



The Scent of Desire: Discovering Our Enigmatic Sense of Smell

By Rachel Herz

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Why do some people like a certain aroma and others hate it? Is smell personal or cultural? How does it affect our choices and our actions?

The Scent of Desire is the definitive psychological study of the importance of smell in our lives, from nourishment to procreation to our relationships with other people and the world at large. Located in the same part of the brain that processes emotion, memory, and motivation, this most essential of senses is imperative to our physical and emotional well-being. It was crucial to our ancestors' existence and it remains so today, profoundly shaping our emotional, physical, and even sexual lives.

One of the world's leading experts on the psychology of smell, Rachel Herz investigates how smell functions, what purpose it serves, and how inextricably it is linked to our survival in this compelling, surprising, delightfully informative appreciation of the wonders of this sadly neglected sense.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Herz, a Brown University professor specializing in the psychology of smell, demonstrates that this sense is vital to our well being—so important to mental and physical health that its loss can drive some people to suicide. Herz explores the relationships between scent, emotion and behavior, emphasizing that scent is an important component of sexual attraction and thus crucial for the survival of our species. Many intriguing facts enliven her book. For example, scents are intimately connected to memory and can be used as memory aids; olfaction shuts down while we are asleep; newborns and their mothers recognize each other by their scent. Herz debunks the mystique of aromatherapy, which she says is effective because of our emotional associations with scents rather than because of any direct action of the scent. Emerging technologies of scent, such as electronic noses that can sniff out terrorists, breath analyzers that can detect diseases and marketing theories based on scents, are given a chapter, but Herz admits that she would rather see the development of technologies to restore the sense of smell to people who have lost it, because for her, scent is essential to our humanity. This illuminating book argues convincingly that the sense of smell should never be taken for granted. (*Oct. 9*)

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Review

“Fascinating . . . A serious book, with many whiffs of delight.” (Washington Post Book World)

“You’ll never take your nose for granted again once you’ve read *The Scent of Desire*.” (USA Today)

“Intriguing...This illuminating book argues convincingly that the sense of smell should never be taken for granted.” (Publishers Weekly)

THE SCENT OF DESIRE was a finalist for the 2009 AAAS Excellence in Science Writing Award (The American Association for the Advancement of Science)

“Filled with intriguing bits of information.” (Weekly Standard)

“This is a spicy perfume of a book, redolent with fascinating facts and provocative hypotheses.” (Steven Pinker, Johnstone Professor, Harvard University, author of *The Language Instinct*, *How the Mind Works*, and *The Stuff of Thought*)

“Astounding and sometimes mind-boggling with (a) wonderfully charming voice and writing style.” (Blogcritics.org)

“Charming. A reminder that life without aromas...would be sad indeed.” (Curled Up with a Good Book)

“A delightfully unexpected blend of personal anecdotes, pop-cultural erudition and scientific understanding.” (Kirkus Reviews)

“A great reference book that everyone should read. An excellent overview of the sense of smell. It kills some of the myths that have long been corrupting Perfumery and explains where the higher debates should really be. Thank you, Rachel Herz, for gathering these facts about olfaction in one place.” (Christophe Laudamiel,

Senior Perfumer, Fine Fragrances & Innovation)

About the Author

Since 2000, Rachel Herz, Ph.D., has been on the faculty of Brown University. She has appeared on the Discovery Channel, ABC News, the BBC, National Public Radio, and the Learning Channel, and is the subject of a *Scientific American* profile piece.

Users Review

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Maria Macdonald:

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