Improvement of nonverbal behavior in Japanese female perfume-wearers

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Sensation and Perception

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A recent study by Higuchi, Shoji, Taguchi, and Hatayama (2005) examined the use of perfume on females’ nonverbal behavior. This study was conducted to gain information about the use of perfume and whether the scent affected others’ views on the wearer or if the scent affected the wearer’s self-perception. According to previous studies, perfume is expected to improve the wearer’s interpersonal impressions in social settings, although the reason for the contribution of olfactory impressions to positive impressions of a perfume-wearer is unclear. A possible suggestion is that the olfactory areas in the brain make anatomically unique and direct connections with the neural substrates responsible for emotional information processing (Higuchi et al., 2005). The closeness of these neural areas leads to the speculation that people who interact with those who wear perfume may experience relatively intense affective responses that result in a positive impression on the perfume wearer.

The current study suggests that the positive reactions to perfume may also be experienced by the perfume-wearers as well (Higuchi et al., 2005). Perfume may cause behavioral changes that result in the wearer’s projecting a positive visual impression. According to the authors, people projecting positive self-impressions are more likely to smile or make eye contact with others and may also modify their nonverbal behavior. The hypothesis of this article is that “perfume-wearers may project positive visual and olfactory impressions” (Higuchi et al., 2005).

To test this hypothesis, the researchers asked 31 Japanese females (mean age of 18.9 year) to participate in an interview. The participants were assigned to one of two groups: a perfume group and a no perfume group. It was not a randomized selection, but selection was based on a screening test, confirming that all participants in the perfume group preferred to the smell of the perfume used in the experiment as well as were unfamiliar with the scent.

The methods included a carefully constructed set that was used in every interview. One of three Japanese females (mean age 21 years old) were the interviewers. All interviewers wore a white gown and were instructed to behave consistently for each interviewee. Training included nodding or smiling at participants’ answers, while leaving time intervals between participants’ answers and the next question. The fragrance used was a commercial perfume, “Breath Garden-Tenderness Time.” The interview task was broken into 4 blocks of questions that consisted of 10-12 questions. Each block lasted approximately 2-3 minutes. The questions asked related to the use of cosmetics, daily life, and interests.

The procedures began with the participants putting on a grey sweatshirt before they entered the interview room. The participants were then asked to sit on a backless swivel chair for the duration of the interview. During the interval between the second and third blocks, the participants in the perfume group were presented with the perfume and used it before the third block began. All blocks of the interview were videotaped by the experimenter.

Various measurements were taken by the experimenter during the study. Two personality traits, egogram and exhibitionism using the Free-Child scale, were used in the study. These measurements were used to determine if the two groups were of similar temperament. Nonverbal behaviors were also measured. The interviewees were rated on smiling, eye contact, and nonsymbolic movement, such as touching (of hair, face, or arm), shifting posture (rotating in chair and crossing of legs), or shaking one’s leg.