The general aim of this ex post facto study was to investigate the emotional component of theory of mind (eToM) in a sample of 97 female patients with eating disorders (ED), considering all the diagnostic subtypes. Empirical research on this matter in ED is limited, specially focused on anorexia nervosa (AN), and results have been contradictory. The Reading the Mind in the Eyes test was administered to the patients and to 39 healthy controls. The emotional valence of the items was also examined. Patients with bulimia nervosa (BN) and ED-not otherwise specified (EDNOS) showed a poorer eToM ability compared to controls, especially in relation to positive emotions and non-emotional cognitive states. AN patients showed no differences in relation to controls. These results suggest that BN and EDNOS may show a specific pattern of difficulties inferring complex emotions, while AN patients would have no relevant difficulties in this regard. These deficits may need to be targeted in psychological treatment.

Keywords
Theory of mind, Anorexia, Bulimia, Social cognition, Ex post facto study.