

# Part 4: SEX

[excerpt]

## What Marketers Know: Everyone Fears Rejection

Companies that merely utilize sexual images and language in their campaigns tend to accentuate the positive, encouraging viewers and consumers to link their products with pleasure and enjoyment. Companies selling sex and sex-adjacent products, on the other hand, prefer to lean on the negative, reminding us that cellulite, body odor, and social awkwardness are ALL major turn-offs. They explain right to our face that we need their help to eradicate these sex-repellent traits.

They're wise to do this. Data analyst Seth Stephens-Davidowitz examined one month of worldwide Google searches related to sex and quickly discovered that most people are utterly obsessed with their own intimacy-related hang-ups. More than any other sex-centric topics, people were trying to find ways to feel better about their bodies and increase their sexual appeal to potential partners. As you might expect, men are addicted to researching penis size, with nine of the top 10 searches focusing on questions or concerns around length, girth, and enhancement. Women's biggest worry? Vaginal odor.<sup>1</sup> Because what could be more repellent than the natural, normal smell of a human sex organ?

Speaking of which ...

### You're Gross. No Sex for You.

Vaginal washes, vaginal deodorants, and the infamous douche are just a few of the products formulated to simultaneously fuel *and* assuage women's fears about stinky nether-regions. These have been around for ages, with more emerging all the time.

What's new is the cross-industry attack on men's hygiene as a mood-killer. Men have long been taught that self-care is for sissies, and they should simply wash their entire bodies with a bar of Dial soap and call it good. Anything more is an embarrassing overindulgence and legitimate cause for verbal abuse from self-proclaimed, macho peers. In recent years, however, millennials have begun to shift thinking around both hygiene practices and measures of masculinity, opening up a whole new avenue for shame-marketing. After all, if it's suddenly OK for men to primp, companies had better bully them into believing that primping *properly* is now expected. Enter a new world, where it takes more than a bath in AXE body spray to get ready for a night out. How predictable.

“Really it boils down to confidence, sexual in nature,” YouTube vlogger Aaron Marino told *GQ* back in 2015. “It’s starting to become a lot more socially acceptable for men to deal with things that are bothering them in an open way, as opposed to years ago where we really just didn’t talk about stuff.”<sup>ii</sup>

It’s a little surprising that this sea change didn’t come sooner, considering how gross men can get, AND how powerful human disgust can be. A 2018 study published in life sciences journal *Royal Society’s Philosophical Transactions B* supports long-standing anecdotal evidence that humans avoid foul-smelling or otherwise repellent stimuli because we know, instinctively, that they could make us sick. Study coauthor Mícheál de Barra, Ph.D., a research psychologist at the Center for Culture and Evolution at Brunel University in London, says, “You can think of [disgust] as a behavioral arm of the immune system.”<sup>iii</sup> The root motivator for sex is procreation, which means that stinky, unkempt, dirty men will have more trouble finding sex partners than their meticulously-groomed counterparts. Because deep down in their lizard-brains, women believe that bumping uglies with stinky, unkempt, dirty men will lead to infection, sickness, and possibly death. (okay, so there’s a little science around why both men and women prefer clean, attractive mates but let’s focus on what really matters: ego.)

Of course, many of the products and campaigns that sprang from the *Dude Grooming Revolution* have nothing to do with sex or sexual appeal ... at least not directly. But fancy shaving kits, toothpaste, and body wash all come down to making a man look, taste, and smell great. In fact, there are still indirect links to be found... everywhere.

But in the interest of being both literal and droll, we’re going to dig deep into two brands that aim below the belt when it comes to marketing male hygiene products.

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<sup>i</sup>Castleman, Michael. “A New Study Reveals Our Deepest Sexual Insecurities.” *Psychology Today*, May 14, 2016, [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/all-about-sex/201605/new-study-reveals-our-deepest-sexual-insecurities](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/all-about-sex/201605/new-study-reveals-our-deepest-sexual-insecurities).

<sup>ii</sup>Fenner, Justin. “Welcome to the Ball Sweat Economy.” *GQ*, September 23, 2016, [www.gq.com/story/ball-sweat-grooming-products](http://www.gq.com/story/ball-sweat-grooming-products).

<sup>iii</sup>Patel, Neel V. “You Are Disgusting in so Many Ways. Scientists Just Outlined Six of Them.” *Popular Science*, June 5, 2018, [www.popsci.com/evolution-disgust](http://www.popsci.com/evolution-disgust).