

70% off
CURATED DECOR

Joss & Main
Be inspired »

SUNDAY, JUL 24, 2011 01:01 PM EDT

The science behind disgust

From dead bodies to pickles, the things that gross us out reveal a great deal about us. An expert explains

MANDY VAN DEVEN

Share 23 15 g+1 5 0

TOPICS: NEUROSCIENCE, NONFICTION, LIFE NEWS



We all have things that disgust us irrationally, whether it be cockroaches or chitterlings or cotton balls. For me, it's fruit soda. It started when I was 3; my mom offered me a can of Sunkist after inner ear surgery. Still woozy from the anesthesia, I gulped it down, and by the time we made it to the cashier, all of it managed to come back up. Although it is nearly 30 years later, just the smell of this "fun, sun and the beach" drink is enough to turn my stomach.

But what, exactly, happens when we feel disgust? As Daniel Kelly, an assistant professor of philosophy at Purdue University, explains in his new book, "**Yuck!: The Nature and Moral Significance of Disgust**," it's not just a physical sensation, it's a powerful emotional warning sign. Although disgust initially helped keep us away from rotting food and

ADVERTISEMENT

Why Was This Video Banned?

She Is Over 50

Your Last Chance To Watch It...

follow salon

Email Address

SUBSCRIBE

MOST READ



Bill Maher is right about religion: The Orwellian ridiculousness of Jesus, and the truth about moral progress

MICHAEL SHERMER



Ron Paul defends insane Charlie Hebdo conspiracy theory: I'm just trying "to get the truth out!"

LUKE BRINKER



Now they're sliming Elizabeth Warren: Fox News tactics and the surprising water carriers for the 1 percent

PAUL ROSENBERG

contagious disease, the defense mechanism changed over time to effect the distance we keep from one another. When allowed to play a role in the creation of social policy, Kelly argues, disgust might actually cause more harm than good.

Salon spoke with Kelly about hiding the science behind disgust, why we're captivated by things we find revolting, and how it can be a very dangerous thing.

What exactly is disgust?

Simply speaking, disgust is the response we have to things we find repulsive. Some of the things that trigger disgust are innate, like the smell of sewage on a hot summer day. No one has to teach you to feel disgusted by garbage, you just are. Other things that are automatically disgusting are rotting food and visible cues of infection or illness. We have this base layer of core disgusting things, and a lot of them don't seem like they're learned.

But there's also a whole set of things that have a lot of cultural and individual variation about whether it's considered disgusting. For example, I like bloody steaks and my girlfriend, who is a vegetarian, finds them repulsive. The core base of what causes disgust has expanded to the point where certain kinds of moral violations, social transgressions, and even value systems of groups one is not a member of can come to be disgusting as well.

And that depends on where and how we grew up?

ADVERTISEMENT

MORE MANDY VAN DEVEN.

Share 23 15 5 0



He never hit me, but I could no longer take his abuse

Next Article

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE

Millennials Are Ditching Delivery for This Dinner Hack
Eater for Plated

Warning: 4 Fish to NEVER Eat (avoid these like the plague)
Inflammation Solution



Petco pulls product that can get dogs as hammered as humans

STEPHEN MESSENGER, THE DODO



The Pope Francis revolution: Inside the catastrophic collapse of the Catholic right

PATRICIA MILLER



"Has America gone crazy?"

ANN JONES, TOMDISPATCH.COM



Death of an American sniper

LAURA MILLER



Hollywood's political ignorance: What Cosby, "Selma" & Hebdoo reveal about white liberal consciousness

BRITTNEY COOPER



A woman describes her sexual relationship with her estranged father

JENNY KUTNER



Why porn is exploding in the Middle East

CARRIE WEISMAN, ALTERNET



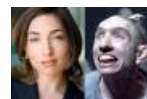
Rahm Emanuel's offensive new pension-gutting scheme

DAVID SIROTA



Pope Francis' new clothes: Why his progressive image is white smoke and mirrors

ANNA MARCH, THE WEEKLINGS



Naomi Grossman of "American Horror Story": "I've never been told I was so pretty until played the ugliest person on TV"

MICHAEL HAYNE



The plight of the bitter nerd: Why so many awkward, shy guys end up hating feminism

ARTHUR CHU



Ivy League's meritocracy lie: How Harvard and Yale cook the books for the 1 percent

LANI GUINIER

FROM AROUND THE WEB

Presented by Zergnet

What Does Your Last Name Say About You?

Ancestry

Wipe out credit card interest payments within 5 minutes by doing this

Next Advisor

The \$1.58 Billion Secret Apple Hid in Your iPhone

The Motley Fool

9 Last Names on the Brink of Extinction

MyHeritage

Sponsored Links by Taboola

More from Salon

- **14-year-old girl films father's sexual abuse with webcam**
- **Warning men about "gray rape"**
- **Carrie Fisher's strange outing of John Travolta**
- **Jenny McCarthy's Playboy spread hurts older women**
- **"I put the pills in the people": Why Tina and Amy's Cosby jokes were ju...**
- **Bill Maher to Muslims: Go away**

We Recommend

- **Experts Select The Top 4 Cash Back Credit Cards** (Next Advisor Daily)
- **How To Make An All Natural Cleanser** (Traditional Medicinals)
- **Are Granite Countertops Over? See The Newest Alternatives** (HGTV Remodels)
- **RA & Alcohol - What You Need to Know** (HealthCentral.com)
- **The Ultimate Marketing Shortcut - Digital ...** (Follow Up Machine by Digital Marketer)
- **NEVER drink these 2 types of MILK (cause ...** (The Fat Burning Kitchen Guide Book)

Promoted Links by Taboola

ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT



MORE RELATED STORIES

<p>"This morning my worst nightmare came true"</p>	<p>He never hit me, but I could no longer take his abuse</p>	<p>Yes, bisexuality is real Yes, bisexuality is real</p>
--	--	--

FEATURED SLIDE SHOWS

1 of 11

Rolling Stone

Laura Marling Plugs in for Dark, Stormy Album

Seahawks Keep Believing, All the Way to the Super Bowl

How 'Jane the Virgin' Became a Sleeper Hit

FX Reveals ' Fargo ' Season Two Details, ' Louie ' Premiere Date

The 10 Best Moments From Bruce Springsteen's ' Surprise ' Charity Concert

HUFFPOST WOMEN

Dorota From 'Gossip Girl' Was On Last Night's 'Girls'

Yolanda Foster Blogs About Her Battle With Lyme Disease: 'I Have Lost the Ability to Read'

Martin Luther King Jr. Inspirations From The Black Community



View Slideshow

Burger King Japan
2014'S FAST FOOD ATROCITIES

Burger King's black cheeseburger: Made with squid ink and bamboo charcoal, arguably a symbol of meat's destructive effect on the planet. Only available in Japan.

MLK, Jr. Asked Us 'What Are You Doing For Others?' Here's How We Answered

Desiree Hartsock And Chris Siegfried Are Married

UPWORTHY

The Martin Luther King Quotes You've Never Heard Because They Shatter The Sterilized Version Of Him

This Scares The Hell Out Of Me. World Leaders Are About To Give Away The Keys To The Internet.

He Climbs On His Desk, Insults His Teacher, And Leaves The Whole Class Speechless. Point Made.

She Proves That Being A Sexy, Swaggy Woman Has Nothing To Do With Having Breasts Or Being Under 35

It Took A Mountain Of Courage For Him To Record This. Do You Know Someone Who Needs To See It?

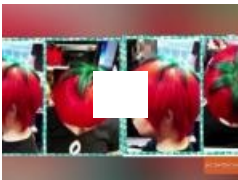
ADVERTISEMENT

Photos from the
Happy Ending Salon

Make Summer More
Poetic with These 10
International Works

8 Illustrated Books
for Every Age and
Every Summer
Reading List

RELATED VIDEOS



Ripe Tomato Hairstyle
Created in Japan



Disgusting or Delicious:
Placenta Recipes



Clinton: Anti-Islam
Video 'Disgusting'

COMMENTS

Comments

You may use these HTML tags and attributes:

 <i> <blockquote>

[Post Comment](#) [Preview](#) [Cancel](#)



The advertisement features a photograph of a smiling couple on the left. To their right is a large orange box containing the text "8% ANNUITY RETURN SECRET". Further right, the text reads "DON'T BUY AN ANNUITY UNTIL YOU SEE OUR SECRET UP TO 8% GUARANTEED*INCOME FOR LIFE". On the far right, there is a red button with the text "CLICK HERE".

[About](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact](#) | [Corrections](#) | [Help](#) | [Investor Relations](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Deals](#)

Copyright © 2015 Salon Media Group, Inc. Reproduction of material from any Salon pages without written permission is strictly prohibited.

SALON® is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office as a trademark of Salon Media Group Inc.

Associated Press articles: Copyright © 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.