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THE FIRST AND DEFINITIVE BOOK ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SMELL
TRACES ITS IMPORTANCE IN OUR LIVES, FROM WHAT WE EAT TO WHO
WE MARRY TO HOW WE CONDUCT OURSELVES SOCIALLY

The Scent of Desire

Discovering Our Enigmatic Sense of Smell

By Rachel Herz

In a New York City subway car, the ambient aroma of chocolate chip cookies reduces violence and rudeness. In a Sydney hotel room, a successful musician hangs himself after losing his sense of smell and spiraling into depression. In almost every relationship, a woman gauges physical attraction to her partner by his body odor.

The human sense of smell is mysterious and fascinating. Research shows it is the most emotionally evocative sense, the sense most closely tied to mental health and happiness, and was the first sense to evolve—yet it has taken a cultural backseat to sight and sound. In **The Scent of Desire**, Brown University professor Rachel Herz, widely recognized as one of foremost smell experts in the world, brings our sense of smell to center stage with a blend of scientific research, individual case studies, charming anecdotes, and surprising facts. Dr. Herz has crafted a compulsively readable book that does for sensory perception what Steven Pinker did for language.

The Scent of Desire demonstrates how an understanding of smell is the key to understanding our psychology. Among Dr. Herz's surprising revelations in the book:

- **Mental Health:** There is evidence of a “Depression-Olfaction Loop.” Not only can anosmia (loss of ability to smell) lead to depression, but depression can also bring about olfactory loss. In these patients, antidepressant medication can improve smell sensitivity.
- **Attraction:** Smell is the single most important physical characteristic for a woman choosing a romantic partner. A woman who begins or stops taking birth control pills partway through a relationship can actually find her odor preferences changed. Men are also drawn to the scent of a woman but choose physical beauty first.
- **Food:** Aroma is so integral to the taste of food and beverage that an anosmic person can't distinguish between an apple and a potato, Coke and Sprite, or even between red wine and cold coffee.
- **Cultural Differences:** Scent preferences differ by culture. Americans react positively to root beer and wintergreen, while the British don't like them at all. Europeans love the

smell of cheese, while Asians are disgusted by it. By contrast, Beijing residents were indifferent to the smell of human waste when, in 1993, they lost the Olympic bid due to odors caused by the dearth of modern toilets. The Chinese government began to remedy this problem for the next bid, and time will tell if 2008 Beijing will be able to meet the olfactory fancies of international visitors.

- **Memory:** Scents trigger the most emotional and evocative memories and can reawaken memories that otherwise would be forever forgotten. Our memories make use who we are, and people who have lost their sense of smell report feeling incomplete, uncertain of themselves or their past.
- **Therapy:** Although most claims about the powers of aromatherapy are scientifically unproven, aromas can affect mood through learned associations. Smelling lavender, for example, has no pharmacological effect, but encourages relaxation because we associate it with baths, spas, and other relaxing experiences.
- **Consumer Behavior:** Smells can influence our buying behavior, and companies like PepsiCo and Coca Cola hire Dr. Herz as an expert consultant. Some companies even use “Nose Muzak” to enhance performance in workers. However, the speed with which we become accustomed to new smells in the environment is a challenge to the effectiveness of these ideas.
- **Parenting:** 80% of new mothers can recognize their two-day old child by smell alone. Fathers can recognize their own babies’ by smell too, although less well. The scent of a baby’s head is one of the few odors that is almost universally considered to be good.

In 2004, the Nobel Prize for physiology and medicine was awarded, for the first time ever, to researchers in the sense of smell. The sense of smell still holds many secrets and discovering the psychological puzzle pieces has been Dr. Rachel Herz’s lifelong pursuit. ***The Scent of Desire*** is a voyage of discovery that illuminates the relationship between our sense of smell and our emotional, physical, social and sexual lives. Dr. Herz is peerlessly knowledgeable and endlessly engaging as she illuminates this underappreciated sense that makes every day of our lives richer.

About the author:

Rachel Herz, Ph.D. has been recognized as the world’s leading expert on the psychology of smell. Since 2000, she has been a visiting professor at Brown University. Her prominence as one of the foremost experts on the sense of smell has led to numerous radio and television interviews, including the Discovery Channel, ABC News, FOX News, The BBC, National Public Radio, and National Geographic. She was the subject of a profile in Scientific American and is regularly interviewed in print media, such as: The New Yorker, The New York Times, The Financial Times, Time Magazine, US News and World Report and Oprah Magazine.

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