Catastrophic worry and systematic processing: Exploring an information processing account of perseveration

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Study 1: Background

Negative mood increases catastrophic worry (Johnson & Davey, 1997) and systematic processing (e.g. Ambody & Gray, 2002)

The appraisals associated with negative mood may increase cognitive variables known to increase an individual’s sufficiency threshold (level of effort required to attain a sufficient degree of confidence that processing goals have been met) and consequently increase an individual’s tendency to use systematic processing strategies.

We hypothesised that participants exposed to a negative mood induction (vs. Neutral or Cognitive Priming) would score higher on measures of systematic processing facilitators (accountability, responsibility, desire for control, and a composite measure)

Method

| Mood Induction (Negative, Neutral or cognitive priming) | Manipulation checks and VAS questionnaire |

Results

The mood inductions were successful; the Negative Mood group was significantly sadder (F(2, 55) = 10.86, p < .001, partial η² = .20) and less happy (F(2, 55) = 5.28, p = .008, partial η² = .16) than the Neutral and Cognitive Priming groups.

The Negative Mood group scored significantly higher on the measures of accountability (F(2, 55) = 5.98, p = .004, partial η² = .20), responsibility (F(2, 57) = 7.80, p = .001, partial η² = .29), and a composite measure of the systematic processing facilitators (F(2, 55) = 6.91, p = .003, partial η² = .20).

References


Study 2: Background

Study 2 extended the design in order to assess the effort of experimental mood manipulations on worry. We hypothesised that the negative mood induction group would score higher on the measure of worry, as well as the systematic processing facilitators.

Method

Mood Induction (Negative, Neutral or cognitive priming) → Manipulation checks and VAS questionnaire → Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ; Meyer, Miller, Metzger & Borkovec, 1990)

Results

The mood inductions were successful; the Negative group was significantly sadder (F(2, 83) = 23.98, p < .001, partial η² = .37) and less happy (F(2, 83) = 13.18, p < .001, partial η² = .24).

The Negative group scored significantly higher on accountability (F(2, 83) = 4.10, p = .02, partial η² = .12), a composite measure of the systematic processing facilitators (F(2, 79) = 3.68, p = .030), and ‘As Many As Can’ deployment (F(2, 83) = 7.13, p = .001, partial η² = .15). The Negative group scored significantly higher on the PSWQ (F(2, 81) = 3.60, p = .032, partial η² = .08). The relationship between Negative Mood and higher PSWQ scores was fully mediated by the composite systematic processing facilitators score.

Conclusions

The findings are consistent with the view that negative mood results in perseverate worrying by facilitating factors known to increase deployment of systematic processing.

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