



Reports

Intergroup disgust sensitivity as a predictor of islamophobia: The modulating effect of fear

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ABSTRACT

The present research investigated whether *intergroup* disgust sensitivity (ITG-DS) predicts greater Islamophobia, and whether this positive association is modulated (strengthened or weakened) by the experience of concurrent incidental non-disgust emotions (fear, sadness, anger, happiness). In Study 1 ($N = 225$) participants completed measures of ITG-DS (an emotionally charged individual difference variable reflecting heightened tendency to experience disgust and revulsion reactions toward ethnic outgroup encounters) and dispositional measures of fear, sadness, anger, and happiness. Results revealed that among those experiencing greater (vs. lower) fear or sadness, the positive relation between ITG-DS and Islamophobia was significantly stronger. In Study 2 ($N = 174$), fear, sadness, and happiness were experimentally induced. Among those induced to experience fear, the positive relation between ITG-DS and prejudice toward Muslims was significantly strengthened relative to control. Overall, specific negative emotions, especially fear, interacted with individual differences in intergroup-relevant disgust sensitivity to inform outgroup evaluations.

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In July 2011, an armed gunman went on a killing spree in Norway, killing 76 non-Muslims to “save Europe from ‘Muslim colonization’” (CBC, 2011). Anders Breivik appears to have lashed out because his Norwegian ingroup is embracing Muslim immigrants and their culture, blogging that there is a need to “turn this evil trend [of] Islamisation all across our continent” (Taylor, 2011). His actions connote a sense of revulsion and disgust, the psychological concern that outgroup taint can spread to and contaminate the ingroup, exacerbated by fear. Such prejudices are not isolated but rather are becoming increasingly common. Islamophobia, or prejudice toward Muslims (Brown, 2000; Poynting & Mason, 2007; Runnymede Trust, 1997), was higher than prejudice toward other immigrant groups across Europe in 2000 (Stabac & Listhaug, 2008). The September 11, 2001 attacks amplified this negativity (Allen & Nielsen, 2002; Fetzer & Soper, 2003; Sheridan & Gillet, 2005). Despite some decline in Islamophobia following the initial post-9/11 backlash, negativity toward Islam in the U.S. grew from 2005 to 2010 (PEW, 2010), as did hate crimes against Muslims in Canada (Dauvergne & Brennan, 2011). The recent Norway killings have sparked concerns about growing Islamophobia in the West, with Muslims becoming the “new Jews of Europe” (Reeves, 2011). We focus on prejudice against Muslims given this widespread rise of Islamophobia.

Efforts to explain prejudice have turned increasingly to the role of emotions (e.g., Bodenhausen, Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Moreno, 2001;

Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Mackie & Smith, 2002). Understandably, this research has focused on fear and anxiety. Comparatively under-researched, *disgust* also plays an important role in expressions of intergroup attitudes (e.g., Hodson & Costello, 2007; Inbar, Pizarro, & Bloom, 2009; Olatunji, 2008; Terrizzi, Shook, & Ventis, 2010). We seek to (a) confirm that individual differences in *intergroup* disgust sensitivity predict greater prejudice against Muslims among non-Muslims (see Hodson et al., 2011); and (b) test the boundary conditions for this effect, addressing whether this association is strengthened or weakened by the concurrent experience of non-disgust emotions (e.g., fear).

Disgust: revulsion, avoidance, and prejudice

Relative to other emotions, disgust has received less empirical attention (Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 2009). Yet disgust is widely considered a basic emotion (Ekman, 1992; Tomkins, 1963), one that concerns “something revolting, primarily in relation to the sense of taste, as actually perceived or vividly imagined... to anything which causes a similar feeling, through the sense of smell, touch, or even eyesight” (Darwin, 1872/1965, p. 250). Disgust presumably evolved from earlier psychological processes involving ingestible substances (e.g., food), hence protecting the physical body, but also extended to the service of social or moral regulation (Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 2000; Rozin, Haidt, McCauley, & Imada, 1997). Responses indicative of disgust – including revulsion, withdrawal, and avoidance – share commonalities across physical (e.g., food) and social (e.g., groups) domains. Outgroups can elicit revulsion as can rotten food

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or open wounds. Disgust may therefore play a key role in the “behavioral immune system”, protecting us by eliciting avoidance or rejection of other people, particularly foreigners carrying diseases (e.g., Faulkner, Schaller, Park, & Duncan, 2004; Park, Faulkner, & Schaller, 2003; Schaller & Park, 2011). Naturally, people differ systematically in sensitivity to such disgust-eliciting stimuli (Haidt, McCauley, & Rozin, 1994), with individual differences falling into three disgust domains: Core (food rejection, concerns of disease from objects), animal-reminder (reminders of humans as animals, such as sex and mortality), or interpersonal (contamination from ill or immoral individuals) (Haidt et al., 1994; Olatunji, Haidt, McKay, & David, 2008).

Researchers have recently considered the relation between disgust sensitivity and intergroup prejudice. Those higher in disgust sensitivity are more prejudiced toward immigrants, foreigners, deviant or low status groups, the obese, and gays and lesbians (Hodson & Costello, 2007; Inbar et al., 2009; Navarrete & Fessler, 2006; Olatunji, 2008; Terrizzi et al., 2010; Vartanian, 2010). Some specific disgust sub-scales are especially predictive of particular types of prejudice. For instance, interpersonal disgust particularly predicts anti-immigrant prejudice (Hodson & Costello, 2007), whereas core disgust particularly predicts anti-homosexual bias (Olatunji, 2008). Although these studies offer valuable insights into the disgust-prejudice relation, prejudice is ultimately an *intergroup* outcome. Theoretically, individual differences in disgust-sensitivity concerning outgroup contact and associations are more relevant and represent a theoretically stronger predictor of negative outgroup evaluations.

Intergroup disgust sensitivity (ITG-DS)

Hodson et al. (2011) recently introduced the concept of intergroup disgust sensitivity (ITG-DS) – an affect-laden construct reflecting individual differences in the tendency to experience disgust and revulsion reactions toward ethnic outgroups. Specifically, some people are more likely than others to feel repulsed and disgusted by outgroups, particularly foreign but also socially deviant outgroups, with this heightened sensitivity predicting more negative evaluations toward outgroups (Hodson et al., 2011, Study 1, Samples 1–5). In these studies individuals higher in ITG-DS were especially prejudiced toward Muslims (mean $r = .42$) compared to homosexuals, Jews, or Blacks (mean $r_s = .27-.29$). This recently uncovered association between an emotionally-charged dispositional construct (ITG-DS) and negative outgroup evaluations held even after statistically controlling for conceptually related variables such as general disgust sensitivity, intergroup anxiety, or intergroup ideologies (e.g., authoritarianism). ITG-DS is related to greater negative affect (Hodson et al., 2011, Study 1, Sample 2), and those higher (vs. lower) in ITG-DS are especially likely to translate their outgroup disgust reactions into prejudices toward experimentally manipulated, disgust-eliciting outgroups (Hodson et al., 2011, Study 2).

Modulating emotions: can non-disgust emotions influence ITG-DS effects on prejudice?

Contemporary prejudice research has considered how specific emotions connect to particular appraisals, attitudes and actions toward specific social groups (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Fiske et al., 2002; Mackie, Silver, & Smith, 2004; Mackie & Smith, 2002; Tapias, Glaser, Keltner, Vasquez, & Wickens, 2007). For example, threats to ingroup health or values are proposed to elicit disgust, whereas threats to the group's economic resources or freedoms are proposed to elicit anger (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Smith, 1999). Many of these theoretical approaches emphasize specific emotional reactions to specific types of outgroups or threats. Also, multiple discrete emotions can apply to a single outgroup: Thinking about Blacks elicits similar levels of anger and disgust among Whites (see Cottrell &

Neuberg, 2005). In intergroup contexts, therefore, more than one emotion can be experienced.

Such co-occurrence of emotions is well-documented in the broader affect literature (Diener, 1999; Schimmack & Colcombe, 2007; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). These “concurrent emotions” can be of similar or opposing valence (Larsen, McGraw, & Cacioppo, 2001; Schimmack, 2001). For instance, an individual might feel disgusted and angry in one instance (e.g., Hutcherson & Gross, 2011), yet disgusted and amused in another (e.g., Hemenover & Schimmack, 2007). The modulating effect of one emotion on another has been empirically supported: Exposure to equally arousing unpleasant and pleasant stimuli diminishes the pleasure of positive stimuli and lessens displeasure of negative stimuli, respectively (Schimmack & Colcombe, 2007). Thus positive or negative affect can modulate the impact of other emotions on evaluations of targets. In intergroup contexts, the impact of an affective reaction (disgust/repulsion) on an outgroup evaluation (prejudice) can theoretically be modulated by another affective reaction (fear). This conceptual relation is presented in Fig. 1: The relation between ITG-DS (an affect-laden orientation of disgust toward outgroups) and expressions of Islamophobia could be modulated by positive emotions (e.g., happiness – attenuating prejudice) or negative emotions (e.g., fear – accentuating prejudice).

Our approach considers whether the effect of an individual difference variable (ITG-DS) on intergroup attitudes can be modulated by emotions that are dispositional (i.e., individual differences in Study 1) or contextual (i.e., experimentally manipulated in Study 2). Theoretical accounts of modulation have a strong history in the prejudice literature. For example, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1998) strongly predicts prejudice, with this relation amplified under threat exposure (e.g., Cohrs & Asbrock, 2009; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009). Similarly, the relation between social dominance orientation (characterized by endorsement of group-based dominance) and anti-immigrant prejudice or discrimination is strengthened under manipulated threat (Costello & Hodson, 2011). Further, relations between belief in a dangerous world and stereotyping are increased in threatening (vs. non-threatening) contexts (Schaller, Park, & Mueller, 2003). Employing a similar rationale, we consider whether the relation between ITG-DS and prejudice is modulated by non-disgust emotions. To disambiguate emotional effects, we consider *incidental* modulating emotions (those not elicited by the outgroup), rather than *integral* emotions (those elicited by the outgroup) (Bodenhausen et al., 2001). If incidental non-disgust emotions (e.g., fear) modulate the effects of ITG-DS on prejudice this will clearly highlight the importance of the non-disgust emotion per se, not emotions associated with the outgroup.

The idea that incidental emotions affect prejudice expressions is also long standing and well established (Allport, 1954; Bodenhausen et al., 2001; Fiske, 1998; Mackie, Queller, Stroessner, & Hamilton, 1996). It is unknown, however, whether incidental non-disgust emotions influence the relation between ITG-DS and prejudice (see Fig. 1). We tested two main hypotheses. First, we predicted that ITG-DS would predict greater Islamophobia (see Hodson et al., 2011). Second, we hypothesized that incidental emotions (dispositional in Study 1 and experimentally-induced in Study 2) would

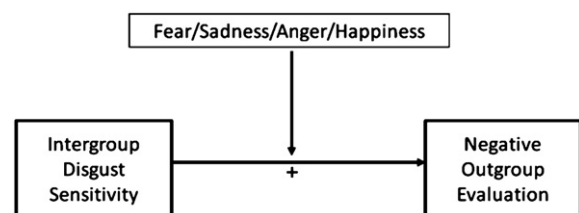


Fig. 1. Proposed modulating emotions hypothesis.

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