Abstract

Disgust is an important adaptive mechanism in protection against disease. Disgust sensitivity is very variable between individuals and, according to the compensatory prophylaxis hypothesis (CPH), should be adjusted to individual's vulnerability to disease. The beginning of pregnancy is associated with a number of changes in the immune system and thus disgust sensitivity is expected to be increased. The aim of this thesis was to test the CPH in relation to longitudinal changes in disgust during pregnancy and after birth, as well as in comparison with non-pregnant control sample of women. Another aim was to observe the maladaptive role of disgust, specifically the relationship between trait anxiety and disgust. Against the set expectations, disgust was observed to increase during pregnancy in the animal reminder domain of disgust. However, the function of this domain in protection against disease has been criticized. These changes were only observed in pregnancies with a male fetus. In line with the CPH predictions, it was shown that women who reported having recent health problems also had higher disgust. Similarly, the results showed a possible protective role of mothers' increased disgust in the beginning of pregnancy, which was related to new-borns having a higher 10 minute APGAR score. When testing the maladaptive function of disgust, a positive association between trait anxiety and disgust in the third trimester and after birth was observed. These results suggest that increased disgust in the beginning of pregnancy has an adaptive function, while increased disgust towards the end of pregnancy and after birth is related to an increase in anxiety. Analyses comparing pregnant women in first trimester with non-pregnant controls showed higher levels of disgust in pregnant women. These results can be, however, affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Changes in disgust during the menstrual cycle, which would be expected according to the CPH, were not observed. The testing of the CPH still brings inconclusive results, which indicates that this is a more complex issue than originally considered.