ABSTRACT

THESIS: The Mediating Effect of Working Memory Impairments on the Relationship between Rumination and Distress

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Rumination is a form of repetitive negative thinking (RNT) implicated in several mood and anxiety disorders. However, little work has been done to provide a rationale for why these disorders are prone to this style of thinking. The present research aimed to demonstrate that biases for negative information, specifically in the context of working memory updating, work to maintain ruminative thinking for those with features of distress psychopathology. It was hypothesized that greater resource allocation towards processing negative information compared to neutral information would mediate the relationship between rumination and characteristics of distress psychopathology. Specifically, it was believed that individuals with features of distress psychopathology have biases towards processing and maintaining negative information, which negatively impacts the resources available to accommodate neutral information. This study utilized event-related potentials (ERPs) elicited by a working memory updating task to examine potential deficits in working memory updating for negative and neutral words. The tendency to engage in ruminative thinking and core features of distress psychopathology were assessed using self-report measures, including a shortened form of the Ruminative Response Scale and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory II Restructured Format. Results obtained using a
sample of 15 undergraduate students suggested working memory updating did not mediate the relationship between features of distress and tendencies to ruminate. Results supported that rumination and demoralization are strongly related. However, working memory updating did not predict distress or tendencies to ruminate. The implications of these findings for dimensional conceptualizations of distress psychopathology are discussed.