

## So really...does size matter?

by ZOE CORMIER  
SCIENCE EDITOR

As we stand on the threshold of a new era of scientific discovery, one where genetics and technology promise an end to disease, hunger and suffering, perhaps it is now possible for science to address one of our most pressing concerns: does size matter?

A quick search in a database of scientific journals will tell you that yes, it does, as evidenced by the substantial amounts of time, energy, and money researchers have spent answering this question. Despite Scottish comedian Billy Connolly's assertion that "One size fits all, m'dear, I haven't got a fucking telescope," scores of psychologists, surgeons, and evolutionary biologists have scrutinized the size of the male organ and tried to discern its importance.

Kinsey pioneered the systematic study of penis length, being the first to ask patients to report their penis size using paper strips. A 1991 study however found "considerable discrepancies" between the lengths of the strips that men handed in and how long their penis actually was (naturally meriting a "duh" response from any layman). Modern penis researchers have solved this problem by devising new high-tech ways to measure penis size, like "volumetric plethysmography" (essentially sticking your member in a tank of water and measuring the volume of liquid that spills out).

With new techniques in hand, scientists have carried out an abundance of rigorous, serious studies on the nuances of the penis. Research has found, for example, that shoe length has nothing to do with penis size. Gay men will no doubt be pleased to hear that they have larger penises on average, according to some research. One study even looked at correlations between penis size and political

preferences.

Numerous studies have asserted that ethnicity, in accordance with certain popular beliefs, is correlated with penis size. Researchers claim that people of African descent have, on average, the largest penises, Caucasians come next, and Asians have the smallest ones.

One researcher, University of Western Ontario's Dr. J. Philippe Rushton, who has been termed a racist by many, has taken this trend a step further. He says having a small penis might not be so bad, because his research says that intelligence is inversely correlated with penis size; in other words, the smarter you are, the smaller your penis (which, of course, merits suspicion as to his intellectual motives). Rushton says this relates to the fact that Asians are statistically "more intelligent" than whites, and blacks "less intelligent" than whites—more penis, less brain. Rushton also asserts that blacks are statistically more promiscuous, have higher crime rates, and do not spend as much time caring for their children.

When asked by *The Varsity* in a phone interview if he could further comment on the significance of penis size, Rushton replied, in his faded English accent: "I think you're focusing on this trait too much. You see there are 60 different traits that [consistently rank Asians, whites, and blacks sequentially]...these factors are based in biology, and we have to begin to accept that there are different varieties, or subspecies, of humans." It is curious to note that missing from Rushton's list are verbal dexterity, a sense of rhythm, musical ability, and athletic prowess (sound familiar?).

While Rushton's work is generally considered illegitimate and offensive, most research that looks at penis size is usually accepted, even if it may denigrate some ethnic groups. Studies suggest that, despite the as-

sertion of Kyle's parents on the series *South Park* that circumcision makes the penis "look a little bigger, circumcised penises actually tend to be a bit smaller. In fact, it is not unknown for "over-exuberant" circumcisions, as one MD calls them, to cause a condition known as "trapped penis," where a normal-sized phallus appears small because it has been trapped in the fat of the groin and must be surgically liberated.

Medical science must come to the rescue for thousands of unfortunate baby boys born with physical abnormalities that fall under the umbrella term "inconspicuous penis." This includes "concealed penis," (also known as "buried penis" or "hidden penis"), "webbed penis," "micropenis," and no doubt most unfortunate, "absent" penis, in which the penis does not form at all but the testicles do (this happens to about one in 20 million boys).

As methods for correcting debilitating birth defects have advanced, so have methods for enlarging the penises of adult men. Between 1990 and 1997, 10,000 American adult men underwent surgical penis enlargement, or "phalloplasty." Surgeons will typically increase the girth or length of a penis with the patient's own tissue, much like using a woman's own fat to enlarge her breasts. Veins and fat are normally used, but one study from Yugoslavia reports, in a pseudo-Biblical spirit, how to use a piece of a man's own rib to enlarge his penis (giving new meaning to the term, "ribbed for her pleasure").

But do most men seeking surgery really need it? Studies show again and again that a man with a normal-sized penis will commonly underestimate his size. This psychological condition even has a name: penile dysmorphism. One study of Korean military men found that fully 70 per cent of them believed their penises were "small," while only five per cent thought theirs was "normal"



VARSIY ARCHIVES

in size. Moreover, those men who underestimated the size of their penis were found to have higher rates of hypochondria, depression, phobias, obsessions, compulsions, and anxiety. These results, however may have more to say about the effects of being in the Korean military than about penis size.

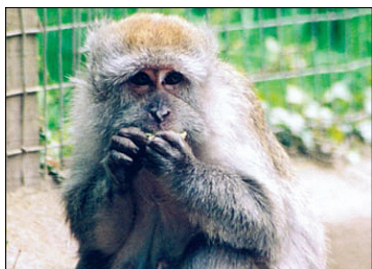
So science has established that men think size matters. They will underestimate how large theirs is, exaggerate when reporting lengths for scientific studies, and will readily undergo experimental surgery for lengthening (which, on a number of occasions, has resulted in unforeseen and costly law suits).

But what do women think? Surely the real value of penis length should be measured by what those who don't have one think?

Out of some 450-odd studies found in scientific databases, *The Varsity* was able to find only one study that looked at the feminine perspective. It found that 55 per cent of women surveyed said the length of the penis was not important, and 22 per cent of all women said length was "totally unimportant"; more than three-quarters of all women don't think length matters. Twenty per cent said it is important, and only one per cent said it is "very important." In fact, more women, 32 per cent, said that girth was important, although they were still in the minority.

So, if you ask women, it is usually the motion, not the meat. In fact, studies show that many women may in fact find their partner's penis too big—pain during sex is one of the most commonly reported problems.

### SCIENCE BRIEF >>



#### Monkeys give up food for sexy photos

A recent study has found that male macaques will readily give up food in order to look at photos of a female monkey's bottom. Males gave up portions of juice in exchange for a half-second glimpse of a female macaque's genitals and anus. "Virtually all monkeys will give up juice to see female hindquarters," says the leader of the study, Robert Deaner. "They really value the images." The males would also give up juice in order to look at faces of the males in their troop, presumably in order to gather social information about their companions and rivals. But they would only give up very small portions of juice compared to what they were willing to sacrifice for a half-second glimpse of a female's behind.

—ZOE CORMIER  
Source: *Nature*

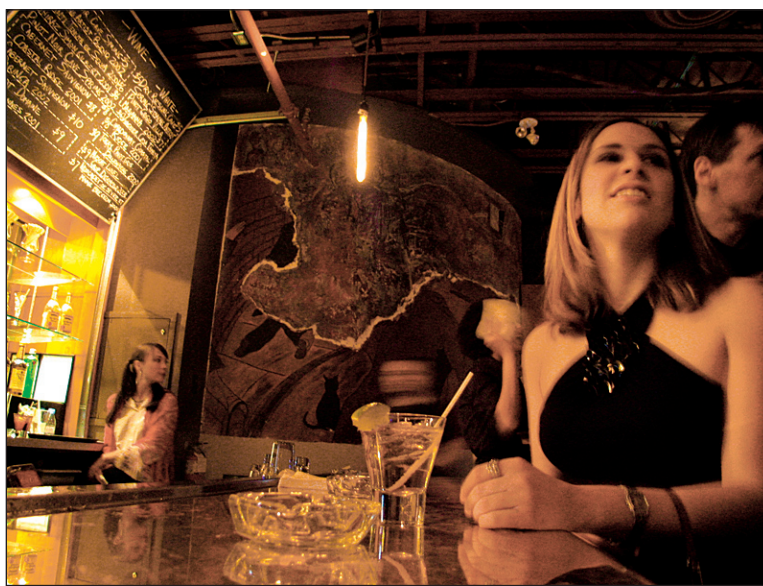
## Breasts, beauty, bling: an inside look at the dating game

by MILENA GUBERINIC

As is customary at such gatherings, I met a host of colorful characters at a party last weekend. The first, a girl named Mary, walked up to me and said, "I don't need to get a job. I'm going to marry a rich guy." Needless to say, Mary was quite drunk. After shaking-off Mary, I met a guy named Bill, who, unfortunately, didn't make for better conversation. He wouldn't stop complaining about his 53-year-old father, who divorced his wife and married his 25-year-old secretary. "She could be my sister," he whined into his beer.

We have all heard stories like these and wondered "Why?" The answer to the age-old question, "What features attract us to the opposite sex?" has just begun to be elucidated by evolutionary and social psychologists.

What do women want? A guy with a nice car, a nice salary, a nice house, a nice set of abs? Yes. The bottom line is, women want resources. They want both themselves and their offspring to be



KARA DILLON

provided for. In our distant past, men who were better at building shelters, hunting for food, and warding off rivals were more desirable to women who needed such resources.

Women who preferred such abilities in men naturally out-survived and out-reproduced those women who did not, and left this desire for resources embedded in their descendants' psyches. This desire is

now evident in women's tendency to prefer men with high incomes and is demonstrated in men's competition for fame and high-paying, high-ranking jobs.

So what do men want? Beauty. It's not unnatural that women the world over spend billions of dollars each year on beautifying themselves. They are merely responding to a selective pressure imposed on them by males.

What, then, is beautiful? Men are attracted to features in women that signal health and fertility. These include a low waist-to-hip ratio and youthful facial features. As illness, malnutrition, and childbearing alter a woman's body, men are justified in using a woman's appearance as an indicator of her health. Naturally, in our evolutionary past, men who preferred signs of fertility in women out-reproduced those who did not; today's men are left with similar desires.

Gold-diggers and divorcees aside, the question of what attracts us is a serious one. Attaining ideals that will attract the opposite sex, or devising search strategies for finding ideal traits in a potential partner determine much of human behaviour. Women spend billions of dollars each year on cosmetics, perfume, and surgery, and men spend countless hours lifting weights, buying fancy cars and fancier suits, all with the intent of attracting the opposite sex. Not only does attraction drive much of human behaviour, it also drives the economy.