



Beauty as Gendered Inequality

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1 Introduction: Beauty and Inequality in Times of Shifting Gender Systems

Gender is one of the lenses, if not *the* main lens, through which beauty and inequality have been most commonly examined. There is no chapter in this handbook that does not address gender in some way. The chapters offer a wide range of perspectives on how and why beauty is gendered, and how this impacts gendered as well as other inequalities. Different disciplines and perspectives foreground different aspects of beauty: beauty standards, norms, and ideologies related to gender performance and appearance, practices related to beauty work and enhancement, gendered differences in ‘returns’ to beauty, and various mechanisms that produce (gendered) beauty-based inequalities. However, all approaches agree on one issue: beauty is primarily associated with women and femininity.

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Across paradigms, there is widespread agreement that beauty is primarily about women: beauty is associated with female gender/sex, or with femininity as a style of performance or representation. Some fields, like feminist/gender studies, sociology, anthropology, (consumer) culture studies, and psychological body image research offer socio-cultural explanations for the association between women and beauty: beauty is primarily expected from women, it signals femininity, and therefore affects women more (see Ojala & Pietilä, this volume; Craig, this volume; Guest & Daniels, this volume; Monier & Mears, this volume). Biological and evolutionary psychological explanations have also emphasized that beauty is gendered, though for different reasons. Especially in earlier and popular evolutionary approaches, beauty is primarily seen as a trait valued by men in a potential female partner. This drives women to care more about their appearance than men (Etcoff, 2011; Kowal et al., 2022; Lidborg & Boothroyd, this volume; McClintock, this volume).

In stressing the central connection between gender and beauty, existing scholarly work reflects a cultural belief that is widely shared in most (and certainly most dominant) contemporary societies: that beauty is about gender, and that gender is binary. Women are expected to ‘do beauty’; men are not. Men should not pay attention to, or receive attention for their appearance, as this threatens to diminish their masculinity. In the English

language, even the word ‘beauty’ is felt to be inappropriate for male human beings, although it can be used to describe aesthetically pleasing appearances of anything from art works to landscapes to sentences and academic articles.

Recently, academics have started to rethink such gendered views on appearance and inequality. Partly, this results from radical changes in the gender system in the past century, particularly since the second feminist wave of the 1960s (Kuipers, 2022). The various feminist waves have witnessed increasing empowerment for women, critiquing how women were held back by gender ideologies that centrally feature the idea of feminine beauty. Changing gender systems have enabled new definitions of masculinity that create space—or, according to some, pressure—for men to care about their appearance in ways traditionally associated with femininity (see Sarpila, 2021, for a review). Consumer culture, pop culture, fitness culture, and social media have played a key role in reformulating the relationship between masculinity and appearance (Foster & Baker, 2022; Kaplan et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2020). Moreover, since the turn of the twenty-first century, the binary logic of the traditional gender system has also been challenged by social movements, pop culture, and academics (Butler, 2002; Halberstam, 2005), creating space for the cultural production of beauty beyond a strictly feminine/masculine binary.

Yet research on beauty and inequality has been slow to catch up with recent, more critical understandings of gender. For instance, until recently the field of (sociological) stratification research held the conventional notion that beauty is indeed more beneficial for women (cf. Hakim, 2011), or that it is a general asset, which equally improves both women’s and men’s opportunities to succeed in life (Kuwabara & Thébaud, 2017; Smith & Hamplova, this volume). Recent research has critiqued this by uncovering the uncertain and detrimental consequences of beauty for women, arguing that men may actually benefit more from their appearance (Bahamonde & Sarpila,

2024; Kukkonen et al., 2024; Kukkonen & Sarpila, 2021; Kühn & Wolbring, 2024).

With the advent of more fluid understandings of gender beyond the heteronormative matrix, appearance and beauty take on a new, and newly important role in the shaping of gender and gendered inequalities. There has been little scholarly attention for this, which is surprising as aesthetic styles have been argued to be an essential element of queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and other non-heteronormative identities (Bergling, 2013; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2014). Shifting gender systems create new interplays between gender, appearance, and inequality, but these shifts are also increasingly politically contested. Over the past decades, people with non-heteronormative identities have acquired more rights and better social and economic positions. In response, cultural and political counterforces promote a return to binary heteronormative views on gender and sex, in which traditional gender norms are often connected with ideas about embodied aesthetic styles (see Pieters, this volume). Thus, gender norms related to appearance take on a political dimension.

Against this backdrop of cultural change and political contestation, this chapter discusses how beauty and appearance are gendered, and how this is related to inequalities of gender and beyond. Rather than giving an exhaustive overview of this huge literature, we focus on bringing together perspectives presented in this volume. We examine the gendered nature of beauty, highlighting beauty standards, beauty practices, and the social norms surrounding them. After that, we discuss unequal gender outcomes of beauty/appearance, and the mechanisms suggested to explain them. Finally, we ask what might be lost or overlooked in the current literature, which examines beauty and inequality solely from a binary gender perspective. We suggest that future research can break new grounds in our understanding of beauty, gender, and inequality by paying more explicit and critical attention to the shifting gender systems (and the resistance this

sparks), by analyzing beauty and gender in intersectional terms, and by going beyond the gender binary.

2 The Gendered Beauty Standards Behind Gendered Inequalities

Many studies have shown that beauty standards differ for women and men. Such beauty standards inform evaluation processes through which people are unequally treated based on their appearance (Kuipers, Chow, Chong & Zhou, this volume). Such gendered standards manifest themselves on two levels. First, standards shape how people evaluate the appearance of *others*. Second, beauty standards inform how people evaluate and try to modify, the appearance of *themselves*. Body image research in psychology and communication science has combined these levels by examining how gendered beauty standards for others impact the image people have of their own body (Paterna et al., 2021; Guest & Daniels, this volume). Similar two-level analyses have emerged in cultural sociology, but from the perspective of embodied gendered and classed taste (Vandebroek, 2016).

Gendered evaluations of the appearance of *others* have traditionally been studied from two perspectives that are often seen as opposing: evolutionary theory on the one hand and gender theory on the other. Evolutionary approaches hold that beauty is gendered because it plays a key role in sexual selection (Etcoff, 2011). Because men and women pursue different ‘mating strategies’, men are more interested in female beauty than vice versa: men tend to pursue women on the basis of appearance, whereas women want to invest in long-term stable relationship and therefore pursue men with resources (for a critique, see McClintock, this volume). For both genders, however, traits perceived as beautiful or attractive are assumed to signal an individual’s genetic fitness or reproductive potential. Thus, beauty is supposed to be universally associated with health (e.g., symmetry, good skin) and pronounced sex characteristics. However,

the most recent research literature has challenged many of these fundamental assumptions (Jones & Jaeger, 2019; Lidborg & Boothroyd, this volume). For example, the universality of beauty standards and the idea that women find masculine traits attractive have been called into question. While masculinity isn’t clearly associated with attractiveness in men (and sometimes femininity comes out as most attractive), research mostly supports a connection between femininity and attractiveness (for reviews, see Little et al., 2011; Lidborg & Boothroyd, this volume).

Gender studies, by contrast, understand beauty as a cultural system that enforces gender-specific modes of control (see Craig, this volume). Because of the widespread association of beauty with women, an attractive, sexualized appearance is a central element in the representation or performance of femininity across cultures (cf. Hatton & Trautner, 2011; Caldeira et al., 2022). In contemporary (Western) societies, the appearance of men is less aestheticized, and beauty or beautification is often seen as conflicting with masculinity (Barber, 2016; Barry, 2018; Black & Sharma, 2001). Consequently, beauty standards became a way to hold women back, both by disciplining them into rigid norms and penalizing them when they fail to conform and by marking them as a distinct category that is mainly there to be looked at, the subject of the so-called male gaze (Bordo, 2023).

Two opposing scientific fields, drawing on distinct theoretical explanations, reach the same conclusion: beauty is primarily associated with the female gender. However, gender studies are more inclined to point to historical and cultural exceptions. From the perspective of inequality, we conclude, first, that beauty places women in hierarchical positions relative to one another, and that this may be less so for men. Moreover, the gender perspective also suggests that the beauty regime places women *as a group* hierarchically below men.

This resonates with the few sociological studies that have examined the gendered nature of beauty standards. As Kuipers (2015) found in an empirical study of beauty standards, men do not ‘have

appearance' in the same way as women do: male beauty is generally interpreted as a reflection of inner qualities and personality traits, rather than being subject to purely aesthetic judgments. When assessing women's appearance, people more easily see women as aesthetic objects. Respondents in this study routinely complained that judging male beauty was difficult, even offensive, while everyone was comfortable with assessing women's beauty. When female beauty standards also were found to be more consistent across different cultures, male beauty standards are more culturally specific (Kuipers, 2015).

Additionally, quantitative studies have provided evidence suggesting that when examining large datasets, women are generally rated as more beautiful (or more gender-neutrally, as better-looking) than men (Sarpila et al., 2021; Wong & Penner, 2016). This also supports the idea that physical appearance, or at least good looks, is more commonly attributed to women and as something that is easier to assess in women.

Studies also show that across cultures, girls are socialized from a young age into a 'feminine' beauty ideal that states that beauty is women's most important asset to be cultivated (see Craig, this volume). Culturally shared stories play an important role in this, for example in media representations through advertisements, television, film, and social media platforms (Döring et al., 2016; Marwick, 2010; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). But the association of femininity with beauty in cultural representation dates back further. For example, in an analysis of the classic Grimm Brothers' fairy tales, Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) have shown that fairy tales' female characters are defined by their beauty more often than male characters by their handsomeness. Furthermore, it is precisely those fairy tales with a strong emphasis on female beauty (Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty) that have been more likely to be reproduced again and again, most recently as Disney princesses. Likewise, in animated cartoons, female characters are more often portrayed as attractive compared to male characters (Klein & Shiffman, 2006). However, the masculine ideal introduced to boys is not separate from appearance either.

But, it is defined in a different way—typically through muscularity and dominance (e.g., Boyd & Murnen, 2017)—and requires different kinds of maintenance to conform. Overall, it seems that children's media content continues to reinforce stereotypical gendered expressions of appearance along conventional gender binaries (Walsh & Leaper, 2020), even when the number of young people identifying outside the binary has simultaneously been found to be increasing (Lehtonen et al., 2024; White et al., 2018).

Beauty standards are gendered not only in the evaluation of others but also in the evaluation of *ourselves*. Psychological body image research has uncovered how individuals react to assumed macro-level body ideals (see Guest & Daniels, this volume). This research shows that especially women feel addressed and pressurized by beauty as a (gendered) ideal. As the term body ideals suggests, this research focuses specifically on body physique, particularly a thin ideal, although more recently it also focuses on muscularity. While thinness has long been regarded as a body ideal primarily for women, today's body ideals place pressure on both women and men to be not only thin but also to have a toned body (Grogan, 2016). In this research tradition, gendered body ideals reflect in women's and men's experiences of their own bodies, such that women feel more pressure to become thin, and men, compared to women, feel more pressure to be muscular (for reviews, see Karazsia et al., 2017; Paterna et al., 2021).

A meta-analysis using standardized measures for temporal comparison found that men's desire to be thinner or more muscular has remained relatively unchanged over recent decades. In contrast, the pursuit of thinness among women appears to have declined, which researchers have interpreted as a shift in body ideals toward a female body ideal that is less focused on extreme thinness (Karazsia et al., 2017). Yet, this interpretation should be approached with caution, as it concerns women's own body perceptions rather than how others view women's bodies. If we consider that beauty standards are double embodied (Kuipers, 2015), meaning they reflect not only the beauty

ideals applied to oneself and one's own body but also the evaluations directed at others, then muscularity is increasingly becoming a body ideal for women (Grahn, 2024).

Body image research has mainly focused on gender comparisons, mostly ignoring intersections of beauty standards and gender, with class, race/ethnicity, or other axes of inequality (for discussion see Guest & Daniels, this volume). Meanwhile, cultural sociological research has provided indications of differences in views regarding the ideal body at the intersection of gender and social class. For instance, Vandebroek (2016) found that regardless of class status, men consider a toned physique as the ideal body, while for women, the ideal body becomes slimmer the higher one moves up the social class hierarchy.

Beauty standards related to gender are not only classed but also racialized. For example, American studies show that Black women may be perceived as more masculine than White women, and therefore less attractive (Monk, this volume). In contrast, Asian men may be stereotyped for their femininity, which in turn is associated with being less attractive (for discussion see, Monk et al., 2021; Monk, this volume). Such scattered studies suggest a need for intersectional studies of beauty.

Research on beauty standards typically approaches gender as binary. However, we see in actual practice that androgynous or gender-fluid looks and other beauty approaches that play with the gender binary are increasingly valued and legitimized by institutions that play an important role in the reproduction of standards, such as high fashion: new 'non-binary' or 'gender-fluid' role models garner millions of followers in social media and appear on high-fashion catwalks and in avant-garde fashion magazines (Beyer, 2022; Crepax, 2017; Kuipers et al., 2017). Kuipers (2015) found that gender-bending appeals to some women and younger people, but less to men and older people. Even the traditional premise of traditional aesthetics and feminist art theory—the assumption that the gender binary is the dominant dividing line in the ways people view images of others—has been challenged

(Miscenà et al., 2024). This demonstrates the need for empirical studies of beauty standards, as applied to self and others, beyond the gender binary.

3 The Role of Gendered Beauty Practices in Perpetuating Inequalities

Another way that beauty is gendered is through beauty practices, or 'beauty work'. The norms associated with these practices support, but sometimes challenge the gendered system of beauty and inequality. In the same way that beauty standards are gendered, so too are the social norms concerning taking care of one's appearance. Although we argue in this handbook that the demand to look good has become a prevailing norm, this does not affect all genders to the same extent. Instead, in the contemporary West, for example, women are still expected to engage in a greater number of body management practices, invest more time and money in engaging in beauty and body work, and in general, be more concerned about their appearance than men (Gimlin, 2007; Sarpila et al., 2020; Åberg et al., 2020).

Although popular accounts and research often stress that gendered norms of beauty are produced in media representations, from fairy tales to social media, beauty norms are also, and maybe primarily, (re)produced in everyday beauty practices undertaken by adults. One traditional and widely discussed theme in gender differences in such practices, especially in the media, has been appearance spending. While there is little research based on representative samples, reliable data do suggest that spending on beauty remains highly gendered. For example, official household consumption expenditure data show that single women spend more money on personal care and hygiene products than single men, and from a time-based comparison perspective, these gender differences have remained surprisingly consistent from the 1990s to around 2020¹ (Sarpila, 2021).

¹ It should be noted that household consumption data, as the name suggests, refer to household-level data, and

Women also buy more clothing (Joanes et al., 2020; Kukkonen et al., 2019) and cosmetics—and not always just for themselves, but also for their family members (Sarpila, 2013). Related to this, there seems to be a significant difference even in the number of products used on a daily basis. A comprehensive French study focusing on exposure to cosmetics found that women use an average of sixteen different hair, face, and body care products daily, while the corresponding figure for adult men was eight (Ficheux et al., 2015). Moreover, the same gendered consumption pattern seems to apply to more extreme ways of altering one's appearance: although the increasing prevalence of cosmetic surgeries for men has been discussed for decades, the vast majority of cosmetic surgeries are still performed on women (Menon, this volume).

Yet, spending money provides only a limited view of the gendered nature of beauty and body work, since 'enhancing' one's appearance also requires another scarce resource: time. By examining time use, we can gain insight into everyday practices like bathing and dressing, which everyone must engage in, regardless of gender. Intuitively, one might think that gender differences are less pronounced in these practices. However, an exemplary examination of the time spent on personal washing, dressing, and sport activities in selected European countries in 2010,² namely Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Finland, shows that across countries, women spend about ten minutes more per day on washing and dressing themselves than men, except in Italy, where we find no gender difference. Conversely, men spend more time on sport activities in all countries. In Finland and Belgium, the difference was found to be over 10 minutes, while elsewhere the difference was smaller (Eurostat, 2018; for a review see Kowal et al., 2022). These gaps naturally raise the question of how gender differences have changed over the years. Looking at the

time use in one country, Finland, the difference in personal washing and dressing has remained constant from the 1980s to the 2020s or even increased slightly, as the time women spend on this activity has increased slightly more than that of men. The gender gap in time spent on exercising has narrowed over time, as women engage in sports more (Statistics Finland, 2024).

Women's increased engagement in beauty work is understandable, considering the contemporary value of good looks and slim and toned body as an indicator of a disciplined and attractive individual (Vandebroeck & Kuipers, this volume; Widdows, 2018). Men likely have not widely adopted beauty work because it is traditionally considered feminine. Tseïlon (1995) argued that beauty work is easily moralized in society because these practices are associated with the artificial construction of femininity involving an element of 'deception'. While femininity emanates as artificial, linked with vanity and even foolishness, men are more easily perceived as 'ready-made' and genuine (Black & Sharma, 2001). Masculine or gender-neutral body modification techniques are also more clearly linked to the concept of 'hard work' (Sassatelli, 2010), which is generally valued in contemporary societies (see De Keere et al., this volume). By contrast, plastic surgery is easily moralized as 'a quick fix' that doesn't require individual effort, and is thus considered morally inferior (Widdows, 2018). This not only affects the value given to different practices, but also their normative approval as practices engaged in by men and women (Sarpila et al., 2020).

The gendered nature of beauty standards mirrors the framing of beauty work as more feminine than masculine. However, there are indications that this is changing, as moral barriers for men to engage in beauty work such as skin and body care, or more extensive dressing and grooming, appear to be lowering (Kuipers, 2022). Similarly, muscularity is strongly associated with male appearance, which may prevent women from engaging in certain sports that visibly build muscle (Vandebroeck, 2016). Yet, younger cohorts of women have been shown to go to the gym increasingly with the motivation to build muscle, while

consumption within households cannot be compared by gender. Therefore, the only option to examine consumption from a gender perspective is to compare the consumption of single-person households.

² The latest EU-harmonized data are from the year 2010.

younger men are nowadays more motivated by weight management—a motivation traditionally considered feminine (Mishina et al., 2024).

Studies of the general population often obscure the beauty practices that are part of the everyday lives of many LGBTQ+ people, which challenge the boundaries of normative femininity and masculinity. Qualitative research, by contrast, has thematized the diversity of queer beauty practices and their consequences for relation between beauty, gender, and inequality, also beyond these communities (Barry & Martin, 2016; Jenzen, 2022). For example, Chen and Kanai (2022) demonstrate how male gay influencers perform femininity in beauty work on social media, influencing beauty work practices among women within and beyond the queer community. Drag queen culture has, for decades, been associated with breaking the norms of heteronormative society and shaking up gender roles and appearance-related expressions (Feldman & Hakim, 2023). Social media offers new affordances to show and spread these alternative beauty practices. Studies have shown how various minorities successfully use these social media platforms to challenge heteronormative, gender, and racial norms related to perceptions of how people ‘should’ look and what kind of beauty and body work they should engage (Jenzen, 2022; Kim, 2023; Maddox 2021).

Yet, it is interesting how mostly men—especially those with considerable status—benefit from this challenge to gender normativity, as they are able to express and experiment with appearances traditionally perceived as more feminine while women are not afforded the same leeway in adopting appearances traditionally perceived as more masculine. Thus, while drag queens have become cultural icons, it is hard to think of examples of ‘butch’ or similar more masculine-coded queer female appearances entering the mainstream. Vandebroek (2016) has analyzed how, as one moves up the class hierarchy, traditional masculine physicality and, conversely, a lean body type are more common than in the working class, where masculinity has traditionally been built around a strong and capable (and thus ‘bigger’) appearance. The idea is familiar from Veblen,

who also saw aesthetic taste and the responsibility for the family’s overall appearance as specifically the task of the upper-class man (Veblen, 1994 [1899]).

In later analyses of heteronormative masculinity and beauty practices traditionally perceived as feminine (for example, in the context of the metrosexual phenomenon), it has also been emphasized that the adoption of ‘new’ ways of caring for appearance by men who are already higher in the status hierarchy does not undermine the traditional gender system but rather reinforces the already strong position of high-status White heterosexual men (Foster & Baker, 2022; Kaplan et al., 2017; Sarpila, 2021). A similar gendered setup can be seen in the following, as we move on to research about the gendered *outcomes* and *mechanisms* underlying gendered inequalities.

4 Gendered Outcomes and Mechanisms Driving Gendered Inequalities

Who benefits from beauty? To understand the relation between beauty and inequality, it is essential to consider the extent to which appearance *outcomes* are gendered and what mechanisms drive these outcomes. On an aggregate level, a convincing argument can be made that the (near-)universal association of women and beauty has not helped women much. However, if we look at the individual level, the outcomes are less clear. Existing research does not offer conclusive answer to the question whether women or men (let alone, other genders) ultimately benefit from more appearance, and how this works.

Individual studies have yielded divergent conclusions on whether men or women benefit most from good looks. Instead of focusing on individual studies, further insights can be gained from systematic literature reviews and meta-analysis. Such reviews collect studies that meet specific criteria, typically sourced from databases, to synthesize findings on a particular topic, such as socio-economic outcomes of beauty.

Interestingly, however, not all systematic literature reviews on the outcomes of beauty have included the gendered consequences of beauty. For instance, the otherwise commendable review of the perks and penalties associated with beauty by Anderson et al. (2010) does not explore how these benefits and disadvantages vary between genders. Over the years, most systematic literature reviews fail to provide a systematic perspective on whether the outcomes of beauty are gendered, and if so, how. Some have concluded that the outcomes are not gendered, while others have concluded that they are.

Reviewing the reviews, we find that the argument for non-gendered or ‘gender-neutral’ socio-economic rewards/penalties for beauty is primarily made in literature reviews that cover research until the turn of the twenty-first century. For instance, the meta-analysis on attractiveness and job-related outcomes by Hosoda et al. (2003) concludes that beauty provides similar benefits to women and men. A similar conclusion has been reached in what is likely the most cited meta-analysis in psychology in this field: Langlois et al. (2000)³ found that people tend to judge and treat individuals deemed attractive more favorably than those perceived as less attractive. Although this meta-analysis does not directly address unequal treatment based on beauty, it has often been cited to offer a mechanistic explanation for beauty-based unequal treatment, in psychology but also economics and social stratification research.

The argument or research hypothesis regarding the non-gendered nature of the consequences of appearance is often grounded in evolutionary

psychology (Lidborg & Boothroyd, this volume) and, to some extent, sociological status characteristics literature (Kühn & Wolbring, this volume). Both fields have traditionally provided researchers studying beauty and inequality with reasons to assume that, due to biological and sexual selection-related factors (evolutionary psychology) and/or various learned associations and stereotypes linked to attractive individuals (social psychology, status characteristics approach), people tend to treat (all) attractive individuals better than others (Hamermesh, 2011; Kukkonen et al., 2024; Kühn & Wolbring, this volume; Raudenska, this volume; Smith & Hampolova, this volume; Wolbring, this volume). These explanations often form the basis of research on lookism, or discrimination or unequal treatment of people based on physical appearance (Hamermesh, 2011; Kühn & Wolbring, this volume).

However, recent literature reviews have identified an interaction between beauty outcomes and gender, meaning that the outcomes of beauty are not nearly always gender-neutral, at least when it comes to socio-economic consequences. Specifically, it seems that beauty does not (always or automatically) bring benefits, especially for women (see reviews by Frevert & Walker, 2014; Kukkonen et al., 2024). Recent individual studies also support this view, suggesting that good looks more consistently bring benefits to men than to women, at least in the context of labor markets (Hellyer et al., 2023; Kühn & Wolbring, 2024). The analysis of these results has pointed to gender stereotypes, particularly how attractiveness in women, when associated with male-dominated professions and contexts, leads people to question women’s suitability for certain fields or roles (see Kühn & Wolbring, this volume). However, systematic literature reviews have not provided clear support for this explanation alone. It has been suggested that women may benefit less from beauty for various contextual factors (Kukkonen et al., 2024), and additional traits beyond just attractiveness and gender (Frevert & Walker, 2014).

One of the most commonly discussed ‘confounding’ or intersectional factors between

³ This meta-analysis by Langlois et al. (2000) exclusively draws on studies from APA databases. It focuses solely on psychological research on the topic, specifically on judgments and treatment based on attractiveness. In other words, it examines, first, the associations (e.g., friendliness) linked to attractive versus unattractive individuals and, second, the treatment effects—namely, the likelihood of outcomes such as cooperation or helping behavior based on attractiveness. Due to the nature of the psychological research tradition, the connection to inequality is mostly indirect, making it distinct from other frequently cited literature reviews, albeit still important. It should also be noted that this meta-analysis did not find any gender differences in the effects of attractiveness on individuals’ judgments or treatment.

beauty outcomes and gender is race/ethnicity. As repeatedly argued in this handbook, both evaluations and valuations of attractiveness are often embedded in race, ethnicity, and gender (Craig, this volume; Kuipers, Chow, Chong & Zhou, this volume; Menon, this volume; Monk, this volume). Despite this, a surprisingly small amount of research has systematically compared appearance outcomes at the intersection of attractiveness, gender, and race/ethnicity. However, as Monk and colleagues' (2021) analysis suggests, examining these intersections is crucial—particularly in the United States, where beauty of Black women and Black men leads to higher earnings. Monk and colleagues suggest that attractiveness signals atypicality relative to stereotypes associated with a racial category, which provides a particular advantage to the individual. Yet, such mechanisms are complex and depend on culture-specific understandings of minority groups, which intersect particularly with gender (Monk, this volume). For example, in Germany, which has a large Turkish minority, attractiveness was not found to be associated with how trustworthy men belonging to this minority were perceived to be (Hellyer et al., 2023). Yet, the recent study by Fernández-Reino and Rovira (2024) indicates that when men and women from ethnic minorities are compared, the outcomes for women are once again more unpredictable and inconsistent. For men, including or omitting a photo in the resume does not affect employers' responses. For women, however, whether an attractive photo on the resume benefits or hampers call-backs depends on the country context (the Netherlands vs. Germany), the minority group, and the visual cues provided (headscarf or not).

Additionally, in relation to the outcomes of beauty and gender—or appearance more broadly—there has been debate in the research literature about the role of class hierarchies in determining who benefits from appearance. Bahamonde and Sarpila (2024), for example, show that looking like the stereotypically 'right kind' of representative for one's occupation in the eyes of others is more likely to bring advantages to men than to women. It seems to be particularly disadvantageous for women to fit the stereotype of

a working-class professional, whereas no similar class-based appearance penalty has been observed for men.

Research on beauty outcomes and the underlying mechanisms has traditionally been very quantitatively oriented, using either surveys or experiments. Consequently, there has been little attention for outcomes beyond classical 'demographics': gender, race/ethnicity, and class. Little has been done to lift the veil on non-binary perspectives, which often are not specifically included in such analyses, and probably require more focused and fine-grained research designs. Next, we will discuss what we can conclude based on previous research and what unexplored areas remain for those interested in gender-related inequalities in beauty.

5 New Avenues: Gendered Beauty, Gender Diversity, and Other Axes of Inequality

This chapter critically reviews research on beauty and inequality from the perspective of gender, and particularly gendered inequalities. In summary, we find that beauty is mostly recognized as a feminine issue and obligation. Across cultures, beauty standards and beauty work are subject to highly gendered norms, which usually place higher demands on women. This is related to the fundamental connection, across many societies, between gender and beauty. As a result, when men engage in beauty work, they are more easily rewarded for something that is taken for granted or seen as obligatory for women (Adkins, 2001 makes a similar argument in another context). Thus, beauty does not appear solely as an uncertain resource for women (see Craig, this volume), but it also becomes a resource that men may actually benefit more from than women.

On the basis of this review, we find some support for the claim that beauty and body work and good appearance are increasingly expected from men. At the level of individual behavior, we find that individuals—regardless of gender—are doing more for their appearance than before, which is in line with Widdows (2018) analysis

of beauty as an ‘ethical ideal’ for everyone, or Kuipers’ (2022) suggestion of ‘an expanding beauty regime’. However, on the basis of the limited evidence, we do not find strong support for a closing gender gap in beauty and body practices. When women undertake beauty and body work that was traditionally more seen as masculine, for example rigorous sports and exercise, they do so in addition to existing traditional beauty work, not as a replacement to it. Available European data suggest that men have not adopted more feminine beauty practices to the same extent. Indeed, it seems that the input-output ratio of beauty and body work also appears better from men’s perspective, as men generally spend less time and financial resources on beauty body work, and at the same time, appearance is more likely to benefit them, for example, in the workplace, than it does women. The forms of body work practiced by men are also considered inherently more acceptable and valuable than the beauty work traditionally practiced by women. However, no far-reaching conclusions can be drawn yet because of the lack of proper statistics and systematic comparisons beyond individual country cases.

In addition to more systematic comparisons, existing research should try to look at beauty standards, practices, and outcomes beyond the gender binary. As non-binary and queer identities are increasingly prominent, and increasingly contested, there is an urgent need to understand how beauty can express and mobilize non-heteronormative identities, and how it can reproduce beauty-based inequalities. Moreover, this will also shed light on how beauty and appearance can be politically thematized and even weaponized in political projects. The current literature has made great advances in demonstrating the gendered nature of beauty within the binary heteronormative gender system. But as we saw in our discussion of studies on queer challenges to this system, looking beyond the gender binary will provide a better understanding of the relation between gender and beauty (cf. Weißflog & Grigoryan, 2024).

Similarly, future research can expand on the promising previous work of research on class and race and its intersection with gender, and beauty

to further develop intersectional approaches to gendered inequality. This can also draw in additional intersections with inequalities, such as age, health, and national or cultural differences. Taken together, the future of the study of gendered beauty inequalities looks promising as the current scholarship provides an excellent base to further study these intersections, develop more systematic studies, include insights from smaller cases studies, and look beyond traditional understanding of gender that seem increasingly irrelevant or outdated in light of shifts to the gender system.

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