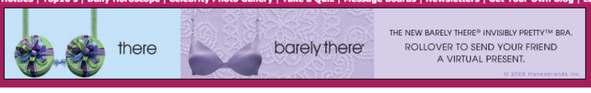

Pheromones: Bending the laws of attraction

Aly Walansky

I took my troubles down to Madame Rue.
You know that gypsy with the gold-capped tooth
She's got a pad down on 34th and Vine,
Selling little bottles of Love Potion #9.

--"Love Potion Number 9", The Beatles

Love potions, aphrodisiacs, pheromones. We hear about them in songs, sigh about them in movies, and fantasize about them in --never mind. Could they actually be real? Are we, as humans, still so primal a being that we can be drawn to one another solely on the basis of scent?

What are pheromones, exactly? According to the Athena Institute, pheromones are naturally occurring substances the fertile body excretes externally, conveying an airborne message to trigger a response from the opposite sex of the same species.

"I really do believe great chemistry does involve smell in addition to the visual, mental, physical and emotional connection between people. And though you can't really 'smell' pheromones, our nose does pick them up, and when we like what our brain is smelling, our body and mind does follow," says Rina Valan, founder and president of Fantasia Home Parties. "Basically, humans detect the odorless sex pheromone with their Vomeronasal Organ (or VNO, also called the sixth sense as per Fortune magazine's Technology column). Located deep in the nasal passage, its only purpose is to detect odorless sex pheromones. Evolution, in its grand plan, created this organ to instantly transmit the presence of this hormone to the areas of the brain the regulate sexual drive."

Fantasia Home Parties is in the game of sensuous products with added human derived pheromones that may be used in everyday applications to help turn yourself into a human magnet (and drive him crazy), such as MadameX's Lust Me, a light cologne for women, MadameX's Touch Me, a shea butter based massage cream, Body Dew, a lightly scented after bath spray oil, and Body Dew Body Mist, a silky body spray/powder combination.

But the question remains, is all this for real?

"There is no doubt that smells are sexual and can attract!" says Dr. Steven Rosenberg, Ph.D., a teacher, psychotherapist and hypnotist. "Over the years I have been giving advice to couples on how to improve their sex life. One thing in common with most people is the smell of their significant other. This smell gives us an associative memory of being romantic. There are products that people have used to enhance their natural aromas. Some of these products work. Some are just too strong and can be a turn-off. For the most part a fragrance that mixes with your body chemistry is what you want. If you can sample the products and see how they mix for you, they can work. To really make them work, you need to like the reaction you get or yourself first. Then, you can get romantic and really get turned-on to make the association strong between the smell and romance. Try a few! They can work."

"It is true that some foods contain certain compounds that behave in certain ways to put you in the mood," she says. "A lot of this work is done by stimulating your sense of smell. When you eat, 80 to 90 percent of the flavor actually comes from the aroma," says Dr. Kathleen D'Ovidio, assistant professor of food science and management at Delaware Valley College in Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

D'Ovidio says research shows that certain smells cause a degree of sexual arousal in men and women. "For men, those aromas were bananas, cinnamon buns, and pumpkin pie. Older men preferred vanilla and strawberries. Even cheese, pizza and buttered popcorn had an effect," she says. "Women liked the aroma of cucumbers -- which stimulates female sex hormones -- and anise or licorice smells. The ancient Greeks and Romans were known to use anise and fennel as aphrodisiacs. Anise, in particular, has estrogenic compounds."

"Anything that increases circulation, such as garlic, ginger or hot peppers are considered to have aphrodisiac qualities," D'Ovidio says. "Throughout history, basil was supposed to drive men wild. Women would dust their breasts with dried basil powder. Carrots have also been used since ancient times, when they were used by royalty to aid in seduction."

For those of you eager to fill your date's plate with aphrodisiacs, try out the cool new web site, EatSomethingSexy by author Amy Reiley -- a great resource for the love, lore and lure of food. The website features the history of aphrodisiacs, the latest science, and even an aphrodisiac web site. Another great resource is InterCourses: An Aphrodisiac Cookbook, which includes guides for choosing the perfect aphrodisiac for various situations and aphrodisiac charts and recipes to match your astrological sign. "Intimate, yet playful, InterCourses' approach to cooking livens up relationships, whether just starting out or 50 years in the making," says co-author Martha Hopkins.

Chemical attraction is no myth; it's just a question of what that chemical is. According to Dr. Helen Fisher, a biological anthropologist at Rutgers University, testosterone is the only true aphrodisiac for both men and women. You can trigger the testosterone by doing novel things together because novelty drives another chemical in the brain, dopamine, which will trigger testosterone and make you feel sexy.

Rumor has it that Pink Elephant, a bar/club in New York City, pumps smells such as cotton candy into their air to encourage the mating instinct, and lingerie giant Shirley of Hollywood (www.pamperedpassions.com) has a line of fragrances (Lust for Her and Virile for Him) that contains powerful pheromone attractants. (Which, by the way, I have put to the test within my own wild and crazy life, to successful results.)

Chemical pheromones are the key ingredients for creating a modern-day love potion. Synthetic pheromones are produced from androstenone (the male pheromone) and androstenol (the female pheromone). The brain reacts to these pheromones instinctively, which immediately creates a physiological and behavioral attraction that directly affects the male and female level of attraction to potential mates. Skincare guru Dino Morra has recently created the world's first Pheromone Candle, available in two fragrances to evoke physical sensations: Women use the warm vanilla combined with stronger notes to produce a sweeter scent that appeals to men, and men use a musky tobacco fragrance creating a heady, earthy smell making the scent more attractive to women. The Pheromone Candle found at www.dinomorra.com releases radicals, while soy, Vitamin E and C enrich the candle with anti-aging benefits. Simply light the candle's wick and allow the fragrant emollient to melt into a thick creamy substance. Once the flame is extinguished, use the spatula provided to apply the body butter substance.

But pheromones alone won't do the trick

"Pheromones help, but they're not the whole picture. They increase your options because they increase the number of people who are interested in being attentive to you," said Dr. Winnifred B. Cutler, a reproductive biologist and the co-discoverer of pheromones in humans, and the president and founder of The Athena Institute, in a recent WebMD chat. "It's only useful to attract numbers if you know what to do when you find someone. It's not the basis, but one of the components. So, if you want to attract someone who loves you, it helps to have a number of candidates. Then it helps to conduct yourself in a way that, when you find the right candidate, that it is the quality of person you'd want to be with. And everybody is somebody's gem."

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