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IMPLICIT ASSOCIATIONS IN EATING DISORDERS: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY WITH THE "SELF-ESTEEM" IMPLICIT ASSOCIATIONS TEST

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Introduction: Greenwald et al.(1998) developed The implicit Association Test (IAT) to measure automatic concept-attribute associations. Several evidences showed that Eating Disorders (EDs) were characterized by a low explicit self-esteem.

Objectives: The first aim was the evaluation of implicit self-esteem in a sample of patients with EDs. Second aim was to verify the correlation between implicit and explicit self-esteem, hypothesizing that they could represent two independent constructs.

Methods: A IAT modeled to assess self-esteem (Self-esteem IAT) has been administered to 17 Anorexia Nervosa (AN), 14 Bulimia Nervosa (BN), 17 Binge Eating (BED) patients and 32 healthy controls (HC). In IAT, the target categories were represented by the words «SELF / OTHER» and «agreeable / disagreeable». A positive IAT effect suggest a negative implicit self esteem, instead a negative IAT effect suggest a positive implicit self-esteem. Traditional self reports were used to evaluate explicit self-esteem to all participants.

Results: Results showed a significant difference between HC and clinical groups in implicit self-esteem. HC and BED showed positive IAT effect, instead AN and BN shows a negative IAT effect. No correlations between implicit and explicit self-esteem were found.

Conclusion: Results showed that HC has a much more positively implicit self-esteem compared to clinical samples. An interesting result concerns the absence of any significant correlation between the implicit and explicit self-esteem, that could suggests that the implicit self-esteem is an independent construct respect to the explicit one.