

TALK

WHY WE CHANGE OUR FACE: THE EVOLUTIONARY AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF APPEARANCE MODIFICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

I will explore the evolutionary and social significance of appearance modifications, emphasizing their multifaceted roles in human behavior. Drawing from cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research, I will argue that humans have never been a "naked ape"—appearance enhancements like makeup, tattoos, and clothing are deeply rooted in our evolutionary history, dating back to Neanderthals and early humans. These modifications serve critical functions, including mate attraction, intrasexual competition, group affiliation, status signaling, and protection.

I will highlight findings from our studies, such as how makeup usage in Brazilian women correlates with mate value and intrasexual competition, and how self-perception shifts with different makeup intensities. Our experiments reveal that even the expectation of being made up (placebo effect) can enhance self-evaluations of attractiveness and confidence. Beyond visual cues, I will discuss olfactory and vocal self-presentation, illustrated by examples like orchid bees using perfumes in courtship.

The talk will also address modern contexts, such as virtual appearance modifications (e.g., photo filters) and pathological grooming, while critiquing the limited focus on intra-individual and cultural variability in research. By integrating evolutionary theory with contemporary studies, I aim to reframe appearance modifications as a universal yet diverse aspect of human nature, shaped by biological imperatives and cultural dynamics.