

Synesthetic associations and psychopathological symptoms

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Abstract

Synesthesia in general is a phenomenon of intersensory and intrasensory linkage that may be observed in various conditions including artistic creativity and also manifests in conditions of various brain dysfunctions and injuries. Synesthesia is a phenomenon represented by transmodal associative connections that may represent a continuum from strong synesthetic phenomena to its mild forms that may enable creation of “synesthetic” metaphors. This study is focused on projective assessments of word-color association and their relationship to psychopathological measures reflecting stress, depression, dissociation and other psychometric measures in 154 participants selected from general population.

The results are in agreement with previous reported studies suggesting that lighter colors are more frequently associated with positive emotional meanings. In addition the results indicate significant relationships of color-word associations to some specific words with depression, anxiety, alexithymia and symptoms of traumatic stress. These results are in accordance with existing findings in context of the so-called metaphorical synesthesia where significant role might be attributed to color intensity. In this context, results of this study suggest that color associations may reflect various mental contents and specifically indicate stimulus words related to dissociated states that manifest as response to conflicting contextual frameworks and stressful experiences. Mainly these results are in accordance with existing findings in context of the so-called metaphorical synesthesia. In this metaphorical process synesthetic experiences are closely associated to typical patterns of memory functionally and specifically consolidated in the hippocampus and other structures that create various contextual frameworks that are specifically influenced by stressful conditions. These findings about metaphoric synesthetic associations may play a specific role in symbolic imagination, where various colors and their levels of lightness or darkness may characterize their association or dissociation (“dis-association”) with predominant contextual framework and reflect unconscious mental processes.