



# Yucky, Ooey, Gross, and Gooney: The Role of Disgust in OCD

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# What we will cover:

Overview  
of disgust

Elicitors  
and  
domains

Maintenance  
mechanism  
for OCD and  
anxiety.

How disgust  
and OCD  
mix

Treatment  
approaches  
and issues.

Breakout  
Groups

# What is Disgust?

- Universal emotion that serves the adaptive function of protecting us from ingesting harmful substances.
- Disgust has deep roots in evolution
- Elicits a distinct facial expression that may be protective
- Motivates avoidance
- Physiological response such as nausea
- Emotion has evolved to include other situations

# Domains and Elicitors

## Core disgust

- Closely related to evolutionary roots
- Spoiled food, unexpected combinations, culturally unfamiliar foods
- Body products from humans and animals
- Body envelope violations
- Death
- Bad Hygiene

## Contamination disgust

- Offensive properties of one stimulus is transferred to another

## Animal reminders

- Insects and rodents, body products, sexual stimuli

## Moral disgust

- Contact with people that are immoral, repulsive or have a disease



# Disgust and OCD

- Disgust can be a driver for maintenance of OCD and anxiety disorders.
- Likelihood of experiencing disgust is dependent on propensity and sensitivity.
  - Disgust propensity- how easily someone is triggered by disgust stimuli.
  - Disgust sensitivity – how unpleasant the experience of disgust is.
- Disgust propensity and sensitivity are higher among individuals with OCD.
- Individuals with higher disgust propensity are more likely to be disgusted by a variety of disgust stimuli.
- Individuals with higher sensitivity are likely to have a more prominent disgust reaction.

# What's the Function?

- Identifying what drives your behavior is crucial to help you develop interventions that allow you to learn a new way of responding to what triggers your symptoms.
- Disgust may illicit an internal experience described as “yucky” or “icky”
- Fear based contamination may be based on a fear of illness or spreading an illness to others.



# Distinguishing Disgust from Fear

## Disgust

- Revulsion toward a contaminant.
- Cognitions focus on magical thinking.
- Reflexive facial response.
- Disgust motivates avoidance of contamination.

## Fear

- Emotion in response to perceived threat.
- Cognitions involve wide range of perceived danger.
- Motivates avoidance of perceived danger.

# Disgust Appraisal

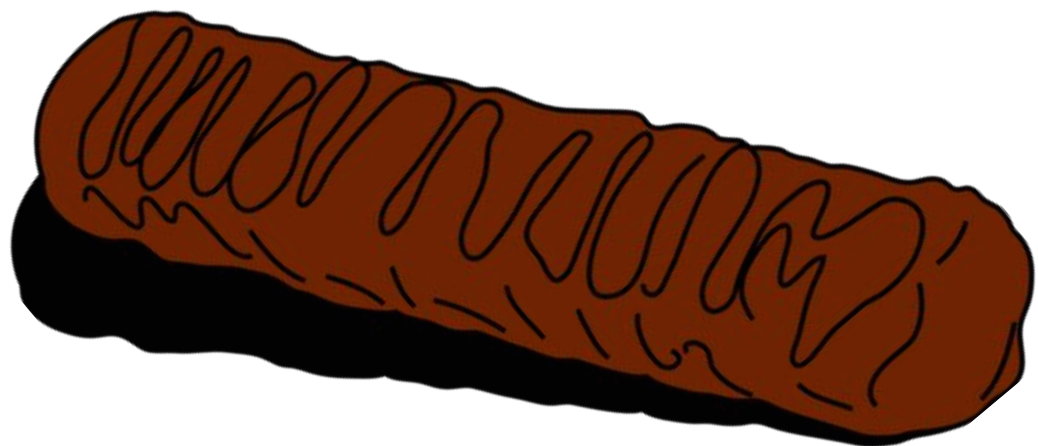
Beliefs are associated with sympathetic magic

**Law of contagion:** “Once in contact, always in contact”

- Pencil experiment

**Law of similarity:** “Things that look similar are similar”

- Chocolate shaped similarly to poop = contamination





# Treatment Targeting Disgust

- Increase tolerance for experiencing disgust.
- Disconfirm fear about what would happen if you are triggered by disgust elicitors.
- Experience the benefits that occur when less sensitive to disgust stimuli in daily life.
- Participating in meaningful activities where disgust elicitors may be present.

# Treatment Options

- Exposure and Response Prevention
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- Inhibitory learning model
- Response prevention planning
- Interoceptive exposure
- Judicious use of safety behaviors
- Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy
- Conceptual Reorientation
- Counterconditioning
- Cognitive approach

# Treatment Challenges

- Research is limited and results are mixed.
- Research suggests that disgust does not habituate at the same rate as fear.
- Disgust is more resistant to extinction than fear.
- Habituation of disgust and anxiety rates were compared in individuals with contamination fear and with other O-C symptoms, such as symmetry and checking. Those with contamination habituated at a slower rate and to a lesser degree than other symptoms.
- Extinction to disgust may require a higher dose of ERP than fear
- Evaluative conditioning is resistant to extinction.

(McKay, 2006, Olatunji, Forsyth & Cherin, 2007)  
(Olatunji, Forsyth & Cherin, 2007)  
(Baeyens, Diaz, & Ruiz, 2005)  
(McKay, 2006)

# ERP for Disgust

- Address avoidance that impacts functioning and interferes with the life activities that you care about.
- Choice of exposures are related to valued living



# Growth Occurs Outside Your Comfort Zone



# Guidelines for Exposure Practice Today

- Choose breakout groups where you are willing to be “all in” with the exposure.
- Willingness to experience discomfort.
- “Yes” and “No” exercise
- Determine your avoidance behavior patterns that is motivated by disgust.
- Identify area of functioning that is affected by exaggerated disgust reactions.
- Curiosity “Hmmm, I wonder what it would be like if I \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Notice and observe your response.
- Be aware of your attitude toward exposure



# Break Out Groups



Nathan



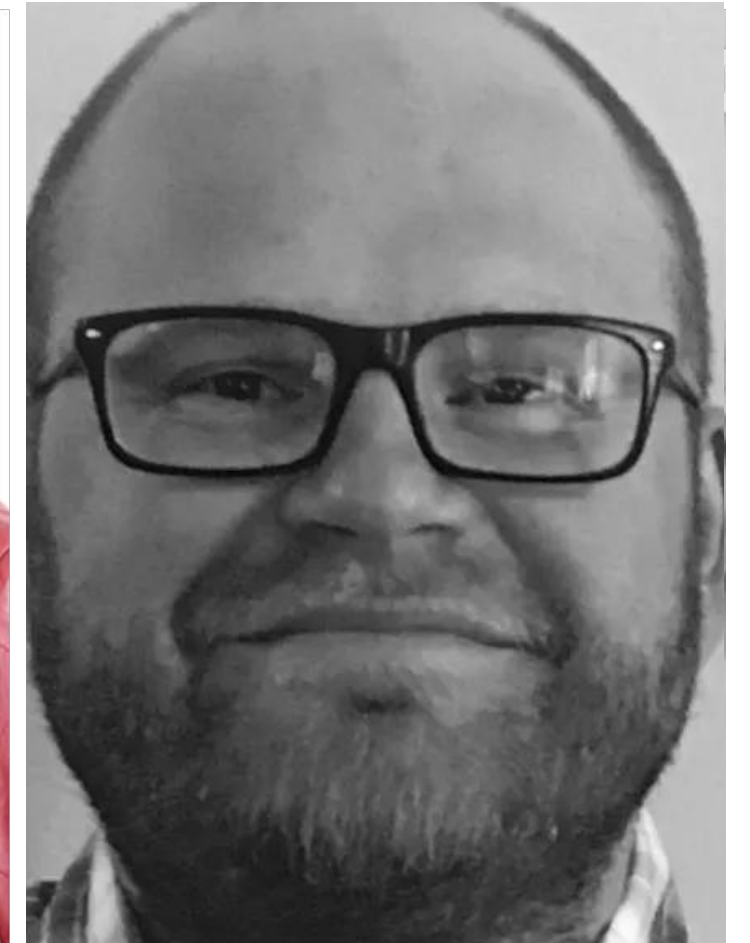
Regan



Molly



Kim



Jeremy

# Key Takeaways

- Clinical research is limited and has mixed results.
- It is crucial to determine the function of behavior related to OCD so your interventions target your triggers.
- ERP generally takes longer to achieve relief when targeting disgust rather than fear.
- You have options for treatment.



Q&A

# Contact Information

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