

## A. Specific Aims

Beauty stratifies. How a person looks influences how much money she or he makes, which has important implications for health and well-being throughout adulthood. Like race, social class, and gender, therefore, physical attractiveness is a source of inequality that can undermine the health of the population. Even though it does not get as much attention as those other demographic and economic factors, the stratifying role of physical attractiveness in the labor market has been studied fairly extensively by economists, sociologists, and psychologists (Hamermesh 2011a). Moreover, the “beauty premium” in wages that this research has documented has become a public issue, fueling media interest as well as legal debates, court cases, and legislation (Rhode 2010). The general consensus seems to be that, although some portion of this premium is undoubtedly a function of contemporaneous discrimination by employers, it may also reflect personal histories of experience across the life course that are shaped by looks. Unfortunately, systematic study of how this adult beauty premium might emerge over time has not been conducted. Much work has been done on specific windows in the stages of the life course leading up to adulthood (see Langlois et al. 2000 for a review), including our own mixed methods work on the social and academic achievement of physically attractive and unattractive youth in high school (Gordon, Crosnoe, and Wang 2013). These snapshots point to a potentially cumulative process of inequality, one that evolves as youth grow up and their looks change, but no data have been available to study this dynamic process over the full span of development from birth to young adulthood.

The purpose of this project is to build such a data source for public use and then leverage it to test the conceptual model of the stratifying role of physical attractiveness from childhood into adulthood that we began developing in our recent book. This model—which draws from multiple theories across disciplines—focuses on the interplay among physical attractiveness, developmental trajectories, and social contexts; recognizes how each can change over time; highlights issues of timing, sleeper effects, and the lingering residue of early experience; and positions experiences from childhood through young adulthood as the foundation for long-term health and human capital inequalities (Gordon et al. 2013). To explore this model, we will build on an extant longitudinal study of a birth cohort of children followed into their early 20s that has been used by a broad array of researchers interested in children and youth for two decades. The NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD) includes videotapes of children gathered nearly one dozen times from infancy to adolescence that we will use to create the largest-ever public repository of physical attractiveness ratings for a cohort from birth into young adulthood. These new data will be merged with the already rich multi-method developmental, biological, and ecological data in the SECCYD to allow an initial test of our conceptual model, and archived at ICPSR so that other scholars can extend our work. *Specifically, the aims of this project are:*

*A1. To measure physical attractiveness dynamically.* Following a systematic observational rating protocol, we will add beauty ratings to the SECCYD for the same children at multiple time points from birth through adolescence. These data will allow the creation of time-specific and longitudinal measures of attractiveness that can, for example, capture youth transitioning from “ugly duckling to beautiful swan” and vice versa.

*A2. To examine and unpack the implications of physical attractiveness for key health, social, and academic outcomes over time.* We first describe the degree to which dimensions of attractiveness associate with mental health, social attainment, and academic achievement within and across time points, and then use longitudinal analyses to capture dynamic change and improve causal inference. The results will pinpoint critical points in the stratifying process of beauty.

*A3. To explore how continuity and change in the stratifying role of physical attractiveness varies across diverse groups and settings.* We assess similarities and differences in the associations among physical attractiveness, mental health mechanisms, and social and academic achievement outcomes by race (as sample sizes allow), gender, and socioeconomic status and across school contexts. These comparative analyses will point to ways in which group- and context-specific norms, opportunities, and resources may accentuate or minimize the consequences of being attractive.

Conducted by a team of mid-career and senior scholars from sociology, psychology, and economics, this project will be theoretically grounded and methodologically sophisticated. It is also policy oriented, which is important given the public and legal interest in the topic. Although health is not its exclusive focus, health is an integral component of the approach to the project—as a dimension of physical attractiveness (e.g., weight), as a mechanism by which physical attractiveness has effects on social and academic achievement (e.g., mental health), and because the adult socioeconomic attainment that is expected to reflect histories of physical attractiveness is a fundamental component of lifelong health and health disparities. Lastly, this project will provide a practical service to the field by expanding a public use data set so that it can be used to study the role of attractiveness in a wide variety of outcomes, including health behaviors and health disparities.