

New research shows metaphors reveal personality

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(Medical Xpress)—A new study by Adam K. Fetterman, a recent doctoral graduate in psychology, and Michael D. Robinson, professor of psychology at North Dakota State University, shows that metaphors for the head and the heart have a surprisingly wide scope in capturing people's personalities.

The paper, "Do you use your head or follow your heart? Self-location predicts personality, emotion, [decision making](#) and performance," has been published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

The study notes that throughout the history of Western civilization, the head has been regarded as the source of rational wisdom, while the heart has been regarded as the source of passions. Fetterman and Robinson examined the accuracy of the [metaphors](#) in a series of eight studies.

[Study participants](#) were asked to choose whether they thought more of the self was in the heart or the brain. Relatively equal numbers of people chose each body part. Participants who chose the heart characterized themselves as emotional, feminine and interpersonally warm.

Participants who chose the brain characterized themselves as rational, logical and interpersonally cold. The results are consistent with common metaphors for the head, such as "she has her head on straight," versus metaphors for the heart, such as "she has a big heart."

In addition, participants who selected the head answered trivia questions more accurately and had higher grade-point averages. Participants who

selected the heart favored emotional over rational considerations in [moral decision](#)-making. They also reacted more emotionally to daily stress.

"When we say that our self is located in the head or that someone 'uses their head,' it is not just a figure of speech. We do so to convey the information to ourselves and others in an understandable way," Fetterman said. Robinson added that the findings indicate that "there are two very different types of people – head people and heart people, exactly as prominent metaphors suggest." Appreciating such differences may allow people to choose careers that better match their interests and may help health professionals to tailor their interventions based on personality.

More information: [psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=b ...
uy&id=2013-21212-001](https://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=buy&id=2013-21212-001)

Provided by North Dakota State University

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