Pretty unequal?
Ethnicity, Gender and Returns to Physical Attractiveness in Germany

Joshua Hellyer (MZES), Emily Hellriegel (BUW), Johanna Gereke (MZES), Reinhard Schunck (BUW)
Pretty Integrated? The Causes and Consequences of Immigrants’ Physical Attractiveness on Integration Outcomes

DFG-funded project, 2021-24

(a) Determinants of physical attractiveness perceptions

(b) Consequences of physical attractiveness for socio-economic outcomes

Lots of experimental data collections ongoing…

Dr. Johanna Gereke
PI, MZES

Prof. Reinhard Schunck
PI, BUW

Joshua Hellyer
PhD student, MZES

Emily Hellriegel
PhD student, BUW
Motivation

• Physical attractiveness confers many advantages in a variety of life domains
  (Frevert & Walker, 2014; Gordon et al., 2013; Jæger, 2011; Langlois et al., 2000; Scholz & Sicinski, 2015)

• Notably, highly attractive people earn more than their peers, receiving a “beauty premium”
  (Doorley & Sierminska, 2015; Gordon et al., 2013; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Mobius & Rosenblat, 2006)

• The size of this premium may vary according to primary axes of social division: gender and race, ethnicity, migration background
  (Doorley & Sierminska, 2015; Monk et al., 2021)
Research question

Does the size of the **beauty premium** vary by migration background and gender?

- contribution to literatures on social stratification and labor market inequalities
Theoretical expectations: Two Perspectives

Resource substitution

- The effect of any given resource is larger for someone with fewer alternative resources (Ross & Mirowsky, 2006)

-> Beauty should give the greatest benefit to the most disadvantaged (Bauldry et al., 2016; Monk et al., 2021)

Human capital

- Capital is not perfectly transferable between countries (Chiswick & Miller, 2009; Friedberg, 2000)
- Due to localized beauty standards, “bodily capital” may not transfer well

-> Beauty should give the greatest benefit those with least cultural distance
Hypotheses

Larger beauty premium for:

**Resource substitution**
1. People *with* migration background
2. *First*-generation immigrants
3. Women vs. men
4. People from backgrounds with *low* cultural similarity

**Human capital**
1. People *without* migration background
2. *Second*-generation immigrants
3. ?
4. People from backgrounds with *high* cultural similarity
Data & methods

• **Data:** German Family Panel pairfam, waves 1-12 (~12,000 respondents) (Brüderl et al., 2021)

• **Independent variables:** physical attractiveness rated 1-7: “How attractive do you find the respondent?” by interviewer in wave 1, migration background (own & parental place of birth)

• **Dependent variables:** log-transformed net & gross hourly earnings

• **Methods:** two-way fixed effects models (interviewer and wave fixed effects)

  *In progress: multiverse analysis*

• **Controls:** relating to respondents’ socio-economic status (SES), health, personality, and social distance
Attractiveness ratings & migration background

Distribution of physical attractiveness first wave: Migration background

Male: No migration background

1st generation

2nd generation

Female: No migration background

1st generation

2nd generation

Physical attractiveness

Male: No migration background N = 4523, 1st generation N = 709, 2nd generation N = 670
Female: No migration background N = 4605, 1st generation N = 860, 2nd generation N = 766
Attractiveness ratings & ethnicity

Distribution of physical attractiveness first wave: Ethnicity

Physical attractiveness

**Male:** No migration background N = 4492, Aussiedler N = 333, Interethnic N = 312, Turkish background N = 268, Other non-German N = 507

**Female:** No migration background N = 4573, Aussiedler N = 365, Interethnic N = 386, Turkish background N = 282, Other non-German N = 635
Beauty premium & migration background

**Women**

- Net hourly earnings (€)
- Attractiveness (interviewer rating first wave)
- Not very attractive vs. Very attractive
- No migration background N = 13524, 1st generation N = 1677, 2nd generation N = 1062

**Men**

- Net hourly earnings (€)
- Attractiveness (interviewer rating first wave)
- Not very attractive vs. Very attractive
- No migration background N = 14499, 1st generation N = 1369, 2nd generation N = 1479

Legend:
- 1 No migration background
- 2 1st generation
- 3 2nd generation
Beauty premium & ethnicity

Women

Men

Gross hourly earnings (€)

Not very attractive

Very attractive

Attractiveness (interviewer rating first wave)

Net hourly earnings (€)

Not very attractive

Very attractive

Attractiveness (interviewer rating first wave)

○ No migration background, N = 14376

□ Aussiedler, N = 752

♦ Interethnic, N = 821

▲ Turkish background, N = 488

+ Other, N = 941
Multiverse analysis

• Planned analysis with multiverse methods to estimate all feasible model specifications (Steegen et al. 2016; Simonsohn et al. 2020)
  • Tests robustness of findings: address the lack of transparency and model uncertainty
  • (Partially) addresses problem of selective reporting
Discussion

• Only Germans without migration background receive a significant beauty premium

• Qualified support for “human capital” perspective: effect of Eurocentric beauty standards?
  • But: no differences between ethnic groups

• Attractiveness as a driver of immigrant-native wage gap?

• Why are Germans with migration background less able to transfer “bodily capital” into earnings?
References (1)


References (2)


