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Pheromones: fashion fad or fact?

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Pheromones –chemical messengers that convey a sender’s state or trait to a receiver –have long been controversial and may be considered more as a marketing tool to sell perfume than a robust scientific phenomenon. However, over the past years empirical evidence has accumulated demonstrating that humans can pick up dynamic states (e.g. emotion, sickness) and enduring traits (e.g. gender, age) from others via the sense of smell with body odor as the carrier of the information. Obvious next questions pertain to the nature and composition of the chemical substrate in body odour that conveys the message (the “odorprint”), and of the role of context and learning in how the message is perceived. I intend to present a framework to help advance our understanding on the role, significance and mechanisms underlying pheromone communication in humans based on De Groot, Semin and Smeets (2017, in press) which may serve as an avenue for future research.

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