Results: Responses from each woman’s highest and lowest progesterone test sessions were compared using a repeated measures ANOVA [within-subjects factors: progesterone level (high, low), sex of face (male, female), and expression (fear, disgust, happy)]. There was a significant interaction between expression and progesterone level (F=3.14, p=.048). Paired-samples t-tests showed a significant effect of progesterone level on perceptions of fearful faces (t=2.175, p=.034) and that the effect of progesterone level on perceptions of disgusted faces approached significance (t=1.895, p=.064). There was no significant effect of progesterone level on perceptions of happy faces (t=1.09, p=.278).

Conclusions: Women demonstrated a greater tendency to perceive fearful and disgusted facial expressions with averted gaze as more intense than those with direct gaze when their progesterone level was relatively high. By contrast, progesterone level did not have a significant effect on perceptions of happy faces. Collectively our findings suggest women are more sensitive to facial cues signalling nearby contagion and physical threat when raised progesterone prepares the body for pregnancy.


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