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Effects of body ownership illusion during exposure to disgusting stimuli

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The Rubber Hand Illusion refers to the feeling of ownership of a rubber hand by synchronously stroking the RH and the own hand of a person. The RHI can be used to simulate skin contact with a disgust-eliciting stimulus. We used a primary disgust elicitor (living maggot) to replicate this finding and to gather data on disgust habituation and in-vivo exposure.

82 healthy participants (57 females) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions; synchronous/asynchronous stroking (control condition) of the rubber/own hand. A maggot was placed on the RH for five minutes. Participants rated experienced disgust at the beginning/end of the exposure and were asked permission to place the maggot on their own hand.

Synchronous stroking successfully elicited RHI, which was associated with higher disgust ratings for the maggot at the beginning of exposure compared to asynchronous stroking. The conditions did not differ in habituation and willingness to in-vivo exposure.

RHI successfully simulated skin contact with a disgust stimulus. Future studies should apply longer exposure intervals and test individuals with higher disgust propensity to gather more data on RHI and disgust habituation.

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