

**Are empathic abilities impaired in dissociation? :**

**Examining the relationship between empathic abilities, dissociation  
and betrayal trauma**

**Submitted by**

**Yvonne Ngo Kit Fong**

**(Student ID: 1155060699)**

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**The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

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### **Abstract**

Retraumatization risk that is related to pathological dissociation has drawn our attention to the link between dissociation and empathic abilities. Empathic abilities are social cognitive functioning allowing us to understand others by inferring and sharing their feeling and mental states in reference to ourselves. Empathic abilities are considered imperative to many forms of adaptive social interaction. The purpose of this study was to examine relation of the psychometric properties of trait dissociation and empathic abilities. A sample of normal college students ( $N = 156$ ) aged 23 to 34 years completed questionnaires measuring dissociation (The Dissociative Experiences Scale, DES), empathy (Interpersonal Reactivity Index, IRI) and also trauma history (Brief Betray Trauma Survey, BBTS). The results indicated that dissociation was significantly related to empathic fantasy and empathic personal distress. In addition, as dissociation was regarded as psychological consequence of betrayal trauma, the predictive role that betrayal trauma might play in relation of dissociation and empathic abilities, was also examined. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings were briefly discussed.

*Keywords:* dissociation, empathic abilities, trauma, emotion, cognition