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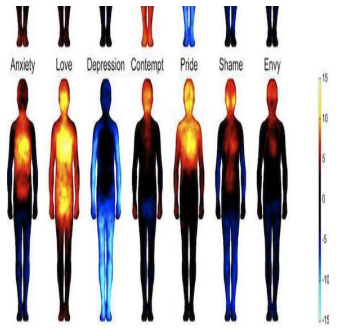
Our Emotional Map: The Body Atlas Revealed



Where do we feel love? And how about getting cold feet? Green with envy?

According to research, the most commonly experienced emotions activate powerful bodily sensations, and the bodily maps of these feelings are topographically different for various emotions.

The sensory patterns showed consistency across West European and East Asian cultures, which underlines that emotions and their respective bodily sensation are indeed biologically based.

Assistant professor Lauri Nummenmaa from Aalto University explained that in addition to adjusting our mental states, emotions also adjusted our bodily states, assisting our ability to swiftly react to dangers. This further allows us to respond to the opportunities present in our environment with regards to pleasurable social interactions. According to Nummenmaa, being aware of the corresponding bodily changes may as a consequence trigger the conscious emotional sensations, such as the feeling of happiness.

These finding are described as having significant implications for our understanding of the actual functions of emotions and their bodily basis. Scientists hope that the results will help us to better comprehend different emotional disorders and subsequently provide innovative tools for their diagnosis and treatment.

The methodology applied by the researchers was to induce a variety of emotional states in their Finnish and Taiwanese participants and to show them pictures of human bodies on a computer. By asking the group to colour the bodily regions where they felt an increase or decrease in activity, the emotional body maps were obtained.

Jointly funded by European Research Council (ERC), The Academy of Finland and the Aalto University (aivoAALTO project), the research was exclusively conducted online and included over 700 individuals from Sweden, Finland and Taiwan. The findings were published in the scientific journal Proceedings of The National Academy of Sciences on 31 December, 2013.

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