Sexual attraction and menstrual cycles

Dear Alice,

First time asker! I've noticed an odd thing about myself over the years and it's remarkably consistent. I generally identify as bisexual since I'm about equally attracted to men and women. However, at two points in my menstrual cycle I'm on one extreme or the other. Example: mid-cycle, during ovulation, I'm very attracted to men. I can't get enough of my boyfriend, and vaginal intercourse feels amazing. Closer to my period, my preferences swing in the opposite direction, and while I still love my boyfriend very much and am attracted to him, I find myself more aroused by women and more attracted to women. Is this just a quirk of my own libido, or is this a known phenomenon?

Curious

Answer

Dear Curious,

Welcome first-time asker! Your astute observations about the relationship between your menstrual cycle and the fluctuations in your attractions to different genders are quite fascinating and mostly uncharted territory in the land of research. So it's hard to say if this is a pattern experienced by others or something unique to your sexuality and physiology.

In terms of published data related to your question, there appear to be some links between the time of ovulation and heightened sexual attraction and activity. Surveyed female participants in one study, both with and without male partners, described more sexual desire near ovulation. Other studies suggest that some people may change their appearance or behavior (even unconsciously!) around ovulation to appear more sexually attractive. These changes include changing voice pitch, body scent, and dressing more provocatively. Some people have also indicated increased feelings of attraction and sexual fantasies during ovulation. On the flip side, perhaps you've noticed that your boyfriend is more aroused by you during ovulation? there's evidence to suggest that men had increased levels of testosterone in response to smelling a shirt worn by someone who was ovulating. Many researchers theorize that elevated sexual desire near ovulation has a biological or species survival function, increasing the likelihood that someone assigned female at birth will become pregnant and have offspring.

However, you may find that it's best to take these findings with a grain of salt. While elements of the published theories may apply to you, sexuality and sex are more nuanced than just
hormones and reproduction. There may be aspects of the existing research that are relevant to your body and sexual experience, but your individual sexual identity and experience are just that — individual. It’s also worth noting that the cited studies were conducted on heterosexual participants, so it may not speak to your increased attraction to women near your period versus increased attraction towards men near ovulation.

You’ve noticed some interesting patterns about your own sexual attractions and preferences. These may continue to be consistent over your lifetime, or they may shift and evolve with time, new people, and new experiences. Regardless of the research, Curious, it’s critical that you stay true to your own desires and continue to listen to your body.

Hope this helps!

Alice!

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