Beauty and Social Capital

Petra Raudenská

1 Introduction

Contemporary society is obsessed with beauty. It admires, displays and televises beauty, determines what or who is beautiful, and ultimately capitalizes on beauty. Hakim (2010) has already noted the increasing importance of erotic capital in the twenty-first century, especially for women, due to visual culture, social media, and other developments in the labor market such as rising incomes and expanding service sector. But the true value of this human (or cultural) commodity, in all its complexity, can only be derived from psychological, sociological, or economic studies that show how strongly attractiveness is linked to marital and professional success, social status, and inequality. The studies then look at what might be behind this relationship and what other personal characteristics (whether actual or expected) attractive people have that contribute to their socioeconomic, social, and personal success. Jæger (2011, pp. 985–987) describes three theoretical approaches that attempt to explain why physically attractive individuals might be advantaged relative to less attractive individuals and remain advantaged throughout life: evolutionary psychology, social psychology, and the social constructionist approach. The latter two are also discussed in detail in the meta-analysis by Langlois et al. (2000).

Simply put, studies conclude that other people (particularly in the job market, among co-workers or managers) believe and expect, based on an individual's physical attractiveness, that attractive people have innumerable positive traits and less attractive people have more negative traits. As a result, they are treated differently based on these expectations. This stereotype then helps attractive people achieve positive outcomes. Studies have shown that people assume that attractive people have relatively higher intelligence, skills, competence, social skills, friendliness, likability, extroversion, and leadership abilities (Eagly et al., 1991; Feingold, 1992; Jackson et al., 1995; Jæger, 2011; Langlois et al., 2000; Peng et al., 2020). Furthermore, psychological research has shown that individuals can internalize these external evaluations and change their behavior in response (Eagly et al., 1991).

Studies have also found that more attractive people have different (actual) personal characteristics. Recent longitudinal studies have shown that more physically attractive people have higher completed fertility (Jokela, 2009) and better physical and mental health (Feingold, 1992; Reither

This work was supported by the Czech Science Foundation 'Finding health and happiness in the post-covid-19 world' (Grant No. 22-09220S).

P. Raudenská (✉)
Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic
e-mail: petra.raudenska@soc.cas.cz

G. Kuipers and O. Sarpila (eds.), *Handbook of Beauty and Inequality*, Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-08035-6_11

et al., 2009).[1] Attractive people are more self-confident, social skilled, popular and extroverted, emotionally stable, self-disciplined, and happier than less attractive people (Langlois et al., 2000; Luxen & Van de Vijver, 2006; Mobius & Rosenblat, 2006; Hosoda et al., 2003; Judge et al., 2009; Datta Gupta et al., 2016; Matějů et al., 2017; Ko & Suh, 2019)—all personality traits with positive effects on social success and career growth.

In this chapter, attractiveness or beauty is approached from the basis of quantitative research tradition. The beauty of the individual is thus understood as a universal phenomenon on which most people are able to agree. Thus, beauty standards could be shared and beauty as a concept can be operationalized and measured, even in relatively large population surveys. In particular, we focus on one of these mediators between attractiveness and professional success, namely social capital. Previous research has shown that individuals have a preference for socializing and establishing connections with more attractive people, thereby enhancing their likelihood of building strong social capital (Gladstone & O'Connor, 2013; Lemay et al., 2010). Attractive people are more likely to be invited to join both organizations and informal gatherings (Palmer & Peterson, 2021). Gladstone and O'Connor's (2013) study also showed that people believe that attractive individuals (automatically) have higher levels of social capital, which gives them a better chance of professional success. Finally, studies have shown that attractive individuals have a special kind of less dense social networks with weaker ties that are primarily aimed at the mutually beneficial exchange of useful information. Attractive individuals tend to strategically choose more advantageous positions in social networks, particularly in broker roles, compared to less attractive individuals (O'Connor & Gladstone, 2018). This strategic positioning in social networks could also provide advantages to more attractive individuals in the labor market and lead to inequalities.

Based on these previous psychological and sociological studies dedicated to the relationship between attractiveness and social capital, this chapter also presents an empirical case from the Czech Republic that shows the structure of the social network of highly attractive and less attractive people. It answers the question of whether attractive people have more friends and social contacts that give them preferential access to important information or other benefits. Finally, this chapter will also show whether there is a relationship between attractiveness and labor market success, even when we take into account the role of individuals' social capital. The final section discusses the empirical results in the context of previous studies and outlines possibilities for new research.

2 The Relationship Between Attractiveness and Social Capital

2.1 Social Capital

The phenomenon of social capital has been studied and explored in the social sciences since the late 1980s. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital, primarily at the individual level, as a set of potential resources (benefits) derived from social relationships, contacts, and acquaintances that an individual can use as his or her own capital in the social world. In the 1990s, political scientist Robert Putnam (1995) began to emphasize a more collective form of social capital. In a unique approach, Putnam links social capital, which includes trust, norms, and relationships, to a socially cohesive, civic democratic society. Networks of relationships exist, but in this case they facilitate mutual cooperation and civic engagement, making people's work more productive and civil society more cohesive (Putnam, 2000). This theory of collective capital posits that social capital not only benefits individuals, but also contributes to and sustains the entire civic community when people are actively engaged in civic life.

The individual dimension of social capital is more relevant when examining the relationship between attractiveness and social capital, with a useful distinction being made between

[1] More in Jæger (2011).

bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital takes the form of so-called strong ties, i.e., affective, close interpersonal relationships that are typically maintained with family and close friends. It is characterized by high levels of interpersonal trust and frequent social contact (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 1999).

Bridging social capital consists of 'weaker' ties between individuals that may be used to exchange information but typically do not provide emotional support in one's life (Granovetter, 1973). It can be mobilized at any time to the individual's benefit, typically on the condition of reciprocity (Matějů & Vitásková, 2006). Therefore, in the following sections, where we present the main results of our analyses, we refer to this capital as *reciprocal social capital*. Those who have contacts—"know the right people"—to help them navigate the labor market are likely to find more promising jobs, negotiate better salaries, or experience career growth (Burt, 2001, 2004; Seibert et al., 2001; Seidel et al., 2000). It is not only the size of the network that matters, but also the economic and cultural capital of the individuals involved in these social ties (Hakim, 2011). Social networks based on mutually beneficial exchanges of various kinds operate in all societies. O'Connor and Gladstone (2018) show that it is this kind of social capital that more attractive individuals tend to possess compared to less attractive ones.

2.2 Why Beauty Matters in Social Relations?

In terms of personal, social, and professional success, individuals with higher levels of attractiveness enjoy an advantage over their less attractive counterparts, at least at different life-stages (Jæger, 2011). Beauty plays an important role, for instance in the labor market, making it easier to get a job with a higher socioeconomic status and to earn a higher income (Anýžová & Matějů, 2018; Cipriani & Zago, 2011; Fletcher, 2009; Hamermesh, 2011; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Harper, 2000). Compared to their less attractive counterparts, individuals with greater attractiveness are more prone to receiving interview callbacks (Bóo et al., 2013), are also more likely to be hired for what are perceived as desirable jobs (Lee et al., 2018), attain promotions at a comparatively faster rate (Morrow et al., 1990), receive different evaluations of their job performance (Hamermesh & Parker, 2005), and experience higher career satisfaction (Hosoda et al., 2003).

Jæger (2011, p. 999) argued that "evolutionary, social psychological and social constructionist theories provide theoretical insights into the mechanisms through which physical attractiveness might affect social stratification over the life course". However, we will attempt to summarize the findings so far in a simpler way by dividing psychological research into two strands that help to explain why beauty pays (see O'Connor & Gladstone, 2018, p. 42).

The first focuses on how other people perceive attractive people and what positive qualities, which then help attractive people to favorable outcomes, they attribute to them. Studies have shown that perceivers believe the attractive person to be relatively more intelligent,[2] qualified, competent, deserving, more sociable, friendly, extroverted, and has higher social capital (Eagly et al., 1991; Feingold, 1992; Gladstone & O'Connor, 2013; Jackson et al., 1995; Jæger, 2011; Langlois et al., 2000). On the contrary, some recent studies indicated that unattractive people are perceived as more intelligent, more trustworthy due to their perceived competence, and earn significantly more than their attractive counterparts (e.g., Kanazawa & Still, 2018), suggesting that the effect of attractiveness may be nonlinear (Peng et al., 2020, p. 67). Psychological research also shows that individuals may internalize these external evaluations and change their

[2] Some studies suggested that more attractive people could have relatively higher intelligence (Jackson et al., 1995; Kanazawa & Kovar, 2004). Some of these findings are quite controversial and contested in the social sciences. For instance, Jæger (2011, p. 999) concludes in his paper on physical attractiveness and socio-economic and marital success that '(e)xisting evidence from meta-analyses on whether physical attractiveness is associated with higher intelligence or other productive skills is mixed'.

behavior in response (Eagly et al., 1991). Given a lifetime of positive social interactions, individuals with greater attractiveness can expect to enjoy relatively more social success (O'Connor & Gladstone, 2018).

The second stream of research points out that more attractive people may have (actually) different characteristics. Psychological studies have found that more attractive people have higher levels of self-esteem, social/communication skills, achievement, emotional stability, self-discipline, well-being, and are simply more popular (Matějů et al., 2017). And all of these psychological factors could consequently have a positive effect on labor market outcomes.

2.3 The Link Between Attractiveness and Social Capital

Among the personal characteristics that might moderate the relationship between attractiveness and career success, social capital also plays a role. A study by Gladstone and O'Connor (2013) shows that, in addition to a number of positive characteristics that attractive individuals (supposedly) possess, people also maintain believe and expect that attractive individuals (automatically) possess higher levels of social capital. Naturally, the labor market is the best place to capitalize on such stereotypes, as potential employers are more likely not only to hire more attractive individuals, but also to favor them for key positions that both require such levels of social capital and allow for its continued accumulation. In this way, perceived social capital quickly becomes real capital—a mechanism that the authors see as a classic case of self-fulfilling prophecy. Their experiment implies that, in the scenario where employers are aware that an individual possesses attractiveness but lacks social capital, they are less likely to assign that person to a crucial position within their company. This finding further strengthens the mediating role of social capital in the relationship between attractiveness and professional status.

Previous studies have also shown that people prefer to socialize and form bonds with more attractive people (Gladstone & O'Connor, 2013), which in turn increases their chances of accumulating stronger social capital. People enjoy and prefer to be in the presence of attractive people that give them greater opportunity for social interaction (Chatterjee et al., 2009; Feingold, 1992; Lemay et al., 2010). This finding is broadly consistent with other evidence that, for example, more attractive children are more sought after by their peers, receive more attention, popularity, and are more likely to be offered help or invited to join teams (Langlois et al., 2000). This finding, which has also been demonstrated for the adult population, could be explained by the positive or strong emotions experienced when encountering an attractive person (Said et al., 2008; Winston et al., 2007) and the automatic association between beauty and friendliness, honesty, pleasant nature, and other socially desirable traits (Eagly et al., 1991; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2008). Apparently, the "halo" effect could shape communication with more attractive individuals, with first impressions playing a key role. A study by Gladstone and O'Connor (2013) also shows that attractive people do not make extra efforts to establish social contacts; they simply receive more offers. A study by Palmer and Peterson (2021) confirms this showing that more attractive people are more likely to be invited to join both organizations and informal gatherings.

Finally, a recent study by O'Connor and Gladstone (2018) also demonstrated structural differences in the individual social capital of more attractive individuals. Such individuals have less dense social networks with weaker ties (between individuals) that can be effectively used for mutually beneficial exchange of useful information in the labor market and professional contexts but typically do not provide emotional support in one's life (Granovetter, 1973). The results of their other experiment showed that more attractive people are more likely to choose for themselves more profitable broker positions in social networks relative to other positions compared to less attractive people. Thus, the authors suggest

that higher levels and a specific structure of social capital are the mechanism that helps translate individual attractiveness into actual labor market returns.

As such, physical attractiveness can be seen as a form of capital that can be used in everyday social interactions and brings obvious benefits to its possessor, including direct or indirect effects on financial gain. According to Catherine Hakim (2010, 2011), beauty is part of "erotic capital" which includes not only physical attractiveness but also a particular kind of social energy, the ability to communicate easily and pleasantly, charm, playfulness, and erotic imagination. Hakim notes that erotic capital is not just another form of capital that facilitates individual success in interpersonal relationships or the labor market, but also one that is increasingly relevant and useful in today's beauty-obsessed society. In this spirit, although we do not measure and utilize the full potential of the concept of erotic capital, we assume that attractiveness and social capital are two distinct theoretical concepts and will treat them as such. The most interesting question, then, is how these concepts relate to each other.

3 An Empirical Case from the Czech Republic

Based on the previous literature, we attempted to explore the relationship between attractiveness and social capital using our own quantitative survey, as many previous results were based on qualitative or experimental survey designs. We would like to present some findings from this research to illustrate the relationship between beauty and social capital.

3.1 Data and Operationalization of the Concepts

The data presented in this chapter were drawn from a nationally representative Czech questionnaire survey called Neglected Human Capital Dimensions (2015)—carried out on 2,220 respondents aged 16–66 interviewed face to face in 2015.[3] This survey was focused mainly on attractiveness, personality traits, values, social capital, well-being, and certain aspects of lifestyle.

Attractiveness of an individual represents a key variable in the analysis. In the Czech survey, there were three kinds of evaluation of *respondent attractiveness*. As part of the survey, the respondents evaluated themselves on an eleven-point scale (0–10) of physical attractiveness. They were also evaluated by the interviewers using the same eleven-point scale of attractiveness. The interviewers assessed the respondent's attractiveness just after his/her face-to-face interview. Generally, people get higher scores at the end of interviews because they have come alive while answering the questions. In effect, this score probably stands rather for erotic capital (e.g., grooming, styling, liveliness, social skills, likability), rather than just good looks narrowly defined. We are also aware that interviewers' ratings may have been biased by other socio-demographic characteristics such as similar age, education, and the social class from which they came (see chapters written by Kuipers et al.).

In the third case, in those cases, where respondents agreed to have their portrait photograph taken, they were evaluated by a panel of 32 independent evaluators using Stephenson's (Stephenson, 1953) Q-methodology.[4] Our analysis of the link between attractiveness and social capital could not work with an index which includes the evaluation of photographs by the group of evaluators because of a limited number of cases for which it was possible to calculate (982 cases). Thus, we used the composite measure of attractiveness based on both self-evaluation and

[3] This survey was a direct follow-up to the previous cross-national representative comparative PIAAC Survey of Adult Skills (OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) and ensured its continuation in the Czech Republic. It carried out on respondents interviewed for the first time between the years 2012 and 2013 in the PIAAC Survey. This is one of the reasons why we have also data on respondents' cognitive skills.

[4] More information can be found in our book "Power of Beauty: Do beauty and attractiveness contribute to life success?" (Matějů et al., 2017).

interviewers' evaluation. We classified individuals as above average (highly attractive), average (moderately attractive), and below average (less attractive). The first category was defined as the 25% of individuals at the top of the attractiveness scale, the second as the 25% at the bottom, and the remaining 50% as average.[5]

To measure the *intensity of social contacts*, we used (a) activity items measuring the importance of friends and acquaintances in one's life (i.e., not just the most immediate circle of the primary group), (b) how often one meets with them outside work, whether at home or (c) elsewhere, and (d) how one compares this frequency with that of other people in one's age group. This concept was measured as a composite index that ranges from 1 (high intensity of social contacts) to − 1 (low intensity of social contacts).

To measure *reciprocal social capital*, our survey used three traditional items on reciprocal relationships of information exchange or assistance. The first question asked how often other people had asked the respondent to help them solve a problem or difficult life situation or to use their influence because of their job, position, or contacts. This captures an active role in reciprocal exchange. The second item, on the other hand, measured how often the respondent turned to other people for help when he/she was in a difficult situation (needed a doctor, lawyer, wanted to get an official to speak on his/her behalf, wanted to get a better job, wanted to get his/her child into kindergarten). These are some of the situations in which assistance is given; this captures the passive role in reciprocal exchange. The third question then asked more generally about the importance of such useful contacts in the respondent's life. The concept of reciprocal social capital was also measured as a composite index that ranges from 1 (high level of reciprocal social capital) to −1 (low level of reciprocal social capital).

Individual *self-esteem* was measured on Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale, with items adopted for the Czech context by Blatný and Osecká (1994).

3.2 Empirical Findings

3.2.1 The Intensity of Social Contacts and Attractiveness

First, we look at the intensity of social contacts of highly attractive and less attractive individuals according to gender. A higher frequency of social contacts is found among younger people than among older people, among men than among women, and among the better educated than among the less educated. However, regardless of these socio-demographic characteristics, Fig. 1 shows that more attractive people meet their friends and acquaintances more often and consider them more important in their lives. Highly and moderately attractive men have slightly more social contacts than equally attractive women.

Interestingly, women are slightly more likely to meet their friends/acquaintances at home and men are slightly more likely to meet their friends outside their home—in restaurants, bars, or cafes for a meal, drink, or just to chat (see Figs. 2 and 3). This effect is eliminated by individual attractiveness, with both highly attractive men and women tending to meet their friends both at home and outside.[6] Since the home environment tends to reflect a higher level of bonding capital (as the emotionally close milieu of one's family life), we attach greater relevance to the level of willingness to meet outside the home, a milieu more conducive to reciprocal relationships of mutual exchange. And it is precisely highly attractive men and women who are more likely to meet their friends in such contexts.

[5] Where it was needed, we categorized respondent's cognitive skills in the same way for better comparability. The variable indicating cognitive skills (SKILLS) is based on two dimensions measured in the PIAAC survey, namely numeracy (NUM) and literacy (LIT). In regression analyses, we use the mean value of the variables NUM and LIT [(NUM + LIT) ÷ 2].

[6] As the correlation between high socioeconomic status and attractiveness may play a significant role here, the results of this frequency analysis are also controlled for individual's ISEI. "Individuals with higher socioeconomic status not only have higher frequency of social contacts and meet their friends outside often, they may have healthier lifestyles and may invest more in beauty-enhancing products than low-SES individuals" (Jæger, 2011, p. 985).

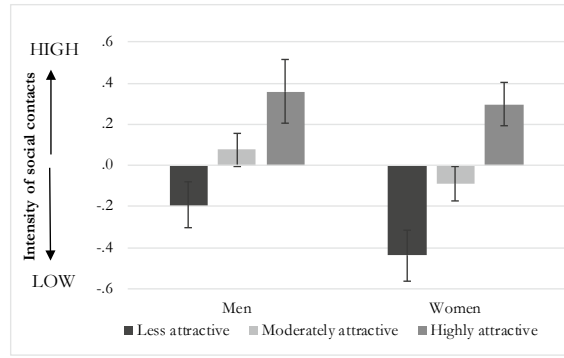

Fig. 1 Intensity of social contacts by attractiveness level and gender

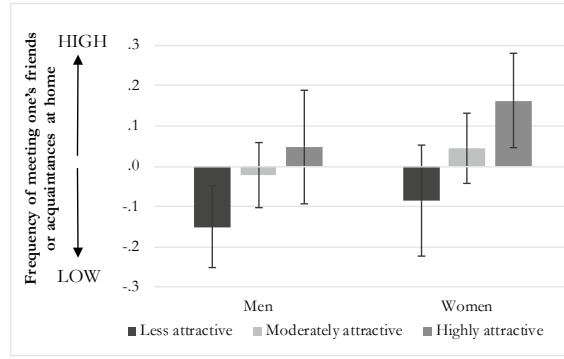

Fig. 2 Frequency of meeting one's friends or acquaintances at home

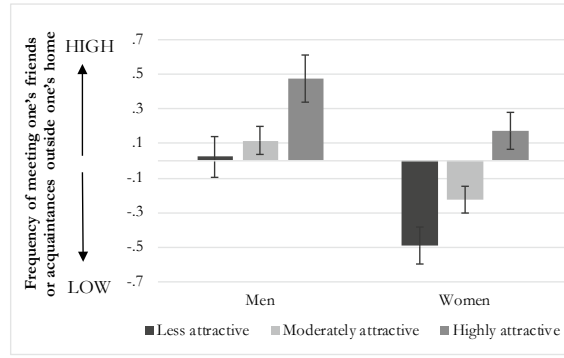

Fig. 3 Frequency of meeting one's friends or acquaintances outside one's home (in restaurants, bars, cafes)

3.2.2 Reciprocal Social Capital

In general, reciprocal social capital is more likely to be found among people who are better educated or belong to younger cohorts. Our research supports Gladstone and O'Connor's (2013) findings that highly attractive people accumulate higher levels of reciprocal social capital of mutual exchange than less attractive people, especially highly attractive women (see Fig. 4).

To explore the issue further, our survey also asked about the types of life situations in which people turn to others for help. Five percentages of highly attractive people (compared to nine percentages of those with below-average attractiveness) often turn to others when they need to find a good doctor or lawyer, get a government agency to act on their behalf, or get their child into a kindergarten; about 80% attractive people do so rarely or sometimes, see Fig. 5.

Eight percentage of very attractive people (three percentage of those with below-average

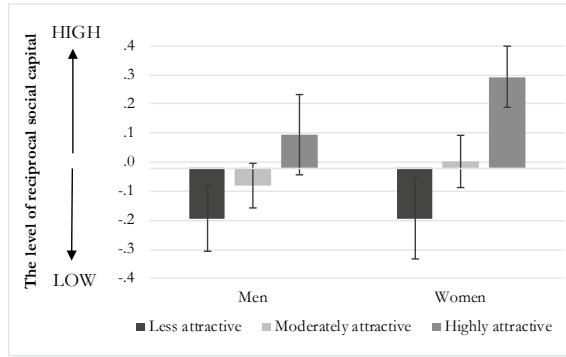

Fig. 4 Level of reciprocal social capital by attractiveness and gender

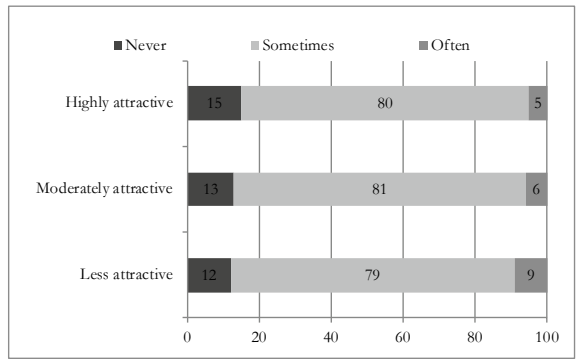

Fig. 5 How often do you turn to other people for help when you find yourself in a difficult situation—you need a good doctor, lawyer, want to get a word in your favor at a public authority, get your child enrolled in school? (percentages)

attractiveness) often ask their friends or acquaintances for help when they need a better job, more than 60% attractive people do so rarely or sometimes—see Figs. 6. The implication of this analysis is that more attractive people are less likely to be reluctant to ask for help in finding a better job, suggesting that they use their social capital to achieve better labor market outcomes and increase their chances of achieving both higher occupational socioeconomic status and higher pay. Attractive women are even more likely than men to turn to others for help with various difficult life situations.

Individual's social networks are characterized not only by their size but also by the economic and cultural capital of those involved in such social ties. We therefore asked our respondents whether their friends or acquaintances could afford more or less than they could. One might expected that more attractive individuals would be more likely to surround themselves with people who have equal or greater levels of cultural and economic capital, and the results suggest that this is the case (see Fig. 7). The circle of friends of highly attractive individuals consists of people who are able to pay about the same as the attractive individual (62%), or even somewhat or much more (24%) than the attractive individual.

3.2.3 Labor Market Outcomes and Career Success

We somewhat disagree with the conclusions of Gladstone and O'Connor (2013) that attractiveness serves only as a proxy for (perceived or real) social capital, and that it is social capital that predominantly (irrespective of individual attractiveness) shapes one's labor market outcomes. Information about an individual's attractiveness may be sufficient to predict the structure of his or her social network (see above), but we believe that one cannot completely rule out the effect either of attractiveness per se or of other psychological traits (such as self-esteem) that are not included in Gladstone and O'Connor's (2013) experimental study.

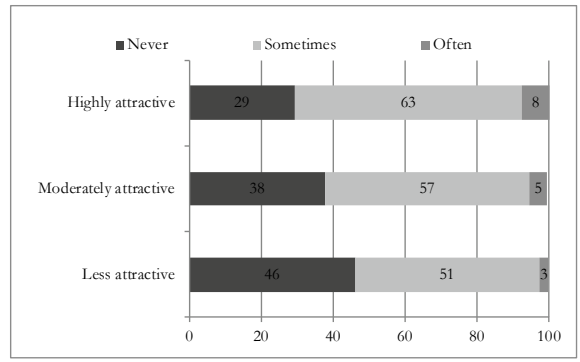

Fig. 6 How often do you turn to other people for help when you need to get a better job? (percentages)

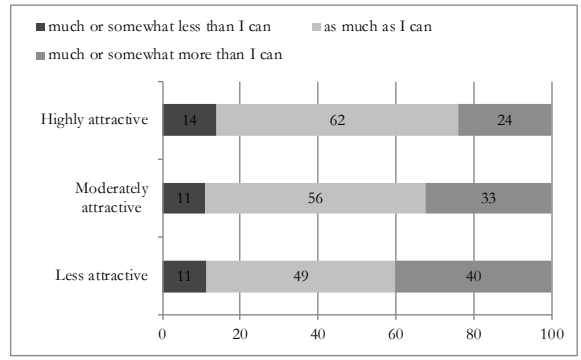

Fig. 7 Friends and acquaintances you meet with can generally afford… (percentages)

The regression results[7] show that attractiveness remains an important indicator of labor market success, even after controlling for reciprocal social capital and individual self-esteem. In terms of the chances of getting a good job, educational attainment and cognitive skills are of course the most significant factors for middle-aged men and women. However, as expected, the effect of attractiveness is not eliminated.

In short, men's status bonus for being attractive is much larger than their status penalty for being unattractive, with a difference of about seven points between highly attractive and unattractive men.[8] Interestingly, the role of attractiveness in women's chances of getting a higher socioeconomic status job is weaker than for men. On the other hand, levels of reciprocal social capital and self-esteem play a significant role only for women. Higher levels of reciprocal social capital and self-esteem increase women's occupational socioeconomic status by 2.5 points (the trend is less pronounced for men). In short, men capitalize more than women on their high attractiveness in their efforts to get better jobs. Women, on the other hand, capitalize more on their attractiveness, self-esteem, and reciprocal social capital.

The second important aspect of labor market outcomes is income. The results show that education is again the strongest factor influencing earnings. Men have no bonus for above-average attractiveness but they have an 11% income penalty for below-average attractiveness.[9] These differences are much more pronounced for women. Their bonus for above-average attractiveness is

[7] Only economically active respondents with non-zero income were included in the analyses. Given that both beauty and cognitive skills become consistently effective in the labor market only in middle age (30–50 years), when individuals are approaching the peak of their careers (see Anýžová & Matějů, 2018), we have conducted the regression analysis only on this age group.

[8] This might be certainly a substantial difference given this variable's (ISEI) range between approximately 16 (cleaners, manufacturing laborers) and 85 (surgeons, senior government officials).

[9] We conducted the analysis with income in terms of average hourly earnings including all bonuses in logarithmic form, which allowed us to interpret the results as percentages of average income.

16% of average income and their malus is seven percentage. There is a 23% income gap between highly and less attractive women, even after controlling for reciprocal social capital and individual's self-esteem.

4 Conclusion

We live in a society where physical appearance matters. Attractiveness clearly plays an important role both in our social lives and in our workplace outcomes. The central goal of this chapter was to describe the relationship between attractiveness and social capital. Based on our empirical case from the Czech Republic, our results show that attractiveness has a strong link with the intensity of one's social activities. More attractive people meet their friends and acquaintances more often, consider them more important in their lives, and tend to meet their friends both at home and outside.

Attractive people are also more likely to be willing to ask for help when they need a better job, a doctor, a lawyer, a word in their favor with an authority, or a place in kindergarten for their child. The circle of friends of people with above-average attractiveness is made up of people who can afford mostly the same as the attractive person, or even somewhat more. This is an important piece of information about the structure of their (reciprocal) social capital complementing previous literature.

Last but not least, we have partially refuted the research conclusions of Gladstone and O'Connor (2013) that attractiveness serves (only) as a proxy variable for (alleged or actual) social capital in the labor market outcomes. In particular, it appears that more attractive individuals have better chances of obtaining higher socioeconomic status jobs and earning higher incomes than less attractive individuals, and that this effect of attractiveness remains even when we take into account individual's social capital and self-esteem. Kanazawa and Still (2018) propose three explanations for the effect of physical attractiveness on earnings—discrimination, self-selection, and individual differences. Our results suggest that discrimination (on the part of the employers, co-workers, or clients) is a plausible explanation in the Czech Republic as the association between attractiveness and earnings does not disappear when respondents' occupations, cognitive skills, social capital, and even psychological characteristics are statistically controlled.

From the empirical case presented, it seems that in the Czech Republic capital associated with attractiveness pays off more for women than for men in some aspects. Thus, these results do not confirm the findings of other research according to which men benefit more than women from exceptional physical attractiveness in terms of socioeconomic outcomes (see a systematic review of Kukkonen et al., 2024, for more). In the Czech Republic, the opposite is true, and the differences in favor of women are considerable. However, similarly higher beauty premiums for attractive women appear also in Germany, Luxembourg, China, and other countries (Doorley & Sierminska, 2012; Hamermesh et al., 2002; Kukkonen et al., 2024).

In their systematic review, Kukkonen et al. (2024, p. 134) illustrate these conflicting research findings in many research studies over the past decades. Furthermore, they found that the results of attractiveness are gendered in that it is more consistently beneficial for men than for women. For women, attractiveness is not a universal benefit and appears to be detrimental in some cases. They conclude that attractiveness is more universally beneficial for men, whereas it may be more context dependent for women.

5 New Avenues for Research

Although the empirical results we have present are based on Czech data, we believe that their applicability extends far beyond Czech borders. Thus, future research should examine cultural variations in the relationship between attractiveness, social capital, and career success, taking into account the impact of evolving social norms, digital advances, and economic developments. It also seems important to extend comparative analyses to emerging economies and to examine how attractiveness and social capital are linked and how they are translate

into labor market outcomes in rapidly evolving economic contexts. It would also be useful to conduct longitudinal studies to observe changes in the effect of attractiveness on individuals' social capital and labor market outcomes over time.

We also believe it is critical to explore intersectionality by considering how factors such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background intersect with attractiveness to affect social capital and career outcomes. We should explore the mechanisms by which attractiveness affects earnings and look closely at the role of discrimination in the labor market and different fields of work, examining employer and coworker biases based on physical attractiveness. From this perspective, it is important to explore potential policy implications related to workplace diversity, inclusion, and policies to counter appearance bias. It would also be useful to explore interventions and strategies that organizations can implement to ensure fair and merit-based assessments in hiring and promotion processes.

There are also unanswered research questions related to a deeper understanding of how individual psychological traits, including self-esteem and attractiveness, interact as predictors of labor market outcomes. We should explore additional psychological factors that may influence career success and earnings, contributing to a more complete understanding of the dynamics at play.

Finally, future research should also pay attention to the role of technology, social media, and digital platforms in shaping perceptions of attractiveness and their influence on labor market outcomes, and how the increasing importance of erotic capital, as noted by Hakim (2010), interacts with technological advances in the twenty-first century. In terms of incorporating modern methodologies, advanced statistical models, experimental approaches, and/or machine learning should be used to uncover nuanced relationships and interactions between attractiveness, social capital, and labor market success.

By addressing these research directions, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between physical attractiveness, social capital, and career outcomes in contemporary societies.

References

Anýžová, P., & Matějů, P. (2018). Beauty still matters: The role of attractiveness in labour market outcomes. *International Sociology, 33*(3), 269–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580918760431

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood.

Blatný, M., & Osecká, L. (1994). Rosenbergova škála sebehodnocení: Struktura globálního vztahu k sobě. *Československá Psychologie, 38*(6), 481–488.

Bóo, F. L., Rossi, M. A., & Urzua, S. S. (2013). The labor market return to an attractive face: Evidence from a field experiment. *Economics Letters, 118*(1), 170–172. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2012.10.016

Burt, R. S. (2001). Structural holes versus network closure as social capital. In N. Lin, K. Cook, & R. S. Burt (Eds.), *Social capital: Theory and research* (pp. 31–56). Aldine De Gruyter.

Burt, R. S. (2004). Structural holes and good ideas. *American Journal of Sociology, 110*(2), 349–399. https://doi.org/10.1086/421787

Chatterjee, A., Thomas, A., Smith, S. E., & Aguirre, G. K. (2009). The neural response to facial attractiveness. *Neuropsychology, 23*(2), 135–143. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014430

Cipriani, G. P., & Zago, A. (2011). Productivity or discrimination? Beauty and the exams. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics, 73*(3), 428–447. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0084.2010.00619.x

Datta Gupta, N., Etcoff, N. L., & Jaeger, M. M. (2016). Beauty in mind: The effects of physical attractiveness on psychological well-being and distress. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 17*(3), 1313–1325. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-015-9644-6

Doorley, K., & Sierminska, E. (2012). *Myth or fact? The beauty premium across the wage distribution* (IZA Discussion Papers No. 6674). Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA).

Eagly, A. H., Ashmore, R. D., Makhijani, M. G., & Longo, L. C. (1991). What is beautiful is good, but…: A meta-analytic review of the physical attractiveness stereotype. *Psychological Bulletin, 110*(1), 109–128. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.110.1.109

Feingold, A. (1992). Good-looking people are not what we think. *Psychological Bulletin, 111*(2), 304–341. https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-2909.111.2.304

Fletcher, J. M. (2009). Beauty vs. brains: Early labor market outcomes of high school graduates. *Economics Letters, 105*(3), 321–325. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2009.09.006

Gladstone, E. C., & O'Connor, K. (2013). Sitting pretty: Attractiveness, social capital, and success. *Academy of Management Proceedings, 1*, 172–188. https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2013.17288abstract

Granovetter, M. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*(6), 1360–1380. https://doi.org/10.1086/225469

Hakim, C. (2010). Erotic capital. *European sociological review, 26*(5), 499–518. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcq014

Hakim, C. (2011). *Erotic capital: The power of attraction in the boardroom and the bedroom.* Basic books.

Hamermesh, D. S. (2011). *Beauty pays: Why attractive people are more successful*. Princeton University Press.

Hamermesh, D. S., & Biddle, J. E. (1994). Beauty and the labor market. *American Economic Review, 84*(5), 1174–1194.

Hamermesh, D. S., Meng, X., & Zhang, J. (2002). Dress for success—Does primping pay? *Labour Economics, 9*(3), 361–373. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0927-5371(02)00014-3

Hamermesh, D. S., & Parker, A. M. (2005). Beauty in the classroom: Instructors' pulchritude and putative pedagogical productivity. *Economics of Education Review, 24*(4), 369–376. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2004.07.013

Harper, B. (2000). Beauty, stature and the labour market: A British cohort study. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics, 62*(s1), 771–784. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0084.0620s1771

Hosoda, M., Stone-Romero, E. F., & Coats, G. (2003). The effects of physical attractiveness on job related outcomes: A meta-analysis of experimental studies. *Personnel Psychology, 56*(2), 431–462. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2003.tb00157.x

Jæger, M. M. (2011). "A thing of beauty is a joy forever"? Returns to physical attractiveness over the life course. *Social Forces, 89*(3), 983–1003. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/89.3.983

Jackson, L. A., Hunter, J. E., & Hodge, C. N. (1995). Physical attractiveness and intellectual competence: A meta-analytic review. *Social Psychology Quterly, 58*(2), 108–122. https://doi.org/10.2307/2787149

Jokela, M. (2009). Physical attractiveness and reproductive success in humans: Evidence from the late 20th century United Status. *Evolution and Human Behavior, 30*(5), 342–350. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2009.03.006

Judge, T. A., Hurst, C., & Simon, L. S. (2009). Does it pay to be smart, attractive, or confident (or all three)? Relationships among general mental ability, physical attractiveness, core self-evaluations, and income. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 94*(3), 742–755. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015497

Kanazawa, S., & Kovar, J. L. (2004). Why beautiful people are more intelligent. *Intelligence, 32*(3), 227–243. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intell.2004.03.003

Kanazawa, S., & Still, M. C. (2018). Is there really a beauty premium or an ugliness penalty on earnings? *Journal of Business and Psychology, 33*(2), 249–262. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-017-9489-6

Ko, A., & Suh, E. M. (2019). Does physical attractiveness buy happiness? Women's mating motivation and happiness. *Motivation and Emotion, 43*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-018-9717-z

Kukkonen, I., Pajunen, T., Sarpila, O., & Åberg, E. (2024). Is beauty-based inequality gendered? A systematic review of gender differences in socioeconomic outcomes of physical attractiveness in labor markets. *European Societies, 26*(1), 117–148. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2023.2210202

Langlois, J. H., Kalakanis, L., Rubenstein, A. J., Larson, A., Hallam, M., & Smoot, M. (2000). Maxims or myths of beauty? A meta-analytic and theoretical review. *Psychological Bulletin, 126*(3), 390–423. https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-2909.126.3.390

Lee, M., Pitesa, M., Pillutla, M. M., & Thau, S. (2018). Perceived entitlement causes discrimination against attractive job candidates in the domain of relatively less desirable jobs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 114*(3), 422–442. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000114

Lemay, P., Clark, M. S., & Greenberg, A. (2010). Projection of interpersonal goals: What Is beautiful is good because what is beautiful is desired—Physical attractiveness stereotyping as projection of personal goals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 36*(3), 339–353. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167209359700

Lin, N. (1999). Building a network theory of social capital. *Connections, 22*(1), 28–51.

Luxen, M. F., & Van de Vijyer, F. J. R. (2006). Facial attractiveness, selection, and personnel selection: When evolved preferences matter. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 27*(2), 241–255. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.357

Matějů, P., & Vitásková, A. (2006). Interpersonal trust and mutually beneficial exchanges: Measuring social capital for comparative analyses. *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review, 42*(3), 493–516. https://doi.org/10.13060/00380288.2006.42.3.02

Matějů, P., Hamplová, D., Hampl, P., Loužek, M., Weidnerová, S., Anýžová, P., & Smith, M. (2017). *Moc krásy: Pomáhá krása a atraktivita k životnímu úspěchu? [Power of Beauty: Do beauty and attractiveness contribute to life success?]* Karolinum.

Mobius, M. M., & Rosenblat, T. S. (2006). Why beauty matters. *The American Economic Review, 96*(1), 222–235. https://doi.org/10.1257/000282806776157515

Morrow, P. C., McElroy, J. C., Stamper, B. G., & Wilson, M. A. (1990). The effects of physical attractiveness and other demographic characteristics on promotion decisions. *Journal of Management, 16*(4), 723–736. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639001600405

O'Connor, K. M., & Gladstone, E. (2018). Beauty and social capital: Being attractive shapes social networks. *Social Networks, 52*, 42–47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2017.05.003

Palmer, C. L., & Peterson, R. D. (2021). Physical attractiveness, halo effects, and social joining. *Social Science Quarterly, 102*(1), 552–566. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12892

Peng, L., Cui, G., Chung, Y., & Zheng, W. (2020). The faces of success: Beauty and ugliness premiums in e-commerce platforms. *Journal of Marketing, 84*(4), 67–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242920914861

Putnam, R. (1995). Tuning in, tuning out: The strange disappearance of social capital in America. *PS: Political Science and Politics, 28*(4), 664–683. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1049096500058856

Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon and Schuster.

Reither, E. N., Hauser, R. M., & Swallen, K. C. (2009). Predicting adult health and mortality from adolescent facial characteristics in yearbook photographs. *Demography, 46*(1), 27–41. https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.0.0037

Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princenton University Press.

Said, C. P., Baron, S. G., & Todorov, A. (2008). Nonlinear amygdala response to face trustworthiness: Contributions of high and low spatial frequency information. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience, 21*(3), 519–528. https://doi.org/10.1162/jocn.2009.21041

Seibert, S. E., Kraimer, M. L., & Liden, R. C. (2001). A social capital theory of career success. *Academy of Management Journal, 44*(2), 219–247. https://doi.org/10.5465/3069452

Seidel, M. L., Polzer, J. T., & Stewart, K. J. (2000). Friends in high places: The effects of social networks on discrimination in salary negotiations. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 45*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/2666977

Stephenson, W. (1953). *The study of behavior; Q-technique and Its methodology*. University of Chicago Press.

Winston, J. S., O'Doherty, J., Kilner, J. M., Perrett, D. I., & Dolan, R. J. (2007). Brain systems for assessing facial attractiveness. *Neuropsychologia, 45*(1), 195–206. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2006.05.009

Zebrowitz, L. A., & Montepare, J. M. (2008). Social psychological face perception: Why appearance matters. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 2*(3), 1497–1517. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00109.x

Petra Raudenská works as a senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy Sciences. Petra is a recognized expert in comparative social survey methodology and social inequality research, with a focus on well-being. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from Charles University in Prague and excels in advanced quantitative methods. Her research interests include survey methodology, social inequality, human capital, well-being, health, and human values. She has authored or co-authored a number of books and her work has been published in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, Humanities & Social Sciences Communications, Social Science Research.*