

The Disgust Sensitivity Scale

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Abstract

Purpose: This study proposes the Disgust Sensitivity Scale (DSS) as a new measure of disgust sensitivity, specifically in four domains: core, animal-reminder, contamination-based, and moral-sexual disgust. As the Disgust Scale – Revised (DS–R) is the most notable measure of disgust sensitivity, it will be used to assess convergent validity for the proposed scale. Since the current study aims to rule out anger to measure disgust separately, the Novaco Anger Scale – Provocation Inventory (NAS–PI) will be used to examine discriminant validity. 100 undergraduate students will be recruited to complete the DSS, the DS–R, and the NAS–PI online. We expect to see a high reliability with the DSS, a strong and positive correlation between the DSS and the DS–R, and little to no correlation between the DSS and the NAS–PI. Finally, we suggest that the proposed measure will be a useful tool in vocational counseling. For example, individuals who score high on the scale should not choose careers in which exposure to disgusting stimuli is part of the job on a regular basis (e.g., dermatology, nursing, dental care).

Introduction

Previous measures have not been successful in showing an association between the moral-sexual disgust domain and overall disgust sensitivity. One of the suggested reasons is that moral and sexual transgressions often elicit a combination of anger and disgust rather than disgust alone. In this study, we propose a new measure that considers the moral and sexual aspects of disgust sensitivity in addition to the three basic dimensions. Because socially unacceptable sexual or moral acts (e.g., betrayal, hypocrisy, racism) often elicit a mixture of anger and disgust, and that the lay meaning of the word disgust can be mistaken for anger (Nabi, 2002), differentiating between these constructs for measurement purposes can be a challenging task. Following a thorough review of the literature on these two constructs, three strategies are used to design test items that specifically measure disgust as the elicited emotion.

Four Dimensions of Disgust

The DSS consists of 24 items with six items measuring each of the four domains of disgust. The response format is a 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (*not gross at all*) to 5 (*extremely gross*). The four domains are described as follows:

1. Core disgust protects the body from the threat of disease and illness through oral incorporation and often involves food as well as body products and hygiene (Olatunji et al., 2007).
2. Animal-reminder disgust reflects the animalistic and mortal nature of humans and often involves sex, death, and body envelope violations (Olatunji et al., 2007).
3. Contamination-based disgust protects the body by avoiding contact with disgusting stimuli that have been contaminated. This type of disgust can be elicited regardless of whether the threat of contamination is real or perceived (Olatunji et al., 2007).
4. Moral-sexual disgust is elicited by abstract moral and sexual offenses that violate social norms and such as murder, rape, and betrayal (Haidt, 1994).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The Disgust Sensitivity Scale will show high reliability.

Hypothesis 2: There will be significant positive correlation between the Disgust Sensitivity Scale and the revised Disgust Scale - Revised, establishing evidence for convergent validity.

Hypothesis 3: There will not be a significant correlation between the Disgust Sensitivity Novaco Anger Scale - Provocation Inventory, establishing evidence for discriminant validity.

Participants and Method

One hundred undergraduate students at Middle Tennessee State University will be recruited to participate in the study by offering extra credits in their psychology courses. Previous research shows that females tend to have a higher disgust sensitivity than males (Druschel & Sherman, 1999). Therefore, the sample will include roughly equal numbers of female and male participants to account for the gender differences.

Proposed Analyses

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha will be calculated to examine the internal consistency of the scale. An acceptable alpha is .80 and above. Anything below .30 will be considered low and require significant modifications of test items. Inter-item and item-total correlations (at least .40 ideally) will also be calculated to make necessary modifications to the scale.

Validity

Pearson product-moment correlations between the DSS and DS–R will be calculated to examine convergent validity while correlations between the DSS and NAS–PI will be used for discriminant validity.

References

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