg, 1986) and decreased social competence (Paulsen, Bru, & Murberg, 2006), and hence to the maintenance of unresolved interpersonal goals, driving further rumination. Moreover, if important personal concerns are silenced to accommodate others' needs but remain unresolved, it is likely that they will become the subject of further internal ruminations (O'Mahen, Flynn, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2010). Second, rumination is itself a manifestation of a passive response style (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991, 2004) and, therefore, may become more frequent as a more passive style of responding is adopted, particularly in situations where people perceive they have little control over their environment. For example, Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, and Grayson (1999, p. 1062) argued that women ruminate more because “they are searching for ways in which they can control their environment and their distress but do not feel efficacious about exerting that control and thus remain stuck in rumination.”

In contrast, Tse and Bond (2004) hypothesised that rumination fuels social functioning difficulties in depression by occupying cognitive resources necessary for social perception and interpersonal problem solving, and by activating negative cognitive schemata, negatively biasing how people interpret and respond to social stimuli. Consistent with this argument, experimental findings have indicated that rumination is causally implicated in increased negative thinking and impaired interpersonal problem solving (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Lyubomirsky, Tucker, Caldwell, & Berg, 1999), and reduced motivation and initiative (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993). These negative cognitive and motivational consequences of rumination would be expected to generate passive and unassertive interpersonal behaviours, as well as contribute to increased perceptions of rejection. Consistent with this hypothesis, Nolen-Hoeksema (2004, p. 112) argued that a greater tendency to ruminate can function to keep women “stuck in cycles of passivity and impair their ability to overcome other problems contributing to their depression such as inequities in their marriages”.

Many of the studies reviewed are limited in using a cross-sectional design, leaving unresolved the temporal nature of relationship between rumination and interpersonal style, that is, whether these interpersonal responses are antecedents and/or consequences of depressive rumination (e.g., Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001; Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007). Moreover, some of the studies utilised non-clinical samples (e.g., Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007; Spasojević & Alloy, 2001), making it unclear to what extent the findings can be generalised to an underlying clinical population.

Therefore the principal aim of this study was to investigate the temporal nature of the relationship between depressive rumination and elements of the associated maladaptive interpersonal style. In order to optimise variability in rumination in the current study sample it was deemed necessary to recruit currently depressed, previously depressed and never depressed individuals. By examining the prospective relationship between rumination and interpersonal style in a mixed sample, we tested two contrasting (but not mutually exclusive) hypotheses: (a) the submissive interpersonal style and elevated rejection sensitivity will predict increased rumination (brooding) six months later, controlling for baseline rumination, gender and depression; (b) rumination (brooding) will predict increased submissiveness and rejection sensitivity six months later, controlling for the baseline interpersonal measures, gender and depression. Given previous findings indicating that

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات