

The Diversity of Love Journal

Body Metaphors of Emotions Across Cultures

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Subjective experiences of love are widely embodied in various sensations and organs. Therefore, it is not surprising that bodily metaphors and metonymies are common for verbal expressions of emotion and love (see, for example, Kovecses, 1988, 2003). For example, an increase in body heat and in heart rate may be indicative of love, as in “I felt hot all over when I saw her,” or “He’s a heart-throb.” Sweaty palms and blushing may also stand for love, as in “She blushed when she saw him,” or “His palms became sweaty when he looked at her.”

The Heart Emotional Metaphors Across Cultures

A few types of heart metaphors referring to the expressions of emotions and love are present in Germanic languages (e.g., German and English) and Romance languages (e.g., Italian, Spanish, and French). The heart is a container of sincere feelings and emotions, as it is presented in German, French, Italian, and Spanish in such expressions as “speaking from the heart,” or “speaking from the bottom of one’s heart” (Pérez, 2008).

The Italian “*parlare col cuore in mano*,” the same way as the Spanish “*hablar con el corazon en la mano*,” has the figurative denotation

“*speak with the heart in your hand*,” meaning “speak frankly,” “clearly show one’s emotions.” In English, the expressions “near my heart,” “give my heart,” “lose my heart,” and “gain a beloved’s heart” are common metaphors of love and affection.

The Turkish words for heart (“kalp” and “yürek”) are also used as metaphors for many emotions, such as fire, force, burden, agitation, and others (Baş, 2017).

In the Gĩkũy – the spoken language of the *Kikuyu* people of Kenya (East Africa), the heart metaphor *wendo ni ngoro* (“love is heart”) figuratively localizes love and other emotions (Gathigia, Ndung’u, & Orwenjo, 2015). Several lexical expressions convey this meaning, such as *wendo utumaga uhure ngoro* (“love makes the heart beat fast”), *wendo ni thakame* (“love is blood”), and *wendo wa thakame nduthiraga ngoroini* (“the love of the blood does not end in the heart”).

Cultural Variation in the Embodiment of Emotions

In many cultures, emotions are also localized in other body parts. In some Turkish metaphoric expressions, emotions are in the liver: “My liver, my soul” (Pérez, 2008). The Malay indigenous people also believe that emotions are situated in the liver (Howell, 1981). The Tahitian people believe emotions derive from their intestines (Levy, 1973). In the cultural expressions of emotions and love in several African cultures, such as Nigeria, the Akan people of Ghana, and Cote d’Ivoire, the belly is the seat of emotions. It is worthwhile to note, however, that many culturally specific words may have multiple meanings that cannot be simply interpreted from a dichotomous view. For instance, the African word *yam* (stomach) is polysemic, and its expressions describe the intricate metaphoric and metonymic relations of the stomach, womb,

heart, chest, and brain, representing multiple positive and negative feelings (Agyekum, 2015).

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