**Can feeling disgust make you pessimistic?**

Research investigating the influence of experiencing disgust on language processing by Maiju Bågman at University of Glasgow

**The inspiration behind the research**

I have always been interested in the role of language in shaping our experiences in everyday life, and when it came time to choose a research topic for my dissertation project, I decided I wanted to study something related to this. After some research I ran into articles talking about how emotion can significantly impact the processing of words. These effects can be contributed to by both, the emotional characteristics of words, as well as the mood of the person processing those words. What especially sparked my interest, was learning about how one’s emotional state has been found to impact interpretation of ambiguous information, potentially encouraging negative thought patterns and contributing to psychological distress. Particularly, the discrete emotion of disgust had previously been linked to anxious pathology and negative interpretational bias.

However, there is a lack of research into this relationship between disgust and mental health, as well as a general lack of research into the effect of discrete emotions on language processing. Thus, I decided to investigate disgust and its influence on another aspect of language, lexical decision. I hoped to shed light into whether disgust may facilitate processing of negative information beyond tasks related to resolution of ambiguity, as this would suggest disgust contributes to a negativity bias in more than one area of language processing.

**The research**

With the help of my supervisor Dr Sara Sereno, I designed a study investigating whether inducing feelings of disgust might affect the speed at which negative words are processed. In the study, the feeling of disgust was induced in participants using imagery, as they read pieces of text that described disgusting scenarios. After this, participants completed a lexical decision task, which measures the speed at which sequences of letters are recognized as words or non-words. In the task participants are presented with negative, positive and neutral words, as well as pseudowords, and are instructed to make quick decisions of whether the stimulus presented is a legitimate word. They do this by pressing one of two designated keys on a keyboard.

My study included both a neutral and a disgust mood induction, as I was interested in whether participants’ response times would be significantly different depending on whether the lexical decision task was preceded by a disgust induction or a neutral induction.

**The findings**

A significant interaction between mood and emotion was found. Further analysis revealed that in the disgust trials negative words had a processing advantage over neutral words, and the processing speed of negative words themselves decreased in disgust trials, compared to neutral trials. This suggests that disgust in fact did have an impact on the processing speed of negative words, supporting the idea that experiencing disgust may encourage negative thinking by facilitating the processing of negative information over other information.