Female preferences' for masculinity cues in body odour

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Previous studies indicated that attractiveness perceptions in humans are influenced by cues of sexual dimorphism (masculinity/ femininity). From an evolutionary view, extremes of phenotypic sexual dimorphism (more feminine for women, more masculine for men) are attractive because they advertise the quality of an individual in terms of heritable benefits ('good genes') and/or superiority in intrasexual (within same-sex members) competitiveness. Namely, more masculine men are believed to provide gains to the partner, such as higher chances of survival, reduced risk of infection, increased resources and offspring disease resistance. One of the variables that seem to be sexually dimorphic is skin colour. Men tend to have a darker, redder and yellower hue comparing to women. In previous research from our lab, women were found to prefer faces of men with a more masculine skin tone.

The present study aimed to understand whether men with more masculine skin colour also have a more attractive body odour. Body odours are believed to communicate important social information and may be used to advertise mate quality. Therefore, we hypothesised that women discriminate opposite-sex body odours based on its level of masculinity. To address this question, we used spectrophotometry to measure CieLAB facial skin colour values from 18 male participants, and a skin masculinity score was attributed to each participant. Male participants also donated a sample of their body odour. Such samples were later smelled and rated by 48 female non-pill users. Ratings included measures of attractiveness, pleasantness and sexiness. As expected, results showed that women attributed higher ratings on such measures to body odours belonging to men with more masculine skin tone. Such findings may imply that women do prefer the odours of men with more masculine skin colour and that sex hormones, responsible for sexual maturation and sexual dimorphic features, may influence chemical compounds in body odours.