

A social cognitive approach to clinical gut: The impact of backward and forward inferences on psychotherapist's metacognitive confidence and information seeking strategy.

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Oral Session II: Strategy and content of information search

Day: Thursday, March 23rd

Time: 13.30

The non-decomposable nature of a psychotherapy session favours intuitive judgments (see Hammond et al., 1987), which may have lingering effects on psychotherapists' conceptualization of patients' conditions. Specifically, the feeling of rightness associated to intuitive judgments (e.g., Koriat, 2012, Thompson et al., 2012) is likely to lead to overconfidence and to the use of a confirmatory hypothesis testing strategies. This, may compromise therapists' evaluation of their clinical (intuitive) judgments.

This tendency could be moderated if besides backward inferences (causal explanations) therapists were requested to make forward inferences (predictions) based on the same session information. Forward inferences are associated to more uncertainty than backward inferences (Hogarth, 2010), and are expected to be associated to an open mindset (e.g. Fiedler et al., 2005). Therefore, forward inferences could decrease overconfidence in the clinical judgment and promote non-confirmatory information seeking, thus contributing to therapy effectiveness.

The present study manipulates, within participants, inference direction: backward vs. forward. Psychology students were presented with two fictional cases and were asked to make clinical judgments, consisting on estimating the probability of causal factors for client's symptoms for one case; and the probability of several future effects of the client's symptoms for the other. After each clinical judgment, participants rated their feelings of rightness, and the overall confidence after all judgments. Finally, information seeking strategies were measured through the ratings of likelihood of several diagnosis; the selection of additional symptoms, from a list, to better understand the case; and the time spent reading additional information.

As expected, results suggest that backward inferences lead to higher confidence and more confirmatory information seeking strategies than forward inferences. Interestingly, backward inferences lead to more diagnostic information seeking strategy. Further research on the mediator role of confidence and therapists' metacognition on information seeking strategies are discussed.