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Downwards Vertical Attention Bias in Conversion Disorder vs Controls; a Pilot Study

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The research was conducted at the Department of Neurology, Tel-Aviv Sourasky Medical Center, Tel-Aviv, Israel.

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Background: Conversion disorder (CD) is a largely enigmatic disorder, one that requires a thorough ruling-out process. Prior research suggests that metaphors and conceptualization are rooted in physical experience, and that we interpret our affective world through metaphors. Spatial metaphors (interaction of affect and vertical space) are a prominent example of the grounding of metaphors. This is a relatively uncharted direction of research of CD.

Objectives: The present pilot study sought to explore this view by investigating the 'healthy is up, sick is down' spatial metaphors (e.g. 'fell ill', 'top shape') in patients with CD, examining the correlation between the processing of bodily-related words, CD and vertical space. We hypothesized that patients with CD, who experience their bodies as ill, will demonstrate a downwards bias when processing bodily-related words; corresponding to the 'healthy is up, sick is down' spatial metaphor.

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