Emotional Implications of Metaphor: Consequences of Metaphor Framing for Mindsets about Hardship

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Metaphors can shape reasoning about complex phenomena like crime (e.g., Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011; 2013). Can metaphors shape people’s emotional states and mindsets about hardship? Can they encourage people to reappraise an emotional situation?

Methods
1516 participants on Amazon Mechanical Turk
- 1305 read about cancer (Exp 1 + 2)
- 211 read about depression* (Exp 3)

Joe was just diagnosed with cancer*. He knows that for the foreseeable future, every day will be a journey with the disease. The road he has to travel will not always be an easy one. Many people have written about their experiences on the Internet, and he can turn to those for consolation. His friends and family want him to know that he will not be alone in his journey. Even though sometimes he might not feel like talking, other times he may want to share stories of his journey with others, and they will be there for those moments.

Did metaphors shape reasoning about emotions?

Battle group believed he would feel guiltier if he didn’t recover than journey group

Journey group believed he could make peace more than battle group

These inferences were true for both cancer and depression contexts

People do not make different inferences about “making peace” and “coming to terms” with the hardship

Metaphors have a stronger effect when people remember them than when they do not

People find battles more appropriate than journeys for talking about a cancer experience

People who prefer battles believe he’ll feel guiltier than those who prefer journeys. People who prefer journeys think he can make more peace.

More people preferred journey after reading journey than after reading battle

Conclusions

Common metaphors for discussing hardship shape reasoning about emotions

Journey associated with less guilt for not recovering and a better chance of making peace than battle

But people found battle to be more appropriate than journey for describing a cancer experience

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