

Does Testosterone Boost an Actor's Oscar Odds?

Fri March 21, 2003 10:42 AM ET

By Jacqueline Stenson

LOS ANGELES (Reuters Health) - Testosterone surges may be one of the factors that separate Oscar-winners like Jack Nicholson and Al Pacino from aspiring actors whose careers never get off the ground, new study findings suggest. Researchers at Georgia State University in Atlanta found that male actors who thought they delivered a top-notch performance during an audition had higher levels of the hormone after they exited the stage than before stepping onto it. Meanwhile, actors who felt they delivered a dud of a performance had dwindling testosterone levels. The results are in line with previous studies showing that men have higher testosterone levels after winning a sporting event or chess match and lower levels after losing, said Dr. James Dabbs, a professor of psychology who has long been studying testosterone. The same has been observed among male animals fighting over territory or a mate. "There's always been this feeling that maybe testosterone is related more broadly to winning and losing," Dabbs told Reuters Health. "A high level of testosterone is going to make you look like a more formidable opponent and make you look stronger before the next encounter," he said. Testosterone has been linked with boldness, fearlessness, concentration under pressure, and high energy in men. As such, testosterone elevations may boost an actor's "stage presence," a theatrical term used to describe confidence, energy, focused attention and domination of the stage, the researchers suggested. In the new study, released here at a recent meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Dabbs and graduate student Kelly Leach Cate tested levels of testosterone in the saliva of 50 male actors before and after a 10-minute audition for a leading role in a play. Each actor also completed questionnaires rating how confident they felt before the audition, how well they thought they performed and how satisfied they were with the performance. Results showed that testosterone levels increased among those who were most confident and happy with their performance, but fell in the actors who were disappointed with their audition. Of course, testosterone surges don't necessarily mean the men were good actors--just that they thought so. But that may be enough to motivate them to gear up for the next audition.

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