

Understanding:

# The Empathy of Our Depressed Friends



# Depression & Empathy

Depression is not just a mood disorder

It is rarely discussed how depression is a serious mental illness that chemically affects how people perceive themselves and others.

People with depression may have a mood disorder coupled with a deficiency in emotional conflict processing; this makes it more difficult for them to empathize with others.

(Hoffman et al, 2016)

Hoffmann, F., Banzhaf, C., Kanske, P., Gärtner, M., Bermpohl, F., & Singer, T. (2016). Empathy in depression: Egocentric and altercentric biases and the role of alexithymia. *Journal of affective disorders*, 199, 23–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.03.007>



# MYTH

“

**People with depression are apathetic; they don't care about anything or anyone.**

”



# BUSTED!

**Depressed individuals are super caring!**

however...

**It's complicated!**

**People with depression feel so much for others that they involuntarily absorb others' negative feelings, causing their attention to shift from the other person to themselves.**

(Hoffman et al, 2016)

# Understanding Empathy

People with depression have...

**Low Affective Response:**  
lessened understanding of psychological  
state of mind

**High Empathic Distress:**  
self preservativion by distancing from  
other people's negative feelings

**Altercentric  
Bias**

putting oneself in  
other people's  
shoes; sharing their  
pain

**Egocentric  
Bias**

being more self  
centered rather than  
putting oneself in other  
people's shoes

# It Gets More Complicated!

Now, is it the meds talking?

A study observed whether depression or antidepressants are the culprit for such complexity in empathy

After medication, depressed patients...

- Were more likely to look at situations in different ways
- Were less likely to let their moods be affected by others' negative mood
- Found it more difficult to identify their own pain



Antidepressants protect patients against negative stimuli; it causes "selfishness" when empathizing with others

# What You Can Do

As a human and a friend

It is a privilege to have a healthy mind, and the best thing we can do is be **understanding** of one another. Especially with the current situations in the world, we must be open minded and kinder to ourselves and those around us.

**Always be mindful of the fact that you are a friend and your friends need your support.**



# If You're in Need of Help

Some FREE resources

## Online Counseling:

[7cups.com](http://7cups.com)

[freeonlinetherapy.org](http://freeonlinetherapy.org)

## Direct Emergency:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:  
1-800-273-8255 (TALK)

Crisis Text Line (text HOME to 741741)