

10th Vienna Aesthetics Symposium

Evolutionary psychology of facial attractiveness

Thursday, September 21, 2017

Faculty of Psychology

Liebiggasse 5, 1010 Vienna

Lecture hall G, 2nd floor (left wing)



Program

- 16:00** *Welcome address and introduction*
Aleksandra Mitrovic and Jürgen Goller (University of Vienna, AUT)
- 16:10** *Facial attractiveness in variable environments:
How environmental cues might guide adaptive preferences*
Anthony Little (University of Bath, UK)
- 16:50** *Attractiveness and distinctiveness in voices and faces of young adults*
Romi Zäske (Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, GER)
- 17:30** *Coffe Break*
- 17:50** *Sampling and measurement in facial attractiveness*
Rob Jenkins (University of York, UK)
- 18:30** *Panel discussion*

Jürgen Goller, Helmut Leder and Aleksandra Mitrovic

Facial attractiveness in variable environments: How environmental cues might guide adaptive preferences

Anthony Little

***Department of Psychology
University of Bath
Bath, United Kingdom***

The idea that fluctuating environments are linked to behavioural flexibility has a long history in research on non-human animals. In humans, there is much flexibility in behaviour and it has been argued that this flexibility has allowed humans to occupy an incredibly wide range of environments across the planet. Culture and learning are important explanations for variation in behaviour in humans. It has also been argued that exposure to different specific environmental cues might lead to adaptive variation in behaviour. In this talk I will review and present new data on “environmental contingent preferences”, addressing how different environmental cues may guide adaptive preferences. For example, cues to disease risk appear linked to increased preferences for healthy partners in both men and women and cues to violence appear linked to increased preferences for dominant partners in women. Such variation can be considered adaptive if it leads individuals in disease rich environments to avoid potentially contagious individuals or leads individuals at risk of violence to gain benefits from partnering with dominant others. Overall, this body of research suggests that preferences may be strategically flexible according to environmental cues and supports the notion of environment contingent preferences.

Attractiveness and distinctiveness in voices and faces of young adults

Romi Zäske

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Facial attractiveness has been linked to the averageness (or typicality) of a face. More tentatively, facial attractiveness has also been linked to the attractiveness of the voice of the corresponding speaker, via the “honest signal” hypothesis according to which attractiveness signals good genes. In four experiments (N = 20 each), we assessed ratings for attractiveness and two common measures of distinctiveness (“distinctiveness-in-the-crowd” - DITC and “deviation-based distinctiveness” - DEV) for both face photographs and voice samples (vowels or sentences) from 64 young adult speakers (32 female). We found consistent and strong negative correlations between attractiveness and DEV, both for voices and faces, generally supporting the averageness account of attractiveness. By contrast, indicating that both measures of distinctiveness reflect different constructs, correlations between attractiveness and DITC were numerically positive for faces (though small and non-significant), and significant for voices in sentence stimuli. As the only exception, voice ratings based on vowels exhibited a moderate but significant negative correlation between attractiveness and DITC. Between domains, no significant correlations emerged between vocal and facial distinctiveness. Remarkably, and at variance with the honest signal hypothesis, we did not observe significant positive correlations between vocal and facial attractiveness, with the exception of a moderate positive correlation between facial and vocal attractiveness ratings in vowels. Overall, while our findings strongly support an averageness account of attractiveness for both faces and voices, they provide little evidence for an honest signal account of facial and vocal attractiveness in complex naturalistic speech. At the same time, while our findings for vowels do not rule out the tentative notion that more primitive vocalizations can provide relevant clues to genetic fitness, these results emphasize the importance to carefully consider the nature of voice samples used in this research, and the degree to which such stimuli are representative of human vocal communication.

Sampling and measurement in facial attractiveness

Rob Jenkins

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I would like to focus on sources of variability in facial attractiveness. These sources of variability include state and trait characteristics of the face, as well as state and trait characteristics of the observer. When we measure facial attractiveness, we are obliged to sample all of these variables—even when we are only interested in one of them. This is a simple but important point. If we ignore sources of variability, then we risk drawing conclusions that do not generalise. I will argue that this view nudges us towards a statistical treatment of facial attractiveness, and that this move is wholly compatible with evolutionary perspectives.