2024

The Semiotics of Smell: Gender, Materiality, and the Language of Fragrances

Kathryn Copeland
University of Kentucky, kco291@uky.edu
Author ORCID Identifier:
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9997-0524
Digital Object Identifier: https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2024.396

STUDENT AGREEMENT:

I represent that my thesis or dissertation and abstract are my original work. Proper attribution has been given to all outside sources. I understand that I am solely responsible for obtaining any needed copyright permissions. I have obtained needed written permission statement(s) from the owner(s) of each third-party copyrighted matter to be included in my work, allowing electronic distribution (if such use is not permitted by the fair use doctrine) which will be submitted to UKnowledge as Additional File.

I hereby grant to The University of Kentucky and its agents the irrevocable, non-exclusive, and royalty-free license to archive and make accessible my work in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known. I agree that the document mentioned above may be made available immediately for worldwide access unless an embargo applies.

I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of my work. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of my work. I understand that I am free to register the copyright to my work.

REVIEW, APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE

The document mentioned above has been reviewed and accepted by the student's advisor, on behalf of the advisory committee, and by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), on behalf of the program; we verify that this is the final, approved version of the student's thesis including all changes required by the advisory committee. The undersigned agree to abide by the statements above.

Kathryn Copeland, Student

Dr. Allison Burkette, Major Professor

Dr. Kevin McGowan, Director of Graduate Studies

THE SEMIOTICS OF SMELL: GENDER, MATERIALITY, AND THE LANGUAGE OF FRAGRANCES

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
Kathryn Copeland
Lexington, Kentucky
Director: Dr. Allison Burkette, Professor of Linguistics
Lexington, Kentucky
2024

https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9997-0524

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE SEMIOTICS OF SMELL: GENDER, MATERIALITY, AND THE LANGUAGE OF FRAGRANCES

Fragrances have long been used in a variety of cultures to communicate or articulate perceptions of different types of people or personae (Classen, Howes, & Synnott; 1994); however, the meanings "articulated" by fragrances have rarely been studied through the analytical frameworks of indexicality, enregisterment, and materiality (Eckert, 2008; Johnstone, 2016; Miller, 2005; Silverstein, 2003).

To do this, I first conducted a quantitative corpus analysis of user-generated reviews of popular perfumes on the fragrance database Fragrantica to identify differences in how reviewers of "men's" fragrances and "women's" fragrances describe their experience with the fragrances, and what these patterns indicate about how fragrance might be used to perform gender. I then qualitatively analyzed commentary about and from "fragrance bros" to explore the olfactory, linguistic, and embodied indexes salient in the perception and performance of this prevalent enregistered persona.

This closer examination of the indexed qualities and enregistered personae co-articulated by language, smell, and embodied practices will ideally not only illuminate further the role that this sensory experience plays in our gendered performance and embodiment alongside language, but I intend to draw an analogy between the analysis of speech and smell and underline the importance of using the framework of materiality in the analysis of speech.

KEYWORDS: Indexicality, materiality, enregisterment, gender performance, corpus linguistics

Kathryn Copeland

(Name of Student)

06/17/2024

Date

THE SEMIOTICS OF SMELL: GENDER, MATERIALITY, AND THE LANGUAGE OF FRAGRANCES

By
Kathryn Copeland

Dr. Allison Burkette
Director of Thesis

Dr. Kevin McGowan
Director of Graduate Studies

04/25/2024
Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following thesis benefitted greatly from the contributions and support of many people. Firstly, I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Allison Burkette, who entertained this idea helped me develop my research questions, as well as assisted me in developing my own theory of materiality to apply in this research. This project would not be possible without her. I would also like to thank Dr. Mark Lauersdorf, who spent many hours giving me a crash course in corpus linguistics so that I could complete this project and whose guidance in corpus linguistics made my analysis much stronger than it would have been otherwise. I also would like to thank Dr. Rusty Barrett, whose invaluable expertise in indexicality and enregisterment helped me further develop my section on the enregisterment of "fragrance bros." Though they were not on my committee, I also would like to thank Dr. Kevin McGowan, Dr. Dennis Preston, Dr. Joe Fruehwald, and Dr. Anna Bosch, all of whom have taught me throughout my time at the University of Kentucky and who have greatly assisted me in my growth as a researcher. Dr. McGowan and Dr. Preston also provided helpful feedback on my project at my defense, which has made this thesis better.

I would also like to thank Stella Takvoryan, who read through my thesis and provided me with incredibly useful feedback not only on how I could improve the flow of my writing but also how I could refine my arguments and ideas. Thank you as well to the rest of my fellow MALTT students, who have supported me throughout my time at the University of Kentucky and helped me grow as a scholar and a person. Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful partner and friends and family who have listened to me talk about this project at length, helped me develop my ideas, and supported me throughout my time completing this degree—thank you Anthony, Devyn, Kelsey, and Finley—I would not have been able to do it without you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Perfume has long been used by people to express themselves and create a certain impression upon the outside world. Much of this impression has to do with gender—as perfume is historically one commodity with a significant bifurcation in marketing strategies for men and women. In addition to this, people of all genders are likely to use perfume to perform their gendered personae within the constraints of how particular scents are marketed (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; Morean, 2007; Wilson-Brown, 2021). The purpose of this project is to investigate, through the frameworks of indexicality, enregisterment, and materiality, the way that smells, through perfume, are used by individuals to construct and perform their gender.

The concept of "indexicality" within semiotics has often been used in linguistics to understand the way that language makes meaning through indexes, or linguistic forms which "point" to a quality of meaning (Eckert, 2008; Silverstein, 1976; 2003). For example, a particular speech feature may index a social identity. In this way, I argue that indexicality could also be used to understand the way that perfume is often used to make meaning: there are particular smells which index femininity or masculinity depending on the cultural context.

I will also analyze fragrance commentary data through the framework of materiality, the anthropological framework which advocates for the analytical elimination of the distinction between the subject and the object and the understanding of how objects can be agentive (Burkette, 2018; Miller, 2005). I will argue that when thinking about something that is both an object but is also ephemeral, like perfume, or like language,

materiality is necessary to explore how these "objects" become a part of ourselves as well as how they exist outside of us. The subject/object distinction also becomes more complicated when attempting to understand how something like perfume is used by individuals to index their gender, as the "object" (the oils and materials in the liquid) is connected to and expressed through the body of the wearer, so it is necessarily bound up with the embodiment of the individual. The sensory experience of a perfume is also not constant, as the odor will dissipate when worn by a person, and the materials in the liquid will degrade over time. The ephemeral nature of perfume makes it difficult to understand as strictly an artifact–which necessitates the use of frameworks usually reserved for speech (which is also ephemeral) alongside the more complex understanding of subject and object put forth in the framework of materiality.

1.2 Meanings and use of smell across time and across cultures

Understanding the history of smells and their associations can be difficult–due to the fact that there is no way to "record" an odor. Additionally, not every person perceives smell in the same way based on varying physiological, environmental, and other unknown factors (Kaye, 2001; p. 36). Speech similarly was ephemeral, up until the invention of recording equipment, and still is something that is perceived differently among different individuals. Also like speech and language, smells have over time been used to "create and reinforce class boundaries…and ethnic and gender boundaries….[which] tend to function below the surface of conscious thought" (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; p. 8)

Since smell does have this ideological dimension, it is unsurprising that smell is also interpreted differently across cultures—though in adults the apprehension of smell

usually evokes strong emotions related to the events and feelings which are connected to the smell, children usually do not learn the difference between traditionally "good" and "bad" smells until about eight years old (Lwin and Wijaya, 2011). Lwin and Wijaya (2011) investigates some of the cultural differences in smell perception based on small focus groups of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, though they were limited to Europe, the U.S., Southeast Asia, and Eastern Asia. They asked each focus group to describe the smells associated with a "clean place," a "not clean place," a "joyous/celebratory occasion" and a "sad/funereal occasion." Their findings suggested that there were many commonalities between the individuals polled: clean places were thought to be associated with fresh air, high altitudes, citrus scents, and synthetic detergents; unclean places called to mind trash, sewage, and spoiled food. Celebratory and sad occasions though, were much different across cultures—the scents evoked were dependent upon the specific rituals, foods, and practices of each culture regarding different holidays or events (Lwin and Wijaya, 2011).

Classen, Howes, and Synnott's 1994 book *Aroma: A Cultural History of Smell* attempts to document some of the cultural differences in the perception of smell across the world, as well as document the changing cultural values of smell over time in the context of Western society, beginning with the time of the Roman Empire and ending in the 20th century. Though their discussion begins with a diachronic look at changing perceptions of smell in Western society specifically, I will first discuss their work on smell in cultures around the world, supplementing their discussion with more contemporary literature, and then return to their discussion of gender and smell in Western society.

In their overview of anthropological studies on different cultures from around the world who use scent to organize and perceive different facets of life, Classen, Howes, and Synnott first describe various practices from cultures around the world in which smell plays a central part. For example, the Andaman Islanders use the scents of the different flowers in bloom at different times of the year to organize their calendar. Similarly, the Dassanetch in Ethiopia classify and organize their farming seasons based upon the smells associated with each season.

Smell may also be used to describe distances and places—the Umeda people native to New Guinea use smells to navigate the rainforest, as do the Desana people native to the rainforest in Colombia (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994). The Desana people additionally conceptualize smells as an experience of the entire body and not simply the nose and use smells to describe and classify individuals. The Suya Indians of Brazil have a similar classification system, in which different age and gender categories of people as well as various plants and animals are classified olfactorily and assigned cultural valuation based on that system. Another indigenous group from the same region, the Bororo, have a similar classification system for people, plants, and animals, along a scale–which places musky and rotten smells (*jerimaga*) at the bottom, and sweet smells (*rukore*) at the top (Classen, Howes, Synnott, 1994: 102).

The Serer Ndut of Senegal similarly have a classification system based around their cultural values, as follows, copied from Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994 (p. 103):

Table 1.1 Srer Ndut olfactory classification system

Hen (fragrant)	Serer Ndut, Bambara, flowers, limes, peanuts, raw onions	*Hen* (fragrant)
Pirik (acidic)	Spiritual beings, donkeys, tomatoes, certain trees and roots	*Pirik* (acidic)
Hes (milky or fishy)	Nursing women, neighboring tribes, goats, cows, antelopes, jackals, fish, frogs	*Hes* (milky or fishy)
Hot (rotten)	Cadavers, pigs, ducks, camels, creeping plants	*Hot* (rotten)
Sun (urinous)	Europeans, monkeys, horses, dogs, cats, plants used as diuretics, squash leaves	*Sun* (urinous)

Notice that this hierarchy reflects differences from what is generally considered good smelling in Western cultures, for example, all European peoples are considered lowest on the olfactory hierarchy, and raw onions (typically thought of as foul-smelling in many cultures), are seen as most fragrant. The Serer Ndut also have a wider range of smell and taste vocabulary than in many Western languages, especially English, where in addition to the odor descriptions/categories listed above, they also have a term for both human (*kiili*) and non-human odors (*nget*). The Kapsiki of Cameroon also have a defined group of "smell classes" with ideas of what people, animals, and materials belong in them—but these are not agreed upon by all members of this culture, class and gender determines what words individuals will use to classify certain items. Smell is also gendered in the United Arab Emirates, where women using "strong" fragrances is associated with being "an adultress" (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; p. 126) and women are supposed to only use strong fragrances in the presence of other women or their families. In general,

what smells are considered “good” or “bad” and what particular smells represent or index differ cross-culturally.

Smells in other cultures may also be inextricably linked to intimacy or the being of another person, rather than just one’s social classifications—for example, in India, smelling someone’s head was historically an intimate greeting. Some cultures also conceptualize of individuals having an “odor-soul,” such as the Temiar people of the Malay Peninsula who consider it taboo to pass too closely behind a person, which might disturb the “odor-soul” in their lower back. Other cultures have taboos against marrying someone of the same odor classification, like the Desana of Colombia, or the Batek Negrito of the Malay Peninsula who have a taboo on mixing odors (typically associated with sex) with an opposite sex close relative. Classen, Howes, and Synnott also discuss the importance of linking smells to people in transitory phases, such as the bridal perfumes used in Sudanese weddings, olfactory practices surrounding death and funerary rites, and beliefs and practices related to people undergoing puberty or menstruation in various cultures throughout the world: “...there is a widely perceived or intuited intrinsic connection between olfaction and transition...it is in the nature of odours to alter and shift, making them an apt symbol for a person undergoing transition” (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; p. 140).

Linguistic patterns of different cultures also may indicate a closer attentiveness to scent, in line with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which indicates that language influences habitual thought (Whorf, 1944). As Classen, Howes, and Synnott argue, in Quechua, a language spoken in the Andes, there are a variety of verbs referring to different kinds of smelling activities—such as *mutqquichacuni,* which means “for a group to smell

something together" and *aznachicun,* which means "to have oneself or let oneself to be smelled." (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; p. 112). However, other anthropologists and linguists have argued that these "distinct" smell terms are actually just built up from "extensive morphological processes" (Floyd et al., 2018; p. 178) instead of being specific smell-related vocabulary, since the dictionaries used by Classen, Howes, and Synnott to describe the smell vocabulary of Quechua were created by colonial-era Spanish priests who did not gloss individual morphemes in the word.

Floyd et al. (2018) also discuss the indigenous Chachi society of Ecuador, who live geographically close to Quechua speakers, and their language, Cha'palaa. In particular, they discuss the unique grammaticalized "smell classifier" of Cha'palaa, which is previously unattested in another language. Based on their analysis of a 500,000-word corpus of narratives and interviews, they argue that the morpheme "*-dyu"* is used to classify a word as a type of smell. The prefix morphemes *a(n)-* and *pu-* additionally classify a sensory experience as either positive or negative. Floyd et al. also argue that "...such notable grammaticalization may be linked to the salience of smell in Chachi society" (Floyd et al. 2018; p. 178). Floyd et al.'s discourse analysis and comparison of the Cha'palaa corpus along with the Imbabura Quechua and English corpora (they used the spoken section of the Corpus of Contemporary American English, along with about 60,000 words from the Rossi Corpus of English) also found that across the different sensory verbs used in each language, smell verbs showed up relatively more frequently in the Cha'palaa corpus as well as smell quality terms. The use and grammaticalization of smell terms therefore may suggest a mutually reinforcing relationship between the

cultural importance of smell in Chachi society and the prevalence and importance of smell-related words in the Cha'palaa.

While these cultural and linguistic practices from around the world may seem somewhat "unusual" in contrast with mainstream views on scent apprehension and classification in Western culture where smell is generally considered to be of less importance (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; Morean, 2007); the same olfactory classification practices take place and have historically taken place in Western culture. For example, Linnaeus attempted to create a hierarchy of smells similar to that found in other cultures:

1. *Aromaticos* (aromatic)
2. *Fragrantes* (fragrant)
3. *Ambrocacos* (ambrosial or musky)
4. *Alliaceos* (alliaceous or garlicy)
5. *Hircinos* (hircine or goaty)
6. *Tetros* (repulsive)
7. *Naufeofos* (nauseous) (Kaye, 2001; p. 24-25).

Though Linnaeus's classification system never really gained prominence throughout Western culture at large, covert olfactory classification practices are still and have always been present in Western society, if not as rigid as the systems described in the previous paragraph seem. Smell itself is classified as "lesser" in Western culture, which is perhaps one of the reasons for the anthropological characterizations of other cultures for whom smell is more important as so "distinct" and "foreign." Post-Enlightenment scientific thought suggested that the sense of smell in humans is not

strong, however, later biological and cognitive science work has shown this is not true—but rather is reflective of an ideology within Western culture that smell is not important (Majid, 2021).

In addition, in Western culture, people are classified by smells and olfactory behavior centered around gender, race, sexuality, and class, all of which are also intertwined (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994). In Western cultures, those with hegemonic power in society, are seen as "odorless," whereas those without power, such as women, marginalized racial and ethnic groups, and the working class, are characterized as emanating different unpleasant odors (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; p. 161). Marginalized or colonized cultures relative to European hegemony are also still "classified" smell-wise today in the perfume industry—many perfumers still use the categorization of "oriental" to describe a particular kind of fragrance—though notably it is more inconsistently used and meaningless than other fragrance categorizations such as "gourmand" or "floral." The term can refer to scents with spices or resinous smells, but not necessarily always—but in any case, the use of the "othering" term to describe scents considered "exotic" reflects a harmful sexualization and fetishization of Eastern cultures and is considered inappropriate to use in many other contexts, but somehow not in perfume (Paradis, 2022). In general though, smell-based hierarchies are used and are important in Western culture, though they may not be as defined as those used in other cultures.

1.2.1 Classifying the classifier through smell

The connection of one's sense of smell and one's odor to their embodiment and as a way of classifying that person is also similar to the more covert way that in Western

culture disposition and taste, including the ability to properly appreciate smells, are ideologically linked with one's body and is in turn used to classify them (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986). This is also similar to how one's ability to conform to standard language ideology and use dominant language forms becomes a way for individuals to exercise symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991).

To understand how objects (in this case, perfumes/smells) and olfactory distinguishing abilities are linked to the social classification of individuals and others, I find it necessary to turn to Bourdieu's theory of capital and of habitus. In "The Forms of Capital," Bourdieu outlines three forms in which capital can manifest: economic, the traditional form of capital in wealth and property immediately convertible to money; cultural, which can be embodied in the form of taste and aesthetic recognition, objectified in the form of aesthetic items or products, or institutionalized in the form of credentials; and social, which represents the sum of in-group status and connections which can be leveraged to multiply other forms of capital. Crucially, Bourdieu argues that the reason that these are forms of capital is that they are accumulated over time–that forms of capital are what makes individuals unequal from one another in terms of opportunity in a given moment, in other words, all these forms of capital contribute to social stratification and classification.

The types of capital which are most relevant to a discussion of perfume and fragrance are both embodied and objectified forms of cultural capital. The fragrances themselves can be seen as objectified forms of capital, in terms of the value of the materials and labor required to make the perfumes, as well as the specialized labor skills and taste of the perfumer. Similarly, the consumption of perfume and fragrances, the

embodied ability to understand what fragrances are "good" or "bad," or to correctly evaluate and identify smells, is a form of cultural capital, in that it takes time and education to acquire such sensory perceptions. The ability to "properly" apprehend scent would be an example of Bourdieu's theory of habitus, more thoroughly outlined and described in his earlier book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* which draws upon his analysis of aesthetic preferences of French people by class. One's "habitus" is the embodied "system of disposition" (6) characteristic of one's social class and other forms of accumulated capital—and relates to tastes and preferences of all sensory modes, as Bourdieu describes, including music, tastes in food, and, most relevantly to this project, smell. According to this theory, the immediate reaction to and perception of cultural objects is dependent upon and constitutive of one's social class: "[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (6).

In addition to the more direct applications of Bourdieu's theories of capital and habitus, the perfume itself becomes a part of the wearer's body after application and becomes a way in which the wearer is perceived by the outside world. This aspect of perfume-wearing perhaps complicates Bourdieu's theory of habitus and embodiment, which is why I later on will discuss other relevant theoretical frameworks to attempt to understand the understanding of identity construction and perception through fragrance.

The relevance of Bourdieu's theories of capital and habitus is not only related to particular judgements about individuals based upon their scent—but the use of perfumes branded with designer names like *Gucci* and *Chanel* imbue the same sort of signifier of taste with the body as wearing such designer clothes (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; p. 192), and simultaneously the use of such branded perfumes presuppose (Bourdieu,

1986) the access to the economic capital (money) necessary to purchase such perfumes. In this way, the marketing and perception of certain brand names as "designer" reinforces the idea that using such fragrances are indicative of good taste and therefore a higher social status. This presupposition, along with the consideration of the accumulated cultural capital necessary to distinguish "good" from "bad" perfume and the labor and materials that go into making perfume—highlight the "the brutal fact of universal reducibility to economics" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 24). Bourdieu's focus on the material underpinnings of more seemingly "symbolic" forms of capital such as cultural and social capital connects to aspects to the more contemporary theoretical framework of materiality (Cavanaugh and Shankar, 2021; Keane, 2003), which posits that material items are not simply representations or instances of communication and function but have their own inherent agentive properties and qualities. The applications of this theory to my own work on perfume will be discussed later.

Similar to Bourdieu's theory of habitus, Michael Silverstein discusses the social stratification of taste judgements with the example of wine in "Semiotic Vinification and the Scaling of Taste" (2016). In this paper, Silverstein first describes the genre structure of wine tasting notes, building on his earlier discussions of *oinoglossia* (2003), especially focusing on the serial phases of apprehending wine—from the initial smell to the phases of the taste and finally the finish (a similar structure is given to discussing the apprehension of fragrance—there's the initial smell, then the dry down, and a distinct time-bounded aspect of fragrance appreciation that I will return to later). One of the aspects of the genre, as he argues, is the description of the qualia of the wine–which he argues has also attempted to be "objectified" in the form of courses and applied scientific

methods which relate to the judgment of wine. He also argues that this genre structure of wine appreciation has spread to other consumable "artisanal" goods, such as cheese, bourbon, beer, and coffee. I would also argue that perfume should be included on this list–though I think the widespread use of particular language to discuss perfume is perhaps much older than some of these others, however, more research is needed to make that claim. Additionally, a fuller semiotic treatment of the register used to discuss perfume, what might be called *fraglossia,* is work that I hope to pursue in the future. However, in order to understand the data that I will discuss in this paper it is necessary to discuss the indexical consequences of a register like this for the construction of gender through fragrance consumption—I will return to this point in the discussion of my data.

The argument made in Silverstein (2016) which is most crucial to my work, however, is Silverstein's positioning of the register of oinoglossia as a "dialectically duplex indexical register effect" (195), that the (proper) use of the register indexes something about the person using it—their class consumptive practices, and their cultural capital which gives them the capacity to appreciate and describe wine (or any artisanal good). Silverstein also adds that such semiotics of consumption are "the key kind of class distinction in late capitalism" (208), a claim which I tend to agree with, and which further elaborates Bourdieu's earlier arguments in the context of today's economy.

Though a complete discussion of the way that smell is used as a way of classifying and discriminating against others in Western culture is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that smell can be a covert discriminatory system, similar to how linguistic discrimination and bigotry is not as frowned upon in Western society today as outright racism, sexism, and classism are. Just as an individual's language use

may be used to justify or state covert racist, classist, and sexist beliefs, an individual's smell will also often be used to justify particular bigoted beliefs: immigrants and working classes are characterized as "smelling bad," and women are criticized for their olfactory practices related to heteronormativity despite the expectation to participate in them (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994). Similarly, socially marginalized groups are subject to critiques of their language as "uneducated" as justification for their exclusion from certain institutions or social groups, and women's linguistic practices are subject to intense critique in order to devalue the content of what women are saying (take, for example, popular commentary surrounding "vocal fry"; cf. Chao and Bursten, 2021).

However, since the focus of this work is on gendered perceptions of fragrances, the remainder of my summary of the necessary olfactory background will focus primarily on the diachronic change in these classificatory practices in Western culture, beginning with Ancient Rome, relying heavily on Classen, Howes, and Synnott's 1994 book *Aroma: the cultural history of smell.* Though this book offers a wealth of information about smell and society more broadly, since the data analyzed in this project primarily relates to gender, I will focus primarily on their discussion of gender. However, it is crucial to note that gender is obviously inextricably linked to race and class in contemporary Western society. That being said, the marketing of mainstream perfumes relies heavily on gendered distinctions (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; Morean 2007), and that is the lens through which this particular analysis will be conducted. Future research should consider other lenses through which to understand the indexicality of smells and perfumes.

1.2.2 A diachronic look at western perceptions of gender and smell

Drawing on descriptions written by those in Ancient Rome, Classen, Howes, and Synnott argue that class, gender, and racial differences began to be indexed by smell in antiquity. Deliberate perfuming of clothing, household objects, and spaces was mostly done in religious contexts or by the wealthy, due to the expense of the raw materials that were used as fragrance, either grown in a local garden or imported from the Middle East. The wealthy in Rome would perfume their walls and floors with oils, fragrant waters, and flowers in order to create a distinct space from the olfactory landscape of the city, which was heavily influenced by the activities that went on in each district—gymnasiums would smell like oil and sweat, tanneries would smell rotten, laundries would smell of urine, and religious and sacred sites would smell like incense or myrrh. On the other hand, those who could not afford fragrant materials would have a home that smelled of waste. This distinction between the rich and poor extended to the bodies of individuals as well–the wealthy could afford personal perfumes to cover their "natural odors," and the poor could not. However, interestingly enough, the smell of money was associated with the poor, as it was common for them to carry coins in their mouths, which added a metallic smell to their breath (p. 33) Classen, Howes, and Synnott (1994) also note that this distinction between rich and poor was not purely based on the olfactory practices of the rich and poor in Ancient Rome, but also that these perceptions were based on the prejudices of the society, as evidenced by excerpts from written accounts discussing such smell-based expectations—the perceptions that wealthy Romans had of poorer people was not purely based on their practices which might have actually contributed to their odors.

Ancient western society also held particular beliefs about the natural odor of women and men. The genders had different "natural" odors, according to this society, and it was also more acceptable for women to wear perfume, but the materials and scents that both men and women would wear were similar—roses, cinnamon, myrrh, spikenard—there were no "men's" or "women's" perfumes. There were also different olfactory associations with women dependent on their age, class, and sexuality. Young women were perceived to be sweet smelling, and older women not as much. More sexually promiscuous women were also perceived to have been much more foul and distinct smelling (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994). Some scents were even associated in particular with sex workers or prostitution, as sex workers would often also work in laundries, lavender was occasionally seen as associated with sex workers, since their work in the laundries left them smelling of lavender (Lister, 2023). In general though, all women were seen as naturally foul-smelling in ancient western society–and seen as needing to be controlled and perfumed to cover for their natural underlying "foulness," which men did not have.

As Christianity began to take over in Europe, prevailing attitudes around scent changed—the idea of individuals using perfume was seen as "frivolous" in a reaction to the accepted practice of perfume use among Roman society. However, later in European society, perfumes became more socially acceptable. During medieval times, there was an association of good smells with sanctity—even the corpses of saints were described as fragrant. The plague was also thought to be warded off with good smells, such as pomanders, which were devices intended to ward off the "bad air" that caused the plague, made of an orange stuck full of cloves (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994). These

would be in use throughout the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Victorian era. Pomanders for the wealthy and aristocratic could be increasingly elaborate and function as a piece of jewelry as well, such as Elizabeth I's jewel encrusted pomanders which can be seen in her portraits (Lister, 2023). Bathing in this era in Europe was also not commonplace—it was considered more of a pastime than a necessity, and it was thought that the act would make one's body moist and therefore weak (to disease) and feminine. Despite not bathing as often as modern people, Europeans were keen on perfuming themselves to hide their natural odors.

"Perfume" as understood today began to be used during the renaissance, especially by the wealthy, who began to engage with perfume as a method of entertainment and personal expression. However, many protestant reformers still clung to earlier ideas about fragrance as a needless luxury. Despite this, there maintained a theme of sweet smells being associated with morality and goodness, and foul smells being associated with immorality—as evidenced by the writings of poets at the time, such as Shakespeare, who uses the odor of roses to symbolize "truth and virtue" in his Sonnet 54:

> "O how much more doth beautie beauteous seeme
> By that sweet ornament which truth doth give;
> The Rose looks faire, but fairer we it deeme
> For that sweet odor which doth in it live" (Shakespeare, as cited in Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; p. 76)

Simultaneously though, animalic odors and ingredients such as musk, civet, and ambergris (which are still widely used in perfumes today, though often synthetic due to ethical or cost concerns) also fell into fashion and were often blended with more traditional scents such as rose. They were particularly popular among the wealthy as they

were also difficult to come by. These odors were in particular associated with sexuality and vitality (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994). Sex workers might also perfume their "nether regions" with animalic or musky scents in order to smell more desirable (Lister, 2023). In the 1700s and 1800s though, Europeans moved away from these scents and tended to favor more floral scents once again, which would remain popular until the 20th century.

This time of renewed interest in perfume was also when the famous Eau de Cologne was invented, in the German city of Köln (Cologne), a blend of rosemary and citrus oils (which you can still buy today). Interestingly, though this lexical item used to refer to that one blend, "eau de cologne" or "cologne" (for short) has broadened to mean (among fragrance producers and invested consumers) any low concentration fragrance (usually three to six percent pure perfume oil). In general, North American English, the word "cologne" is typically also used among those not in the fragrance community to mean a men's fragrance—in contrast to "perfume" which is used to refer to a women's fragrance. "Perfume," however, within the industry and among the speech community of those invested in fragrance, refers to any fragrance which is around 15-20% pure perfume oil concentration. It is interesting though, that outside of the fragrance speech community, this gendered dichotomy has emerged in the definition of these two words, "cologne" and "perfume—" a development which I will return to later.

Later in the 1700s and 1800s, bathing also once again became more commonplace among the wealthy, but not as much among the poor, who could not afford the sanitary infrastructure in their homes, and lived in cramped, olfactorily discordant spaces, which was a source of judgment among the upper classes. Eventually though, as working and

living conditions improved, bathing became more commonplace for all in western societies—which had the effect of reducing perfume's popularity, as it was no longer seen as a sanitary necessity but rather an extravagance— "olfactory neutrality" (Classen, Howes, Synnott, 1994: 83) then became the ideal among the middle class, and perfume use in general declined.

The 1700s and 1800s were also when certain perfumes and smells began to be produced and marketed specifically for men or for women, whereas up until this time, there was no clear difference in expectations for what gender would smell of what scents. "Sweet, floral blends" (Classen, Howes, Synnott, 1994: 83) were deemed to be the domain of women, where sharper, woodsy scents, and tobacco were deemed to be more masculine. This was a part of a broader trend in which women and men were "supposed" to appear different in every way. Manufacturers of perfumes at this time were able to take advantage of such an expectation in their marketing.

The Enlightenment as a philosophical movement also tended to devalue smell in general, privileging instead the sense of sight—smell was associated with "intuition, sentiment, home-making, and seduction" (p. 84) and was also seen as the sense of "'savages' or animals" (p. 84) and thus deemed lesser in a masculinist, rationalist culture, and unnecessary to the "civilized" man. Morean (2007) argues that the persistence of such attitudes may be partially responsible for the lack of anthropological work on the sense of smell. "Natural" human odors were even categorized by those putting forth systems of racial classification and categorization—suggesting that even those of certain hair colors had recognizable differences in natural odors, and "a higher olfactory consciousness in non-European cultures was taken as one more proof of their lower status

on the evolutionary scale of civilization." (p. 91). These racist politics of smell can be exemplified by white Americans, who publicly characterized Black Americans as "smelling bad" in the earlier years of American history, despite owning Black slaves or employing Black servants—thus letting those they supposedly considered "bad-smelling" into their homes. Nazi rhetoric similarly characterized Jewish people as "bad-smelling."

Through the identification of smell as a sense with lower-level instincts, the use of perfume and even paying attention to smell itself were stigmatized, and perfume began to be associated primarily with women alone, whereas historically, it was used by all. This is especially true in the United States, where using any kind of fragrance is seen as marked, either for "foreignness" or "femaleness" (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994 p. 168).

In 1940, *Perfumes and Spices* by A.H. Verrill was published which argued that the main purpose of perfume was to "make women more attractive and alluring" and that "...the men of American blood remain firm in their determination to not use perfumes" (Verril, 1940, as cited by Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994 p. 162-163). Smell also became another aspect of life for which women were subjected to a double standard, using scent was (and is) expected in order to conform to norms of femininity, but at the same time women are perceived as manipulative or seductresses when they use perfume to attract women, though this is certainly the expectation. Throughout the 20th century, advertisements for perfume changed along with the expectations for women in the West. In the 1950s, perfume was marketed to women to help them perform elegance and charm. In the 1960s and 1970s, perfumes were marketed to allow women to perform naturalness but also sexuality, and even liberation—Classen, Howes, and Synnott even cite one

particular perfume of the 1970s, *Charlie,* which features an image of a woman taking on men's roles through name of the perfume, and the presentation of a woman with a briefcase who pats a man on the behind in the advertisement. The fact that being a businessman and sexually harassing those of the opposite gender are what are linked with the images of "manhood" is also certainly worth noting here, as it reflects on the hegemonic beliefs about men, power, and heterosexuality (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994; p. 190).

During the latter part of the 20th century is also when perfumes began to be marketed to men, but due to the association of the medium with women, the marketing almost always featured overly exaggerated images of masculinity—cowboys, leather, combat, etc. Perfumers also began to market male fragrances to women, since women began to (and still do) often purchase perfumes for men—so advertisements also began to represent male perfume as something that would enhance the qualities of masculinity which may be appealing in traditional heteronormative relationships (Classen, Howes, and Synnott, 1994).

1.2.3 Current perceptions of gender and perfume in western culture

In contemporary Western societies, the deodorant and perfume industries are quite large and profitable, and present an idealized progression of removing "natural" odors and adding "ideal" odors in the form of perfumes. Other cleaning products are also imbued with particular scents and aromas, enhancing their marketability. The marketing of such "ideals" becomes difficult because scents are difficult to describe through language—so instead marketing will often rely on creating a "fantasy," often based on the constellations of meanings and values associated with a particular smell, or as

linguists might call it, the indexical field (Eckert, 2008) of the smell. Consumers seem to follow this trend as well—a 2012 study by Lindqvist indicates that users' perceptions of twelve different feminine and masculine perfumes were strongly correlated with the manufacturer's classification, though the ratings were more so on a continuum rather than clustering into two binary groups as marketing patterns would predict (Lindqvist, 2012). Zarzo (2019) uses data on perfume rating website Fragrantica.com as well as the *H&R Fragrance Guide* (1991) to explore the potential scent descriptions and statistically analyzed which are more likely to occur in both to describe women's perfumes versus men's or unisex perfumes. They found that "floral", "fruity", "aldehydic", "sweet", "powdery", and "balsamic" were all more likely to be used for women's perfumes, and "herbaceous", "spicy", "woody", "mossy", "leathery" and "fresh" were more likely to be used for men's or unisex perfumes (Zarzo, 2019). It can be said then that these particular ingredients and odors "index" femininity or masculinity, though most likely these indexes have to do with the cultural associations between the materials themselves or the images of the materials, in the case of "flowers" which can represent beauty or romance, or "leather" which represents the killing and skinning of an animal. The construction of these gendered ideas through the indirect links of the materials themselves and the ability of the odor to index a particular gender would be an interesting avenue for future research but is beyond the scope of this paper.

As previously mentioned, the advertisements which call upon the indexical field of particular smells by crafting different images of the scents have changed over time as ideas about gender have changed in Western societies. Additionally, many more perfume brands have moved towards creating and marketing "gender-neutral" scents. In a podcast

interview, Saskia-Wilson Brown (2021) asks several contemporary perfumers about their personal relationship with performing gender through fragrances. Joshua Smith from Libertine Fragrance discusses his fascination with the type of "sensitive and indulgent" masculinity associated with dandyism and how that inspires his perfumery work, through which he hopes to blend more traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine notes. He also discusses the fact that he believes many mainstream masculine fragrances are marketed around anxieties around the role of heteronormative masculinity in society, exemplified by what he and host Saskia Wilson-Brown describe as the "frag bro" stereotype in modern perfume culture (an identity that I will return to later). Ömer İpekçi of Pekji perfumes, who is also interviewed on the episode, also discusses his experience with customers of different genders, noting that men typically are more careful to ask whether or not a particular fragrance is "for" men or women, whereas women do not really seem to care. He also notes that the association between perfumery for men and gayness also leads to some of the anxieties heterosexual men feel about meeting hegemonic ideas of gender. Tom Blunt from Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab also talks about the connection between sexuality and scent and how that also plays into scent as a part of gendered performance. Blunt also mentions that scent is a particularly fruitful way for trans people to explore their gender, since it is not as dependent on the body as something like clothes are and might allow for more freedom with that exploration.

Wilson-Brown also interviews the artist Miles Regis, who has explored scent as a medium for his art, who discusses how our experiences influence our perception of what smells are "meant" for what gender—discussing his inspiration to wear Creed's "Spring Flowers" from Michael Jackson wearing that fragrance as a way to play with traditional

ideas of scent and gender. Another perfumer interviewed, Alia Raza of popular niche brand Régime des Fleurs, discusses her shift to focus on making perfumes that are more traditionally masculine (with notes of leather, vetiver, patchouli, and more as she describes) after years of working with primarily feminine notes (jasmine, tuberose, florals as she describes). Although she mentions that she firmly believes gender is a social construct, she also wants to play with and exaggerate the "typical" ideas with gender and scent, since many niche and independent perfumers are moving towards creating more explicitly genderless fragrances with difficult to classify note profiles based on traditional ideas about what notes are in what kinds of fragrances (Wilson-Brown, 2021).

Despite all of these developments in the perfume industry and the growing more nuanced understanding of gender in society at large, gender still remains incredibly relevant to the marketing and classification of perfumes—both by companies themselves as well as by consumers of perfume. For example, one popular fragrance house Etat Libre d'Orange, still classifies its fragrances on a spectrum of "XX to XY" (referencing gender-associated chromosomal makeup), though they are not extremely obviously marketed to one gender or another in terms of bottle design like many mainstream house fragrances are (*Fat Electrician*):

Figure 1.1 Gendered Scale from Etat Libre D'Orange

Though the idea of a spectrum is perhaps a bit more "forward-thinking" in terms of gender theory, the use of chromosomal references betrays an uncomfortable

attachment to biological essentialism. Even the brand Libertine Fragrance (the perfumer of which's interview I described earlier), who lists as their first values on their website that "[o]ur scents are all gender neutral and meant for any body…" and "[s]cents don't inherently have a gender…" and "[w]e feel marketing along gendered lines limited exploration" ("Libertine Fragrance") still uses imagery with heavily gendered associations in Western culture in the advertisement of their products. For example, many of their scents are marketed with the following imagery of naked feminine bodies:

Figure 1.2 Advertisement for Sex & Jasmine by Libertine fragrance (*Sex & Jasmine)*

Figure 1.3 Advertisement for Smoked Bloom by Libertine Fragrance (*Smoked Bloom)*

Sexuality is of course not inherently bad, but it is interesting that "gender neutral" perfumes still use the same marketing images as more overtly gendered ones do—and how heteronormativity (and thus gender roles) may be inextricable from the use of sexualized imagery in perfume marketing.

This analysis seeks to understand the perceptions of perfume users by analyzing the linguistic and embodied behavior of individuals and how their behaviors rely upon the changing indexical field of smells. As Zelman argues in his chapter entitled "Language and Perfume," perfumes may not be as clear of an example of an indexical relationship as the smell of smoke indexing a fire or the smell of coffee indexing fresh brewed coffee, since the relationship is not direct, the continuous use and perception of particular scents with particular gendered performances seems to suggest that at least in Western cultures there is an indexical relationship between the smells used in perfumes and gendered performance. Understanding these perceptions not only relies upon the

analogy between perfume and language through indexicality, but also the theoretical framework of materiality, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of perfume as both an extension of an individual but also as an agentive object in its own right. As Zelman also argues, “there are no words for odors, only for objects” (Zelman, 1991; p. 110). The words used to classify the ephemeral sensory experiences are also grounded in the materials used and the materials created through the visual marketing of the perfume bottle as an artifact—which further necessitates frameworks of material culture in order to fully understand the indexical relationships between smell and gender.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Indexicality and Enregisterment

Indexicality relies upon Peirce's tripartite theory of signs, which delineates the difference between "icons," "indexes," and symbols. According to Silverstein's (1976) summary of this theory, icons are signs in which the thing signified bears properties similar to the thing it is signifying, indexes are that which bear some sort of understood "spatiotemporal" connection to the signified, and symbols are arbitrary, of which linguistic systems are considered the classic example. Much of the work regarding indexicality in linguistics attempts to get at how those "spatiotemporal" connections are created and understood. Silverstein's 1976 chapter "Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description" also posits a fourth sort of semiotic categorization: shifters, whose referential meaning is entirely dependent on the context of the speech event. Silverstein's project in laying out such categories of linguistic signs is to emphasize the importance of these modes of communication that occur in language which link language to the broader structure of social life.

Silverstein's (2003) paper "Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life" further elaborates on this process of how the "micro-context" (individual speech event) is related to the "macro-context" (broader sociological context) and how speakers and hearers continuously call upon and recreate this relationship through the indexical order—an exploration of how the spatiotemporal relationships in linguistic indexes are created. This is dependent upon a specific presuppositions and entailments which each index calls upon when used and how those are understood and recreated by agents in a social context. Each order of indexicality draws upon the connections made in the

previous order to create a new type of recognized meaning: "for any indexical phenomenon at order n, an indexical phenomenon at order n+1 is always immanent, lurking in the potential of an ethnometapragmatically driven native interpretation of the nth order paradigmatic contextual variation that it creates or constitutes as register phenomenon" (Silverstein, 2003; p 212). In other words, the use of a particular form can be interpreted by a hearer as linked to a specific way of being/speaking (i.e., register), and take on a new meaning when re-used in a creative or performative context. Silverstein connects this to Labov's ideas of linguistic indicators vs. markers vs. stereotypes. Indicators are those features of speech which "reliably presuppose" membership in a particular group or categories, "markers" are those which vary not only by group membership but also by stylistic performance of speakers, and "stereotypes" are those which are also commented upon by speakers and hearers of a language due to their association with the particular group or style. Silverstein would then posit these three categories as differing levels of the indexical order (i.e., 1st, 2nd, 3rd).

Eckert's (2008) paper "Variation and the indexical field" builds upon this idea of indexicality and the indexical order by focusing in on the theorization of "indexical fields," or broader constellation of meanings which may be activated by the use of a particular form and the situated meanings that can be activated, depending on the "microcontext" as Silverstein (2003) might call it. Similarly, Eckert (2008) crucially emphasizes the lack of linearity in Silverstein's theorization of indexical fields: they are all co-occurring as any reinterpretation is "already immanent" (Silverstein, 2003, p. 212). Eckert's theorization of indexical fields and the multiplicity of meanings which may be indexed by a particular token is extremely relevant to the idea of using indexicality to

understand scent. Take for example, the smell of lavender, which was once thought to index one's status as a female sex worker (Lister, 2023), and is now considered a "men's" perfume ingredient (Zarzo, 2019). Additionally, the smell has other associations, such as calmness or sleep, as it is thought to assist in calmness in homeopathic circles and is used in perfumes which reference such (see Hilde Soliani's Buonanotte).

The development of lavender is also an example of a smell "moving up" the indexical order, though we now look back and can identify contemporary attitudes which indicate that lavender was linked with being a sex worker, the linkage was due to the fact that many sex workers worked in laundries as well, where lavender water was used. One can imagine that what was originally an indicator eventually became a stereotype through the olfactory perception of the fact that sex workers often smelled of lavender.

The indexical order and indexical fields are also necessary to explain the phenomenon of "enregisterment." Johnstone (2016) defines enregisterment as the "practice in which … links [between linguistic and other meaningful acts and ways of being] are formed." Through enregisterment, a set of linguistic signs becomes emblematic of a particular "register" or way of speaking. Broadening the idea of linguistic signs to beyond just speech, this could also mean a set of physical signs which link to a way of being. In line with this, Norma Mendoza-Denton's 2011 paper "The semiotic hitchiker's guide to creaky voice: Circulation and gendered hardcore in a Chincana/o gang persona" addresses the way that particular linguistic features become bundled with other linguistic features and visual expressive elements (such as style of dress) in terms of creating a persona. She discusses in terms of the example of the construction of the hardcore Chicano gangster persona, looking a variety of media

sources to explore how creaky voice co-occurring with other more overtly stereotyped linguistic features such as codeswitching and certain discourse markers along with particular clothing choices creates a "bundle" of semiotic features, some of which are semiotic hitchhikers.

Similarly, Rusty Barrett's 2017 book *From Drag Queens to Leathermen: Language and Gay Male Subcultures* illustrates the importance of embodiment and physical performances in contextualizing and understanding the linguistic practices used to construct various gendered identities. For example, in his discussion of drag queens' concurrent use of voice and dress to create their overtly performative stylizations of female gender, they will incorporate practices of dress which index a kind of "authentic" femininity, while simultaneously shifting their voice down pitch-wise in order to call attention to the fact that they are doing a performance. In this way, their embodiment is crucially linked with other linguistic and material signs in performing their particular gendered persona—an idea which is relevant to the discussion of "fragrance bros" that I will return to later.

Johnstone (2016) also discusses the connection between the linguistic and the material with the example of merchandise which circulates to connect certain linguistic features with Pittsburgh identity, such as mugs featuring a constellation of related "Pittsburghese" pronunciations of words. The production, sale, and uptake of these products among those who would identify as "Pittsburghers," is one practice which would fall under the umbrella of "enregisterment." Johnstone (2016) also discusses, using production and perception data from Pittsburghers, that enregisterment is not understood the same by all individuals at all times—Johnstone found that perception of

"Pittsburghese" linguistic variants was dependent upon the respondent's previous linguistic experiences, and some speakers linked the same variable with different types of people.

Another theoretical construct connected to indexicality and enregisterment is that of stance. Stance relates to the choices of indexicals (subconsciously or consciously) deployed by individuals in order to do interactional work in a given situation, as Kiesling (2019) argues, "stance helps organize identity registers" (1). Every utterance involves some kind of stancetaking and is defined by Jaffe (2009) as "taking up a position with respect to the form or content of one's utterance" in her book *Stance: Sociolinguistic Perspectives.* Stance analysis in some way differs from discussion of indexicality, as analysis of stance is concerned with the "kind of relationship that the speaker is trying to create" (Kiesling, 2019: 4), rather than an analysis of indexicality which focuses on the representational dimensions of a sign that a speaker employs with respect to their own performance of some aspect of their identity. However, these things are inextricably linked, as others before me have argued (Kiesling, 2009, 2019; Jaffe, 2009), since indexical links, enregistered persona, and identities more broadly are socially constructed and mediated between individuals, which necessitates a consideration of both indexicality and stance. For example, as Kiesling (2019) argues, the "laid-back" or "low investment" stance indicated through the deployment of "brospeak," a kind of enregistered persona associated with dominant middle-class hegemonic heterosexuality masculinity, is related to their positioning and representation of their identity as the dominant one—because they have social power, their level of worry and investment is lower. Kiesling contrasts this with the enregistered "gay voice," which is characterized by high investment

stancetaking through the use of forms which index carefulness or formality (such as released /t/, cf. Eckert 2008). The employment of similar stancetaking practices in the enregisterment of the "fragbro" persona through the lens of stancetaking is a topic which I will return to.

To briefly apply these theoretical frameworks to the perfume industry, I would argue that the distribution and advertising of particular perfumes serves to further enregister the olfactory and visual elements of particular fragrances with specific ways of being, and these meanings may be understood differently by different people. Take the example of Delina, manufactured by Parfums de Marly, one of the "top ten women's fragrances of all time" as voted on by the perfume user community of the site Fragrantica.com in 2022:

Figure 2.1 Delina by Parfums de Marly bottle

Figure 2.2 Delina by Parfums de Marly notes

(both images from *Delina Parfums de Marly perfume*)

The bottle is pink, which in Western cultures is a color linked with femininity, and suggestively curves in at the middle portion of a bottle, suggesting a waist and referring to an iconic representation of a "feminine" figure. The framing of the bottle also features soft, decorative flowers. The bottle also features a tassel of adornment. The notes are floral, fruity, soft, and vanilla—fragrant notes that have been traditionally associated with women (see earlier discussion). Compare this to Parfums de Marly's Layton, a fragrance voted as one of the best "men's fragrances" by Frangrantica.com users in 2022:

Figure 2.3 Layton by Parfums de Marly bottle

Figure 2.4 Layton by Parfums de Marly notes
(both images from *Layton Parfums de Marly perfume*)

Here the bottle is dark blue (linked with men in Western cultures), square and straight on the sides and features horses as some sort of shield or crest in the embossing.

Similarly, the notes, while sharing some of the same overlap with regard to fruits, flowers, and vanilla, are heavier on lavender, woods, spices, and patchouli (all historically associated with men). Some of the links between perfume notes and perfume bottle presentation might be exemplary of the semiotic process of iconization, as described by Gal and Irvine 2000. Iconization is the process by which ideologies among a particular group mediate the indexical association between a sign and a social group or activity such that the sign is seen as reflective of that group's or activity's inherent nature. I would argue that the ideology of binary gender interferes in the semiotic understanding of these notes and bottle designs, linking these olfactory qualities and visual styles with the binary genders (naturalizing and essentializing the link) are similar to those linguistic processes which link ways of speaking with ways of being. The processes by which this happens with fragrances is an area of interest in this paper.

The broader commentary offered by users of the fragrances is also part of this practice of enregisterment–older culturally constructed ideas about gender and perfume use (largely popularized in capitalist western societies at the time of industrialization, see earlier discussion) continue to be called upon by individuals wishing to indicate their adherence to particular gendered norms, and this continual semiotic bundling and reification is one way in which smells can become "enregistered." But, looking at the earlier discussions of the way that the perfume industry is in many ways moving towards more "unisex" branding and marketing—it is possible that news ways of enregistering gender and different gendered personae through smell could be emerging, rather than the typical overt bifurcation in perfume production and marketing. A complete discussion of the ways in which indexicality, stance, and enregisterment can be used to analyze the

marketing and distribution of perfume is beyond the scope of this paper but is research that I hope to pursue in the future.

2.2 Materiality

Indexicality and enregisterment do to some degree begin to explain the way that fragrances are used by individuals to construct their genders. But these frameworks are, I feel, not entirely sufficient—so in order to get a better picture of the semiotic landscape of fragrances, I deploy the theoretical framework of materiality. These three theoretical lenses also directly relate to the idea of materiality. Though materiality emerged from material culture studies and the study of artifacts, other linguistic scholars and linguistics-adjacent scholars, such as Michael Silverstein and Webb Keane, have emphasized the importance of using materiality in order to further uncover what has traditionally been analyzed in linguistics as indexicality or enregisterment. As Keane and Silverstein note in their curated conversation on materiality (Keane et al., 2017), materiality allows for a way to get beyond the purely deterministic explanations of human perception that dominate in psychological work, but without also focusing too heavily on the overly symbolic. The anthropological framework materiality allows for more space and understanding of the dialectic through which meaning is achieved in interactional contexts through material objectifications of "thought" and "meaning," as Keane says, "[i]t's not simply that things are emerging into the social or the social is saturating some other domain, but that both are going on" (p. 37).

Silverstein (1984) foresees his later thoughts on the importance of materiality to the study of language, as he argues: "if we look carefully enough at language, in any of its forms, it seems we are confronted with objects" (p. 10). In this essay, Silverstein

describes his work with Upper Chinookians, who use proper names like objects—he argues that in this community, names "function like heirlooms," as they are accumulated throughout one's life, passed on after one's death, and can be revoked at any time by the community dependent upon the individual's behaviors. He also discusses the Worora, Ngarinjin, and Wunambal people in Northwestern Australia whose performance of Corroboree or poetic texts can be used as forms of payment within the community. Silverstein cites Marx to further make his argument about the valuation of objects as being similar to the way we refer and designate with language: "the specification of a useful object as a value is just as much a social product as language is" (Silverstein 1984; p. 1). Thinking about the indexicality of perfume branding, this relationship seems even more messy and fraught. For example, a Chanel perfume is named and valued as such because it is produced with (presumably) higher quality ingredients and by more experienced labor, yet at the same time the indexical weight of using a "Chanel" perfume—which allows the wearer to index their economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1980) is just as much about the name as it is the supposed actual material "value." In this way, the naming and classification of the perfume is as important in conferring value (economic and otherwise) on the object as is the actual material object of it.

Classification, material and otherwise, is another important area in which material culture studies and materiality can enhance the study of language. Burkette's (2018) chapter "Negotiating classification" describes the processes by which categorization is dependent on continual encounters with the language used to describe objects *as well as the objects themselves*: "...categories don't have boundaries; meanings and categories are

the result of the continual process of encountering language, material objects, and mental/psychological states in specific circumstances" (18). The means of arranging the world through language, in the form of categories, is also directly related to the concepts of indexicality and registers/enregisterment, as outlined earlier. The classification that occurs as a result of identifying the indexical meanings of a particular form and the reinterpretation and reuse of those forms is also an example of continuous negotiation of categories in particular communities and contexts. The different levels through which classification can occur in language and the mechanisms involved though still depends upon an understanding of objects, or language, and necessarily separate from subjects, or the people creating the forms, linguistic or otherwise, a dichotomy which the framework of materiality questions (even the categorization of subject/object is open for the negotiation of its boundaries within the context of academic discourse).

In his introduction to *Materiality* (2005), Daniel Miller begins his discussion of the term through the lens of artifacts, rather than simply looking at material objects as a container for meaning or a communicative purpose. In his chapter in this volume, Webb Keane expands upon materiality, emphasizing the importance of analyzing semiotic processes in conjunction with looking at signs themselves, such as iconicity and indexicality.

Another important topic introduced by Keane is the idea of bundling, or the co-occurrence of elements of signs with other qualities within a material object. The example he uses is that the idea of the color red cannot occur on its own, but rather is only realized along with other qualities. For example, in an apple, redness only exists in conjunction with the qualities of sweetness, tendency to rot, and a spherical shape—there

can certainly be other realizations of the idea of red, but in the material world, it must be realized alongside other things. Such has similarly been theorized in work on the way that linguistic features work to index and communicate deeper meanings. Mendoza-Denton's aforementioned 2011 work on "hardcore Chicano gangster" personae and Barrett's aforementioned 2017 work on gay male subculture performance are examples of this.

In the final chapter of Miller's volume, "Things Happen: Or, From Which Moment Does That Object Come?," Christopher Pinney takes Miller's conception of material culture and objectification one step further, questioning the fundamental dichotomy between "subject " and "object" which underlies much of the work in material culture and work in the social sciences more broadly. Although projecting human qualities onto objects and giving them some agency moves beyond the older paradigm of seeing objects as merely a reflection of a society or a culture, Pinney argues that this framework does not move beyond the fundamental dichotomy of subject and object. This dichotomy becomes harder to accept in the case of perfume. Though the actual liquid of a perfume and a bottle are a separate object from a person, when the person puts that liquid on their body it becomes a part of their projection in the world; it becomes a part of how others experience and perceive them as a subject. Not only is the subject using the fragrance to present themselves olfactorily in some way, but the actual ingredients in the fragrance are acting as an agent, shaping the world around the person that the fragrance is on. Pinney's breaking apart of this dichotomy is also relevant to language. Language shapes the world around the person, not just in terms of felicitous speech acts and the naming of things, but in the sense that particular linguistic features are used by linguistic actors to index certain qualities and stances along with their persona.

Pinney also takes issue with the presentation of artifacts or objects as a crystallization of the historical time period or epoch that they come from–hence the subtitle, "From Which Moment Does That Object Come?" He argues that instead of understanding the object on its own terms, we "form a judgment of the moment and then read into the image [object] what we have already determined by other means" (264). In his view, this interpretation and use of images/objects not only misses the "multiplicities" (264) happening at a given moment, but also neglects to account for the recursive nature of image/object production. Images and objects are constantly being remade and recontextualized, which makes it more difficult to understand their role as a reflection of human society and culture. This point also becomes especially important when considering the nature of perfume production and consumption—iconic fragrances are constantly being remade and referenced in the production of new perfumes, as well as in the secondhand market for vintage perfumes. The labor and the environment which creates the raw materials necessary for fragrance production has also changed drastically over time—from the globalization of the industry (and outsourcing of labor) to the move to synthetic production of certain ingredients.

Keane (2011), "Semiotics and the social analysis of material things," similarly takes issue with the idea of objects being read as "about" the world, not as necessarily a part of the world. He argues that part of this analytical framework is related to the semiotic ideology of the Sassurean "mind/body" distinction and "signifier/signified" distinction in linguistics, which posits that the material world can only be representational of ideas. Ultimately, Keane argues that "the goal is to open up social analysis to the

historicity and social power of material things without reducing them to either being only vehicles of meaning on the one hand, or ultimate determinants, on the other" (p. 411)

Keane begins to unpack potential methodologies for such analysis by looking at the idea of Peircean "Thirdness" or the "unbounded and unspecified range of possible tokens yet to be" implied by the existence of any particular token (this might also be related to Silverstein's indication of the "already immanent n +1st indexical orders"). As Keane argues, the implication of futurity also implies that the process of analyzing a particular token also requires analyzing the agency bound up within that token, further highlighting the degree to which the "subject/object" distinction is difficult to use as a framework of analysis. Perfume is especially relevant to this—as perfumes are sold and apprehended not only as "artifacts," in terms of the bottles sold and the marketing texts and advertisements which center on the perfume, but also as emanating from the wearer of the perfume—whose embodiment and agency plays a crucial role in "reading" or understanding the perfume.

Cavanaugh and Shankar's 2021 chapter "Language and materiality in global capitalism" critically examines the ways in language and material culture are both one in the same as well as in conversation with one another—and argues that analyses of what they call "language materiality" may provide a better understanding of the circulation of language and objects together in global capitalism. Centrally, their primarily argument is that the study of language and the study of material culture are inseparable and can inform one another, which they support with an enumeration of the findings of various ethnographic studies from around the world. In this, they identify several ways in which language and material culture are relevant to one another. Material conditions necessarily

influence speakers' use and perception of language, as they argue, and as elaborated in Bourdieu (1984, 1991), and language itself can be used as a form of symbolic or cultural capital.

Another way in which language and material culture are connected is in the objectification of language—be they lexical elements, registers, genres, or written/digital texts. This is immediately applicable to fragrances in terms of the way that the naming and descriptions of scents become a part of the purchased commodity. In addition, as I will discuss and have mentioned, there are objectified registers used to talk about perfume which circulate in a variety of media, though my research focuses primarily on those proliferating online. The "fragbro" register I will investigate is one such example, the "fraglossia" register which I alluded to earlier is another. Other fragrance scholars have similarly noted the emergence of Fragrantica notes posting as a particular visual genre of communicating about smell online (Robinovitz, 2024). Though these are not complete pictures of each of the phenomena described, I believe that further investigations into each of the phenomena would only further illustrate Cavanaugh and Shankar's point about the interconnection of language and material culture (and smell, which I think could be included in both the categories of "language" and "material culture").

Cavanaugh and Shankar also, like many sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists, argue that material objects, embodiment, words, and linguistic features all come together in semiotic systems to do the representational work of language (cf. Barrett, 2017; Mendoza-Denton, 2011). They also argue that investigations of the sounds that make up spoken language require consideration of materiality–as talk is "grounded in

the mouths and bodies that produce it and otherwise experience it sensuously" (175). This observation suggests that the experience of smell, or perfume, might also be connected to the experience of language—as in some ways, they are fundamentally about understanding sensory information.

These aspects of the material instantiations of perfume complicate any attempt to analyze the meanings and cultural and economic values assigned to fragrances, smells, and perfumes, which is the goal of this particular project, and which is why varied theoretical frameworks are important to apply to analyzing fragrances and the discourse surrounding them. Though this thesis will primarily focus on the ways that words, objects and *smells* word together in semiotic systems in the performance of gender, the norms, naming, bottle design, marketing practices, and online commentary surrounding fragrance should also be investigated in the context of how the linguistic feeds into the commodification of fragrance as a product. This is work I hope to explore in the future but is beyond the scope of this particular paper.

CHAPTER 3. CORPUS ANALYSIS OF GENDERED FRAGRANCES

3.1 Methods

In order to begin to explore the way that fragrances are understood and perceived, and investigate the indexical links made between gender and scent, I decided to make two corpora composed of all reviews of the "top ten women's perfumes of all time" and "top ten men's perfumes of all time" from the perfume review website Fragrantica.com according to the user-voted-upon 2022 Fragrantica awards. Fragrantica is a popular fragrance database that hosts descriptions of many perfumes, along with a variety of forums regarding perfume selection and other aspects of the industry (investigating the language used on these forums is a potentially rich source of future data). I created the corpora by going to the page for each of the top ten men's/women's perfumes of all time, loading the entire page to ensure that all reviews were captured (this required literally just scrolling all the way to the bottom) and downloading the content of the page as an html file (due to security measures employed by Fragrantica, there is no way to automatically do this, otherwise I would have made the corpora larger). Using BBEdit, a text and code-editing software, I combined all of the ten pages for the "men's" and "women's" fragrances respectively, pruned out the advertisement and introductory information at the top of the file and separated each review so they were on their own line in the text file (this allows for the corpus to be sorted by date later, if desired). After doing this, I tagged the corpora for part of speech and lemmas (headwords) using TagAnt (Anthony, L; 2022). The corpus for the "women's" perfumes was 2,309,091 tokens large and the "men's" perfume corpus was 1,928,135 tokens large.

Using these corpora, I wanted to find any potential differences between how users talked about or experienced the perfumes that were under discussion based on the gender that the perfumes were marketed for or perceived as being better for (for example, one of the perfumes whose reviews were included in the "women's" corpus, Maison Francis Kurkdijian's Baccarat Rouge 540, is considered a "unisex" perfume but is included in the list of the top ten women's fragrances from 2022). Using methodology similar to Baker (2006) in his analysis of British parliamentary arguments both for and against fox-hunting bans, I started by compiling headword frequency lists for each of the corpora using AntConc's analytical tools (Anthony, L; 2023). Unlike Baker (2006), I chose not to employ the methodology of keyness in my analysis since the target corpora ("men's perfume reviews" and "women's perfume reviews") I was comparing to my reference corpus (all of the reviews together) were too similar, and did not reveal variation in how perfume was discussed in each of the corpora, and primarily only revealed that the proper names of certain fragrances were not used in one corpus when they were in the other. I instead chose to manually compare the frequency lists of each corpus to identify places where the frequencies were significantly different (adjusted for the slightly larger size of the "women's" corpus, which I did by using a simple ratio to calculate the scaled frequency of each token in the women's corpus, had this corpus been the same size as the men's).

Looking at the 200 most frequent words in both corpora and comparing those lists, I found that (unsurprisingly) many of those words were function words like "the," however, I did notice that some "lexical" or "content" headwords had distinct differences in frequencies across the corpora. Additionally, some more frequently used words, such

as personal pronouns, did have strikingly different frequencies across the corpora, which I felt was worth exploring further. That being said, I then identified 26 of these "words of interest" which had noticeable differences in frequencies across the two corpora for further concordance analysis and an attempt to understand why those words were more frequent, given the background on the history of gender, smell, and fragrances along with the theoretical frameworks outlined in the last section. Future analyses might use a more careful or mathematical way to determine differences in frequencies, but my analysis is based on an impressionistic comparison of the top frequency words in each corpus. A full list of the 200 most frequent lemmas in both the women's and men's fragrance corpora are available in the appendix.

I grouped these 26 words into five different categories: words categorizing fragrances, words describing materials/smells, words describing the "performance" of a fragrance, personal pronouns, and general descriptors of attitudes towards a fragrance, such as "like" and "love." I will now discuss each of these groups in turn, along with showing some of the words in their contexts in the corpus, similar to Baker's (2006) presentation of his corpus data.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Classificatory words

The first category is related to the naming and classification of the fragrances themselves, which differed across corpora:

Table 3.1 Classificatory Words

lemma	women's raw freq	men's raw freq	women's normalized freq
PERFUME	9743	2307 (22.1%)	8136 (77.9%)
PARFUM	1748	2289 (61.1%)	1460 (38.9%)
FRAGRANCE	8012	13432 (66.8%)	6690 (33.2%)
COLOGNE	293	1148 (82.4%)	245 (17.6%)

Table 3.1 demonstrates the difference in frequencies across corpora for each of the four words which can be used to classify a fragrance. The percentages in the final two columns (from left to right) indicate the share of tokens of the word that would occur in the total normalized corpus for each of the gendered corpora.

As this table shows, even when normalizing for the slightly larger size of the women's fragrance corpus (2,309,091 tokens versus 1,928,135 tokens), the words "fragrance," "cologne," and "parfum" are used much more frequently in the men's fragrance corpus than in the women's. This is despite the fact that the majority of the fragrances whose reviews were included in both corpora are classified by the manufacturer as "eau de parfums," or "perfumes." Two of the women's fragrances are actually classified as the lower concentration "eau de toilette." One of the men's fragrances is classified as an "eau de toilette," and one is advertised as an even higher than eau de parfum concentration "parfum" and one as an even higher concentration "elixir." It is possible that some reviewers mistakenly reviewed their "eau de cologne" of the same name and brand on the page that I downloaded the reviews from, as it is common for manufacturers to make different concentrations of the same fragrance available, but I was only able to find one of the fragrances in the database which has an accompanying eau de cologne. This also makes sense, as "cologne" was least frequently used in both of the corpora.

But in any case, it is clear that the classification of the fragrances alone among users is gendered—as “perfume” is more commonly used for women’s fragrances than men’s, and the more general “fragrance” is more commonly used for men’s fragrances, along with the technically inaccurate “cologne.” Impressionistically, my hunch is that because the word perfume itself has gendered associations, so the more gender neutral “fragrance” is more commonly used for men’s fragrance reviewers when referring to an eau de parfum. It is also interesting to note that the French “parfum” (which just means perfume) shows up much more in the men’s fragrance corpus, which suggests that the French word may not have the same associations as the English word for the same thing. Using a French word and a word which may be considered more “jargon-like” might also allow those reviewing men’s fragrances to index masculinity in a different way, by appearing more worldly and educated on the subject matter, demonstrating their heightened taste and cultural capital; and therefore social power (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986)
A closer look at the tokens in AntConc’s Keyword in Context (KWiC) concordancing tool (sorted by most common frequent first, second, and third token to the left)demonstrates further the complex ways that these classification words are being used. I looked at the collocations of “cologne,”“perfume,” and “fragrance” in both the women’s fragrance review corpus as well as the men’s fragrance review corpus and collected terms which were direct indexes of gender (men’s/feminine, etc) and which collocated immediately to the left of any of these three terms. The following are the collocates in the women’s fragrance corpus:

Table 3.2 Immediate left collocates in the women’s fragrance corpus

	1L collocates of cologne	**1L collocates of perfume**	**1L collocates of fragrance**

Table 3.2, Immediate left collocates in the women's fragrance corpus, continued

men/man/men's/man's	43	0	0
masculine	4	0	0
male	0	0	0
manly	0	0	0
unisex	0	14	32
feminine	0	31	48
female	0	0	0
women/women's	0	12	0
lady	0	25	0

Here is the same chart for the men's fragrance reviews corpus:

Table 3.3 Immediate left collocates in the men's fragrance corpus

	1L collocates of cologne	**1L collocates of perfume**	**1L collocates of fragrance**
men/man/men's/man's	32	5	16
masculine	0	0	74
male	9	13	42
manly	0	0	12
unisex	0	0	31
feminine	0	0	0
female	0	5	0
women/women's	0	3	0
lady	0	0	0

Though there is much more to be investigated in terms of the collocates with each of these words which indirectly index gender, especially in the fragrance world, such as "leather" and "floral," that is beyond the scope of this paper. In any case, these charts demonstrate that "cologne" is more commonly collocated with words which directly index or mark male gender identity, and "perfume" seems to collocate with words which index female gender identity. However, in the men's fragrance corpus—masculine words

seem to also collocate with perfume, in addition to feminine words. This may be because they are attempting to overcome the potential gender markedness of "perfume." Fragrance, on the other hand, seems to have a much more gender-neutral connotation, as it collocates with "unisex" and both feminine and masculine terms, depending on the gender which the writers in the corpus are reviewing. The connections between the collocations and frequencies of each of these classification words depending on the intended gender of the fragrance that the reviewers are referring to is an interesting area which would require more data in order to understand the connotations and gender marked-ness of these classification words. However, in any case, there seems to be a patterning that "cologne" and "fragrance" are preferred by men's fragrance reviewers, and "perfume" is preferred by women's fragrance reviewers, and that "fragrance" tends to be the most "unmarked" or commonly used word among the three.

Which words are used to categorize the fragrances themselves is a crucial part of understanding the interactional work done through these discourses. As mentioned earlier in a discussion of Allison Burkette's 2018 chapter "Negotiating classification," the ways in which objects are classified and the words we use are meaning and value laden. It seems to be that the reanalysis and classification of fragrances "for men" under the word "cologne" rather than the (in many cases) technically correct "perfume" or choosing to use a more general word like "fragrance" suggests to me that the way that those who are using "masculine" scents are cautious to not use the label "perfume." Perhaps this is because "perfume" may indirectly index femininity, so they may be using "cologne" in order to differentiate themselves and avoid the association between femininity and fragrance consumption which is common in contemporary Western societies (Classen,

Howes, and Synnott, 1994). This pattern of men, or those who are using or perhaps simply reviewing (and therefore concerned with) masculine-marketed and classified perfumes, trying to sidestep this link seems to be one that comes up frequently in both the corpus data that I analyze as well as the discourse analysis data I will turn to in the next section.

3.2.2 Note Descriptions

The second category of words that had distinct differences across the corpora is words which have to do with the specific ingredients or olfactory qualities that reviewers are using to discuss perfumes. The following words tended to show up more in one corpus versus the other:

Table 3.4 Note descriptions

lemma	women's raw freq	men's raw freq	women's normalized freq
VANILLA	6497	1718 (24.0%)	5425 (76.0%)
JASMINE	2912	279 (10.3%)	2432 (89.7%)
LAVENDER	2013	986 (37.1%)	1681 (62.9%)
FLORAL	2113	531 (23.1%)	1764 (76.9%)
WARM	2186	968 (34.7%)	1825 (65.3%)
LEATHER	682	2735 (82.8)	569 (17.2%)

Table 3.4 demonstrates the difference in frequencies across corpora for each of the note description words. The percentages in the final two columns (from left to right) indicate the share of tokens of the word that would occur in the total normalized corpus for each of the gendered corpora.

All of these smell descriptors show up more in the reviews of women's perfumes than men's other than "leather." This seems to suggest that vanilla, jasmine, lavender, and "floral" and "warm" accords are all more likely to show up in women's perfumes, as these smells and qualities could index femininity. This also follows from the historical

patterning of women's perfumes being more floral, especially since the 1800s in the West, and matches the olfactory perception research earlier, which, as a reminder, suggested that descriptions such as "floral", "fruity", "aldehydic", "sweet", "powdery", and "balsamic" were all more likely to be used for women's perfumes, and "herbaceous", "spicy", "woody", "mossy", "leathery" and "fresh" were more likely to be used for men's perfumes (Zarzo, 2019).

The prevalence of vanilla in women's perfumes and in the commentary surrounding them is also interesting. I was initially interested in this due to a recent bout of online discourse surrounding the popularity of vanilla-based fragrances and vanilla accords for women. This began when a series of tweets went around theorizing "why men like vanilla fragrances," most of which involved weird assumptions about men's sexuality—that vanilla reminded them of childhood or innocence, and therefore was suggestive of pedophilia, others cited an article suggesting that men like vanilla because it smells like breast milk (Krause, 2022). Other fragrance-posters were quick to decry the oversexualization of women's fragrance choices (audrey, @foldyrhands, 2023). In any case, the linguistic evidence from these corpora suggest that vanilla was perceived as a note more often in the perfumes marketed towards women than men, and I will also note that eight out of the top ten fragrances for women whose reviews were included in these corpora did have vanilla listed as a note, whereas only two of the top ten listed for men did.

These expectations related to gendered performance through fragrance are also borne out in the prevalence of the "warm" descriptor among the women's fragrance corpus when compared to the men's fragrance corpus—the association between women

and the expectation of warmth is common, as women are generally expected to be more caring and motherly—a metaphorical sort of warmth, and the links between female sexuality, vanilla fragrances, and motherhood seem to suggest that the "warm" descriptor could be associated with this note.

In contrast, leather shows up in the commentary surrounding men's fragrances much more. This is in part likely due to the fact that leather accords are more likely to be used in men's fragrances, generally speaking, and do show up in some of the fragrances that are being described in the reviews. The material of leather and its associations with masculine fragrances also betray some interesting ideas about gendered performance– leather is created through killing an animal, and leather as a material indexes such masculine figures as the cowboy, or items such as luxury furniture and cars.

Lavender is also an interesting note to have shown up in this particular case—as I mentioned earlier, the scent of lavender has historically been linked with female sex workers, but now seems to be primarily linked with men among the community of serious fragrance users, and it does often show up in compositions marketed to men. However, in the minds of the public—lavender seems to be more closely associated with women. There is a viral tweet that has been recopied and reposted numerous times, so I am unsure of the original poster, but it says: "Women get to smell like real things (vanilla, lavender) but men have to smell like concepts. What the fuck is 'cool sport rush'" (Iver, 2023). Lavender is often marketed in men's perfumes in contemporary Western societies due to the popularity of the fougère class of perfumes, which typically features a lavender top note. The fact that the gendered indexical links among the general public and among fragrance consumers on Fragrantica (as demonstrated above) differ

from what perfumers or perfume historians might argue suggests that there is a difference in the in-group and out-group perceptions and linkages for these olfactory signs. This general public perception has also perhaps influenced what the reviewers on Fragrantica are saying, which requires more research. This further reinforces the connections between language and scent—the perceptions and linkages made by the "hearer" or "smeller" will differ upon one's past experiences.

3.2.3 Power and Quality

The third category of words which were different across the corpora is words which refer to the strength, projection (i.e. how far away from the wearer's body can it be smelled) or lasting power of the fragrance, along with similar words which refer to the overall quality of the fragrance. It seems that this was a much more important factor for evaluating fragrances in the men's corpus:

Table 3.5 Power and Quality

lemma	women's raw freq	men's raw freq	women's normalized freq
PROJECTION	717	2453 (80.4%)	599 (19.6%)
HOURS	1995	3523 (67.9%)	1666 (32.1%)
LONGEVITY	1709	3189 (69.1%)	1427 (30.9%)
PERFORMANCE	474	2660 (87.0%)	396 (13.0%)
BATCH	144	2531 (95.5%)	120 (4.5%)
PRICE	942	1924 (71.0%)	787 (29.0%)
LAST	3485	3510 (54.7%)	2910 (45.3%)
TIME	4436	4103 (52.6%)	3704 (47.4%)

Table 3.5 demonstrates the difference in frequencies across corpora for each of the words having to do with power and quality. The percentages in the final two columns (from left to right) indicate the share of tokens of the word that would occur in the total normalized corpus for each of the gendered corpora.

Words like "projection," "performance" and "longevity" were especially prevalent in the men's fragrance corpus, all of which indicate a concern with the power of

the perfume as it relates to wearing it in public. “Longevity” and “performance” also unfortunately seem to index a relationship between the wearing of men’s fragrance and a fixation on heteronormative sexual prowess (the comparative prevalence of “performance” is especially damning). This idea will return in the next section, when I discuss the enregistered figure of the “fragbro” who is concerned with using fragrances to get compliments from women (potential sexual partners) and thinks of perfume primarily in terms of how it can help their sexual goals. The prevalence of the reviews which index this same sort of concern with the power and sexual possibilities of a fragrance in this corpus suggest one of two things–either there are so many consumers of perfumes marketed towards men who are engaging in this enregistered persona that it skews the overall data, or that these concerns are common even among less overtly masculinist consumers of perfume. Further analytical work to determine the reach of the “fragbro” persona might help to tease this out. In any case, this general pattern of the these words which seem to refer to power or success showing up more commonly in the men’s fragrance corpus seems to suggest that consumers of men’s perfume are attempting to frame themselves as powerful, socially and sexually. I believe that this might be an overcompensation for the fact that perfume and fragrance is generally considered a more feminine hobby (Classen, Howes, Synnott, 1994).

Investigating “last” also reveals some more interesting patterns, as this word could potentially be used as an adverb or adjective in addition to a verb. The inclusion of the word in this particular analysis relies upon the word being used as a verb, and it was used as a verb 2549 out of 3510 times in the men’s fragrance corpus, which was most of the time. It was also used as an adjective (844 tokens) or adverb (54 tokens). The

remainder of the tokens were tagged as “noun plurals,” but this might require further checking as this is perhaps a mistake on TagAnt’s part. However, in any case—the use of last as a verb is the most frequently occurring use of it in the men’s fragrance corpus. This was also the most common use of “last” in the women’s fragrance corpus, 2637 out of 3485 tokens of the headword “last” were used as a verb form in the women’s fragrance corpus. This suggests that the word was being used similarly in each corpus, as a verb most commonly to refer to the length of time the smell of the fragrance “lasts,” but slightly more often in the men’s corpus, once again suggesting that men’s fragrance reviewers were more concerned with the power of the fragrances.

The men’s fragrance corpus also featured more words such as “batch,” and “price” which are related to concerns with the quality of and investment necessitated by the fragrances they are purchasing. Discussions of “batch,” in both corpora, relate to evaluating the relative quality of perfumes of different manufacturing dates:

lepartment store here in Manila . Mine has the	batch	code (22074) but it does n't seem
)5/23/2019 11:59 Does anyone here have the	batch	# 18333 ? Because the sample I tried was
Alien . I did n't snap a picture of the	batch	code on the bottom of the bottle so I
y & either the reviewers have duped me or the	batch	I got is bad because all I get on
ıerfume can expire , and that if you search the	batch	code on the bottom of the box , you
9 the fragrance longevity Is real poor than the	batch	codes starting with 7 or 8 . I purchased
ssimo1 * 06/20/2019 23:30 I noticed that the	batch	code stating with the number 9 the fragrance I
hot weather) or whether it is due to the	batch	I have . I have the travel size set
so shocked when I got home & looked up the	batch	code & found out it 's from the 2nd
n't help but think that maybe I got a bad	batch	? Or perhaps I 've just become nose -
urine . I wondered if I maybe got a bad	batch	. But I have let it sit now on
. That offensive note ... maybe I got a bad	batch	. That was from Bloomingdale 's . The dreamy

Figure 3.1 Keyword in Context results for “batch” in the women’s fragrance corpus

10/21/2015 14:24 Bought a 75ml of this . The	batch	number in the bottle is LT4215R11 . Linear pinea
nounced , but it remains fresh throughout . The	batch	I have is not as smokey as something like
. 7/10 scent . Maybe an 8/10 depending on the	batch	. 0/10 value . mathghamhan * mathghamhan * 1
has more fans than enemies . Depending on the	batch	, year , etc . you might get different
sure or a disgusting fragrance depending on the	batch	that you get . Some people say that the
ıds of a single continuum and depending on the	batch	, the bottle will be either more smoky or
ınacceptable and frustrating . Depending on the	batch	or year of manufacturing the same perfume (Ave
rfume , which can each time (depending on the	batch	or production year) smell a bit differently ,
ve about Aventus . It absolutely depends on the	batch	. I tried Aventus 3 times before (one
It 's either fruity or woody . Depends on the	batch	. Either way it 's a nice clean smell
. 9.5/10 on the 2013 batch . 6/10 on the	batch	out now . islam * islam * 09/10/2017 17:04
reed fragrances can be hit or miss based on the	batch	, but the 2012 batch I just received from

Figure 3.2 Keyword in Context results for “batch” in the women’s fragrance corpus

As these data show, there are often discussions of potential “bad batches” or differential qualities of perfume “depending” on the batch. This level of discernment in terms of fragrance consumption relates back to the earlier discussion of habitus and embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986). Having the “refined” taste and knowledge necessary to distinguish perfume quality across batches is an example of the embodied form of cultural capital discussed by Bourdieu (1984) in his study of cultural preferences of French citizens and Silverstein (2021) in his examination of the language used to review and describe wine. Similarly, the prevalence of “price” in the men’s fragrance corpus suggests there are more reviews which evaluate the relative quality of the fragrances compared to the price which is being charged for them, which one again suggests a finer ability to distinguish what perfumes may be worth it or not. I would argue that these attempts to index a higher degree of cultural capital is another way in which the reviewers of the men’s fragrances are trying to present themselves as more socially powerful, in order to overcome the feminine (and thus less socially powerful)

associations with the consumption of perfume. This theme seems to recur, and I will return to this in my discussion of the "fragbros" in the next section.

3.2.4 Personal pronouns and embodiment

The fourth category of words which differed across corpora has to do with personal pronouns and the wearer of the perfume themselves. Usage of "I," "me," and "my" were all higher in the women's fragrance corpus when compared to the men's:

Table 3.6 Personal Pronouns and Embodiment

lemma	women's raw freq	men's raw freq	women's normalized freq
I	84252	52225 (42.7%)	70352 (57.3%)
MY	20830	14148 (44.8%)	17393 (55.2%)
ME	16887	7447 (34.5%)	14101 (65.5%)
YOU	11308	11079 (54.1%)	9442 (45.9%)

Table 3.6 demonstrates the difference in frequencies across corpora for each of the pronouns. The percentages in the final two columns (from left to right) indicate the share of tokens of the word that would occur in the total normalized corpus for each of the gendered corpora.

The higher usage of the personal pronouns "I," "my," and "me," suggests that the reviewers of women's fragrances were more likely to see themselves as an integral part of the fragrance. This could possibly connect back to historical ideas in western society which thought of women as inherently "corrupt" and "foul-smelling," whose use of perfume was necessitated to cover up that inherent corruptness (Classen, Howes, Synnott, 1994). Men were not categorized in such a way, so perhaps men's fragrance reviewers are more likely to understand the fragrance's smell and performance as separate from their own "natural" odor.

Men's fragrance reviewers were also more likely to use "you," referring to some generic party that would be reading their reviews. This seems to suggest that men's fragrance reviewers may see their opinion as more authoritative or more valuable to

readers, whereas women's fragrance reviewers might be more likely to discuss their own personal experiences with a fragrance without necessarily expanding that claim to all users of fragrances. Once again, this seems to reflect the pattern of men's fragrance reviewers attempting to project more cultural capital and social power in their discussion of fragrances. This pattern might also suggest a difference in how reviewers of the different gendered fragrances see themselves in relationship to the material artifact of perfume—perhaps the men's fragrance reviewers see the perfume itself as an entirely separate object to be evaluated by them, whereas the women's fragrance reviewers are more inclined to see the olfactory aspect of the perfumes as an extension of themselves.

The way this hypothesis plays out is a possible line of future research, which could use the theoretical framework of materiality to understand the way that users of fragrances see the fragrances as connected to themselves or to their bodies, and what fragrances users believe those connections to be. This hypothesis could also be further investigated from the dataset used in this particular study, as KWiC (Keyword in Context) concordance analysis could further illuminate how these personal pronouns are being used.

3.2.5 Experiential Words

The fifth and final category of words which differed across the corpora is more general words to describe the experience of fragrance:

Table 3.7 Experiential Words

lemma	women's raw freq	men's raw freq	women's normalized freq
SCENT	10142	9593 (53.1%)	8468 (46.9%)
SMELL	9369	9423 (54.7%)	7823 (45.3%)

Table 3.7 Experient Words, continued

LIKE	15792	10358 (44.7%)	13186 (55.3%)
LOVE	8643	4761 (39.8%)	7217 (60.2%)

Table 3.7 demonstrates the difference in frequencies across corpora for each of the experiential words. The percentages in the final two columns (from left to right) indicate the share of tokens of the word that would occur in the total normalized corpus for each of the gendered corpora.

The first difference to note between the two corpora is the fact that women's fragrance reviewers were more likely to use both "like" and "love" when compared to men's fragrance reviewers. This once again points to the idea that perhaps reviewers of women's fragrances were more likely to frame their reviews as personal opinions, rather than statements of fact. "Like" though, is a bit more complicated, since it can be used as a verb as well as a comparative, and as a discourse particle. Like is used about as much in the women's fragrance corpus as a verb as in the men's fragrance corpus (about 25% of all tokens of "like" in the women's fragrance corpus, and about 24% of all tokens of like in the men's fragrance corpus). In addition, like is used as an interjection or discourse particle at about the same rate in both corpora, about 5% of all total tokens of "like." But the largest portion of "likes" in both corpora was used as a conjunction. All of these findings suggest that "like" was used in similar ways in both corpora, only that women's fragrance reviewers were more likely to use the word in general. The potential consequences of this in terms of how the reviewers are constructing their gender through the discussions of fragrances and understanding the fragrances as gendered objects would require a closer look at these forms of "like" to understand the different interactional work done by the word when used in different ways, and to better understand why women's fragrance reviewers might use the word more. This line of questioning would

be interesting to pursue with this corpus data in the future, but is beyond the scope of this paper.

"Scent" and "smell" are both used more in the men's fragrance corpus, a pattern which is not immediately interpretable. I hypothesize based on the collocations of "scent" in the men's fragrance corpus that the higher comparative usage is due to men's fragrance reviewers wanting to find a way around describing the fragrance itself without using the feminine "perfume" or the incorrect but masculine "cologne," similar to the reason why "fragrance" comes up more in the men's fragrance corpus:

mens_frag...	, too smoky but still a decent fragrance . The	scent	is a 6/10 and this is not a fragrance
mens_frag...	both thought - provoking and definitive . The	scent	is not overpowering but it does have a strong
mens_frag...	ho want to be noticed and remembered . The	scent	is both unique and captivating , leaving you fe
mens_frag...	2021 (non - magnetic bottle cap) . The	scent	is very aquatic and there is not as much
mens_frag...	t has decent performance and longevity . The	scent	is really unique for western people but it just
mens_frag...	expect from a cheap summer fragrance . The	scent	itself is very good , manly and incensy .
mens_frag...	11/22/2020 03:33 I 'm kind of like it . The	scent	is good and long lasting during a whole day
mens_frag...	all three seasons so far with four sprays . The	scent	is pleasant enough and has some depth , but
mens_frag...	opposing aquatic notes , in my opinion . The	scent	gets better as it matures , rounding into more
mens_frag...	e . Completely non - offensive and safe . The	scent	is popular but unique . Scent : 10 Longevity
mens_frag...	It makes you feel powerful , in control . The	scent	is seductive , with strong projection and sillag
mens_frag...	cean waves that crash on volcanic rocks . The	scent	really matches the official description . Not onl

Figure 3.3 Keyword in Context results for "scent" in the men's fragrance corpus

However, the difference in smell might be a little more complicated. The differences in the parts of speech for "smell" are especially noticeable when comparing the two corpora. Looking at the breakdown of part-of-speech usage for "smell" in the women's fragrance corpus, it is most likely to be used to be used as a verb, followed closely by a noun. On the other hand, in the men's corpus, the numbers are similar, though a higher proportion of tokens seem to be used as a noun—which once again could be a strategy used by reviewers to avoid saying the femininely indexed word "perfume." However,

"smell" and "scent" both have more to do with the sensory experience of fragrances that the more object-like words "perfume," "cologne," and "fragrance." Though beyond the scope of this paper, future research into the way these words are used in reviews of perfume (whether that be language related to qualia, morphosyntactic patterns that emerge, or even orthographic differences) might further reveal how fragrance users interact with their understanding of the totality of a perfume—the olfactory, visual, and linguistic properties associated with it.

Overall, it seems to be that there are differences in the ways that men's fragrance reviewers and women's fragrance reviewers describe their experiences with particular fragrances, in addition to the well-known ways that men's and women's fragrances are marketed differently. This suggests that the understanding of perfume as semiotic objects differs by the gender that the perfume is marketed towards, so perhaps by the gender of consumers of perfume. This corpus data also suggests that because the consumption of and interest in perfume itself is gendered (Classen, Howes, Synnott, 1994), masculine perfume wearers are describing their experience of perfume in such a way that indexes heterosexuality and social power, in order to avoid the possible "feminine" connotations of being interested in perfume—this is exemplified in the indexing of cultural capital through their concerns with distinguishing batches of fragrances and their "objective" evaluation of the fragrances, the iconic nature of the notes used and commented upon in the "masculine" fragrances, and their resistance to the use of the "feminine coded" (though technically correct) term "perfume." This is interesting, because it suggests that male fragrance wearers are using their fragrances as a way of indexing more traditional ideas about masculinity—so the question is *why* does this occur in the discussion of

fragrances? I do not know the answer to this, as it is beyond the scope of this paper, but these data presented here hopefully prove that this is an open question and is one worth further exploring.

CHAPTER 4. EVIDENCE FOR THE ENREGISTERMENT OF "FRAGRANCE BROS"

4.1 Methods

One example of the enregisterment of smells along with other linguistic and embodied practices is the current trend of "fragrance bros," alternatively referred to as "fragbros." From my own impressionistic associations with this characterological figure based on my involvement in online fragrance communities as well as the data I have analyzed for this analysis, I would characterize "fragbros" as aggressively heterosexual men, who wear strong, expensive fragrances, especially Creed fragrances such as Aventus, as well as other designer house perfumes. Others have commented on the trend of frag bros as well, such as Joshua Smith from Libertine Fragrance, who mentioned it in his interview that I cited earlier (Wilson-Brown, 2021). Using evidence from the construal of indexicals through discourse analysis and stancetaking, I will argue that in general, there seems to be an interesting psychosexual relationship to class, money, and power suggested in the way that fragbros consume and talk about perfumes. Additionally, I will argue that the relationship between the body, sensory perception, and language use exemplified in this case study necessitate the employment of the framework of materiality to understand the performance of gender which is occurring and being evaluated in this particular context, but I also would argue that the inclusion of the framework of materiality in linguistic analyses can provide more robust information about the personae and styles at play in a given linguistic performance.

The data I will analyze is commentary on the comedy-focused fragrance subreddit r/eaudejerks, as well as more serious fragrance focused subreddits such as r/Colognes and r/Perfumes; I will also look at a video from German fragrance vlogger Jeremy Fragrance, who is one classic example of this stereotype, and whose abnormal behavior in videos has had him become somewhat of a meme on the internet even outside of fragrance circles.

To analyze this data, I turned to the methodology of discourse analysis, specifically, I used Wortham and Reyes's *Discourse Analysis Beyond the Speech Event,* which provides methodologies for analyzing discourse within their broader contexts, rather than simply the exact speech event that they are embedded in, along with how to incorporate kinds of signs other than just speech into discourse analysis. Crucially, as they argue, that continually "[a]s participants across events presuppose the sign-typification linkage, it becomes more durably presupposed" (21), so the repeated association of particular features (linguistic, olfactory, or otherwise) with a particular social type (fragbros) only reaffirms and reasserts those connections, so that when one of those particular features is employed, the connection to the fragbro persona is presupposed.

Wortham and Reyes' methodology is also useful in that they provide a detailed structure to do discourse analysis through, with five different phases of breaking down a piece of discourse in order to understand the social action happening in a particular instance of discourse, and what other instances of discourse it might be connected to. The phases are as follows:

Table 4.1 Phases of discourse analysis

1. Mapping narrated events	What characters, objects, and events, are referred to?

Table 4.1 Phases of discourse analysis, continued

2. Selecting indexicals	What are the signs which signal relevant context, both within and across events? What signs demonstrate the kind of social action happening?
3. Construing indexicals	Which accounts of "voicing, evaluation, positioning, and social action" are used to construe salient indexical signs?
4. Configuring indexicals	How do the signs "coalesce" into "stable configurations" within or across events to establish recognizable types of social action?
5. Interpreting social action in narrating events	What best explains the positioning and social action occurring in the narrating event? (The instance of discourse being studied)

(Summarized/adapted from Wortham and Reyes, p. 42).

In this structure, stages two, three, and four are all happening iteratively, and are intertwined with one another. Another useful framework offered by Wortham and Reyes is there delineation of the different kinds of indexicals present in any particular text: "deictics, reported speech, and evaluative indexicals" (46). In this particular analysis, I will focus primarily on evaluative indexicals, or what might be considered as instances of stancetaking (Jaffe, 2009), since I am analyzing a broad swath of different instances of discourse to make an argument that further, more detailed analyses of smaller chunks of discourse would be interesting and fruitful.

4.2 Negative evaluation and disalignment

The first "sign" I will discuss is that of the word "bro" itself. The use of the word "bro" in "fragrance *bro*" already seems to suggest the qualities of this particular persona. Kiesling's 2019 paper on "brospeak" argues that the "bro" more generally is a recognizable social type: "the stereotyped young, white, cisgendered, heterosexual, middle-class American man—the most hegemonic category" who has an air of "comfortably entitled dominance…[and] relishes in the lack of concern afforded by

straight white male privilege" (Kiesling, 2019: 11). Though the "fragbro" persona draws heavily on this social type, and the classification of this figure in fragrance discussions as a bro at all suggests that audiences are making those indexical leaps, there are some differences in the way that this subtype of bro manifests. In any case though, the crucial aspects of bro identity–social power and aggressive heterosexuality—are maintained in this persona as well as indexed through other means rather than simply relying too heavily upon the "bro" social type.

To begin to identify the visual, linguistic, and olfactory indexes related to the characterological figure of the fragrance bro, I started by scrolling through the subreddit r/eaudejerks, which mocks this kind of persona. This subreddit is an example of a "circle jerk" subreddit, which is a variety of subreddit that exists for many topics, but which is intended to parody or mock a particular kind of person who is into a particular topic; posts on these subreddits are not meant to be taken seriously or at face value. The fact that the subreddit adheres to this form already suggests that there is an enregistered persona (Johnstone, 2016) which is being commented on. In addition to parody posters, the subreddit features a lot of people posting screenshots or clips from "fragrance bro" influencers, who seem to be most active on Youtube and TikTok, which they find "mockable." People will also post "mockable" posts from other more serious online fragrance communities. In addition, I looked at posts from other popular fragrance subreddits, such as r/Colognes, which discuss the fragbro persona. Below are a few examples of posts which mock the "fragrance bro" persona:

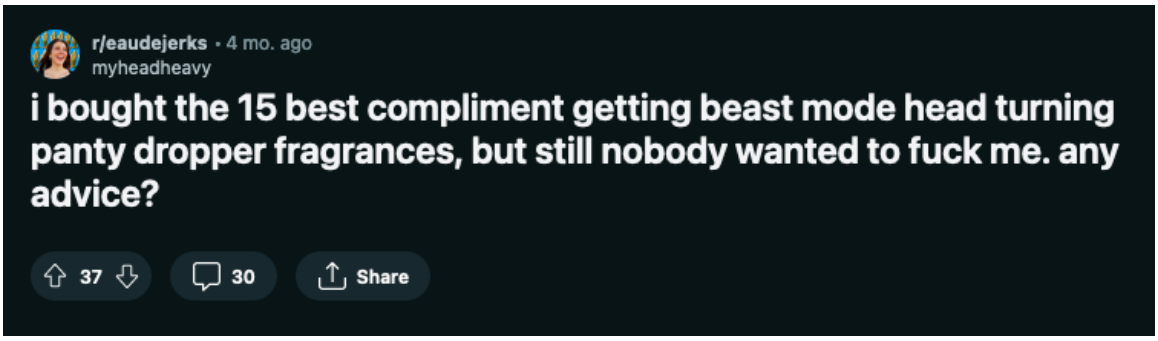

Figure 4.1 Reddit post in r/eaudejerks mocking the persona of fragbros (myheadheavy)

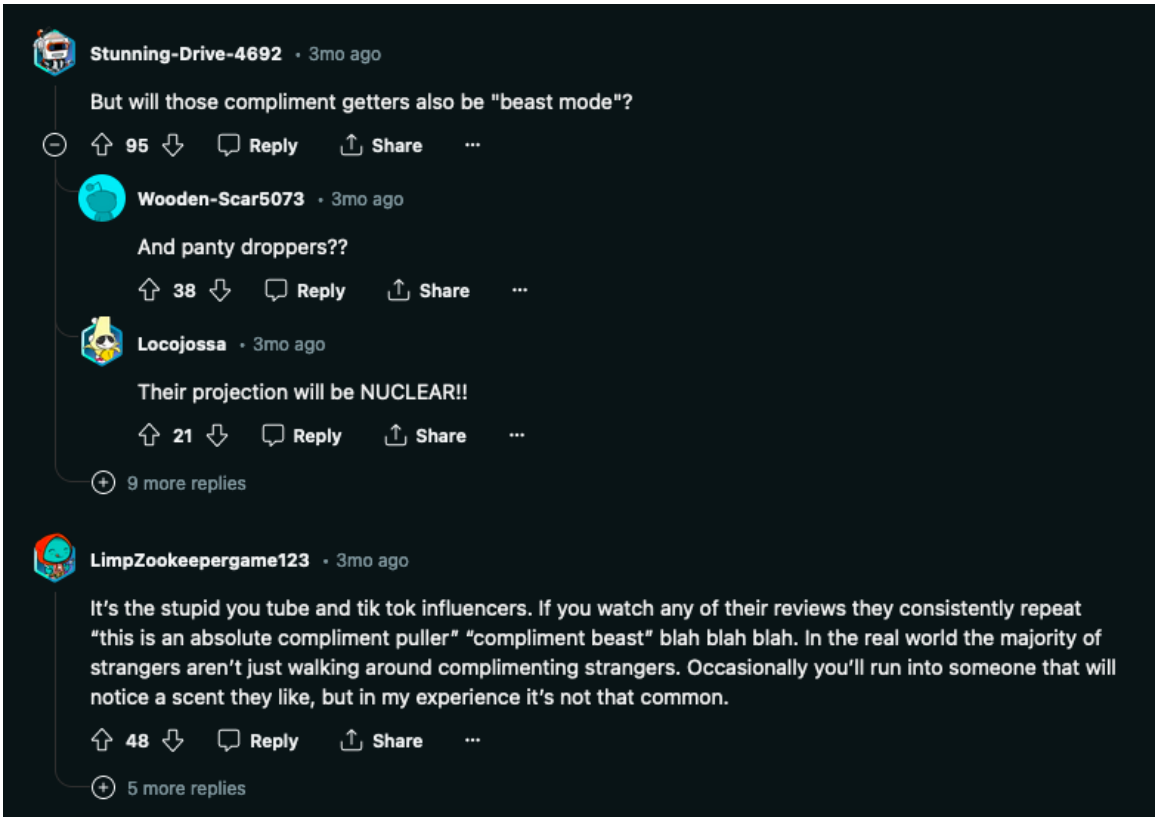

Figure 4.2 Comment section from a post in r/Colognes mocking fragbros (Stunning-Drive-4692, Wooden-Scar5073, Locojossa, LimpZookeepergame123)

Figure 4.3 Comment in r/Colognes mocking fragbros (bigbilly1234567899)

From these selection of posts, one can see some lexical patterns emerging in the mocking of "fragrance bros." The idea of "compliments," "beast mode," and "panty droppers" (the comment about "boxer droppers" turning the gender norms around and revealing the obvious stupidity of the phrase). The obsession with getting compliments, "dropping panties," and projection (a term referring to how far outside of a perfume wearer's personal bubble a perfume is smellable) reflects a general pattern of concern with other people's perceptions. "Panty-dropping" in particular reflects a concern with women's opinions of a man in a heterosexual marketplace. These features of the persona are not only identifiable by those mocking it, but there is also evidence of the pervasiveness of this persona in more mainstream, "serious" fragrance forums. See the following posts from r/Colognes:

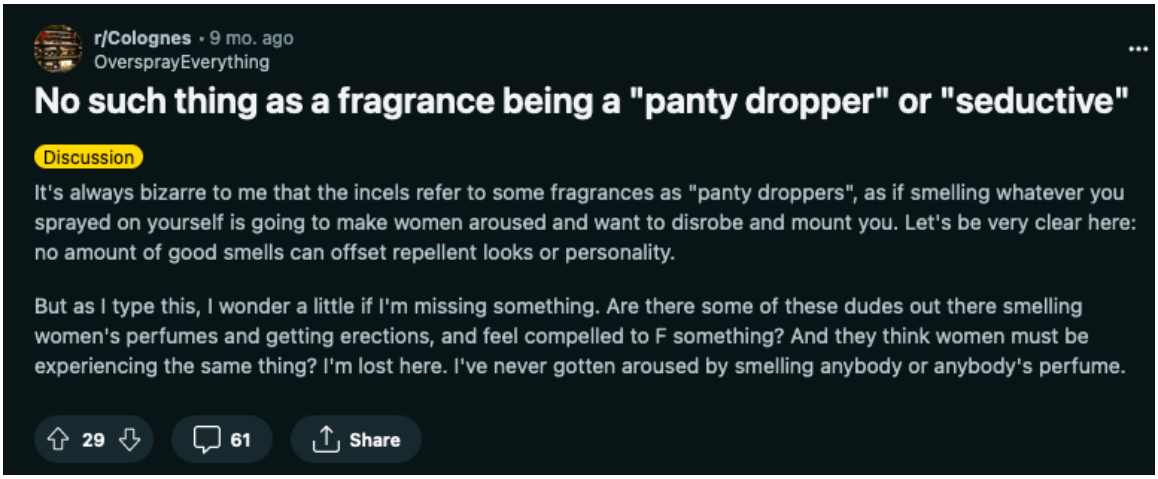

Figure 4.4 Post in r/Colognes complaining about the fragbro behavior (OversprayEverything)

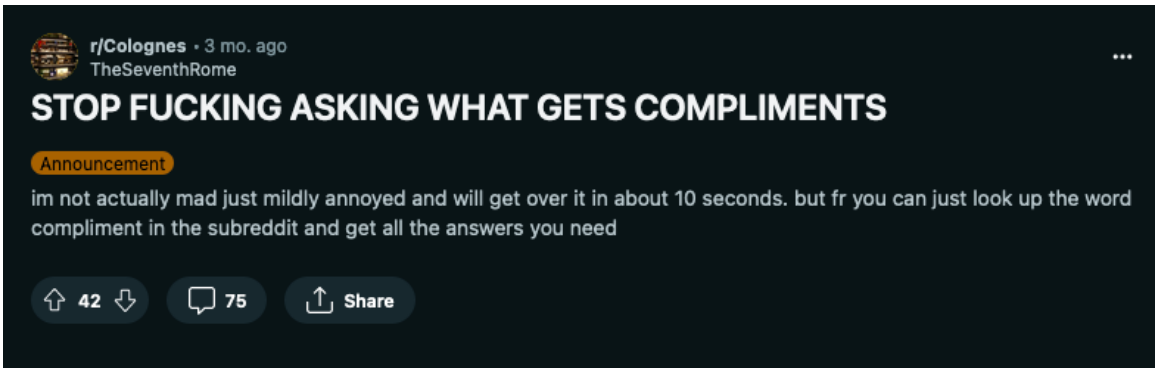

Figure 4.5 Post in r/Colognes complaining about compliment-driven fragbro behavior (TheSeventhRome)

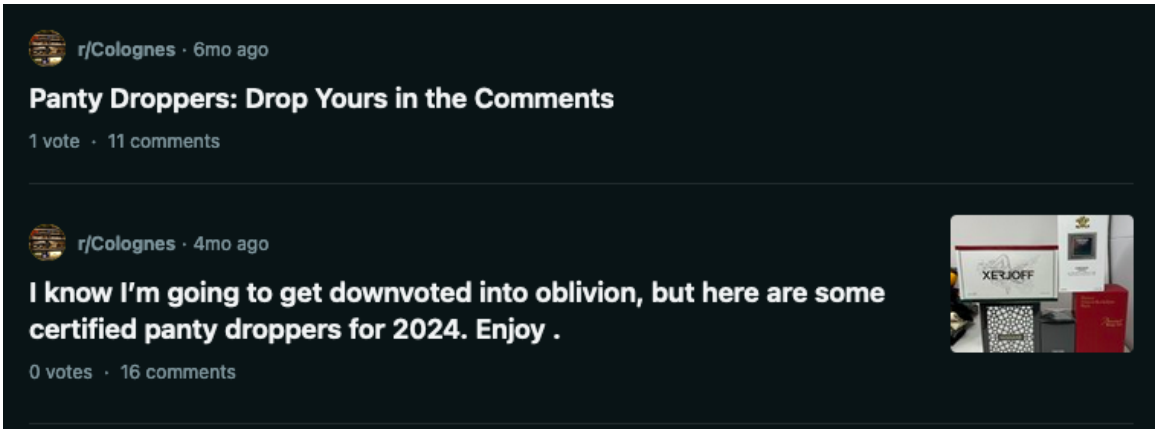

Figure 4.6 Screenshot demonstrating the prevalence of "panty dropper" in r/Colognes (Lapingaandante, superdstar56)

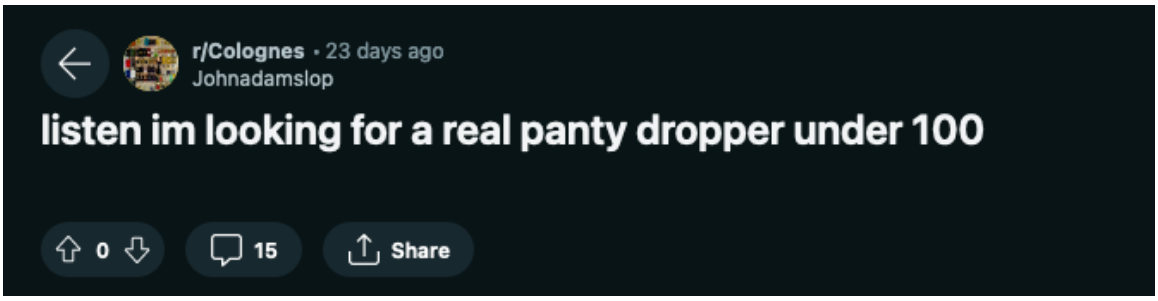

Figure 4.7 Another example of "panty dropper" in an r/Colognes post title (Johnadamslop)

Firstly, it is interesting to note that these were posted in r/Colognes, rather than r/fragrances, or r/Perfumes (which have posts discussing keywords/phrases such as "panty droppers," which I will return to later), since as suggested by the corpus data I will present, "cologne," despite *actually* referring to a concentration of perfume materials, has come to refer primarily to male scents. The presence of posts complaining about "panty dropper" posts and "compliment getting" fragrances suggests that these are more common in r/Colognes, and more common among men. In r/Perfumes (which impressionistically seems to be the "women's" subreddit to r/Colognes' "men's"), a search for "panty dropper" returns fewer posts, and posts which mostly mock the idea, or otherwise indicate they do not take it seriously:

Figure 4.8 Post in r/Perfumes discussing what fragrances may be a "panty dropper" (lilmisse85)

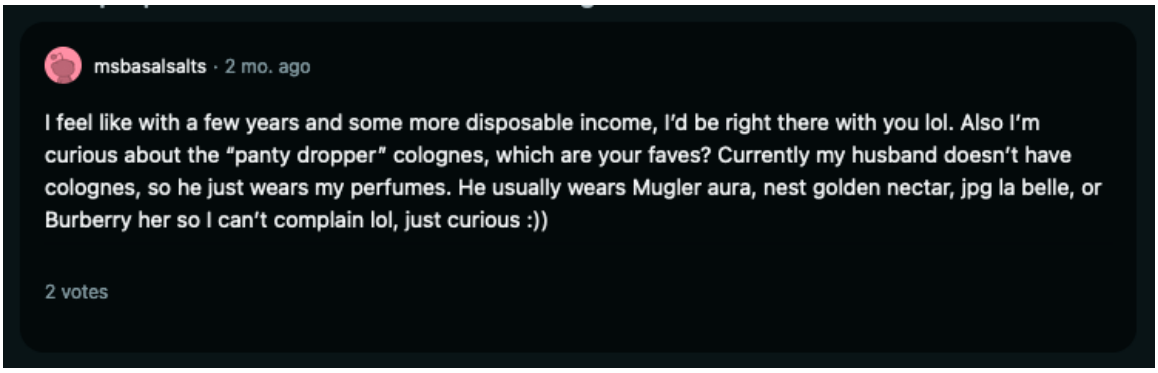

Figure 4.9 Comment in r/Perfumes discussing the idea of "panty droppers" (msbasalsalts)

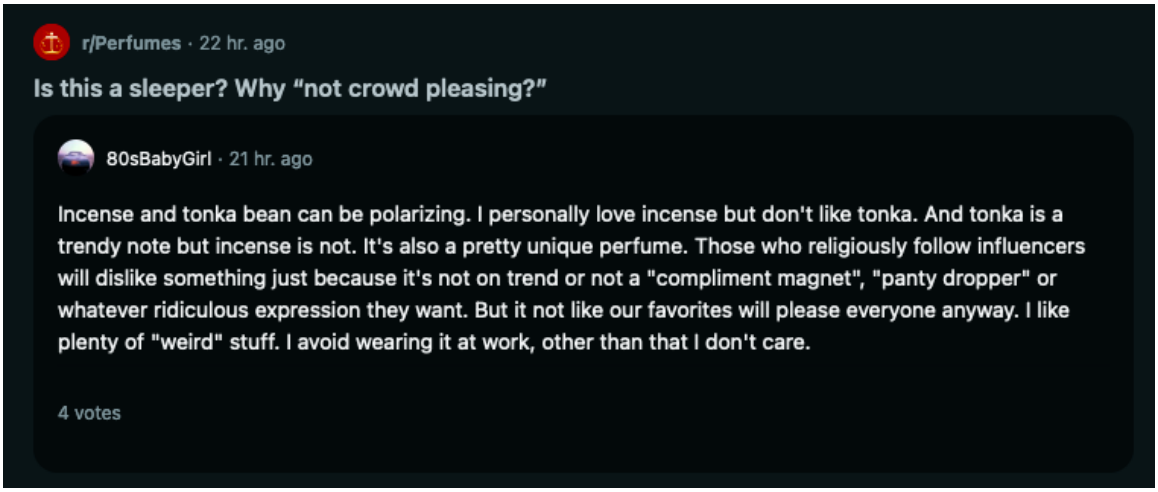

Figure 4.10 Post in r/Perfumes discussing the terminology used by fragbros (80sBabyGirl)

In all three of the top results from searching “panty dropper” on r/Perfumes, they are all comments rather than posts themselves, and all three times, it is used in quotes– indicating that the posters do not take the phrase seriously, and the third poster even says “or whatever ridiculous expression they want” after “panty dropper.”

Among the posts “mocking” fragbros, the evaluative indexicals such as quotation marks around some of the phrases and using the genre of reddit “circle jerk” posting indicate a broader interactional stance towards the discursive figure of the fragbro—one of disalignment. In mocking the “fragbro,” they distance themselves from the stereotypical bro, who they evaluate negatively. However, some posters who mock the “fragbros” also seem to take some of the assumptions underlying the fragbro mode of perfume consumption for granted: for example, one poster in r/Perfumes is concerned with the “sexiness” of particular men’s fragrances, and another poster admits to being “curious” about so-called “panty droppers.” I do not yet know exactly what to make of how these particular posters are engaging with gendered ideas about fragrances, but further research should consider these points.

Additionally, there were also multiple posts in r/Colognes which used the phrase seriously (or at least without quotation marks). r/Fragrances also has a number of posts which feature the phrase "panty dropper," but a complete analysis and discussion of all of the Reddit posts mentioning this particular phrase is beyond the scope of this paper, however, future work should investigate the discourse on these pages—and especially attend to the interactional stances taken by users when they discuss the fragbro persona. That being said, this data is provided in order to provide evidence for the enregisterment of the "fragrance bro" persona, demonstrate the particular lexical items which are associated with it: "panty dropper," "compliments," and to a lesser extent "beast mode," and indicate the degree to which some of the "fragbro" assumptions are taken seriously among fragrance users.

"Panty dropper" especially seems to be a characteristic emblem (Wortham and Reyes, 2017) of the "fragbro" persona. This term did not originate within the "fragbro" persona though, and actually indexes more generally a bro-like persona, as well as heterosexual success in general. The name is given to an alcoholic drink and is used in general to refer to a man women want to have sex with or certain aspects of a man which will make women want to have sex with him.

There also seems to be a theme emerging in that these fragrance bros are concerned with projection and strength—which would make sense if their chief concern is getting compliments, because how else would anyone be able to smell you if your perfume did not project well? This also patterns similarly to the corpus data discussed in the previous section, in which the reviews of "men's" fragrances tended to include these words which refer to the "power" or strength of the perfume more often than the reviews

of the women's fragrances. To briefly recap some of my findings in the corpus analysis section, I argued that the cluster of words which had to do with the strength and quality of the perfumes could in many cases index heterosexual prowess—and I argue that these lexical items have a similar indexical function in this context. Once again, these references to heterosexuality and power are perhaps a way for men to overcome the feminine associations with the use of fragrances.

In addition to these lexical items though, there are some physical and olfactory "features" that are enregistered alongside this particular way of thinking and speaking. For example, as I had previously mentioned, I associate "fragbros" with Creed's Aventus perfume (100 mL of Aventus goes for $495, which is quite high for any perfume, especially one so popular and widely available; Aventus is also sold in 1000 mL bottles for refill, which is something I personally have not seen before). The name Aventus itself also begins to index some of the aspects of hegemonic masculinity discussed earlier—the word means "power," and supposedly the perfume was inspired by Napoleon Bonaparte (Schneider, 2011). Perhaps these indexical links are why fragbros have clung to the perfume, but in any case, I am not the only one who has this association between fragbros and Aventus—judging by this meme from the r/eaudejerks subreddit that has been reposted a couple times:

Figure 4.11 Post in r/eaudejerks mocking fragbros who use Creed's Aventus (Deleted user)

This meme demonstrates a couple of facets of the energisterment of fragbros: the aggressive masculinity and social power indexed by the contextual use of the meme of the man talking to a clearly uninterested woman, the use of "bros" and the discussion of compliments and the discussion of the particular batch of Creed's Aventus that the man in the meme is wearing (this connects back to the "batch" and "quality" discussion which came up in my corpus analysis section). The use of the word "bro" in Aventus bro, once again, like the use of the word "bro" in the description of the persona more generally, once again calls to mind this figure of stereotypical, laid-back, dominant masculinity. The adoption of this specific perfume also reinforces the necessity of bringing materiality into an analysis such as this one. Not only is the object of the perfume used as a part of the

gendered persona performed—but the fragbros' perception and understanding of the perfume object is incorporated into the way they perform this persona. This also ties back into the idea of habitus and distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). As I mentioned earlier in the corpus analysis section, the concernedness regarding the batch and the quality of perfumes, this type of discussion indexes in general more cultural capital and "taste" which enables men to project the kind of cultural capital they want to have—and crucially, since what they are performing is an aspect of their own perception and is inextricably linked to the body—it is difficult to understand that semiotic link without the framework of materiality.

The interesting thing about this meme is that it does not only indicate the lexical aspects of this gendered performance–but it indicates that there are also olfactory features bundled with the performance of the fragbro persona. The smell of Creed's Aventus, and perhaps in particular the pineapple "note" (which is often focused in on in discussions of Aventus—see the earlier meme) is one of the features that is bundled with the lexical items such as "panty droppers" (this is anecdotal evidence, but my own association of pineapple notes with Aventus has caused me to shy away from trying other perfumes which also feature a pineapple note–further suggesting that the indexical field of pineapple notes includes a connection to this persona). Though it is possible that this pineapple note has become associated with fragbros simply because it is one of the distinct notes in the characteristic fragbro perfume, Aventus, I believe there also could be some indexical work happening in the focus on the pineapple note. Pineapples might typically recall a tropical setting, or vacation, or Spongebob Squarepants, all of which sort of cluster together around the idea of a beach or the ocean—a place where one might

be laid-back. Since as Kiesling (2019) identifies, one of the characteristics of the "bro" social type is their lack of worry due to their dominant social place, the pineapple note could be a way in which this laid-back aspect of the persona is indexed. On the other hand, there are common medical "tips" which circulate in discourse which state that eating pineapple will make one's semen taste better (Miller, 2020). Whether or not this is true—the link that many might infer could mean that the focus on the pineapple note is due to its connection with sexuality, and in particular male sexuality.

In addition to the potential olfactory features bundled with lexical items in fragbro performance, there also seems to be some visual features connected with fragbros. This small selection of Youtube fragbro influencer thumbnail reposts from r/eaudejerks also demonstrates some of the same lexical patterns as the reddit posts—discussion of the "strength" of fragrances (described as nuclear—indexing physical and military power), making fragrances "last longer" and mentions of "compliments." In addition, these screenshots show some visual and other elements which are connected with this persona. Two of the influencers are wearing baseball caps, associated with the "bro" persona more broadly, as indicated by Kiesling (2019), one is smoking a cigar in the thumbnail, and another influencer describes using fragrances as an investment strategy (which is being mocked by the poster on r/eaudejerks, by equating the influencer to Warren Buffet). These images and ideas are suggestive of stereotypical masculinity (cigars, sports caps, finance), and which continue to relate the persona of the fragrance bro to stereotypically masculine images, and thus to the persona of the "bro" in general, emphasizing the stance of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity and domination that these fragbros are trying to take.

Figure 4.12 Post from r/eaudejerks mocking fragbro youtubers discussing using fragrances as an investment strategy
(sweet_milk1)

Figure 4.13 Post from r/eaudejerks mocking a youtuber describing fragrances as "nuclear"
(Gap_Numerous)

Figure 4.14 Post in r/eaudejerks mocking a fragbro youtuber (The_Zed_Word)

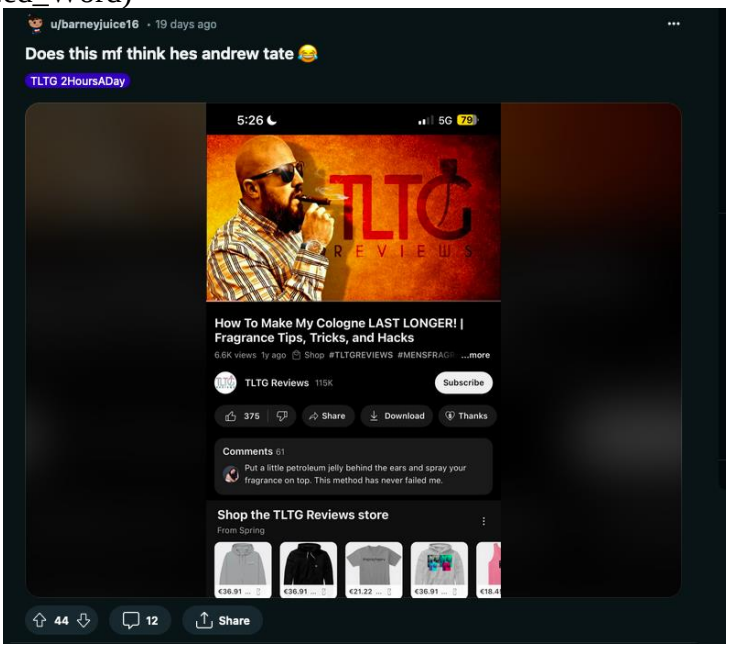

Figure 4.15 Post r/eaudejerks mocking a fragbro youtuber and comparing him to Andrew Tate
(barneyjuice16)

4.3 In the words of a fragbro himself

The visual and lexical items associated with "fragbros" can also be seen very clearly through a video made by popular fragrance influencer-turned meme Jeremy Fragrance. This is the final piece of data I will look at in order to begin a descriptive analysis of the indexed qualities and stances associated with fragrance bros.

In this video, he talks about his top five "panty dropper" fragrances—for a variety of contexts: the gym, the office, school (for teenagers, as he remarks), the club, and in "general." In the video, he is wearing his trademark all white suit with the first few buttons undone to reveal his large golden cross (his catholic religion is important to him and something he does often—and perhaps the indexed identity of social power that comes with Christianity in Western countries such as Germany where Jeremy lives is yet another way in which he is attempting to overcome the feminine associations with perfume). He also stands in front of his large wall of fragrances, and has low lighting with candles in order to seemingly create a "sexy" mood in line with the idea of

discussing panty droppers:

Figure 4.16 Screenshot of Jeremy Fragrance from his video “Top 5 Panty Dropper Fragrances”
(Fragrance, 2020)

The wall of fragrances seems to suggest the air of connoisseurship implied in the fragbro persona, and the suit continues to index stereotypical masculinity. In the discourse of the video, there are also a variety of evaluative indexicals which further demonstrate the characteristics of fragrance bros that I discussed earlier. The first quality implied in this video is the idea of “fragbros” being extremely adept connoisseurs of fragrance. This was hinted at in the discussion earlier of “Aventus bros,” with the meme featuring a guy talking about the superiority of the particular batch of the fragrance he is wearing. Jeremy Fragrance implies that a similar rarity of smell would make a man sexually appealing:

00:08: Panty dropper fragrance in the gym.

00:11: You want to be sexy in the gym, Montblanc Legend Spirit.

00:15: This smells just like Invictus Aqua 2016, which is discontinued.

00:21: So you're getting a fragrance that smells like a fragrance that is not available anymore, which is immensely sexy.

The key line here is the final one: the implication that smelling like something discontinued or exclusive is inherently sexy. This suggests that according to Jeremy, the ability to smell more "exclusive" or "rare" would be attractive—and "rarity" in this case might be linked both to higher cultural but also economic capital—having the taste to know when something is rare and having the financial means to attain it would index higher social class—this is similar to the obsession with particular batches of Aventus (also see earlier discussions of Bourdieu, 1984; and Silverstein, 2021). Similarly, in his discussion of the "panty dropper in the office," Jeremy suggests that wearing suits or being the CEO (i.e., having more financial power or indexing that through clothing) is sexy, and can be indexed through the use of a particular fragrance:

> 00:59 This is Acqua di Gio Profumo. It's very sexy, it smells like a CEO
> 1:03 (sniffs perfume)
> 1:04 it smells like a boss, the guy like he has everything under control
> 1:08 and it's very not for an all white type of an outfit it's more of a
> 1:14 (kisses cross pendant)
> 1:15 it's more of a suit and tie, gray suit, gray tie type of a vibe
> 1:23 very elegant very sexy in the office this thing

Once again, the link between suits and this particular persona is drawn, and Jeremy takes it even further as describing this fragrance as reminiscent of a "CEO." This suggestion by a "fragbro" to potential "fragbro" followers continues to suggest that there is a need to index a higher social class through fragrances, either because that is seen as sexually appealing, or because having more capital (of any kind) can be connected to power in general which is more "masculine," which reinforces the idea that there is a sort of psychosexual obsession with power (social and physical) displayed in these

discussions of perfume by "fragbros." Though the entire "Top 5 Panty Dropper Fragrances" video merits consideration and analysis, the final segment I will discuss is one in which Jeremy continues to reiterate on this idea of "power." The word "power" is also well known as one of Jeremy Fragrances "catchphrases," as he often says it numerous times in his videos, and includes it in his social media posts or captions. This video is no exception:

> 6:04 dominance manifests
> 6:07 this is something that Jordan Peterson says dominance manifests
> 6:12 so good and bad I will encourage you to have high energy to be powerful to be a follower of certain things to be a leader of other things
> 6:23 just be dominant and don't let yourself push–punch—pu—punch in the face by other people baby
> 6:31 that's my opinion
> 6:32 thank you God for guiding me how you want to guide me
> …
> 7:02 power forward strength power power power
> 7:07 I love you guys this is a fantastic journey
> 7:10 have a great day I love you bye guys

In addition to his signature repetition of the word "power" and "powerful" in this clip–you also see that he references Jordan Peterson, a right wing "academic" and influencer—citing his phrase "dominance manifests." The focus on dominance and power alongside the citation of Jordan Peterson, whose thoughts on gender equality are extremely negative, suggests that Jeremy wants his viewers or followers to engage in a heterosexual, male-dominant behavior. The fact that this bit of advice and sign-off is appended to a video about "panty droppers" is particularly horrific, as it suggests that the sexual "appeal" created by these fragrances is linked with behaving in a chauvinist way. And crucially, all of these ideas are imbued in the wearing of a particular fragrance.

It is also clear that the lexical items pulled from these texts are being used more generally in fragrance reviews. In the corpora discussed in the previous section, "compliment" is unevenly distributed in each corpus. In the women's fragrance corpus, "compliment" is used 232 times, so 194 times adjusted for size, compared to 635 times in the men's fragrance corpus. Similarly, "panty dropper" does show up much more often in the "men's" fragrance corpus. There are 51 total hits for "panty" in this corpus (there are 3 in the larger "women's" perfume corpus), all of which collocate with "drop" in some sense, here is a selection of some of these tokens in context:

mens_frag...	ard everyone in the fragrance world call this a "	panty	dropper , " I just had to smell it
mens_frag...	out to be . Aventus is often described as a	panty	dropper , but it 's more like a boxer
mens_frag...	to be asked what your wearing . It is a	panty	dropper , conversation starter and a good chat u
mens_frag...	answer has been found . This is crowd pleaser ,	panty	dropper , it projects a calm , self -
mens_frag...	could be better and due to its notoriety as a	panty	dropper , you might encounter teenage try - har
mens_frag...	of the best colognes of all time , the "	panty	dropper " , La Nuit De L'Homme is ...
mens_frag...	freaking good . Can imagine this is a real "	panty	dropper " . Both clear masterpieces . Thank you
mens_frag...	for me . Although I hate using the term "	panty	dropper " or " sex in a bottle "
mens_frag...	ıe wrong reason . Many people consider this a "	panty	dropper " which in my opinion brings the percep
mens_frag...	2 words ... Lady killer . 2 more words ..	Panty	dropper . I do n't care where I am
mens_frag...	oo * 02/26/2020 13:41 perfection . lady killer .	panty	dropper . mr steal your girl . does n't
mens_frag...	girl . Women love this scent . It 's a	panty	dropper . One of the best panty droppers out
mens_frag...	ıttention . There is obviously no such thing as a	panty	dropper . That shit is just stupid . It

Figure 4.17 Keyword in Context Results for "panty dropper" from the men's fragrance corpus

Another excerpt from a review says "no panty shall remain undropped," a rephrasing of "panty dropper" which seems to mock it. Additionally, a few of these tokens demonstrate the sort of metalinguistic commentary which suggests that the potentially negative or mockable entailments of the phrase are known to the speaker, such as the one reviewer who says "Although I hate using the term "panty dropper…" and although some reviewers do use the term seemingly seriously, many also put the phrase

in quotation marks, which once again seems to evaluate the term in a negative light (which, I will reiterate, is probably a good thing, given the aggressive heterosexuality implied in the term).

4.4 Indexicals and their interactional work

In order to begin to attempt to synthesize the meaningful outcomes of the discourse discussed here, I have used the framework from Wortham and Reyes (2020), which was described earlier, to map out the effect of the indexicals discussed:

Table 4.2 Construing Indexicals

Mapping narrated events	Reddit posters and Youtube influencers are either talking about themselves and their own fragrance collections, describing their experience with fragrances and how women/others react to their fragrances Or reddit posters are referring to an amorphous group of posters concerned with compliments–referred to as "fragbros" or "influencers"
Selecting indexicals	Particular lexical items: beast mode, projection, panty dropper, compliments/compliment getter Olfactory: Creed Aventus, pineapple notes Visual: Cigars, suits, baseball caps
Construing indexicals	"Bro" indexes the social type of hegemonic masculinity "Panty dropper" indicates a level of stereotypical heterosexual prowess Projection, beast mode (physical strength, taking up space) Dominance, power (physical and social power) "CEO," suits, cigars (wealth, social power) Baseball caps indexes the "bro" social type, laid-backness, sports (physical power) Aventus (military power, success)

Table 4.2 Construing Indexicals, continued

	Pineapple notes (laid-backness, semen) Quotation marks are used as evaluative indexicals to indicate that the phrase “panty dropper” or “beast mode” are not being used seriously In one of the r/Colognes posts, “boyz” co-occurring with panty dropper indicates a level of insincerity “I know I’m going to get downvoted into oblivion for this…” before asking about “panty droppers” indicate that the speaker knows the negative evaluation of the phrase
Configuring indexicals	Using indexicals to project hegemonic masculinity and physical/social power, perhaps to overcome the feminine associations with perfume The negative commentary around “compliments” and “panty droppers” Mocking the desire for sexual/financial success through perfume
Interpreting social action in narrating events	Fragrance influencers and posters attempt to demonstrate their sexual prowess and specialized knowledge and taste (habitus) through invoking the persona of the “fragbro” Posters on r/Perfume and r/eaudejerks mock the excessive masculinity demonstrated by “fragbro” influencers and posters—negative evaluation and disalignment

In addition to this chart, I created a visual to summarize the indexical fields associated with the visual and lexical signs which I have discussed in this section, and the potential overlap in the fields which create the associations of the enregistered persona of the “fragbro:”

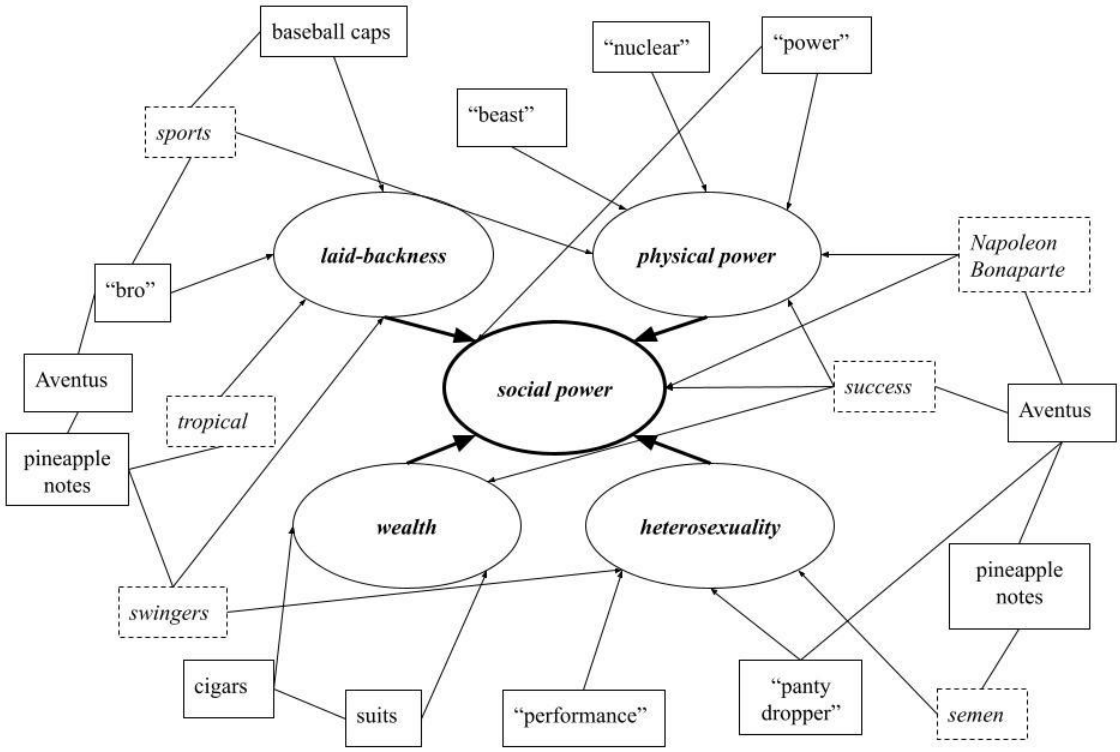

Figure 4.18 Web synthesizing the connection between the signs and indexes identified among fragbros

This web demonstrates the overlapping indexical fields of all of these signs which ultimately all point back to the underlying indexed quality. To do so, I have attempted to show the relationships between the various signs, the intermediary ideas or objects they call to mind, the qualities indexed by the signs and the intermediaries, and the overlap in all of these qualities in that they ultimately point back to the idea of social power. The boxed items are signs, either lexical, olfactory, or visual, the dashed boxes with italicized titles are "intermediaries," or ideas or images conjured by the signs which make the indexed qualities of the signs more legible, and the ovals are the indexed qualities that are a part of the indexical fields of all of these signs. Through making this graphic, I attempting to demonstrate the complex set of indexicals employed in the creation of this

recognized subtype of the more generally recognizable “bro” persona. Ultimately, I would argue that all of these indexicals pointing back to social power and hegemonic masculinity is once again perhaps an example of the ways that male consumers of fragrances are attempting to overcompensate for the feminine associations with perfume in general by projecting an exaggerated type of aggressively heterosexual hegemonic masculinity.

Though this analysis barely scratches the surface of understanding the gendered nature of online fragrance discourse, especially surrounding “fragbros,” the synthesis and contextualization of discourse which I have attempted here demonstrates the other images and concepts related to hegemonic masculinity called upon in the performance of the “fragbro” persona: aggressive heterosexuality and physical and financial power. In addition, the intense and unusual concern with batch quality seems to suggest a higher, more refined level of taste, indexing higher social status (Bourdieu, 1984; Silverstein, 2021). Since using perfume or fragrances is something which in western culture typically indexes femininity, it is possible that the “fragbro” persona has emerged as an acceptably masculine way of engaging with fragrances. However, it also seems that this persona is the source of mockery, evidence by the posts described from r/eaudejerks and the memification of Jeremy Fragrance as a whole. Despite that, this persona is an influential and notable one within the fragrance community at large, so further analysis is necessary to understand the construction of this persona, the signs associated with the persona, audience recognition of the persona (is this a recognizable social type only for those heavily embedded in online fragrance communities?), and the social action accomplished by either performing or mocking this persona. Future analyses should take into account

stance methodologies in order to begin to unpack and describe this further. Additionally, future analyses should consider the classist, racist, and potentially homophobic implications or associations with this persona—which could potentially further complicate the "memed" recontextualizations and sharing of instances of the "fragbro" persona in action, such as ironically sharing or watching Jeremy Fragrance videos.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

5.1 Conclusions and future directions

Though this treatment of the indexicality of particular fragrant features and certain language use in the discussion of fragrances online and the enregisterment of "fragbros" begins to scratch the surface of understanding the social actions which occur during these online discussions and influencer videos, much more work is needed to get a clearer, more focused picture of how these male fragrance influencers present themselves online and how their personae are interpreted and understood. Hopefully, this analysis has demonstrated the richness of these texts and the potential for future research into online persona centered around the posting of fragrances using linguistics methodologies. In addition, this analysis paired with the discussion of the corpus analysis which I provided earlier hopefully demonstrates the interesting gendered patterns in perfume usage and perfume discussion, further investigation of which is necessary to fully unpack the gendered dynamics at work in online discussions of fragrances. In general, my analysis thus far demonstrates that there seems to be a trend among "fragbros" and users of male-marketed fragrances of performing an aggressive type of hegemonic masculinity in their discussion of fragrances, which I would argue is a tool for them to distance themselves from the feminine associations with perfume and cosmetics more generally.

This reaffirmation of normative gender roles and ideas in this space is fascinating, because in many ways, the perfume industry seems to be moving towards preferring "genderless" fragrances, especially with the boom in interest in niche, independent, and "weird" fragrances (June, 2022), and many perfumers are experimenting more consciously with gender in their artistic process (Wilson-Brown, 2021). However, as I mentioned earlier, it seems to me that the gendered aspect of perfume consumption may be more difficult to shake—which is supported by my analysis of corpus data and "fragbro" posting. The data which demonstrate posters who mock "fragbros" but yet seem to engage in some of the underlying assumptions made by fragbros (perfume will make men more sexually appealing to women) especially seems to suggest this. Impressionistically, I would suggest that since perfume is such a deeply embodied and sensorial experience, individuals may use their initial instinctual reactions to the smells to justify engaging in the heavily gendered marketing practices—maybe women just *like* smelling like vanilla and flowers and do genuinely find it sexy when men smell like leather and spices. And it seems to be that sexuality and olfactory sensory experiences are deeply linked in some ways (Wilson-Brown, 2021), but the question remains whether ideological assumptions about binary gender are mediating so-called "personal preferences" surrounding scent.

These regressive gender politics are also interesting considering the fact that popular perfume website Fragrantica (which admittedly, I use in my personal life, and which was used for this project) has often been criticized for their allowing of homophobic and transphobic comments made by users to stay on the site (Robinovitz, 2024). Given some of the other trends in the perfume industry, such as the fact that the

word “oriental” is still used as a classifier (Paradis, 2022), it begs the question of why behavior and language which would be considered unacceptable in many environments are allowed to flourish in this particular community. I am certain that the answer is complicated, but in any case, I believe that it warrants further investigation.

This deeply embodied aspect of fragrances, alongside the aspects of fragrances which are undoubtedly material objects, reinforces another argument I hope to have elaborated upon in this thesis: that the theoretical framework of materiality should be employed in the study of fragrances, because without it, one cannot have a theory which incorporates the material and linguistic aspects of a fragrance that are bundled together (either in perception or by the manufacturer) with the olfactory experience, and how both the deployment and perception of those features is all happening within the body, or within the “subject.” This complicated fact makes it difficult to analyze or understand how people use and perceive perfume without considering all of these factors at once—which is why materiality is a useful framework for understanding fragrance, and it is also why materiality is a useful framework for understanding language, as many others have argued (Cavanaugh and Shankar, 2021; Keane and Silverstein, 2021), since language is also used and perceived at the intersection of the visual/material and the auditory, so therefore relies upon both “the subject” and “the object.”

The qualic signification of speech also is analogous to the qualic signification of fragrances—and more investigation should be done into both of these areas, especially understanding the way that qualic representations through fragrance become socially embedded, such as my earlier discussion of the descriptor “warm” for women’s fragrances. Future research should also consider whether olfactory and sociophonetic

perception are influenced by one another. We know that visual information influences sociophonetic perception (Hay and Drager, 2010), so the possibility that olfactory information might also influence sociophonetic perception would illuminate the understanding of the social and interactional work done by both speech and smell.

These qualic representations of smell are also represented visually and linguistically—a fact which also necessitates further research and investigation. For example, the potential description of a *fraglossia,* as I mentioned earlier in line with Silverstein's (2003, 2021) work on *oinoglossia,* might illuminate the ways that linguistic descriptions of fragrances attempt to capture the ephemeral nature of perfume apprehension. Not only would this "bottom-up" analysis of how reviewers and connoisseurs describe fragrance be interesting—but further analysis of how manufacturers, perfumers, and marketers try to describe these ephemeral qualities of perfume might also be interesting. There is also another interesting "bottom-up" trend that has emerged among the fragrance community mostly on social media (Twitter and Tumblr especially, and which I myself often participate in), that of "fragrantica note-posting." The idea is that when discussing the perfume one is wearing or wants to purchase, etc., you also post the visual layout of the notes from the website Fragrantica. For example, here is the visual of one of my personal favorite perfumes (Paradisi by Jorum Studio):

Figure 5.1 Note description for Jorum Studio's Paradisi
(*Paradisi Jorum Studio perfume*)

As Audrey Robinovitz argues in her "Post-Fragrantica Manifesto" (2024), the recent trend in posting Fragrantica notes has interweaved the visual and material with the olfactory in new and interesting ways, especially given that the images selected to represent fragrances on Fragrantica are not value-neutral, and that the emphasis on the visual rather than strictly olfactory has changed the perfume industry. She mentions the brand Toskovat', who has found success through users sharing the provocative and unusual olfactory pyramids used for their perfumes. For example, here are the "notes" for Anarchist A- and Age of Innocence by Toskovat (respectively):

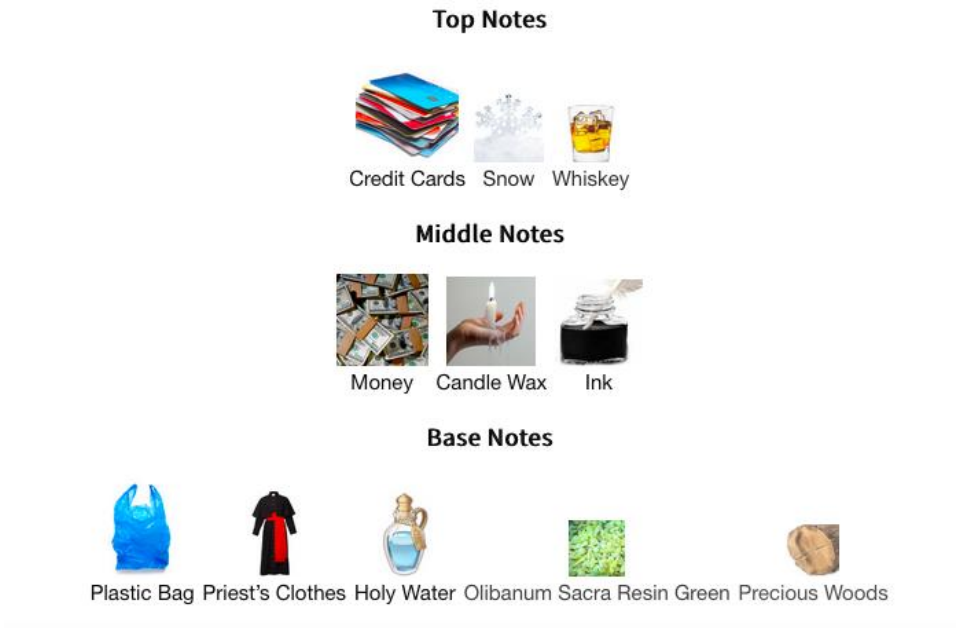

Figure 5.2 Note description for Anarchist A- by Toskovat'
(*Anarchist A- Toskovat'*)

Figure 5.3 Note description for Age of Innocence by Toskovat'
(*Age of Innocence Toskovat'*)

These strange and unusual "notes" have been a large part of why the brand has found so much success—once again suggesting the inextricable links between the visual, material, and olfactory—especially when it comes to commodities such as perfume.

One significant consideration to make with all of the analysis in this project is that it does not attend enough to the fact that fragrances are, for the most part, commodities. They, like other commodities such as fashion, can be used for self-expression and may in many cases be considered an aesthetic object, but at the end of the day, many manufacturers and users of perfume consider fragrances as objects for sale and purchase. Additionally, there is a significant amount of labor which goes into making perfume—from the harvesting and preparation of the materials that go into the perfume, to the experimentation and art which goes into creating the blends. This labor often goes underdiscussed, but these material aspects of the creation of perfume are indeed semiotically significant to the perfume itself. Perfumes which might play on racist and colonialist stereotypes also might use ingredients which are harvested by workers in colonial or neocolonial settings (take, for example, Shalimar by Guerlain, one of the first "oriental" fragrances, which uses, among other ingredients harvested outside of the French origin of Guerlain, civet essence, which comes from an animal only found in Africa and Asia). The nose which creates a perfume might also imbue the object with a particular significance—famous noses such as Jean Claude-Ellena having worked on a perfume would grant it more "value." This emphasizes the importance of considering what Cavanaugh and Shankar (2021) call "commodity registers—" or the consideration of the capitalist value formation which emerges from the semiotic bundling of the linguistic and material. Fragrance seems to be an exemplary case of the "commodity

register," as I have argued, the linguistic, visual, material, and olfactory elements all come together and influence the way that fragrances are used and perceived by individuals to perform their identity. These aspects of the material conditions which shape perfume require more investigation and attention, and I hope to conduct future research to this effect.

APPENDIX

Top 200 most frequent lemmas in the women's fragrance review corpus

Headword	Rank	Freq	Headword	Rank	Freq
.	1	106176	find	101	3122
I	2	101084	something	102	3119
,	3	87062	even	103	3070
be	4	82924	up	104	3069
it	5	70323	only	105	2995
the	6	65805	also	106	2879
and	7	56302	's	107	2836
a	8	53415	Shalimar	108	2812
to	9	36083	give	109	2763
*	10	34625	floral	110	2718
this	11	34161	way	111	2716
of	12	31288	people	112	2714
not	13	29250	beautiful	113	2706
but	14	21370	long	114	2705
in	15	20954	then	115	2674
my	16	20802	down	116	2641
that	17	20562	how	117	2638
smell	18	19250	hour	118	2607
for	19	18985	jasmine	119	2593
have	20	17551	bit	120	2508
on	21	16905	warm	121	2483
like	22	16646	year	122	2428
do	23	15081	use	123	2412
!	24	14518	de	124	2364
with	25	13347	come	125	2362
perfume	26	11997	than	126	2353
so	27	11691	'	127	2350
scent	28	11682	definitely	128	2314
you	29	11323	many	129	2291
-	30	10587	your	130	2265
fragrance	31	9951	Alien	131	2254
love	32	9699	who	132	2233
as	33	9690	woman	133	2220
very	34	8837	see	134	2172
wear	35	8777	little	135	2149
one	36	8757	most	136	2128
get	37	8677	/	137	2119
"	38	8511	into	137	2119
can	39	8278	've	139	2082

just	40	7768	review	140	2068
all	41	7167	sexy	141	2063
at	42	6812	never	142	2043
<	43	6792	dry	143	2041
more	44	6314	sample	144	2034
)	45	6252	same	145	1960
or	46	6238	lavender	146	1936
note	47	6205	Guerlain	147	1929
vanilla	48	6161	old	148	1900
(	49	6108	any	149	1896
think	50	5833	..	150	1794
bottle	51	5822	Eau	151	1779
if	52	5776	work	152	1755
would	53	5577	nice	153	1750
when	54	5456	great	154	1717
sweet	55	5365	maybe	155	1710
time	56	5337	though	156	1705
from	57	5169	longevity	157	1701
will	58	5057	quite	158	1699
really	59	4980	almost	159	1682
an	60	4925	nose	160	1679
...	61	4871	her	161	1670
try	62	4758	feminine	162	1648
>	63	4723	off	162	1648
what	64	4694	lot	164	1642
too	65	4525	version	165	1612
well	66	4524	different	166	1602
first	67	4500	why	167	1599
make	68	4441	before	168	1582
skin	69	4440	remind	169	1558
go	70	4431	over	170	1554
about	71	4376	thing	170	1554
good	72	4317	take	172	1544
they	73	4304	while	173	1527
there	74	4284	few	174	1515
say	75	4254	sillage	175	1494
by	76	4049	powdery	176	1492
spray	77	4042	always	177	1476
buy	78	4001	ever	178	1466
because	79	3984	here	179	1459
much	80	3946	new	180	1452
out	81	3917	myself	181	1448
feel	82	3894	original	182	1446
?	83	3890	Parfum	183	1434

she	84	3838	around	184	1411
day	85	3790	sure	185	1405
its	86	3653	&	186	1402
after	87	3617	soft	187	1389
other	88	3614	seem	188	1374
’	89	3601	night	189	1369
which	90	3496	musk	190	1359
last	91	3485	back	191	1347
some	92	3413	yet	192	1341
:	93	3373	every	193	1335
still	94	3327	fresh	194	1324
know	95	3260	again	195	1321
want	96	3194	own	196	1318
strong	97	3182	become	197	1307
now	98	3176	nothing	198	1302
no	99	3168	Poison	199	1300
could	100	3131	unique	200	1292

Top 200 most frequent lemmas in the men’s fragrance review corpus

Headword	Rank	Freq	Headword	Rank	Freq
.	1	89564	people	101	2682
be	2	68041	only	102	2673
,	3	65272	even	103	2598
I	4	61612	’	104	2539
the	5	61185	your	105	2502
it	6	49377	now	106	2405
and	7	43808	sweet	107	2364
a	8	43355	/	108	2363
*	9	32628	man	109	2339
this	10	28054	projection	110	2263
to	11	27955	know	111	2223
of	12	26756	want	112	2221
not	13	22306	give	113	2174
in	14	17195	could	114	2173
for	15	17058	use	115	2172
that	16	16785	price	116	2162
but	17	16398	long	117	2159
have	18	14841	also	118	2148
smell	19	14559	then	119	2144
my	20	14129	strong	120	2119
fragrance	21	13854	feel	121	2090
you	22	13441	's	122	2072
on	23	12387	Homme	123	2053

do	24	11738	same	124	2050
with	25	11635	leather	125	2039
like	26	10912	most	126	2037
scent	27	10751	compliment	127	2029
-	28	9229	dry	128	2028
!	29	9000	find	129	1996
get	30	8601	year	130	1977
as	31	8344	way	131	1941
one	32	8164	any	132	1937
so	33	7108	something	133	1905
good	34	6973	Dior	134	1882
"	35	6706	bit	135	1875
<	36	6699	come	136	1852
very	37	6693	how	137	1824
can	38	6532	original	138	1809
more	39	6439	nice	139	1789
just	40	6353	Parfum	140	1788
wear	41	6252	opening	141	1785
if	42	5981	new	142	1783
all	43	5962	..	143	1762
)	44	5665	who	144	1757
at	45	5441	fresh	145	1742
well	46	5413	definitely	146	1708
or	47	5404	2	147	1664
(	48	5385	into	148	1642
from	49	5362	've	149	1630
bottle	50	5352	many	149	1630
:	51	5307	review	151	1627
will	52	5176	see	152	1611
love	53	4761	version	153	1592
>	54	4642	masculine	154	1580
buy	55	4545	vanilla	155	1575
would	56	4431	quality	156	1561
hour	57	4352	over	157	1556
they	58	4333	work	158	1549
note	59	4245	'	159	1548
say	60	4159	off	160	1540
an	61	4158	lot	161	1490
time	62	4103	old	161	1490
about	63	4016	night	163	1478
go	64	4010	thing	164	1451
really	65	3958	3	165	1449
what	66	3957	spicy	166	1443
its	67	3799	little	167	1435

out	68	3767	around	168	1433
think	69	3738	amazing	169	1428
...	70	3671	different	170	1423
spray	71	3604	never	171	1416
when	72	3518	sillage	172	1404
last	73	3510	here	173	1396
batch	74	3507	sample	174	1374
there	75	3471	nose	175	1372
Aventus	76	3405	he	176	1344
?	77	3399	own	176	1344
by	78	3397	before	178	1337
after	79	3367	few	179	1312
make	80	3364	Eau	180	1303
first	81	3228	hype	181	1284
much	82	3198	take	182	1277
skin	83	3177	Sauvage	183	1253
longevity	84	3165	every	184	1252
great	85	3157	though	185	1235
some	86	3128	quite	186	1224
day	87	3037	maybe	187	1212
still	88	3033	10	188	1209
other	89	3029	start	189	1194
than	90	2949	ever	190	1187
which	91	2889	while	190	1187
perfume	92	2854	Creed	192	1185
try	93	2848	sure	193	1174
de	94	2771	those	194	1172
no	95	2762	5	195	1166
up	96	2749	warm	196	1165
down	97	2741	almost	197	1152
because	98	2709	worth	198	1149
too	99	2705	10/10	199	1148
performance	100	2694	bad	199	1148

REFERENCES

80sBabyGirl (2024, March) *Incense and tonka bean can be polarizing. I personally love incense but don't like tonka. And tonka is a trendy…* [Comment on the online forum post *Is this a sleeper? Why "not crowd pleasing?"*]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Perfumes/comments/1bir0qc/comment/kvmazok/

Age of Innoncence Toskovat' (n.d.) Fragrantica. Retrieved April 26th, 2024 from https://www.fragrantica.com/perfume/Toskovat/Age-of-Innocence-75417.html.

Anarchist A- Toskovat' (n.d.) Fragrantica. Retrieved April 26th, 2024 from https://www.fragrantica.com/perfume/Toskovat/Anarchist-A-78326.html

Anthony, L. (2023). AntConc (Version 4.2.4) [Computer Software]. Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University. Available from https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software

Anthony, L. (2022). TagAnt (Version 2.0.5) [Computer Software]. Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University. Available from https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software

audrey [@foldyrhands]. (2023, July 18). *my statement on the vanilla perfume incident. my most sincere apologies to anyone my actions have hurt.*[Tweet]. X. https://twitter.com/foldyrhands/status/1681330456938070016

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.

Baker, P. (2006). *Using corpora in discourse analysis*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

barneyjuice16 (2024, February) *Does the mf think hes andrew tate* 😂 [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/eaudejerks/comments/1b0lpcd/does_this_mf_think_hes_andrew_tate/

Barrett, R. (2017). *From drag queens to leathermen: Language, gender, and gay male subcultures*. Oxford University Press.

bigbilly1234567899 (2023, April). *Top ten boxer droppers coming soon* [Comment on the online forum post *No such thing as a fragrance being a "panty dropper" or "seductive"*]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/1472bib/comment/jntoxeb/

Bourdieu, P. (1986). "The Forms of Capital." In Richardson, J., H*andbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Greenwood, pp. 241–58

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction*. Translated by Richard Nice.

Burkette, A. (2018). *Language and Classification: Meaning-making in the Classification and Categorization of Ceramics*. Routledge.

Burkette, A. P. (2015). Language and material culture. *Language and Material Culture*, 1-209.

Classen, C., Howes, D., & Synnott, A. (2002). *Aroma: The cultural history of smell*. Routledge.

Deleted user. (2022) *Aventus Bros* [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/eaudejerks/comments/u1s88g/aventus_bros/

Delina Parfums de Marly perfume (n.d.) Fragrantica. Retrieved April 26, 2024, from https://www.fragrantica.com/perfume/Parfums-de-Marly/Delina-43871.html.

Eckert, P. (2008). Variation and the indexical field 1. *Journal of sociolinguistics*, *12*(4), 453-476.

Fat Electrician. (n.d.). US Etat Libre d'Orange. Retrieved April 26, 2024, from https://etatlibredorange.us/products/fat-electrician-en?_pos=1&_sid=37379187b&_ss=r.

Floyd, S., Roque, L. S., & Majid, A. (2018). Smell is coded in grammar and frequent in discourse: Cha'palaa olfactory language in cross-linguistic perspective. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *28*(2), 175-196.

Fragrance, J. [Jeremy Fragrance]. (2020, December 17). *Top 5 Panty Dropper Fragrances* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9zXqFYgdJs.

Gap_Numerous (2024, February) *Explode with compliments* 🤣 [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/eaudejerks/comments/1b692zr/explode_with_compliments/

Hay, J., & Drager, K. (2010). Stuffed toys and speech perception. *Linguistics*, *48*(4), 865-892.

Iver, R. [@ronnui_]. (2020, August 15). *Women get to smell like real things (vanilla, lavender) but men have to smell like concepts. What the fuck is "cool sport rush"*[Tweet]. X. https://twitter.com/ronnui_/status/1294677498064756737.

Jaffe, A. (Ed.). (2009). *Stance: sociolinguistic perspectives*. Oxford University Press.

Johnadamslop (2024, April 7). *listen im looking for a real panty dropper under 100* [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/1byai25/listen_im_looking_for_a_real_panty_dropper_under/

Johnstone, B. (2016). Enregisterment: How linguistic items become linked with ways of speaking. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *10*(11), 632-643.

June, Sophia. (2022, December 7). *How Fragrance Posting and Niche Perfume Houses Evolved the Scent Industry.* Nylon. https://www.nylon.com/life/perfume-fragrantica-scent-marissa-zappas-hilde-soliani-culture

Keane, W., Silverstein, M., Cavanaugh, J. R., & Shankar, S. (2017). Curated conversation:"Materiality: it's the stuff!". *Language and Materiality: Ethnographic and Theoretical Explorations*.

Keane, W. (2003). Semiotics and the social analysis of material things. *Language & communication*, *23*(3-4), 409-425.

Kiesling, S. F. (2009). Style as stance. *Stance: sociolinguistic perspectives*, 171-194.

Kiesling, S.F. (2019). The "gay voice" and "brospeak": toward a systematic model of stance. In K. Hall and R. Barrett (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality*.

Krause, R. (2022, November 8). *Our Love-Hate Relationship with Vanilla, Explained*. Allure. https://www.allure.com/story/love-hate-relationship-vanilla-perfume#:~:text=%22But%20as%20a%20function%2C%20because,we%20know%20to%20be%20good

Lapingaandante (2023, December) *I know I'm going to get downvoted into oblivion, but here are some certified panty droppers for 2024. Enjoy* . [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/189hbvq/i_know_im_going_to_get_downvoted_into_oblivion/

Layton Parfums de Marly perfume (n.d.) Fragrantica. Retrieved April 26, 2024, from https://www.fragrantica.com/perfume/Parfums-de-Marly/Layton-39314.html.

lilmisse85 (2022) *I'm a woman and have never worn either of these so my opinion is purely from sniffing samples. I prefer…* [Comment on the online forum post *Prada Luna Rosa Ocean vs Bleu de Chanel edt*]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Perfumes/comments/w4h1wm/prada_luna_rosa_ocean_vs_bleu_de_chanel_edt/

LimpZookeepergame123. (2023, November). *It's the stupid you tube and tik tok influencers. If you watch any of their reviews they consistently repeat "this is… (2023, December). But will those compliment getters also be "beast mode"?* [Comment on the online forum post *STOP FUCKING ASKING WHAT GETS COMPLIMENTS]*. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/17wkzkr/stop_fucking_asking_what_gets_compliments/

Lindqvist, A. (2012). Perfume preferences and how they are related to commercial gender classifications of fragrances. *Chemosensory perception*, *5*, 197-204.

Lister, Kate (Host). (2023, September 07). "Cleopatra to Jane Austen: Perfumes of Powerful Women" (No. 145) [Audio Podcast Episode] In *Betwixt The Sheets: The History of Sex, Scandal & Society*. History Hit.

Locojossa. (2023, November). *Their projection will be NUCLEAR!!* [Comment on the online forum post *STOP FUCKING ASKING WHAT GETS COMPLIMENTS*]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/17wkzkr/stop_fucking_asking_what_gets_compliments/

Majid, A. (2021). Human olfaction at the intersection of language, culture, and biology. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, *25*(2), 111-123.

Mendoza-Denton, N. (2011). The semiotic hitchhiker's guide to creaky voice: Circulation and gendered hardcore in a Chicana/o gang persona. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *21*(2), 261-280.

Miller, D. (2005). "Materiality: An Introduction" In D. Miller, *Materiality* pp. (1-51). Duke University Press Books.

Miller, T. (2020, November 2). *The Best Things to Eat and Drink For Better Tasting Bodily Fluids*. Lifehacker. https://lifehacker.com/the-best-things-to-eat-and-drink-for-better-tasting-bod-1529977820

Morean, B. (2007). Marketing scents and the anthropology of smell. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, *15*(2), 153-168.

msbasalsalts (2024, January) *I feel like with a few years and some more disposable income, I'd be right there with you lol. Also…* [Comment on the online forum post *To the people who think their collection is too big:*]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Perfumes/comments/19besc9/comment/kiszw77/

myheadheavy. (2023, November). *i bought the 15 best compliment getting beast mode head turning panty dropper fragrances, but still nobody wanted to fuck me. any advice?* [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/eaudejerks/comments/17vutrb/i_bought_the_15_best_compliment_getting_beast/

OversprayEverything (2023, April). *No such thing as a fragrance being a "panty dropper" or "seductive"* [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/1472bib/comment/jntoxeb/

Paradis, C. (2022, July 28). *Perfumery disoriented, part 1: Ambery or Oriental? A family story.* Nez. https://mag.bynez.com/en/reports/perfumery-disoriented/perfumery-disoriented-part-1-ambery-or-oriental-a-family-story/.

Paradisi Jorum Studio perfume (n.d.) Fragrantica. Retrieved April 26th, 2024 from https://www.fragrantica.com/perfume/Jorum-Studio/Paradisi-73093.html

Pinney, C. (2005). “Things happen: or, from which moment does that object come?” In D. Miller, *Materiality* pp. (256-273). Duke University Press Books.

Robinovitz, Audrey. (2024, April 1). *Post-Fragrantica Manifesto: Perfume’s digital slouch toward flatness.* Dirt. https://dirt.fyi/article/2024/04/post-fragrantica-manifesto.

Schneider, S. R. (2011, February 7). *Creed Aventus–DE PERE EN FiLS DEPUIS 1760*. Gentlemen’s Gazette. https://www.gentlemansgazette.com/creed-aventus/

Sex & Jasmine (n.d.). Libertine Fragrance. Retrieved April 26, 2024, from https://www.libertinefragrance.com/products/sex-jasmine-jasmine-vanilla-ambergris?variant=45661855088962.

Silverstein, M. (2016). Semiotic Vinification and the Scaling of Taste. In E. S. Carr & M. Lempert (Eds.), *Scale: Discourse and Dimensions of Social Life* (1st ed., pp. 185–212). University of California Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9hvqvv.13

Silverstein, M. (2003). Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life. *Language & communication*, *23*(3-4), 193-229.

Silverstein, M. (1984, November). The ‘value’of objectual language. In *rd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Denver*.

Silverstein, M. (1976). Shifters, linguistic categories, and cultural description. *Meaning in anthropology*.

Shankar, S., & Cavanaugh, J. R. (2012). Language and materiality in global capitalism. *Annual review of anthropology*, *41*, 355-369.

Smoked Bloom (n.d.). Libertine Fragrance. Retrieved April 26, 2024, from https://www.libertinefragrance.com/collections/eau-de-parfum/products/smoked-bloom-apricot-osmanthus-vetiver?variant=45661861642562.

Stunning-Drive-4692. (2023, November). *But will those compliment getters also be “beast mode”*? [Comment on the online forum post *STOP FUCKING ASKING WHAT GETS COMPLIMENTS*]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/17wkzkr/stop_fucking_asking_what_gets_compliments/

Stunning-Drive-4692. (2023, November). *But will those compliment getters also be “beast mode”*? [Comment on the online forum post *STOP FUCKING ASKING WHAT GETS COMPLIMENTS*]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/17wkzkr/stop_fucking_asking_what_gets_compliments/

superdstar56 (2023, August) *Panty Droppers: Drop Yours in the Comments* [Online forum post]. Reddit.

https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/16jre3z/panty_droppers_drop_yours_in_the_comments/

sweet_milk1 (2024, February) Dilly Dally the new Wall Street sage [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/eaudejerks/comments/1bgc2sw/dilly_dally_the_new_wall_street_sage/

TheSeventhRome (2023, April). *STOP FUCKING ASKING WHAT GETS COMPLIMENTS* [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/17wkzkr/stop_fucking_asking_what_gets_compliments/

The_Zed_Word (2024, February) *Aww, did the big boy get some new niche toys?* [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/eaudejerks/comments/1b11h0n/aww_did_the_big_boy_get_some_new_niche_toys/

Wilson-Brown, Saskia. (Host). (2021, April 29). "It's a Man's World" (No. 8) [Audio Podcast Episode]. In *Perfume on the Radio.* Lookout FM.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. 1944. The relation of habitual thought and behavior to language. *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, 1(4): 197-215

Wooden-Scars5073. (2023, November). *And panty droppers??* [Comment on the online forum post *STOP FUCKING ASKING WHAT GETS COMPLIMENTS*]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Colognes/comments/17wkzkr/stop_fucking_asking_what_gets_compliments/

Wortham, S., & Reyes, A. (2020). *Discourse analysis beyond the speech event*. Routledge.

Zarzo, M. (2019). Understanding the perceptual spectrum of commercial perfumes as a basis for a standard sensory wheel of fragrances. *Cosmetics*, *7*(1), 3.

VITA

Kathryn Copeland is originally from Harriman, Tennessee. She earned a Bachelor's degree in English, with a concentration in Rhetoric and Writing and a minor in Linguistics at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She was awarded a combined Research/English Teaching Assistant Fulbright scholarship for Austria in 2021. As a graduate student at the University of Kentucky, she tutored in the Robert E. Hemenway Writing Center and taught as an instructor for the department of Linguistics and the department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies. Upon publication of this work, she will have completed a Master of Arts in Linguistic Theory and Typology from the University of Kentucky.