Topic 1.
Why study facial attractiveness?

Prof. Ben Jones
ben.jones@abdn.ac.uk

why is it important to study judgments of physical attractiveness and beauty?

attractiveness judgments influence key social outcomes across the lifespan

BRITAIN'S GOT TALENT

this is partly due to the 'attractiveness halo effect'
understanding how and why we judge attractiveness gives insight into behaviour

but what social outcomes and behaviours are most influenced by attractiveness?

we prefer to date and marry attractive individuals

and ‘mismatched’ couples stand out from the crowd
in surveys, people say 'looks' don't matter....

......but they are the best predictor of how much people enjoy a blind date

we prefer to hire (and hate to fire) attractive people

we prefer to vote for attractive politicians
juries and judges go easy on attractive burglars

but are tougher on attractive confidence tricksters

attractive teenagers live longer
people perceive cute kids as angelic and reliable

mothers bond closer and quicker with cute babies

cute babies in NICU have higher survival rates
why study facial attractiveness?

the fusiform face area is a region of the visual cortex that is critical for face processing and plays a key role in social interaction.

an attractive face matters more than an attractive body.
is beauty really only in the eye of the beholder?

idiosyncratic ideals certainly exist, suggesting not all aspects of attractiveness are universal

people from diverse cultures find similar facial cues attractive (e.g. symmetry and prototypicality)
infants look at faces that adults rated as attractive more than those that adults rated as unattractive

some non-human primates also prefer to look at ‘attractive’ characteristics in conspecifics’ faces

Key points

- attractiveness judgments influence critical social outcomes
- there is, to some extent, agreement about attractiveness, suggesting it may have a biological basis
- what is the nature of this biological basis?