We have studied facial cues to health, body physique and personality and how these cues affect attractiveness. Carotenoids are plant pigments that increase skin yellowness. Carotenoid colour provides cues to dietary health and aerobic fitness. Colour cues to health are evident in European, Asian and African populations but there are cultural differences in skin yellowness preferences.

Body height, muscle and fat mass are each perceivable from face shape, yet estimates of strength are limited in accuracy and biased by overall body size. Cues to physique are similar across cultures, yet there are differences in preference for the cues. When the environment becomes harsher, men become more attracted to cues to high body weight in women. For women, fear of domestic violence decreases attraction to cues to strength in men.

Facial shape, posture and expression all influence impressions of trustworthiness. There is cultural consistency in trust judgments but individual variation in attraction to trustworthiness (e.g. an insecure attachment style enhances preference for trustworthy looks).

Overall studies demonstrate pervasive influences of facial cues to health, demeanour and physique which transcend culture but there is also an adaptive flexibility in attraction to the cues.