Abstract

Background: The attentional scope model of rumination postulates that a narrower scope of attention limits the array of thoughts and thus increases the likelihood to focus on the same topic repetitively. It is hypothesized that narrowed attentional scope is a key characteristic of ruminators.

Methods: In stage 1, 918 university students were recruited to complete an online questionnaire. In stage 2, individuals with the Ruminative Response Scale total score falling within the top 10^{th} percentile (Ruminators) and the bottom 10^{th} percentile (Non-ruminators) were selected to complete a range of tasks.

Results: Ruminators had a significantly lower rating on moderately good and weak exemplars in categorization task (i.e. a narrower scope of conceptual attention). No significant difference was found between ruminators and non-ruminators regarding global-local vision, peripheral-center style of processing and remote association ability. However, rumination was associated with narrower global-local vision and brooding, in particular, was associated with narrower peripheral-center processing in ruminators, but not in non-ruminators.

Conclusions: Current findings suggest that ruminators had a narrower range activation of mental representations in a given context, which may be related to a limited array of thoughts that are accessible and activated.