

# The myth of the relationship between scent and attractiveness



The Myth of the Relationship between Scent and Attractiveness Researches have shown physical attractiveness is not solely dependent upon the visual aspects of appearance but is often modulated by other sensory cues as well. While the importance of the sense of smell in social interactions and behavior of animals is well known, olfaction has often been thought to be of minor relevance to primates in general and humans in particular. However, social psychology research has demonstrated that people tend to rate other people more positively when in the presence of a pleasant ambient fragrance (Dematte, Osterbauer, & Spence, 2007). Indeed, the personal use of fragrance should be considered as an integral part of one's image management, with different fragrances being chosen for different occasions. Nowadays, wearing perfume and cologne is a popular way humans attempt to attract mates. Our group is interested in investigating the relationship between scent and attractiveness. Currently, there are three specific questions that we would like to explore.

First of all, we would like to know whether an odor can influence a person's judgment of another person's physical attractiveness when assessed visually. Research by Wedekind, Seebeck, Bettens, and Paepke has shown that a man's major histocompatibility complex will, to a certain extent, determine the attractiveness of his bodily odor to females (Dematte, Osterbauer, & Spence, 2007). Research by Herz and colleagues even suggests that body odor may be as, if not more, important than all other physical attractiveness cues, including visual (Dematte, Osterbauer, & Spence, 2007). For example, Herz and Inzlicht showed that, on average, women report that how men smell is the most important physical criterion

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for choosing someone as a potential lover. In a book chapter by Kirk-Smith and Booth, the authors found that in the presence of a perfume (the brand Shalimar), both men and women rated half-torso clad photographs of men and women as being significantly sexier and softer as compared with a no-perfume condition (Dematte, Osterbauer, & Spence, 2007). Moreover, the experiment by Dematte et al. showed that the female participants rated the male faces as being significantly less attractive in the presence of an unpleasant odor than when the faces were presented together with a pleasant odor or with clean air.

However, there are several studies showing that olfaction is not an important determinant of attractiveness. For example, the male college students in a study by Cann and Ross had to rate a series of pictures of female faces while in the presence of either a pleasant or unpleasant ambient odor or in the absence of any specific odor (Dematte, Osterbauer, & Spence, 2007).

Analysis of the students' attractiveness ratings indicated that the variations in odor had absolutely no effect on these social judgments. In another study, Bensafi et al. conducted an event-related potential (ERP) experiment in which female volunteers had to judge the attractiveness of female faces in the presence versus absence of a pleasant floral odor. In all, 36.2% of the faces were judged as pleasant in the no-odor condition versus 36.8% in the presence of the floral odor (Dematte, Osterbauer, & Spence, 2007).

Unsurprisingly, this difference was not statistically significant. Further, in the experiment by Foster, women rated the attractiveness of t-shirt odors and facial photographs of 21 men either independently or together. Results show <https://assignbuster.com/the-myth-of-the-relationship-between-scent-and-attractiveness/>

photograph ratings were far more predictive of overall attractiveness than were t-shirt ratings. Thus he concludes when tested under conditions that approximate how attractiveness perceptions are made in the natural environment, sight is more important than smell when women judge the attractiveness of men (Foster, 2008). In all these studies, however, it is difficult to separate the effects of the mere presence of the odor on judgments of the people from the indirect effects that extended exposure to that odor may have had on a person's mood. Thus, we would also like to explore the effects of scents on mood and self-perception and how these effects influence judgment on attractiveness. The perception of smell consists not only of the sensation of the odors themselves but of the experiences and emotions associated with these sensations. Our olfactory receptors are directly connected to the limbic system, the most ancient and primitive part of the brain, which is thought to be the seat of emotion.

One recent study familiarized women to a pleasant fragrance within their skin care product and showed that this odor later induced psychological and physiological changes associated with a state of increased relaxation (Roberts, Little, Lyndon, Roberts, Havlicek, & Wright, 2009). This personal cheering effect by fragrance will inevitably be reflected in behavior, may be of help in attracting potential partners. In the experiment by Roberts et al., they tested the effects of a double-blind manipulation of personal odor on self-confidence and behavior. They gave to male participants either an aerosol spray containing a formulation of fragrance and antimicrobial agents or an otherwise identical spray that lacked these active ingredients. Over several days, they found effects between treatment groups on psychometric

self-confidence and self-perceived attractiveness. Also, the same women judged men using the active spray as more attractive in video-clips, suggesting a behavioral difference between the groups. This effect highlights the flexible nature of self-esteem to respond to rapid changes in one's own physical traits through the use of artificial fragrance (Roberts, Little, Lyndon, Roberts, Havlicek, & Wright, 2009).

It means an individual's personal odor and the perfume product chosen may thus influence both self-perception and impressions formed by others. The last question we are curious about is whether the effect of pheromone on attractiveness exists. Pheromones are odorless chemicals excreted from the body that affect reproductive interactions among both animals and humans.

They are picked up by a special organs or tissues in the nose, and then conveyed to regions higher up in the brain. According to previous research, the effect of a putative female pheromone on the socio-sexual behavior in young women was investigated. In a double-blind and placebo-controlled study, some participants had the synthesized putative pheromone added to their perfume.

The main results of the study was that a significantly greater proportion of participants in the experimental group increased over baseline in frequency of the dependent variables labeled sexual intercourse, sleeping next to a partner, formal dates and petting/affection/kissing. The authors concluded that the compound acted as a sex attractant in increasing the attractiveness of women to men (McCoy & Pitino, 2002). Nevertheless, according to an

extended analysis of this data by Winman, it is shown that there is not a statistically significant increase in any of the socio-sexual behaviors for the experimental groups. Most notably, there is no support in data for the claim that the substances increase the attractiveness of the wearers of the substances to the other sex (Winman, 2004).

With the answers to all the three questions open, we would have much space in investigating the relationship between scent and attractiveness.

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