

Male lust is blind, research suggests

By Roger Dobson

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Men have long been accused of judging women on looks alone, but even the plainest Jane can get their hormones raging, a study has found.

Research involving a group of male students found that their levels of the hormone testosterone increased to the same extent whether they were talking to a young woman they found attractive – or to one they didn't fancy much at all.

After 300 seconds alone in the same room as a woman they had never met before, and in some cases did not find particularly attractive, the men's testosterone levels of the hormone had shot up by an average of around eight per cent.

advertisement The study's authors believe the rise in testosterone may be an automatic and unconscious reaction that has evolved in man when faced with a woman, to prepare him for possible mating opportunities.

The rising levels may then fuel more visible changes in male behaviour that occur in the presence of a woman, including a squaring of shoulders, an upright posture, and greater use of hands – and even, it is suggested, a flaring of the nostrils.

The rise in the male hormone may also be the reason why men are more likely to tell women exaggerated stories about their job, career, education and earnings, the researchers believe. The study, published in the journal *Hormones and Behaviour*, involved 63 male students aged 21 to 25 who were not aware of the purpose of the study.

Their testosterone levels were measured with saliva samples and they were then taken to another room by a researcher under the guise of being there to solve a sudoku puzzle.

In the same room another man or a woman appeared to be solving a similar puzzle, but he or she was in fact acting as the so-called stimulus.

The women were chosen on the basis of being moderately attractive for the student population.

The researcher then made the excuse that he did not have the correct puzzle for the participant and left the room to get it. The two were then left alone to wait together for five minutes. The stimulus people were told to engage in friendly conversation in a natural manner, or allow long pauses if the man elected not to talk.

After five minutes, the experimenter returned with the correct puzzle, and then left the room with the stimulus person.

Fifteen minutes later, the experimenter returned to collect the puzzle from the man, and to take a second saliva sample. Comparison of the saliva tests showed that testosterone levels rapidly increased by an average of 7.8 per cent after the five minute contact with a woman.

Men who were rated as more aggressive or dominant types had gone up even higher. The results also show that testosterone levels did not change when they were in the room with another man.

The men were also asked to rate the attractiveness of the woman in the room, and the results show that the testosterone increase was not influenced by the perceived attractiveness of the women.

Leander van der Meij, who led the study at the University of Groningen in Holland, said: "We found a testosterone increase after only five minutes of exposure to a woman. Our results suggest that the increase in testosterone levels that we found, may be an automatic male response that activates receptors in organs and the nervous system to prepare the human body for mate attraction."

The researchers believe the results suggest that one of the ultimate functions of testosterone may be to attract mates. One way it may do that is by orchestrating changes in appearance and behaviour that may increase their attractiveness.

This idea is supported by evidence that dominance behaviours of men increases their desirability as a date and by research showing that men who exhibit more dominant-like behaviour make more frequent successful contact with women.

Mr van der Meij added: "We showed that testosterone levels increased in men after contact with women. This increase is probably an important mechanism through which men acquire partners.

"Testosterone levels rose motivating men to seek mating opportunities. That in turn triggers changes in unconscious behaviour designed to attract a mate. The rise in levels of the hormone bring about changes in way men display themselves.

"Once levels have risen, they can display more dominant behaviour. They talk more with their hands, there is more eye contact, their posture is more upright, and they are more likely to tell stories designed to impress the woman. We know that women can be attracted by these kinds of things. All this, we believe, may be fuelled by the rise in testosterone that we have found."

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