

POSTER

PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO DISGUST-ELICITING VISUAL STIMULI: A COMPARISON OF ANCESTRAL, MODERN, AND PANDEMIC-RELATED THREATS

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of evolution, animals and humans developed complex physiological and behavioural mechanisms to respond to threats. The key emotion associated with the avoidance of the threat of infection is disgust. This study focused on the measurement of physiological reactions to disgust-eliciting visual stimuli. We divided the stimuli into three main categories: ancestral (spoiled food, worms, and bugs), modern (pollution, toxic substances), and pandemic-related (sneezing, masks, hospitals) threats. We analysed and compared selected parameters of physiological responses and subjective ratings of disgust across the categories. The results showed that among the experimental categories (spoiled food, worms and bugs, pandemic, and pollution), participants were most likely to react to the worms and bugs category, which depicted parasitic or worm-like animals, while other categories evoked reactions as frequently or even less frequently than the control stimuli (leaves). In cases where reactions were present, the largest average amplitude was found in the pollution and pandemic categories, while the average amplitudes for other categories were similar to or even lower than the control stimuli. The subjective ratings of the used pictures did not correspond with the average reaction probability nor with the average amplitude. The results suggest that modern threats might evoke a stronger emotional response than ancestral threats, even though the reactions might occur less frequently.