

Effects of Anhedonia and Mood on Emotional Reactivity to Affective Stimuli

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Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is an extremely debilitating disorder with respect to physical, psychological, and emotional functioning. However, impairment in people with MDD may vary drastically based on the cluster of symptoms that people exhibit and the severity of those symptoms. The present study examines the relationship between the two gateway symptoms for diagnosis of MDD, anhedonia and depressed mood, and emotional reactivity within a large non-clinical sample. To this end, participants (N=107) were asked to complete an Emotional Picture Rating Task (EPRT). The EPRT required participants to rate the valence and arousal level of their emotional response to 100 pictures (40 negative, 20 neutral, and 40 positive pictures) from the International Affective Picture System. In addition, participants completed self-report questionnaires used to assess levels of hedonic capacity, general affect, and depressive symptomology. We found that elevated levels of anhedonia (i.e. decreased hedonic capacity) predicted blunted emotional reactivity to both positive and negative pictures, while elevated depressive symptoms predicted potentiated negative emotional reactivity to negative pictures. These findings are consistent with current literature that suggests that MDD affects emotional processing, but suggests that different symptoms affect emotional processing in different ways. These findings could suggest that treatment of MDD should be approached at a symptomatic level rather than at a generalized level.