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Views of self and mental distress: Negative or conflictual?

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Negative self-views have been considered a common trait of many psychiatric disorders (particularly, depression) and for psychological distress in general. However, some lines of research have shown that cognitive conflicts represented by conflicting positive and negative self-perceptions can be vulnerability markers of high significance but often neglected or under-researched. We have conducted a series of studies testing out the relevance of these internal conflicts using the repertory grid technique to carefully assess patients' constructions of self and others and to explore conflicts between their personal constructs. Our results show that patients with depression, eating disorders and other clinical conditions present a pattern of mixed positive and negative self-descriptions with a high rate of conflict. Regression analyses yielded support to the conflict hypothesis in relation to clinically relevant indicators such as symptom severity, and global functioning. Therefore it would be useful for therapy to focus on conflict resolution, making desirable changes in behaviour and mood compatible with the need for preserving coherence of identity. For example, psychological interventions could target dilemmas as a therapeutic focus and enable therapists to tailor treatment to fit their patient's own experiences. Finally, several studies using interventions targeted to resolve cognitive conflicts will be examined in terms of available evidence and range of disorders to which they could be implemented. They could also be considered as transdiagnostic interventions.

Biography

Guillem Feixas Viaplana is currently Professor at the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Barcelona, completed his PhD at this center and holds a Postdoc position at the University of Memphis, USA. He is the Director of the Master in Cognitive Social Therapy and other Postgraduate courses. He has published more than 90 papers in reputed journals and 10 books and led several research projects. His investigations have been focused in interpersonal construing and its role in health (both mental and physical), and in the process of psychotherapy.

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