

The affective and perceptual experience of human perspiration in Amsterdam in 2016

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Introduction

Both the sense of smell and the olfactory perception of perspiration are vital for navigating social interactions and acquiring affective knowledge (Ferdenzi et al. 2016).

Love Sweat Love was a dating performance that impugns the aesthetic and moral repression of human olfactory perception (Classen et al. 1994; Le Guéer 2002). Furthermore, it challenged Western normative social expectations of body odor control.

The main question for this work was:

How do participants of the performance Love Sweat Love affectively perceive perspiration in Amsterdam in 2016?

Methods

Smell Sampling

Participation involved:

- 1) donating an underarm scent sample
- 2) smelling other people's scent samples
- 3) selecting up to three favorite scents.

Survey

The smelling was guided by an anonymous survey inquiring into:

- 1) the use and non-use of fragrance products
- 2) the meaning of scent in relationships
- 3) biological sex
- 4) associations
- 5) feeling states
- 6) descriptors for each liked scent.

Analytical framework

The qualitative content analysis focused on survey results from respondents who perceive scent in a relationship as meaningful. The following question was explored for the 20% most favorably rated perspiration samples.

How do respondents feel about the scent samples they liked within these specific cohorts?

- female respondents who use fragrance (57 likes)
- female respondents who do not use fragrance (20 likes)
- male respondents who use fragrance (30 likes)
- male respondents who do not use fragrance (11 likes)
- other respondents who use fragrance (3 like)

Qualitative content analysis

- Perspiration samples were assigned to feeling dimensions as presented in Table 1. This approach draws on the Geneva Emotion and Odor Scale (GEOS) (Chrea et al. 2009) as the analytical framework that groups dimensions of feelings evoked by odors.

- To be able to assign feelings, the GEOS's six dimensions (1. pleasant feeling, 2. unpleasant feeling, 3. sensuality, 4. relaxation, 5. refreshment, and 6. sensory pleasure) were expanded by two more dimensions (7. neither pleasant nor unpleasant and 8. both pleasant and unpleasant).

Table 1. Feeling dimensions based on the GEOS (Chrea et al. 2009).

	Females with fragrance: 57 likes		Females without fragrance: 20 likes		Males with fragrance: 30 likes		Male without fragrance: 11 likes		Other with fragrance
Pleasant	3 x good 6 x happy nice to smell happy to smell something good	smells good I like :) comfortable	attracted 4 x happy nice to smell	comfortable natural	4 x happy [1 x :)] OK :) fairly mellow		4 x happy nice	naturally positive	happy
Sensuality	girly enthusiastic 3 x sexy loved adventurous manly	2 x interested warm understanding soft creamy feeling like spring is coming	desire heavenly adventurous	curious warm 2 x sexy	comfortable Shy!! warm amazing 2 x romantic mysterious fairly mellow makes me feel like i want to cum	gives me a homely feeling More of that smell CAN'T SAY, I'M MARRIED 2 x excited understanding harsh soft creamy	ALL RIGHT	warm	comfortable
Refreshment	4 x fresh 2 x energetic reddingsmiddel	fresh like a morning after a shower eindelijk een beetje oke lucht feel free as a bird!	fresh refreshing relieved		clean hungry	energetic feeling like spring is coming eindelijk een beetje oke lucht		BUT AT LEAST SMELLS HUMAN	
Relaxation	4 x relaxed trust quiet	chill gives me a homely feeling natural	relaxed 2 x safe 2 x calm connected to the earth	pine trees familiar secure	free 2 x calm	feel free as a bird! relaxed		COMFORTING	free
Sensory Pleasure	party, fun hungry	vanillary (vanilla like) made me think of an ex lover			natural	a girl i know			holiday back in school
Neither/Nor Pleasant/Unpleasant	okay	neutral, not excited neither disgust						eh it's okay	4 x NEUTRAL
Pleasant & Unpleasant					hangovery				

Results

Explicit, unpleasant feelings are not mentioned.

Female respondents who use fragrance

- Feelings are described in a wide range of dimensions, most prevalently within dimensions of 1. pleasant feeling, 2. sensuality, 3. refreshment, and 4. relaxation.
- The most frequently used terms are "happy" (6x), "fresh" (4x), "relaxed" (4x), and "good" (3x).
- Relaxed feeling terms are most popular among this group.

Female respondents who do not use fragrance

- The feeling labels match with only four of the seven dimensions; 1. pleasant feeling, 2. sensuality, 3. refreshment, and 4. relaxation.
- The most frequently used terms are "happy" (4x), followed by "romantic" (2x) and "calm" (2x)

Male respondents who use fragrance

- Describe their feelings with the greatest variation in dimensions.
- The most frequently used terms are "happy" (4x), followed by "romantic" (2x), "free" (2x), and "calm" (2x).
- The feeling state "clean" was mentioned only once among this group.

Male respondents who don't use fragrance

- The majority of elicited feelings fall under the dimension "pleasant feeling".
- "Happy" (4x) is the most frequently used term.
- The feeling descriptor "But at least it smells human" stands in contrast with all the labels that are primarily based on inherent emotional qualities.

One other respondents who does not use fragrance

- The feeling descriptors only correspond to dimensions of 1. pleasantness, 2. refreshment, and 3. sensory pleasure dimensions.

Conclusions

The results show:

- The variety of feeling descriptors among cohorts is very rich in variation and heterogeneous. This suggests: 1) the affective experience of perspiration is wide-ranging 2) feelings are individual and,
- that preferences, and patterns of feelings are group-specific.

Although the development of the GEOS (Chrea et al. 2009) contained only one perspiration sample among a multitude of other odorants, it offers a suitable basis for analysis of the diversity of affective experiences of human perspiration.

Against the backdrop of smell's devaluation in modern aesthetics and in psychoanalysis, the results demonstrate that affective experience of human perspiration can be pleasant, sensual, relaxing, and refreshing.

This study contributes to a social rehabilitation of the aesthetic and moral repression of olfactory perception.

References and Notes

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Notes:

1. The study used a five-point scale to measure how meaningful scent is in a relationship from "1" (not meaningful) to "5" (very meaningful). Values 4 and 5 counted as "meaningful" in the analysis.

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