**CAN POOR EMPATHic SKILLS BE EXPLAINED BY COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY DEFICITS IN DEPRESSION?**

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Cognitive theories posit that depression could be characterized by cognitive flexibility deficits. Furthermore, studies showed poorer empathic skills in depression. As functional empathy requires to switch from self to others’ perspective, the purpose of this study is to investigate the role of mental flexibility in empathic deficits.

To this aim, we recruited a sample of 30 young women, aged 18 to 25. To assess behavioral affective empathy (AE) and cognitive empathy (CE), participants performed the Multifaceted Empathy Test (MET), which consists of photographs depicting people in emotionally charged situations. Subjects had to rate pictures’ valence, protagonists’ emotional states and their level of compassion toward these. Afterwards, participants completed a local-global task measuring cognitive flexibility. In the emotional condition, happy and sad faces where displayed behind local and global forms, whereas no faces appeared in non-emotional condition.

Results showed that subjective empathy (Basic Empathy Scale, 2008) was negatively correlated with depression (Beck Depression Inventory-II, 1996). Performances at the MET task revealed better recognition for negative emotions (specially sadness) in higher levels of depression. The cognitive task highlighted flexibility deficits in participants with higher levels of depression in the non-emotional condition and when they were processing happy faces. Furthermore, they performed better when processing sad faces in the local condition, while worse scores were obtained in the global one. Thus, depression seems to reduce flexibility and influence empathy. The partial role of mental flexibility in empathic skills through the ability to switch from its own perspective to one another will be discussed.