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Iconic Gestures – a Double-Edged Sword for Creative Imagery

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Abstract

Hand gestures have been shown to enhance overall verbal divergent and convergent creative thinking, especially for people with high imagery. In the present study, we tested whether gestures can also boost creative imagery, or creative visual imagination, as both creativity and gestures might rely on visuospatial skills. Participants first generated ideas regarding a simple unfinished figure and then completed the figure with their favorite idea. Spontaneous and encouraged gesture frequencies during idea generation and verbal descriptions of the idea before drawing it were calculated. We found that iconic gestures produced when generating ideas could lead to more vivid and original creative imagery. However, gesturing during idea description could result in reduced transformativeness (i.e., reduced modification and flexibility when drawing). These findings suggest that iconic gestures can be beneficial for visual creative imagery when generating ideas. However, once we settle on a particular idea, gesturing about it might hinder creative flexibility.