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Embodiment of abstract concepts: Good and bad in right- and left-handers.

J. Exp. Psychol.: Gen. 138, No. 3, 351-367 (2009).

Summary: Do people with different kinds of bodies think differently? According to the body-specificity hypothesis, people who interact with their physical environments in systematically different ways should form correspondingly different mental representations. In a test of this hypothesis, 5 experiments investigated links between handedness and the mental representation of abstract concepts with positive or negative valence (e.g., honesty, sadness, intelligence). Mappings from spatial location to emotional valence differed between right- and left-handed participants. Right-handers tended to associate rightward space with positive ideas and leftward space with negative ideas, but left-handers showed the opposite pattern, associating rightward space with negative ideas and leftward with positive ideas. These contrasting mental metaphors for valence cannot be attributed to linguistic experience, because idioms in English associate good with right but not with left. Rather, right- and left-handers implicitly associated positive valence more strongly with the side of space on which they could act more fluently with their dominant hands. These results support the body-specificity hypothesis and provide evidence for the perceptuomotor basis of even the most abstract ideas.

Classification: C30 C80

Keywords: cognitive science; cognitive psychology; experimental psychology; research; abstract concepts; body-specificity hypothesis; embodied cognition; emotional valence; mental metaphors; left-right; good-bad; handedness; judgement influence; body-specific judgments

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