Changes in appearance & desire across the ovulatory cycle

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Introduction

Ovulatory Shift Hypothesis: Women experience an increase in mating motivation near ovulation¹
- Desire to attract short-term mate
- Outcompete rival women

Two decades of research have provided evidence, some mixed, of cycle shifts in women's preference for cues of mate quality¹.

Aim
Here we focus on a lesser studied aspect, the shift in women’s appearance and desire. Our study is novel, taking measurements (not ratings) of daytime appearance rather than eveningwear.

Hypothesis: women's sexual advertisement and desire should be greater when risk of conception is high in the high fertility (HF) phase than in the low (LF) fertility phase:

Q1. women’s appearance: clothing and ornamentation
Q2. desire: attraction to opposite sex and sexual thoughts

Methods

25 single and 18 partnered heterosexual women (18-30y) not on contraception were tested in each fertility phase
- low fertility <5d before menstruation
- high fertility positive LH surge from ovulation predictor test

Analysis: Repeated measures 2X2 mixed ANOVA (fertility phase and relationship status).

Results

Q1. APPEARANCE:

Make-up: Use of make-up was heavier at HF than LF
(F₁,₃₀=15.6, p<.001, np² =0.34, 95% C.I. 0.24 – 0.77)

Clothing tightness: Women wore tighter clothes at HF than LF
(F₁,₃₀=9.11, p=0.005, np² =0.23, 95% C.I. 0.30 – 1.54)

Clothing colour: Brighter clothing was worn at HF than LF
(F₁,₃₀=6.2, p=0.019, np² =0.17, 95% C.I. 0.07 – 0.7)

There were no effects of clothing cover, sheerness or use of jewellery.

Q2. DESIRE

Attraction: No effect of fertility phase or relationship status

Sexual thoughts: Increase in sexual thoughts at HF compared to LF
(F₁,₂₉ = 10.38, p=0.003, np² =.26, 95% C.I. 0.38 -1.68)

No effects for any variable of relationship status (single/partnered)

Discussion

- Women increase daytime sexual advertisement during high risk of conception, when they also experience an increase in sexual desire.
- Our findings support the hypothesis of self ornamentation⁴ through personal grooming (use of make-up) and clothing choice (tightness and colour).
- There was no effect of relationship status - both single and partnered women experienced a shift in appearance and desire across the cycle. However, sample sizes are relatively small and replication is needed.

References