

Disgust, Shame and Manners

Based on <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn4563-disgust-is-good-for-you-shows-study.html#>.

And <http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21929350.200-manners-maketh-man-how-disgust-shaped-human-evolution.html?page=1#.Uz0gZPIdV14>

'Manners maketh man' **Are manners a display of social status?**

Imagine....YOU wake up in the morning. Your partner burps and drags on a smelly dressing gown. You can't find your toothbrush so you use his, and then wipe some muck off the floor with it. Leaving the house, you step over a turd deposited by a neighbour, then drive into a traffic jam caused by everyone ignoring the lights. In your office, everyone interrupts each other until a spitting match breaks out. Leaving work, ill-groomed strangers press up against you in the lift and one sneezes in your face.

How do you feel after reading this? Why do we feel this way?

How do we think disgust as a human emotion evolved?

Is disgust one of the easiest facial expression to interpret?

How are disgust and shame related?

We are a cooperative species – **how do manners help us?**

'.....manners are so important that they should be up there with fire and the invention of language as a prime candidate for what makes us human.' **What do we think?**

In 2008, Simone Schnall, now at the University of Cambridge, showed that placing people in a room with an unacknowledged aroma of fart spray and a filthy desk increased the severity of their moral judgements about, say, whether it's OK to eat your dead pet dog.

Perhaps it's no surprise, then, to find that the more "disgustable" you are, the more likely you are to be politically conservative, says Pizarro, who has studied this correlation. Similarly, the more conservative that people are, the harsher their moral judgements become in the presence of disgust stimuli.

Together, these findings raise all sorts of interesting, and troubling, questions about people's prejudices, and the ways in which they might be influenced or even deliberately manipulated. Humanity already has a track record of using disgust as a weapon against "outsiders" - lower castes, immigrants and homosexuals. Nazi propaganda notoriously depicted Jewish people as filthy rats. This has implications in politics, the judicial system and selling. **How?**

For those seeking to avoid disgust's influence, it's first worth noting that some people are more likely to be grossed out than others, and that the triggers vary according to culture (see "Cheese and culture"). In general, women tend to be more easily disgusted than men, and are far more likely to be disgusted about sex. Women are also particularly sensitive to disgust in the early stages of pregnancy or just after ovulation - both times when their immune system is dampened.

The young are more likely to be influenced by the yuck factor, and we tend to become less easily disgusted as we grow old. This could boil down to the fact that our senses become less acute with age, or perhaps it is simply that older people have had more life experience and take a more rational view of potential threats. **Should we try to reduce the influence of disgust?**