

## Why human pheromone myth persists despite lack of scientific evidence

Every year around Valentine's Day, there is a [rash of stories](#) in the news about sexy smells and pheromones. You could be forgiven for thinking that human 'sex pheromones', in particular the 'male molecule' androstadienone, were well established: countless 'human pheromones' websites sell it and there are tens of apparently scientific studies on androstadienone published in science journals. These studies are cited hundreds of times and have ended up being treated as fact in books on sexual medicine and even commentary on legislation.

The [birthplace of the pheromone myth](#) was a 1991 conference in Paris sponsored by a U.S. corporation, EROX, which had an interest in patenting androstadienone and another molecule – estratetraenol, from women – as 'human pheromones'. Unwittingly, leading mammalian olfaction scientists lent the conference credibility. Slotted into the programme and conference proceedings was the short 'study-zero' paper on the ['Effect of putative pheromones on the electrical activity of the human vomeronasal organ and olfactory epithelium'](#). To my surprise, the authors gave no details at all of how these molecules had been extracted, identified, and tested in bioassays – all routinely required steps in the exhaustive process before any molecule can be shown to be a species-wide chemical signal, a pheromone. Instead there was just a footnote: 'These putative pheromones were supplied by EROX Corporation'. The missing, essential details were never published. (The claim by EROX-sponsored scientists that adult humans have a functioning vomeronasal organ, [against all the evidence](#), is a story for another day).

**Read full, original article:** [Sexing up the human pheromone story: How a corporation started a scientific myth](#)