

## INTIMACY, SEX & RELATIONSHIP

# Women More Sensitive To How Another Person Smells



### DR. SANDRA SCANTLING

**T**here isn't a woman alive who hasn't been forced to run the fragrance gauntlet in the cosmetic aisles of major department stores.

It's always the same for me ...

I push open the big glass doors, walk into the store and am immediately accosted by an olfactory tsunami of spicy, floral, exotic and grassy "notes" that flood my senses.

I think to myself, "Why do women think they should smell this way?" I try to hold my breath as long as I can as I make a beeline through the accessories department to avoid the battalion of "perfume soldiers" positioned at their duty stations, armed with vials of their most current love potions. The bottles are strategically poised, ready to fire at the first sign of customer receptivity. I keep walking with a purposeful stride.

I'm sure you've also noticed that men aren't made to play the "run from the cologne game." The male cologne aisle is on the other side of the store, near shirts, wallets, and other necessities. Why is that? Very simply, men usually discover a product that works for them and stick with it. Unless their lover makes them the gift of a new fragrance touted to transform them into "beasts in bed," they're not apt to leaf through magazines scratching and sniffing.

Isn't it interesting that it's your female friends (or female lovers) who tend to compliment you on your new fragrance. You spend more than \$100 on some amazing, sure-to-seduce scent and nada, zilch from your special male. There's a reason for that, other than the fact that it's not very PC for men to say, "Gee you smell terrific" (unless they're hitting on you). Women generally are more sensitive to how one another smells and how they think they should smell.

This goes for every part of our bodies, from our arm pits to our toes. Even though we're smart enough to know our vaginas aren't supposed to smell like a field of fresh daisies, we still buy the propaganda that says otherwise and continue to fret about how we smell "down there." Simple soap and water is the only thing a healthy vagina needs. And while you're at it, go easy on the soap. It will dry out your delicate vaginal tissues. But when is the last time your male put lavender on his genitals? (And would you really want him to?)

Not only are we sensitive to our own smells, research reveals that women prefer the body odor of their male partners when it smells differently from their own. Based on the research conducted by Swiss biologist Claus Wedekind that people are now calling the "sweaty T-shirt study," 44 men wearing the same T-shirt for two days had their shirts sniffed by college women to see whether they preferred shirts that smelled similar to themselves. The findings revealed that the women were more attracted to the smell of the T-shirts whose "major histocompatibility complex" (MHC) — a series of genes involved in our immune system — was most dissimilar from their own.

That opposites attract makes sense from an evolutionary point of view. If we mate with a partner who has a different immune system, it theoretically would improve our chances of offspring survival by broadening the immune repertoire.

While scent attraction plays a major role in animal magnetism, sensory preference isn't stable. When a woman is pregnant or on the pill, opposites do not attract and she prefers scents similar to her own.

Obviously, the perfume industry is well aware that women are complex. No wonder there are so many fragrances foisted upon us.

I can't wait to see how they market "stinky T-shirt #9."

»» Dr. Sandra Scantling is a licensed clinical psychologist and certified sex therapist in Farmington. You can e-mail her at AskDrScantling@aol.com; her website is www.drscantling.com. This column is not intended as a substitute for professional advice. Case material used here is not intended to represent any actual individuals.