

NATIONAL SCHOOL OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES
DOCTORAL SCHOOL
SOCIOLOGY FIELD

SUMMARY
DOCTORAL THESIS

Scientific coordinator:

Prof. univ. dr. Vladimir PASTI

PhD student:

Corina Ioana BENGA

BUCHAREST

2024

NATIONAL SCHOOL OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES

DOCTORAL SCHOOL

SOCIOLOGY FIELD

DOCTORAL THESIS

MECHANISMS OF THE CONSTRUCTION AND FUNCTIONING OF EROTIC CAPITAL IN ROMANIA

Scientific coordinator:

Prof. univ. dr. Vladimir PASTI

PhD student:

Corina Ioana BENGA

BUCHAREST

2024

Contents of the doctoral thesis

INTRODUCTION.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 1. Body and sexuality	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Sexuality between biological and social; Historical aspects.	Error! Bookmark not defined.
History of representations of the human body.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The dynamics of beauty ideals	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Industrial Revolution and changes in body image	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Increase in movements of positive approach to corporeality	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Technological and medical advances. Their influence on the perception of the human body	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Theoretical perspectives on the body	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Body and the Construction of Sexual and Gender Identities	Error! Bookmark not defined.
defined.	
The role of culture in shaping sexual norms.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Body Politics and Sexuality Regulation	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Contemporary debates on sexual autonomy and bodily rights.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
defined.	
Chapter 2. Femininity and masculinity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Attractiveness, sensuality and sex appeal.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Body and femininity. Femininity Management.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Femininity Management and Objectification	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Femininity and motherhood.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Ideal models and their construction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Femininity Management and Fashion	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The social valorization of femininity between the consumer society and the socialist world	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Construction of gender roles – the female gender.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Socialization and gender roles	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Gender performance and women's roles	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Theoretical approaches to masculinity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The importance of studying masculinity from a sociological perspective.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
defined.	
Hegemonic masculinity in Connell's theory of gender order.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
defined.	
Intersectionality and Masculinity: The Role of Race, Class, and Sexuality	Error! Bookmark not defined.
defined.	

Challenges to Traditional Masculinity: Toxic Masculinity and Gender Norms	Error!
Bookmark not defined.	
New masculinities and gender fluidity in contemporary society	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 3. Social Role Costume	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Fashion as a language of social identity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The role of fashion in social stratification	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Cultural capital and aesthetic dimensions in fashion.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Dress codes and professional identity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Dress codes in gender performance	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Subcultures and resistance through clothing style.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Clothing style and impression management.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Clothing as a form of non-verbal communication.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Goffman's Social Interaction Framework.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Analyzing the performance of social roles	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 4. Social and erotic capital. The role of erotic capital in social stratification.....	Error!
Bookmark not defined.	
Bourdieu and the theory of forms of capital	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The role of economic capital in social stratification	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Cultural capital and social mobility	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Cultural capital in the educational system and social mobility.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
defined.	
Share capital and its forms.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The relationship between social capital and power dynamics	Error! Bookmark not defined.
defined.	
Catherine Hakim: erotic capital as a factor of social mobility	Error! Bookmark not defined.
defined.	
The Components of Erotic Capital in Hakim's Perspective.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
defined.	
Other approaches to erotic capital	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The problem of symbolic capital	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Tangible capital.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The interaction between corporeal and symbolic capital	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Sexual Capital.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The repression of erotic capital and the pressures to maintain social hierarchy	Error!
Bookmark not defined.	

Chapter 5. Erotic Capital Research. Quantitative and qualitative approach ..**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Methodology.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Objectives	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Research Questions.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Quantitative research. Opinion poll.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Qualitative research. Group focus	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Technical description	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Values, attitudes and erotic capital. Nationally representative research.. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Values and attitudes in everyday life	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Perceptions of female practices and concerns related to erotic capital management....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Self-confidence and its gender dimension.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Men's self-confidence	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Shared knowledge and erotic capital	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Flirting and social interaction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Family life.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Women's Social Practices and Attitudes	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The ideal man from three perspectives	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Mapping perceptions of erotic capital	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Self-confidence – the engine of erotic capital. A qualitative approach ... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Erotic capital – definition and components	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The construction of erotic capital	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The impact of motherhood on erotic capital.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Emotional power versus physical power	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Benefits and Costs of Erotic Capital.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Social Functions of Erotic Capital and the Moral Aspects.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

CONCLUSION

Bibliography

ANNEX 1. Questionnaire – everyday life

ANNEX 2. Focus group grid - pre-test

ANNEX 3. Focus group grid - Women

ANNEX 4. Focus group grid - Men.....

Summary of the doctoral thesis

Chapter 1. Body and sexuality	8
Sexuality between the biological and the social. Historical aspects.....	8
History of representations of the human body.....	8
The dynamics of beauty ideals	9
The Industrial Revolution and Body Image Changes.....	10
Theoretical perspectives on the body	10
The Body and the Construction of Sexual and Gender Identities	11
Contemporary debates on sexual autonomy and bodily rights.....	11
CHAPTER 2. Femininity and masculinity.....	13
Attractiveness, sensuality and sex appeal.....	13
Body and femininity. Femininity Management.....	14
Femininity Management and Fashion	15
The social valorization of femininity between the consumer society and the socialist world	16
Construction of gender roles – the female gender	17
Theoretical approaches to masculinity	18
Chapter 3. Social Role Costume	20
Fashion as a language of social identity	20
Cultural capital and aesthetic dimensions in fashion.....	21
Dress codes and professional identity	21
Dress codes in gender performance.....	21
Clothing style and impression management.....	22
Goffman's Social Interaction Framework.....	22
Chapter 4. Social and erotic capital. The role of erotic capital in social stratification.....	24
Bourdieu and the theory of forms of capital.....	24
Catherine Hakim: erotic capital as a factor of social mobility	25
The problem of symbolic capital	25
Tangible capital.....	26
Sexual capital.....	27
The repression of erotic capital and the pressures to maintain social hierarchy	27
Erotic Capital Research. Quantitative and qualitative approach.....	28
Methodology.....	28
Values, attitudes and erotic capital. Nationally representative research.....	31

Values and attitudes in everyday life	31
Perceptions of female practices and concerns related to erotic capital	33
Self-confidence and its gender dimension	37
Shared knowledge and erotic capital	38
Family life.....	39
Women's Social Practices and Attitudes	41
The ideal man from three perspectives	43
Mapping perceptions of erotic capital	43
Self-confidence – the engine of erotic capital. A qualitative approach	44
Erotic capital – definition and components	44
The construction of erotic capital	45
The impact of motherhood on erotic capital.....	46
Emotional power versus physical power	47
Benefits and Costs of Erotic Capital.....	48
Concluding remarks	50

Introduction

The PhD thesis presented is based on extensive theoretical analysis and extensive empirical research, divided into four chapters. The first chapter explores the evolution of the body and sexuality throughout history, including issues such as sexual norms and current policies on autonomy and bodily rights. The second chapter addresses femininity and masculinity, analyzing the social influences on these constructs and performative gender roles. The third chapter investigates how clothing and fashion influence social identity, and the last chapter deals in detail with the theory of erotic capital and how it connects with social, bodily and sexual capital, while highlighting its mechanisms of repression.

The research component of the thesis involves a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative study, conducted on a nationally representative sample, provides significant data on the perceptions and capitalization of erotic capital in Romania. Qualitative research, conducted through focus groups and interviews, has brought a deeper dimension to how individuals perceive and experience this type of capital.

Chapter 1. Body and sexuality

Sexuality between the biological and the social. Historical aspects

Human sexuality has been studied scientifically since the nineteenth century, initially from a medical perspective. Havelock Ellis published in 1897 the first major work on sexuality, which was banned from the general public until 1935. Studies of sexuality were marginalized until the interwar period, although anthropologists documented aspects of sexuality in various cultures.

Human sexuality differs from animal sexuality through the strong influence of social and cultural factors, controlled by norms and values that shape desirable behaviors. Sexual relations have not only a biological function (procreation), but also a social one, often separate from the biological purpose. Furthermore, Catherine Hakim suggests that sexuality is influenced by factors such as erotic capital, defined as a combination of beauty, sensuality, and social skills.

The human body is a topic of major interest in multiple fields, including medicine, philosophy, sociology, and art. Ancient philosophers and theologians saw the body separated from the soul as a prison for reason. Instead, modernity and scientific developments have changed the perception of the body, moving from the dualistic view to one in which the body is an essential element of human existence and identity. The sociological study of the body highlights a transition from the biological to the social body, influenced by norms and power

relations. Michel Foucault introduced the concept of the "docile body", a body disciplined by social institutions through supervision and control. Pierre Bourdieu also pointed out that bodily practices, such as clothing and grooming, reflect cultural capital and social class.

The body and sexuality were influenced by religion, traditions, and magical practices, from agricultural rituals to the worship of the beauty gods in ancient Greece. The evolution of the body as a subject of study highlights how its image and use have been shaped by cultural and social changes throughout history. Today, the body and erotic capital are seen as valuable resources that influence behaviors and social relationships.

History of representations of the human body

The evolutionary perspective on the human body explains how physical traits and functions, including sexuality, have been shaped by natural selection and adaptation. From the hypothesis suggesting that human traits evolved in response to the environment of the African savannah, to the hypothesis (Foley, 1987) "*aquatic ape*" Noting that human ancestors spent a period of time adapting to a semi-aquatic environment, these theories have implications for understanding bipedal walking and the distribution of other physical traits that play a role in the social management of the body, implicitly in human sexuality. In addition, these adaptations have also shaped attractiveness standards and mating behaviors, influencing sexual selection (Lovejoy, 1981/2017).

Evolution has determined preferences for physical traits that signal health and fertility, impacting the social construction of beauty standards (Symons, 1979). Evolutionary psychology shows that sexual preferences and behaviors are rooted in adaptations for survival and reproduction (Buss, 1989). Physical aspects influence social dynamics and hierarchies, being correlated with status and social value (Burke, 2009).

Thus, the sociological study of the body must recognize the evolutionary influences on physical and psychological traits and their impact on social norms and relationships related to sexuality.

The dynamics of beauty ideals

Throughout history, the human body has reflected the beauty ideals of different societies, from the robust fertility statuettes of the Paleolithic to the slender proportions of the twentieth century. Beauty has been influenced by economic, cultural and social factors. In ancient Greece and Rome, the ideals of symmetry and harmony were centralized in art, and the Renaissance perpetuated these standards through the works of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, which illustrated anatomical perfection and balance.

In the following centuries, ideals changed: the Baroque period celebrated opulent forms, while the Victorian era favored corseted silhouettes. The Industrial Revolution brought a contrast between the valorization of the functional body and a romantic return to the robust image of rural life. The twentieth century saw a rapid spread of beauty standards through the media, promoting ideals that were difficult to achieve and challenged by feminist movements and the affirmation of body diversity. Today, social media perpetuates and challenges traditional ideals, emphasizing the importance of accepting physical diversity.

These changes reflect the connection between the body and the cultural and social values of each era, demonstrating that beauty is not just a biological concept, but a social construct loaded with meanings.

The Industrial Revolution and Body Image Changes

The Industrial Revolution radically transformed the perception of the human body. In pre-industrial societies, where agrarian labor was dominant, physical strength was essential. With industrialization, the focus shifted from brute force to efficiency, adaptability, and bodily discipline, in accordance with the demands of mechanization and industrial labor (Sennett, 1998). Changes in the way of work have led to a reconfiguration of the rhythms of life and redefining the idea of health and productivity (Thompson, 1967).

Industrialization created a clear distinction between social classes, where the middle class began to associate physical appearance with social status, investing in body care as a symbol of identity and success (Giddens, 1991). Norbert Elias, in his theory of the "process of civilization", points out that industrialization has led to a greater internalization of body control and hygiene and presentation norms, influencing the way society viewed the management and care of the body (Elias, 1939/2000).

Public health movements have accentuated this need for body optimization, promoting hygiene and health as essential social standards (Szreter, 1988). Thus, the Industrial Revolution transformed the body into an entity that needed to be managed, disciplined, and improved, laying the foundations for new standards of health and body image that continue to influence contemporary perceptions.

Theoretical perspectives on the body

The sociology of the body explores how our physical self is shaped and regulated by social structures, offering varied perspectives from Karl Marx to Michel Foucault. Marx sees

the body as an essential element in economic and class structures, where physical labor is central to capitalist production (Marx, 1867/2011). Durkheim, through the concept of social fact, shows how collective norms and rituals impose a conformity of the body to the collective consciousness, demonstrating the importance of ritualized gestures and postures in maintaining social order (Durkheim, 1912/1995).

Symbolic interactionists, such as Mead and Goffman, describe the body as a tool for communicating and negotiating identity. Goffman, in *"Everyday Life as a Spectacle"*, emphasizes social performativity, showing how individuals manage their bodies to conform to social expectations and create favorable impressions (Goffman, 1956/2009).

The Body and the Construction of Sexual and Gender Identities

The sociological study of the body as a place of construction of gender and sexual identity emphasizes how these identities are performed and shaped socially, not just biologically. Judith Butler argues that gender is a performative identity, constituted over time through the stylization of the body, and not a stable feature (Butler, 1990/2006). Pierre Bourdieu, through the concept of habitus, shows how social structures shape bodily practices and dispositions, reflecting societal norms (Bourdieu, 1979/2010).

West and Zimmerman's (1987) "doing gender" theory presents gender as a continuous act in social interactions, where the body becomes a performative agent. Similarly, Foucault explores how social institutions define sexual norms, with the body being the place where cultural sexual scenarios are played out (Foucault, 1976/1995).

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) emphasizes how the dimensions of race, class, and religion influence bodily experiences, providing a deeper understanding of how the body is perceived and experienced. The sociology of the body shows us that gender and sexual identity are actively constructed through interaction with social norms and structures, reflecting the complexity of the interaction between body, gender and sexuality in society. The difference between gender identity and sexual identity is that the former refers to the individual's perception and experience of their own gender, while the latter refers to sexual and/or romantic attraction to other people. These two identities intertwine and contribute to understanding how identity works at the individual and social levels.

Contemporary debates on sexual autonomy and bodily rights

Contemporary debates about sexual autonomy and bodily rights reflect how individuals claim control over their own bodies and sexualities, in a context where social and political regulations play a significant role. Contemporary feminism, influenced by thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, promotes sexual autonomy as a response against the historical control of bodies and the objectification of women, emphasizing the right of each individual to freely govern their own sexual expression and to have access to reproductive rights.

The controversial issues of surrogacy, assisted reproductive technologies, and abortion rights have become central to discussions of bodily rights, highlighting the ethical and social implications of new technologies. Researchers such as Charis Thompson and Catherine MacKinnon have analyzed how these technologies are redefining motherhood and family, challenging the exploitation of women and gender inequalities (Thompson, 2005; MacKinnon, 1989).

The Internet and social networks have brought new spaces for expression and activism, facilitating the affirmation of diverse identities and community support, but also provoking new forms of digital abuse and harassment, highlighting the complexity of sexual autonomy in the digital age. These debates reveal an ongoing struggle between personal freedoms and social control, highlighting the importance of a sociological perspective on how sexual autonomy and bodily rights are negotiated in contemporary society.

Chapter 2. Femininity and masculinity

This chapter focuses on the complexity of the concept of femininity, emphasizing the fact that, although at first glance it seems an easy term to define, on closer analysis it turns out to be much more complex and varied. Femininity is not just a collection of traits traditionally associated with women, but a social construct that includes norms, behaviors, and relational expectations that vary according to time, culture, and social context.

Traditional definitions of femininity include traits such as passivity, submission, and compassion, being perceived as opposite to masculinity. However, anthropologist Margaret Mead has shown that these traits are not universal, but differ according to culture and historical periods. Femininity has also been studied by psychoanalysts such as Freud, who linked it to characteristics such as modesty, and Françoise Dolto, who highlights the role of women in creation and care for others. Simone de Beauvoir redefined femininity, stating that a woman is not born this way, but becomes a woman through the societal processes that shape her. Also, femininity is divided into the traditional one, based on submission and passivity, and the modern one, which promotes autonomy and resistance to dominant norms.

Attractiveness, sensuality and sex appeal

Attractiveness includes not only physical appearance, but also behaviors and personality traits associated with women. Naomi Wolf in *"The Beauty Myth"* highlights the influence of cultural constructs on female beauty and attractiveness standards, showing how they can affect women's self-perception.

Sensuality refers to the personal expression of sexuality and the ability to evoke emotional responses through gestures, aesthetics, and emotions. Michel Foucault, in *"The History of Sexuality"*, explains the impact of societal norms on sexuality and self-perception, thus influencing female sensuality.

Sex appeal combines attractiveness and sensuality, being defined as the ability to arouse interest or desire, usually in a sexual sense. Erving Goffman, in *"Gender Advertisements"*, analyzes the influence of media and marketing in building and reinforcing narratives about sex appeal and femininity, contributing to the socialization of women and the constraint of their behaviors.

These elements form a powerful construct that influences the way women perceive themselves and others. Society's obsession with the external manifestations of femininity can lead to the internalization of unrealistic ideals, affecting women's self-esteem and their social position. Pierre Bourdieu, through the theory of social capital, emphasizes that attractiveness can function as a "social currency", helping women navigate through power structures and privileges. The ideals of femininity vary according to the social, historical, cultural and economic context, and do not translate uniformly between different cultures. The norms and expressions of femininity are dynamic, adapting as societies evolve.

Body and femininity. Femininity Management

The relationship between the body and femininity encompasses aspects related to gender identity, representation and self-representation, as well as the embodied experiences of being identified as feminine. Throughout history and in different cultures, the female body has been imbued with meanings and expectations that form an intrinsic part of how femininity is understood and expressed (Bartky, 1990). Femininity is a set of attributes, behaviors and roles generally associated with girls and women, being shaped and maintained through cultural symbols, media representations and social interactions that define the appearance and behavior acceptable to women (Butler, 1990/2006).

Social standards of beauty are constantly evolving, but they continue to put pressure on women to conform to often limited definitions of femininity. The discourse on beauty and femininity is also related to race, class, and sexuality, significantly influencing self-esteem, mental health, and body image (Wolf, 1991). Femininity is also expressed through personal practices such as clothing choices, makeup, and body modifications, which can undermine the expected norms of femininity and create spaces for alternative forms of female identity (Butler,

1990/2006). The relationship between body and femininity also involves the experiences of transgender women, for whom the expression of femininity becomes an essential aspect of the acceptance of society's normativity (Serano, 2007). Thus, the female body and its associations with femininity are managed both personally and socially, having a profound influence on the way women live their identity.

The female body has been, since ancient times, regarded as a reproductive body, with a fundamental role in society, being defined by the ability to bring life into the world and to breastfeed. In pre-modern societies, research on the woman's body was centered on motherhood and the medical care of the body. In the modern world, perceptions have changed, with an emphasis on the aesthetics and maintenance of the body. This change occurred especially after the nineteenth century, with the emancipation of women and the wide acceptance of the role of sexuality in women's lives, including the freedom to capitalize on erotic capital (Hakim, 2014). In this context, body care is no longer only related to health and motherhood, but also to its enhancement in broader social contexts. The body becomes an investment, its transformation being often achieved through makeup, clothing and other aesthetic methods.

The ideal body model imposed by society directly influences the way women perceive their own bodies and the way they try to conform. The elites of society and social agents, such as designers and aesthetic doctors, have an essential role in disseminating body models and orienting them towards current aesthetic values. Thus, the feminine ideal has undergone considerable changes, from the voluptuous body of the 50s, to the athletic one of the 80s and the lean and toned one of today. The impact of these models has led to new behaviors and social phenomena, such as nutritional diseases or the call for cosmetic surgeries to achieve the desired body dimensions. The feminine ideal does not only mean bodily adjustments, but also practices of caring for and presenting the body in front of others. Women are not only evaluated on the basis of their bodies, but also on the way they manage their appearance through fashion and other social practices, a phenomenon of great impact in contemporary society.

Femininity Management and Fashion

Although concerns about the body and fashion have existed for a long time, interest in fashion has increased significantly in modernity, at which time urbanization, access to resources and the development of communication channels have accelerated changes and popularized clothing models. The sociology of fashion approaches fashion as a social phenomenon that

reflects the desire for differentiation and conformity, connecting it with the processes of social stratification and cultural capital.

In previous centuries, clothing clearly differentiated genders: men wore sober and functional clothes, symbolizing seriousness and strength, while women wore voluminous dresses that constrained their mobility and emphasized delicacy and obedience. These differences reflected the traditional social roles of each gender, with women perceived as passive and docile beings, in contrast to active and dominant men. Instead, the twentieth century brought major changes in women's clothing, with their emancipation and the abandonment of restrictive clothes, such as corsets. Women began to wear more practical and comfortable clothes, including trousers and short haircuts, which allowed them increased mobility and active participation in society.

In the post-war period, women's fashion oscillated between feminine and practical styles, but also under the influence of political ideologies. In communist Romania, women were promoted as workers and mothers, with a sober and practical clothing style, without luxury and extravagance, reflecting the values of the regime. In contrast, in Western Europe and North America, beauty standards have increasingly focused on the woman's body, which must also be cared for according to the trends of the moment.

Today, fashion continues to play a significant role in shaping gender identities, with women often being valued more by their physical appearance than by their skills. Despite the diversification and democratization of fashion, social pressures regarding compliance with certain aesthetic standards remain strong, which profoundly influences perceptions of femininity and the roles that women occupy in society.

The social valorization of femininity between the consumer society and the socialist world

Even if the recognition and study of erotic capital have become more evident in modern societies, the concern for perfecting and capitalizing on physical appearance has existed since ancient civilizations, especially among the elites who could afford to invest in expensive clothing and accessories.

During the communist period in Romania, although the official emphasis was not on fashion consumption, beauty and femininity remained important themes. The advice manuals

for women from the '80s, such as *"The Messengers of Beauty"* by Constanța Popovici, promoted the idea that beauty is a continuous life project, which requires care, discipline and self-knowledge. Women were urged to be visually pleasing and maintain an elegant and natural outfit, to control their gestures and voice, and to adopt a kind and graceful behavior. Popovici emphasizes that beauty is not an innate trait, but a set of qualities that are educated and perfected over time, including aspects such as walking, behavior, and attitude.

These works reflect not only an interest in aesthetics, but also a way of harnessing feminine potential in a society that, while promoting equality, continued to emphasize femininity and beauty. This type of discourse on femininity highlights that the concern for physical appearance was present in various forms even in more restrictive political regimes, such as the communist one, emphasizing that beauty and femininity are not only aesthetic elements, but also social strategies of affirmation and recognition.

Construction of gender roles – the female gender

The historical evolution of female roles reflects how socio-cultural, economic and political factors have shaped the expectations and norms attributed to women in society. From the traditional division of labor in early human societies, where women's roles were often limited to domestic spheres, to the transformations of the modern era, the role of women has undergone significant changes. In ancient civilizations, women were responsible for raising children and maintaining households, a structure that legitimized the patriarchal social order (Lerner, 1986). The Industrial Revolution marked a first major change, as women entered the workforce, albeit under discriminatory and exploitative conditions. In the post-war period, there was an oscillation between the ideal of the housewife in the 1950s and the emancipation movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Coontz, 1992). In the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, the role of women has continued to evolve, with greater representation in politics and progress in gender equality, but also with challenges related to reconciling careers and traditional family roles (Sandberg, 2013).

Today, the role of women continues to be subject to change, influenced by feminist discourse, globalization and technological change. However, the historical legacy of traditional roles still influences contemporary perceptions, often accentuating tensions between professional opportunities and family expectations. These changes are perceived differently in different societal contexts, and are often analyzed more in developed Western societies.

Understanding gender roles through different theoretical perspectives provides a "lens" on how they are created and supported through social norms and interactions. The constructivist paradigm states that gender roles are not innate biological traits, but are constructed through social interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Judith Butler (1990/2006) proposes the idea that gender is performative, constituted by repeated acts that produce and reinforce gender identity. Structural functionalism, through Talcott Parsons (1951/2013), suggests that the division of labor by gender in the family contributes to the maintenance of social order, but also that it reinforces patriarchal structures by justifying the subordination of women (Connell, 1987).

Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) emphasizes that gender roles must be understood in relation to other social factors, such as race and class, which complicates and diversifies the way female roles are perceived and experienced. Symbolic interactionism, through Erving Goffman (1956/2009), highlights how individuals present their gender roles in interactions, using "impression management" to perform femininity.

Socialization and culture play a crucial role in shaping and sustaining gender roles, and they start at an early age through institutions such as family, school, and media. In many cultures, girls are socialized to adopt behaviors that are considered feminine, which influences their identity and role expectations throughout their lives. These roles are often reinforced by stereotypical media representations and cultural expectations that perpetuate traditionalism.

Theoretical approaches to masculinity

Masculinity is defined not only in opposition to femininity, but also by a series of expectations and norms that have varied over time. Within Western societies, masculinity has been linked to work, skills, and cultural narratives. For example, in the American West, masculinity was defined by skill and endurance rather than mere physical strength, and in the British postwar period, managerial masculinity was fraught with emotional rivalries, reinforcing male dominance in leadership positions.

Michel Foucault pointed out that gender norms are influenced by power relations and institutions, suggesting that masculinity is not static, but continually reshaped. Theorists such as Raewyn Connell have elaborated on the concept of hegemonic masculinity, explaining how certain forms of masculinity dominate and marginalize other types. Connell proposes that hegemonic masculinity is a normative ideal that sits at the top of a gender hierarchy and

supports patriarchy. Critics of this model emphasize the risk of fixing specific traits, neglecting the fluidity of masculine identities.

Intersectionality analysis reveals how masculinity is influenced by race, class, and sexuality. Kimberlé Crenshaw's perspective demonstrates that male identities are fundamentally altered by the intersection with other social categories, illustrating the diversity and complexity of male experiences. For example, African American or Latino masculinities can be shaped by distinct experiences related to racism and social marginalization.

The concept of "toxic masculinity" criticizes the traditional traits of dominance and aggression associated with masculinity, bringing into question the negative impact on individuals and society. From medieval literary narratives to the contemporary educational context, it highlights how toxic gender norms perpetuate inequality and harmful behaviors. Recent studies suggest the need for educational interventions to deconstruct these norms from an early age.

New masculinities and the acceptance of gender fluidity mark a significant transition towards more inclusive interpretations of gender, challenging traditional frameworks. These changes, supported by Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity, demonstrate that gender identities are not fixed, but are constructed through repeated acts influenced by society. New masculinities promote empathy and vulnerability, rejecting the oppressive and violent norms of hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter 3. Social Role Costume

Fashion as a language of social identity

Fashion functions as a complex language of social identity, being a means through which individuals signal their belonging to certain social groups and express their differences from others. Clothing and personal presentation style communicate much more than aesthetic preferences; They convey information about social status, profession, cultural affiliation and personal values. Clothing choices are rarely random, being deeply rooted in social, historical and economic contexts that influence individual behavior and taste.

From a sociological perspective, fashion serves as a marker of social status, facilitating integration into certain groups and differentiation from others. Dress codes function as known and respected social norms, thus reflecting the belonging of individuals to different social, cultural or professional backgrounds. Clothing can indicate belonging to a particular social class, profession or subculture, and changes in fashion trends often reflect broader transformations in societal values and norms. Sociologists such as Simmel have explored the

idea that fashion is a form of imitation and differentiation, with individuals following trends to feel included in certain groups, but also to express their individuality.

Fashion plays a significant role in social stratification, reinforcing the divisions and hierarchies present in society. According to Bourdieu, tastes and clothing preferences are influenced by social position, and fashion thus becomes a means by which class distinctions are visible. Moreover, fashion not only reflects social stratification, but also actively contributes to its perpetuation. Weber points out that status groups maintain their prestige and exclusivity through distinct lifestyles, including fashion. For example, dress codes specific to certain professions, such as the classic suit in the financial sector, reinforce social hierarchies and convey values such as professionalism and conservatism. At the same time, fashion can be a tool for challenging the social order. Subcultures often use unconventional clothing styles to defy prevailing norms and values, using fashion as a means of expressing resistance and alternative worldviews.

Cultural capital and aesthetic dimensions in fashion

From a sociological perspective, fashion functions as a mechanism for articulating cultural capital, a concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu. Cultural capital refers to non-economic resources, such as knowledge and education, that confer social status and power on the individual. Thus, fashion becomes a tool for expressing and consolidating social identity through which individuals navigate social hierarchies.

The interplay between fashion and cultural capital is reflected in how certain styles and brands become status symbols, often used to signal wealth and position in society. Veblen's theory of "ostentatious consumption" explains how luxury items are purchased not for utility, but to display status. At the same time, fashion also reflects social and political movements, subcultures using clothing styles as forms of cultural resistance and identity expression.

Contemporary fashion is influenced by globalization, technology, and mass production, driving rapid changes in trends and aesthetics. These transformations not only reflect, but also shape social values and norms, making fashion a field of negotiation for social identities and positions. Thus, fashion is not only a marker of belonging, but also a tool through which individuals and groups assert and transform their status in the contemporary social landscape, providing a deep understanding of societal dynamics.

Dress codes and professional identity

The interconnection between dress codes and professional identity is central to the sociology of fashion, highlighting how clothing functions as a visual language that reflects professional status and roles. In many areas, strict dress codes not only facilitate professional recognition, but also legitimize individuals' competence and authority, helping to internalize roles and create a sense of belonging.

Dress codes, from corporate suits to medical uniforms, influence both external perception and professional self-perception, but can limit the expression of individuality. Cultural changes and globalization complicate traditional notions of attire, and remote work, with the phenomenon of the "Zoom effect", redefines clothing expectations, highlighting the transformations of professional codes in modern society.

Dress codes in gender performance

The way individuals choose and wear clothing is a central aspect of gender performance in society, reflecting how gender identities are expressed through clothing choices and behaviors. According to the theory of gender performativity proposed by Judith Butler (1990/2006), clothing is not a neutral element, but a cultural marker that reflects society's gender norms, dictating specific dress codes for men and women.

Traditional dress norms have imposed clear differences between genders, but in recent decades, especially in Western societies, these codes have become more fluid, reflecting changing attitudes towards gender and personal identity. For example, women who wear suits in professional contexts not only adopt a fashion trend, but symbolically challenge the gender order associated with male power. Such clothing choices can function as acts of challenge to traditional norms and as political statements about gender diversity.

However, even in this progressive context, the perpetuation of gender stereotypes through fashion remains prevalent. Fashion and the media continue to promote distinct categories of clothing for men and women, often reinforcing social norms. While clothing provides a platform to challenge these norms, it can also perpetuate them, reflecting broader cultural and ideological tensions.

Thus, clothing plays a crucial role in gender performance and expression, functioning as an interface between the individual and society. As fashion continues to evolve, it remains

an essential prism through which gender performativity is designed, challenged, and reinterpreted, reflecting the complex dynamics of gender identities in an ever-changing society.

Clothing style and impression management

Impression management, conceptualized by Erving Goffman, explains how individuals control their behaviors and clothing choices to influence the perceptions of others and perform their social roles. Clothing functions as an essential prop in this "social dramaturgy," communicating an individual's status, profession, and cultural identity.

Clothing is not just an aesthetic choice; it marks belonging to social groups and helps to build personal and collective identity. Through fashion consumption, people express their belonging and social status, while digital influences, such as those of social media platforms, amplify this process through careful management of public image.

Goffman's Social Interaction Framework

Erving Goffman uses the metaphor of theater to explain social interactions, arguing that everyday life is a series of performances in which individuals play roles to influence the perceptions of others. The concept of "impression management" describes how people control how they are perceived in various social contexts, presenting different versions of the self.

Goffman differentiates between "scene" and "backstage," suggesting that individuals behave differently in front of others compared to private areas, where they can be authentic. This distinction reflects the ability of individuals to manipulate how they are perceived, playing various roles depending on the context. The role theory proposed by Goffman emphasizes that the self is not a fixed entity, but a collection of roles learned and played, which can generate conflicts and tensions in the fulfillment of these roles.

Goffman emphasizes the fluidity and dynamism of social interactions, suggesting that our performances are influenced not only by individual will, but also by broader social structures such as cultural and economic norms. His theory continues to be relevant, having applications in various fields, from social psychology to organizational behavior, and provides valuable insight into how identity and social reality are constructed through daily performance.

Chapter 4. Social and erotic capital. The role of erotic capital in social stratification.

Bourdieu and the theory of forms of capital

Pierre Bourdieu, in his theory of forms of capital, proposes a complex understanding of how non-financial resources and capitals contribute to social stratification. His concept of economic, cultural and social capital are essential pillars in the analysis of social power and inequalities, going beyond the simple accumulation of wealth and including forms of capital that influence the social positioning and mobility of the individual.

Economic capital, the first form proposed by Bourdieu, refers to material assets and financial resources that can be converted into other forms of capital and that play a crucial role in social stratification. Economic capital not only supports a person's position in the social hierarchy, but also facilitates access to education, valuable social relationships, and cultural experiences, thus reinforcing other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This fungibility of economic capital explains how individuals can maintain or improve their social status by converting economic resources into cultural or social capital, which contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities.

Cultural capital, another central form in Bourdieu's theory, encompasses the educational and cultural resources accumulated by individuals, which allow them to differentiate themselves and gain advantages in various social fields. It comes in three forms:

embodied (personal skills and knowledge), objectified (cultural goods), and institutionalized (diplomas and qualifications), all of which play an essential role in defining an individual's social status (Bourdieu, 1986). In the educational system, cultural capital is both a consequence of social position and a factor that determines success and social mobility, especially favoring those from the upper classes who have the resources to accumulate and capitalize on this capital.

Social capital, which includes networks of relationships and resources gained through social connections, is equally important in determining access to social opportunities and advantages. Bourdieu shows that individuals with extensive social capital have access to information, support and influence, elements that increase the chances of success in a competitive social field (Bourdieu, 1986). The ability to build and maintain valuable social relationships is often closely linked to economic and cultural capital, demonstrating the interconnectivity of different forms of capital.

Bourdieu emphasizes that these forms of capital do not operate in isolation, but can convert to each other, strengthening the social position of the individual. In this sense, economic capital can be transformed into cultural capital through education and cultural experiences or into social capital through access to exclusive networks. This conversion capacity makes those who hold economic capital have a significant advantage in maintaining and increasing their social status.

Catherine Hakim: erotic capital as a factor of social mobility

Catherine Hakim introduced the concept of "erotic capital" in 2010, an approach that brought a new dimension to the analysis of the types of capital proposed by Bourdieu. Erotic capital, defined by Hakim as a combination of physical beauty, sensuality, social skills, charm, clothing presentation and sexual competence, works similarly to other forms of capital (economic, cultural, social), contributing to social mobility and obtaining advantages in various contexts, especially in the labor market.

Hakim points out that, unlike other types of capital that accumulate over time, erotic capital has a distinct dynamic, being subject to possible deterioration with age. Erotic capital is also influenced by economic capital (through access to resources that can improve physical appearance) and, in turn, can influence social capital by creating beneficial relationships and contacts. Physical beauty, sensuality, social skills, zest for life, social presentation, and sexual competence are the six major components of erotic capital. Physical beauty and sensuality depend on both natural features and the ability to adapt to social and relational standards. Social

appearance and social presentation reflect the ability to interact effectively in various social contexts, and sexual competence refers to intimacy and the ability to maintain private relationships.

Hakim's major contribution lies in defining erotic capital as a distinct and autonomous form of capital, which, although partly based on physical traits, also includes social and behavioral dimensions. This recognition underscores the importance of physical attractiveness and social charm in gaining advantage in the labor market and other spheres of social life, providing a new perspective on how power relations and inequalities are perpetuated through the harnessing of erotic capital.

The problem of symbolic capital

Symbolic capital, as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu, is not a direct economic asset, but plays an essential role in social positioning and access to resources, facilitating the achievement of objectives in various fields. It includes recognition, legitimacy, and authority, which allow individuals to influence social relationships and manage their positions in hierarchies (Lamont, 2012).

Symbolic capital can be transformed into other forms of capital, such as economic or social capital. Prestige can attract resources and opportunities, but conversion depends on power structures and the individual's ability to use these resources. The production of symbolic capital is closely linked to socialization and education, and the dominant values and norms in various fields regulate how this capital is perceived and validated (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1990).

The relational character of symbolic capital makes it unstable and open to contestation, requiring continuous recognition in order to preserve its value. Its dynamics are deeply related to power, since those who control perceptions can influence the distribution of this capital (Swartz, 1997).

Tangible capital

Catherine Hakim has proposed a systematic theory of erotic capital, but similar concepts such as bodily capital (Wacquant, 1995), physical capital (Shilling, 1993), aesthetic capital (Anderson et al., 2010), and feminine capital (Mears, 2015; 2020) have been used previously. All these approaches recognize tangible capital as a recoverable resource, capable of generating material and symbolic benefits, such as economic gains, social status or relational opportunities (Benga, 2022, p. 49).

Body capital refers to an individual's physical attributes and abilities that have social and economic value, such as aesthetics, strength, health, and sports skills. Physical aspects, such as attractiveness, play a major role, having the potential to bring significant social and economic benefits (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Physical abilities and health also contribute to productivity and can be converted into economic capital, especially in areas such as sports (Wacquant, 1995).

The interaction between corporeal capital and symbolic capital highlights how physical attributes are valued and transformed into prestige and social recognition. For example, in the fashion industry, models obtain symbolic capital by associating them with cultural ideals and prestigious brands (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006). Elite athletes convert bodily capital into symbolic capital, becoming celebrities and influencing public opinion (Bourdieu, 1979/2010).

The digital age brings new forms of interaction between these capitals. Fitness influencers, for example, leverage body capital to gain token capital online, through the recognition and legitimacy granted by their followers (Marwick, 2013). At the same time, gender and race norms influence the way in which bodily capital is perceived and symbolically rewarded, highlighting the complexity of the conversion between these capitals (Skeggs, 1997).

Sexual capital

Sexual capital represents the value that individuals can accumulate from their sexual attractiveness and abilities in social contexts, having a significant role in social interactions and power dynamics (Green, 2008). Although less formalized than other types of capital, sexual capital can influence access to resources, social mobility and personal relationships, being particularly important in professional environments and in the context of gender relations.

Interaction with symbolic capital involves transforming sexual attractiveness into prestige and social respect, a process influenced by cultural context and power structures (Green, 2008). For example, working-class women may have difficulty converting sexual capital into token capital, unlike those from more privileged backgrounds (Skeggs, 1997).

Media and popular culture facilitate the conversion of sexual capital into symbolic capital, but this valorization is often volatile and dependent on changing social norms (Turner, 2014). At the same time, the use of sexual capital raises ethical dilemmas, and can reinforce gender inequalities and oppressive norms (McNay, 2000).

The repression of erotic capital and the pressures to maintain social hierarchy

Erotic capital plays a significant role in social interactions, sexual attraction, and the dynamics of human relationships, but in many societies there are mechanisms of control and repression that limit its expression and valorization. These mechanisms are rooted in ideologies and cultural norms that exert pressure on the individual, especially women, to conform to restrictive standards.

One of the main factors in the repression of erotic capital is religion, especially Christian religion, which severely regulates erotic and sexual manifestations. Religion imposes strict norms of behavior, especially on women, and sees erotic expression as immoral. Historically, religion has tried to control women's attractiveness and behavior, considering eroticism an unchecked and potentially dangerous power.

Traditional cultural models constitute another factor of control over erotic capital. Patriarchal societies have over time limited women's right to capitalize on their erotic capital, considering that physical attractiveness can only be appreciated in private contexts, but not publicly exploited for personal benefit.

Feminism, especially in its first waves, sometimes had an ambiguous attitude towards erotic capital, seeing it either as a source of power or as an instrument of oppression. The idea of equality has sometimes been accompanied by a critique of traditional femininity, being perceived as a socially cultivated handicap. In this context, femininity and erotic capital have been seen as obstacles to gender equality, with some activists and theorists rejecting the idea that women should harness these attributes.

At the microsocial level, control over erotic capital manifests itself in stigmatization, labeling, and social criticism, which can have emotional and social costs for individuals. In many communities, the free expression of erotic capital is met with gossip, moral judgments, and ostracism, maintaining constant social control over those who choose to enhance their attractiveness. These control mechanisms not only limit the potential for social mobility, but also generate personal costs for those who face cultural and moral pressures.

Chapter 5. Erotic Capital Research. Quantitative and qualitative approach

Methodology

Chapter 5 of the paper focuses on the research of erotic capital. As mentioned, although erotic capital is visible in social relationships, it is difficult to quantify, unlike other forms of capital, such as economic or social capital. To explore erotic capital and its social mechanisms, two research methods were used: questionnaire-based sociological inquiry and focus groups. The sociological survey was chosen for the representativeness of the data and for the ability to identify trends and correlations between variables at the level of the adult population in Romania. In addition, the survey provides a degree of anonymity that can reduce the pressure of desirable answers, given the sensitivity of the topic.

The focus-group method was used to explore in depth the mechanisms and elements that constitute erotic capital. This allowed to stimulate discussions between participants and a better understanding of their perceptions and motivations. The focus groups complemented the quantitative analysis, providing a detailed perspective on the topics studied. The combination of these two methods allowed us to gain a complex perspective on erotic capital.

The objectives of the research focus on exploring and understanding erotic capital, with a focus on defining this concept, analyzing how it is constructed and perceived, as well as investigating its relations with other forms of capital (economic, social, cultural). These are:

1. Defining the concept of erotic capital. The aim was to clarify and highlight the different existing theoretical perspectives, in order to provide a more complex and coherent definition of erotic capital.

2. Analyzing the construction and functioning mechanism of erotic capital. The research focused on how erotic capital brings benefits and on identifying the mechanisms by which this capital is developed and capitalized on in social interactions.

3. Analysis of the perception of erotic capital: the aim was to study how people perceive and accept the benefits of erotic capital, as well as to become aware of the costs associated with it, including financial, moral, personal and psychological.

4. Analysis of the relationships between the different types of capital: the interaction between erotic capital and the other types of capital has been analyzed, analyzing how they influence each other and how these relationships are perceived by individuals.

The research questions have been formulated to guide the research and are meant to capture various aspects of erotic capital, such as: what is the importance of its components?

What are the differences in perception, both between genders and between generations? What is the role of self-confidence? What are the associated benefits and costs? What are the construction and maintenance mechanisms? What is the relationship with moral aspects? What are people's perceptions of interacting with other forms of capital? These questions are essential to understand the complexity and dynamics of erotic capital in the contemporary social context.

The chapter dedicated to quantitative research describes the process of conducting a sociological survey type of research. The research aimed to objectively measure phenomena, identify patterns and establish relationships between variables, providing the possibility to generalize the conclusions to a wider population.

The national survey was conducted between August 28 and September 12, 2023, using the CATI (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing) method, which ensures efficiency and accuracy in the administration of questionnaires. 1266 questionnaires were collected from a representative sample for the adult population in Romania, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of $\pm 2.8\%$.

The questionnaire used was structured in four main sections, addressing social values and attitudes, family life, women's specific concerns and socio-demographic data. It included 20 questions, each with sub-items or multiple options, covering a wide range of topics in everyday life. The data analysis was carried out in the SPSS, weighting the base according to the gender of the respondents. A greater willingness of men to participate in the survey was observed, contrary to the trends observed in previous surveys on social or political topics. This trend was explained by the reluctance of women to discuss topics related to erotic capital, considered intimate subjects or rather "feminine secrets".

As part of the qualitative research, five focus groups were organized to explore in depth the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors related to erotic capital. They were composed as follows:

- Two focus groups with women aged 18 to 30 (the first focus group was used to test and refine the discussion grid).
- A focus group with women aged between 31 and 50.
- A focus group with men aged between 18 and 30.
- A focus group with men aged between 31 and 50.

Participants were selected based on gender and age criteria. Separating them into distinct groups was done to create a comfortable environment, conducive to expression without inhibitions. At the same time, separating the participants according to gender and age allowed me to better understand the differences and similarities in terms of perceptions, attitudes and

behaviors related to gender when we talk about erotic capital. All focus groups were recorded both video and audio. Each focus group lasted an average of two hours and a total of 49 people participated. The focus group grids were designed by adapting to the different categories of participants and organized by sub-themes. Before use, the grid was pre-tested through interviews and a calibration focus group, which led to the elimination and reformulation of some questions and the addition of new ones. In the end, the grid contained 26 questions, with small differentiations for the female and male focuses.

The first section included some opening questions, including semantic resonance tests (such as "*what do you think when you hear the word...*"), so that I could define the main concepts. The second section focused on the construction of erotic capital, exploring the attributes of attractiveness and cultural ideals through detailed questions. In this context, we also asked respondents to refer to the way they see the moment of marriage and motherhood in the dynamics of attractiveness.

The next section of the grid focused on questions related to the benefits and costs of erotic capital. Finally, the last section included questions about the social functions of erotic capital and the moral aspects that arise from the benefits of this form of capital. The focus groups were conducted in a comfortable, friendly environment, audio-video recorded with the consent of the participants, and the data analysis also included their non-verbal behavior.

Values, attitudes and erotic capital. Nationally representative research

Within the doctoral thesis, the research focused on measuring the main components of erotic capital and their connection with everyday practices that contribute to the maintenance of erotic capital, especially the female one. The study started from the premise that, like other forms of capital, erotic capital requires investment and can interact both positively and negatively with other forms of capital. The research was quantitative, being carried out at national level and having a high degree of data fidelity. The questionnaire used was structured in four sections:

1. The Social Context of Erotic Capital: The first section looked at the values and attitudes that influence erotic capital in everyday life. Various attitudes and values have been identified that are essential for how individuals manage their daily relationships and interactions.

2. Family life: The second section examined the impact of family life on the management of erotic capital and explored its connection to various family practices.

3. Women's attitudes and opinions related to women's practices. The third section was dedicated exclusively to women and focused on their concerns, attitudes and opinions related to erotic capital maintenance practices.

4. Socio-demographic data: The last section included questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

Values and attitudes in everyday life

In the first part of the questionnaire, the focus was on measuring the importance that people attach to a set of 15 essential values, providing a detailed insight into how everyday values influence erotic capital. The importance perceived by the subjects on several elements was measured, namely: neighbors, health, respect for others, friends, children, partner, family, well-groomed physical appearance, clothing, self-confidence, inner beauty, intelligence, sense of humor, masculinity and femininity. The results of the research show that health and family are the most important values for respondents, with 67% and 72% of them considering them to be very important, respectively. Relationships with neighbors are less important, with only 4% of respondents attaching great importance to them, although almost half still consider them important. Respect from others is also significant, with 20% of respondents considering it *very important* and 58% *important*. Family relationships, including partner and children, are essential for most, and friends, although less important than family, are considered relevant in the context of communities and professional relationships.

Regarding the detailed analysis of the results, the well-groomed physical appearance is essential in the appreciation of individuals, this being important for the majority of respondents, reflecting the general concern for personal image and hygiene. But representative statistical differences appeared between men and women, for example in the *very important category*, 26% of women and only 17% of men answered as follows. We used four age categories: 18-30, 31-45, 46-60, over 61. Young adults (31-45 years old) have the highest percentage in the *important category* (60%) and a significant proportion who consider it *very important* (20%). Mature people (46-60 years old) have practically similar scores. On the other hand, the elderly have a more balanced opinion, with 45% considering the well-groomed physical appearance as *important*, and 20% *very important*. In this age group, 24% consider physical appearance *quite important*, and 6% *not too important*. Thus, we can say that the perception of the importance of a well-groomed physical appearance decreases slightly with age. Interestingly, the 46-60 age group attaches the greatest importance to a well-groomed physical appearance, suggesting that this category seems to be the most concerned with maintaining a pleasant physical appearance.

The results of the research highlight the importance of different values and attitudes in everyday life in the context of erotic capital management. Clothing is considered *important* by 56% of respondents, but only 12% see it as *very important*, suggesting that although it is relevant, it does not have the same weight as health or relationships. Women tend to place more importance on clothing than men, and young people and young adults place more emphasis on it than older people.

Self-confidence is considered *important* or *very important* by 80% of respondents, with no significant differences between genders, but with a greater emphasis on young people. Inner beauty is appreciated by 79% of respondents, with women giving greater importance to this trait than men. Also, age differences show that young people and older people consider inner beauty *very important* to a greater extent than other age groups. Intelligence and a sense of humor are also appreciated, with 39% considering intelligence *very important* and 27% considering humor equally essential. Both traits are seen as positive in social interactions, with no significant differences between genders or ages. Masculinity and femininity are considered *important* by the majority of respondents, with similar percentages (59% for femininity and 58% for masculinity), suggesting that gender roles and associated characteristics continue to be relevant in society.

Perceptions of female practices and concerns related to erotic capital management

Another category of questions concerned women's concerns and practices related to erotic capital management and were analyzed through a projective question, which described a hypothetical situation in which a woman with an average salary purchases a pair of expensive shoes, exceeding the usual budget. The purpose of the question was to measure respondents' attitudes towards personal image spending. The majority of respondents (54%) consider that an occasional purchase of more expensive items is acceptable, as long as it does not become a frequent practice, emphasizing a balance between personal desires and financial responsibility. Another group, 18%, recommends saving upfront for such purchases, reflecting a cautious approach to managing finances. About 12% justify the purchase by the importance of shoes for personal image and self-confidence, suggesting that physical appearance is considered a significant investment. On the other hand, 15% believe that sacrificing other expenses for expensive shoes is not a wise decision, demonstrating a more financially conservative attitude.

However, analyzing the data on the gender dimension resulted in significant differences in this question. The results show significant differences in perceptions of expensive shoe purchases by gender and age. Women are much more lenient towards such purchases, with 19%

of them believing that the decision to buy the shoes was correct "because it was about shoes", compared to only 6% of men. This reflects a greater appreciation of fashion and personal appearance among women. In terms of financial responsibility, men tend to be stricter, scoring higher in all response categories that involve restrictions or a more conservative attitude towards spending.

Age differences are also significant. Young people are more inclined to accept expensive purchases, with 20% believing that the woman has done the right thing, but this percentage decreases significantly with age, reaching only 6% in those over 60. This data highlights the influence of both gender and age on perceptions of financial responsibility and values related to fashion and personal appearance.

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked about their perceptions of women who invest in themselves through various actions or activities, including in aspects related to personal development, which can be considered part of erotic capital. These investments are perceived as both ways to improve social appreciation and as a means to increase self-esteem.

The results of the analysis on perceptions related to a woman who invests *a quarter of her income in purchasing and reading books* reveal some interesting aspects. Most respondents have a clear opinion about this activity, reflected by the fact that only 1% did not answer or did not know what to answer.

A quarter of respondents (26%) were indifferent to this activity, which suggests a neutral perception of this type of spending. Only 8% considered it a negative activity, indicating that most do not see the purchase of books as problematic. 17% felt that spending a quarter of their income on books was not the best use of money, reflecting concerns about financial management and prioritising other spending. On the other hand, almost half of the respondents (45%) considered this activity to be beneficial, emphasizing the importance of education and personal development. A small 3% considered investing in books to be extremely beneficial, demonstrating a strong appreciation for reading and education. Although they do not necessarily reflect a common practice, these responses suggest a desirable value horizon in society, where education and personal development are valued, even if they are not prioritized by all individuals.

The results of the research highlight significant differences between genders in perceptions related to spending a quarter of their salary on books. Women have a much better opinion than men in this regard, with 56% of women considering this activity very good or good, compared to only 39% of men. This suggests that women value the purchase of books

more, reflecting cultural and social differences in the perception of education and personal development between genders.

As far as clothing purchases are concerned, in the same interrogative logic the results are similar in some respects. A quarter of respondents (26%) were indifferent, indicating a neutral attitude towards spending on clothing and accessories. Of the respondents, 11% considered this activity inappropriate, seeing these expenses as unnecessary. A share of 21% considered that spending a quarter of their income on clothes and accessories is not ideal, suggesting a preference for another prioritization of spending. However, a sizable 39% see these purchases as positive, indicating the importance of clothing and accessories for personal appearance and self-confidence. Only 2% considered this activity extremely good, which suggests that, although appreciated, such expenses are not seen as essential.

In the questionnaire, a third question in this section concerned perceptions related to spending a quarter of income on cosmetics. About 11% of respondents consider cosmetics spending to be a negative thing, and 19% rated these expenses as inappropriate, suggesting a concern for resource management and a lower prioritization of these purchases. However, 40% of respondents see these expenses as positive, emphasizing the importance of personal care and physical appearance. Only 3% consider this activity to be extremely beneficial, similar to perceptions of spending on books and clothing. There were also significant differences between women and men in terms of responses, with women generally being more favourable to these expenditures than men, highlighting the importance given to personal care among women.

The research also included two questions related to women's participation in cooking and dancing lessons, which could contribute to the formation of specific skills. In the case of cooking lessons, 25% of respondents were indifferent, and 7% considered these lessons useless and rated them negatively. Another 10% had a less favorable opinion. However, the majority of respondents (51%) rated the cooking lessons positively, reflecting their appreciation for developing practical skills. A small but significant percentage (6%) considered this activity to be extremely beneficial, a higher percentage compared to other similar questions. For dance lessons, 27% of respondents were indifferent, while 8% considered them useless, and 12% had a less favorable opinion. About 48% rated these lessons positively, highlighting the importance of developing social and physical skills. A small percentage, 4%, considered them extremely beneficial. The differences between women and men in the evaluation of dance lessons were similar to those observed in cooking lessons, reflecting different perceptions between genders of these activities. The results of the research indicate a higher share of women who have a favorable opinion of cooking and dancing lessons, although the differences in perception

between genders are smaller compared to other questions. In the case of cooking lessons, 63% of women and 49% of men have a good or very good opinion, highlighting a wide appreciation for these practical skills. Similarly, the results show that women have a much more favorable opinion than men about dance lessons, with 60% of women positively evaluating this activity, compared to 44% of men. Although the differences in perception between the genders were to be expected, the considerable number of men who take such lessons is remarkable.

Another question concerned the appreciation of cosmetic surgeries. Regarding aesthetic surgeries such as breast augmentation and facial correction, a significant proportion of respondents (40%) are indifferent or not concerned about these topics. About 10-11% have a negative opinion, considering that these procedures involve high costs and are not necessary. On the other hand, around 28-30% of respondents consider these procedures useful and evaluate them positively, although only a small percentage (3%) consider them extremely beneficial.

Another set of questions highlighted the main elements that make a woman attractive. The study highlighted perceptions of female attractiveness by identifying factors considered important by respondents. These elements were:

The smile was considered an important factor for attractiveness, being placed in first place by 17% of respondents, emphasizing the importance of positive facial expressions. **Clothing** was mentioned as an important factor by only 2% of respondents, indicating that, although it is relevant, it is not essential in the perception of attractiveness. Interestingly, only 1% of respondents considered **the presentable partner** to be a significant factor in a woman's attractiveness, suggesting that personal factors play a bigger role than the partner's influence. **A sense of humor** and **sensitivity** were mentioned in moderate proportions, and **breasts** were mentioned by only 2% of respondents, suggesting a low importance compared to common expectations. **Always being groomed and cared for** was considered the most important factor by 46% of respondents, which underlines the importance of self-care in the perception of attractiveness. **Hair** and **eyes** were less important (less than 3% mentions) and an **elegant attitude** was appreciated by a significant number of respondents, considered important by 11% in first place, 14% in second place and 10% in third place, this trait suggests appreciation for refined behavior and good manners. **Intelligence** was mentioned by 45% of respondents. **Self-confidence** and **physical beauty** were also considered important, but not as essential as self-care or intelligence.

In my research, I tried to analyze how the importance that respondents give to women's attractiveness in various social and relational contexts is contextualized and emphasized.

Therefore, the question was *in what contexts and for whom should an attractive woman be?*

Here are the results:

For general interactions, 57% of respondents believe that a woman should be beautiful to a great extent in any context, while 8% have her in the very important category. However, 28% believe that this aspect is only necessary to a small extent, and 2% do not consider it necessary at all in broad social contexts.

At social events, 74% of respondents believe that it is important for a woman to be beautiful to a great extent, and 17% to a very large extent, at the events she attends.

In close relationships, such as with neighbors and colleagues, attractiveness is considered important by about 50% of respondents, indicating that physical appearance plays a moderate role in these interactions.

In friendships, 54% of respondents believe that attractiveness is important to a large extent in such cases, and 8% to a very large extent, suggesting a greater importance of attractiveness in close social circles.

In relation to children, 69% of respondents believe that it is important for a woman to be beautiful to a great extent, and 11% to a very large extent, suggesting the need for women to be a role model and to be appreciated by their children.

Within the family and towards relatives, 70% believe that it is important for a woman to be beautiful to a great extent, and 12% to a very large extent, emphasizing the importance of attractiveness within the family.

In the relationship with the partner, 75% of respondents believe that it is important for a woman to be beautiful to a great extent, and 16% to a very large extent, which was to be expected, given that relational feedback is essential in a couple relationship.

Self-confidence and its gender dimension

In my research I focused on self-confidence and its gender dimension, analyzing the role of self-confidence as an essential attribute for the functioning of erotic capital, along with other attributes discussed in previous research, such as those of Hakim. Self-confidence has been considered a key factor that directly correlates with erotic capital.

The study aimed to identify the elements that, in the respondents' perception, most influence a woman's self-confidence. Respondents were given the opportunity to choose up to three items from a list to answer this question. Here are these results succinctly:

Physical appearance was considered important for self-confidence by only 13% of respondents, suggesting that while adherence to ideal weight standards has an impact, it is not essential for most. **Being loved** was considered important by a third of respondents, reflecting

the role of affective relationships in women's self-perception. **Flirtatiousness and elegance** were mentioned by a quarter of respondents as important for self-confidence, emphasizing the importance of self-care. **The presence of a presentable partner** was not a major factor, with only 6% placing it in first place, indicating that women do not significantly capitalize on their partner's erotic capital. Finally, **intelligence** was the most important factor, mentioned by more than 80% of respondents, which underlines the importance of intellectual abilities in building self-confidence. **Independence**, mentioned by two-thirds of respondents, is also essential, reflecting the value of personal and financial autonomy. **Clothing** and **good earnings** were considered less important, being mentioned by only 10% and 13% of respondents, respectively. **Makeup** and **body** had a moderate influence, being important for 14% and 16% of respondents, respectively, but more interesting are the distributions – in the case of the body, it was mentioned only as the first factor, not in second or third place.

Shared knowledge and erotic capital

Another thematic category of the questionnaire analyzed the respondents' agreement with various statements that have a strong value dimension, relevant for the evaluation of the components of erotic capital. These statements are anchored in common knowledge, reflected in proverbs and beliefs widely shared in society, and are often associated with women.

The first statement, *"A beautiful woman opens any door"* was rated on an ordinal scale. The results showed that 13% of respondents strongly agree with this statement, and 66% largely agreed, accumulating a significant percentage of almost 80%. This indicates that a large portion of the population strongly believes in the power of physical beauty to influence access to opportunities and success in life. Only 16% of respondents agreed to a small extent, and those who chose the "very little" or "not at all" options accounted for only 3%, an insignificant percentage. About 2% did not answer or did not have a clear opinion, which suggests a possible indecision or lack of interest in this topic. This data reflects a widespread belief that physical beauty has a considerable impact on a woman's opportunities and success.

The second statement explored common beliefs about a woman's domestic role, namely the idea that a man's appearance reflects the care provided by his partner. The statement was formulated as follows: *"the well-groomed woman is known by her man's clothes"*. The results show that 10% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement, which indicates a small but significant percentage of people who strongly believe that caring for a woman is directly reflected in her partner's appearance. A much higher percentage of 59% largely agreed, suggesting that most respondents recognize a link between how a woman cares for herself and

her partner's presentation, based on an ingrained cultural stereotype that sees caring for the appearance of family members as a female responsibility. However, 24% of respondents agreed only to a small extent, indicating reservations about this correlation and acknowledging that there are other important factors. A small 5% agreed to a very small extent, and 1% disagreed at all, suggesting that these respondents do not consider that there is a significant link between a woman's self-care and the presentation of her partner. In conclusion, although there is widespread agreement with this statement, reflecting a persistent cultural stereotype, there is nevertheless a notable segment of the population that has reservations or does not recognize this connection.

The questionnaire also included two statements relevant to the perception of female beauty: The first statement was "*a beautiful woman is a woman with children*" highlighted that almost three-quarters of respondents (73%) agree with this idea. Of these, 12% strongly agree, and 61% to a large extent, which underlines a strong association between female beauty and motherhood. This perspective reflects cultural values that associate femininity and beauty with the role of mother and the ability to care for children. However, 21% of respondents agreed only to a small extent, and 5% almost completely rejected this connection, believing that beauty is determined by other factors.

The second statement, "*a woman in love is a beautiful woman*" received an even stronger agreement, with over 80% of respondents stating that they agree to a large and very large extent. A small percentage of 15% of respondents agreed to a great extent, and 68% to a large extent, indicating a widespread belief that falling in love amplifies a woman's beauty. This suggests that the well-being and happiness associated with falling in love are seen as key factors in increasing personal attractiveness. Only 12% agreed to a small extent, and an insignificant 4% rejected this connection. Interestingly, the gender of respondents played a significant role in this question. Women had a stronger perception of the connection between falling in love and beauty, with 18% of them agreeing to a very large extent, compared to 11% of men. However, the general consensus is broad, with both genders recognizing the positive impact of falling in love on the perception of beauty.

In the research, the last statement analyzed was "*a woman's femininity attracts any eye*", in order to concretely assess the perception of how feminine traits influence the attention of others. The results showed that an overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) agree to a large or very large extent with this statement, indicating a widespread belief that femininity is a powerful factor that captures attention and contributes to a woman's attractiveness. A smaller percentage, 6%, recognize this influence, but consider it less important. Only 3% of respondents

believe that the influence of femininity on attracting attention is very small or non-existent. These data underline the widespread perception that femininity plays a key role in attracting attention and appreciating beauty, reflecting the cultural and social values related to femininity and its role in defining attractiveness.

Family life

In the second part of the questionnaire, the focus was on family life, analyzing couple relationships and the factors that contribute to their harmony. First, a filter question was used to determine the respondents' marital status and select the relevant questions. The majority of respondents were married (60%). Another 17% were in stable relationships but not married, and 10% were single. Divorce and widowhood were less common, at 1% and 4%.

For those in a relationship, the questionnaire explored the degree of understanding between partners. Most reported good understanding, with 31% giving their relationship a maximum score of 10 and 24% opting for 9. However, 4% of respondents rated their relationship as very problematic, choosing a grade of 1, and 17% did not respond. It is notable that there were no options for average grades (4, 5, 6), suggesting that respondents either maximize their appreciation of the relationship or trenchantly acknowledge the existence of problems.

Regarding couple conflicts, most respondents (67%) say they argue at certain time intervals: weekly (6%), monthly (23%), once/several times a year (38%). A percentage of 17% said they never argue, 16% did not answer this question.

Another aspect analyzed was the identification of the factors that contribute to harmonious and long-lasting relationships. Mutual sincerity was identified as fundamental by 51% of respondents, followed by love between partners (24%). Aspects such as the presence of children or maintaining attractiveness were considered important by only 6% of respondents. Other elements, such as traditional gender roles, have been mentioned very rarely.

In my doctoral thesis, I analyzed how erotic capital is perceived and evaluated in particular social contexts such as first encounters. We asked respondents to mention up to three elements that attracted them most to their partner on the first date. The results highlighted the importance of physical and inner beauty, self-confidence, smile and eyes. These factors were:

Physical beauty was by far the most important factor, mentioned in first place by 51% of respondents, indicating that physical attraction plays a key role in forming the first impression. **Inner beauty** was considered very important by half of the respondents, placing it second in overall importance. **The eyes** were another key element, mentioned by a third of respondents in the first two places, which underlines the importance of this physical aspect in

attracting initial attention. **The smile** was particularly appreciated in third place by 31% of respondents, although it was rarely mentioned in the first two places, suggesting that it is a secondary but significant factor. **Self-confidence** was valued by 47% of respondents, being frequently mentioned in third place, which indicates that this trait contributes to the overall positive impression, but is not decisive on the first date. Other physical aspects, such as **hair** and **height**, were mentioned less often, and **clothing** was considered insignificant by most respondents, contradicting common expectations about the importance of clothing on first dates.

Finally, **sensitivity** and **strength** were appreciated by a small number of respondents, suggesting that emotional traits and empathy are more difficult to assess on the first date. **Elegance** was moderately appreciated, being mentioned by about a fifth of respondents, indicating a certain importance of style and overall presentation.

Women's Social Practices and Attitudes

The last section of the questionnaire, addressed exclusively to women, explored the frequency and importance they attach to different body practices and acquisitions related to personal care and physical maintenance. The analysis focused on how women invest in their physical appearance by purchasing clothing, shoes, accessories and cosmetics.

Most women purchase these products once or twice a year, suggesting less frequent but more substantial buying behavior. Cosmetics, on the other hand, are purchased more frequently, weekly, indicating that they are considered essential and require regular renewal. About half of women (51%) buy clothes once or twice a year, and similar percentages are valid for shoes (45%), accessories (42%) and cosmetics (53%). A significant number of women (35-41%) purchase clothing, footwear and accessories occasionally, probably reflecting spontaneous purchases or those based on immediate needs. Cosmetics are less purchased occasionally, with only 24% of women choosing this option. A small segment of the female population never buys these products: 8% do not buy clothing, 11% do not buy shoes and accessories, and do not buy cosmetics. This suggests that there are women who either do not consider these regular purchases necessary or receive these products through other means, such as gifts.

Another set of questions in the questionnaire focused on how often women resort to various cosmetic procedures, such as going to the hairdresser, manicure/pedicure, waxing and tweezing. The data reveal that these beauty procedures are performed relatively rarely by most respondents. For example:

Going to the hairdresser. None of the respondents said they went to the hairdresser weekly or more often, suggesting that very frequent visits were not common, probably due to cost, time or the perception that it was not necessary. Only 12% of women go to the hairdresser once or twice a month, reflecting moderate attention to hair care. The overwhelming majority (75%) say they go to the hairdresser every few months or only occasionally, usually for special events, and 11% of women never go to the hairdresser, which may indicate a preference for home hair care or the perception that a visit to a salon is not necessary.

Manicure/pedicure. In the case of manicure/pedicure there was no respondent who stated that she goes to these services weekly or more often. In contrast, 42% of women go to the salon for manicure/pedicure once or twice a month, indicating constant attention to nail care, and 41% do these procedures every few months or occasionally, suggesting that almost 80% of respondents resort to such treatments at least monthly or less frequently, but still regularly. Of the respondents, 14% never go to a salon for a manicure/pedicure, preferring to take care of their nails at home.

Thoughtful. Tweezing visits are most commonly made once or twice a month (41%) or every few months/occasionally (39%). Of women, 17% never tweeze at the salon, which suggests either a preference for naturalness or the lack of need to consider tweezing at the salon as necessary.

Overall, these results suggest that most women prefer regular, but not excessively frequent, maintenance of their physical appearance, with a higher frequency for essential procedures such as manicures/pedicures and tweezers, and a lower frequency for going to the hairdresser.

Another procedure was hair removal. It is a procedure performed regularly by most of the respondents in the study, suggesting a constant concern for body care. The most frequent visits to the salon for hair removal are made once or twice a month (38%) and every few months or occasionally (39%). These data indicate a trend of regular, but not excessively frequent, maintenance of hair removal. A percentage of 20% of women never use hair removal at the salon, which may reflect either a preference for performing this procedure at home or a lack of interest in this practice. None of the respondents stated that they epilate weekly or more often, suggesting that epilation is not seen as a procedure that requires a very high frequency.

In the study, the importance given by women to preparing for social events was investigated, revealing that most women prioritize certain specific activities to improve their appearance and feel confident. On the first place in the respondents' preferences is going to the salon, considered essential by 56% of them. Also, the purchase of new clothing items is another

priority aspect, with 63% of women placing it on the first and second places in the hierarchy of important actions for preparing an event.

Other activities, such as lipstick and perfume, were considered less essential, being mentioned by a small percentage of respondents. For example, only 1% of women mentioned lipstick as a priority, suggesting that these activities are perceived as a daily routine and not as a special preparation for events. In contrast, eye makeup and buying new shoes were moderate in importance, reflecting the attention paid to details that complement the overall look. The purchase of accessories was placed in third place in preferences, being considered important by 44% of women. This shows that accessories are seen as essential elements to complete an outfit. Arranging at home is preferred by a small segment of respondents, suggesting either a reduction in costs or a personal ritual of preparation. The presence of a presentable partner at the event was important for a third of the respondents, but not as a priority as other aspects related to personal care.

Regarding women's interest in personal development, the results show that two-thirds of respondents (66%) would be willing to take personal development courses, indicating a major interest in self-improvement. Also, 59% of women would be willing to take manicure/pedicure classes, and 61% would take cosmetic classes, which emphasizes the importance of self-care in their lives. Courses in good manners and cooking are also attractive to a significant percentage of women (55% and 58% respectively), reflecting the desire to excel in skills considered useful and culturally appreciated.

[The ideal man from three perspectives](#)

The study assessed women's perceptions of the ideal man from three key perspectives: behavior in a conflict situation, managing tense relationships with authorities, and the ability to perform technical household roles.

The majority of women (74%) believe that the ideal man should face a conflict situation directly, seeing it as a sign of responsibility and maturity. Only 24% of women prefer a man who avoids confrontation and ignores conflict, and an insignificant percentage (2%) consider running away from conflict acceptable.

When it comes to a tense situation with the authorities, such as a traffic stop, women have clear expectations that the man will be in control of himself. The overwhelming majority (77%) gave the highest grade for this trait, emphasizing the importance of calmness and self-confidence in such situations.

In terms of technical skills, 82% of women prefer a man who repairs household faults himself, associating this skill with independence and skill. However, 18% of women prefer to

turn to a specialist, reflecting a more modern and practical approach. Interestingly, women over 61 years of age have a greater tendency (33%) to prefer to call a specialist, which may be influenced by the age of the partner or by a better knowledge of their limits.

Mapping perceptions of erotic capital

In the final part of the chapter, we carried out an exploratory exercise that aimed to map the perceptions of erotic capital by referring to different regions of Romania. Although the survey is nationally representative, this regional analysis has limitations, given that the representativeness of the data is lower at the level of each region. The aim of this exercise was to visualize the differences in perceptions of erotic capital between the various regions, using maps that illustrate these aspects. These maps were constructed only for those data that proved significant in the initial analysis. The colors used on the maps vary in intensity, from lighter to darker shades, thus reflecting lower or higher response scores at the region level.

This type of visualization provides an intuitive and clear understanding of regional differences in the perception of erotic capital, highlighting the cultural and social diversity that exists in different parts of the country. The maps thus allow a visual interpretation of the data, complementing the analysis with a geographical and cultural dimension. Differences in the selected items are extremely clear, suggesting once again that the aspects of erotic capital are not only transnational and transcultural, but are present in much smaller regional contexts.

Self-confidence – the engine of erotic capital. A qualitative approach

The analysis of qualitative data in this research had a key role, being focused on the deep exploration of how erotic capital influences everyday life. The research included the organization of five focus groups, each with an average duration of two hours and consisting of ten participants. The groups were carefully selected on the basis of gender (women and men) and age (18-30 years and 31-50 years) to ensure the diversity and relevance of the discussions. The main objective of this analysis was to examine whether and how erotic capital, defined as a set of physical and personality attributes that can generate social and professional advantages, manifests itself in the daily lives of individuals. It also aimed to identify the perceptions, experiences and strategies through which participants build and use their erotic capital in various social contexts. In addition, the analysis also focused on the advantages and costs associated with this type of capital.

The results of the focus groups provide a detailed insight into the complexity and diversity of the ways in which erotic capital is perceived and harnessed in social interactions.

These results contribute significantly to understanding how erotic capital influences everyday life, providing a clear picture of its impact in the current context.

Erotic capital – definition and components

The qualitative research of perceptions related to erotic capital involved exploring how participants define and understand concepts such as beauty, attractiveness, sensuality, femininity and masculinity. From the very beginning, within the focus groups I aimed to identify the meanings attributed to these terms and the way they manifest themselves in everyday life.

Beauty. It was defined by participants in a variety of ways, including aspects such as femininity, elegance, attitude, and behavior. Beauty is not only perceived as a physical attribute, but also as a characteristic that implies the personality and general presence of the individual. In the perceptions of young men, beauty is primarily associated with women, and in the case of mature men, it is seen as having a connection with femininity or even divinity. Young women associate beauty with harmonious features and uniqueness, while older women associate it with home and tranquility.

Attractiveness. Attractiveness is seen as more complex than beauty, involving not only physical appearance, but also elements such as communication, energy, attitude, and even mystery. It is perceived as a dynamic and subjective quality, influenced by context and social interactions. While beauty can be statically deciphered, attractiveness involves movement, action and relationships with others.

Sensuality. Sensuality has been directly associated with sexuality and physical, emotional or erotic pleasure. Men tend to focus on physical pleasures, while women emphasize the emotional aspects of sensuality. Sensuality is perceived as a feminine attribute, being related to attitude, gestures and behavior.

Sexy. The term "sexy" has been associated more with obvious physical appearances, in contrast to sensuality, which is related to body movement and attitude. Young men associate this term with physical elements such as cleavage or thighs, while more mature men associate it with a more vulgar and superficial area of attractiveness.

The flirtatious woman. The flirtatious woman is perceived as a more than elegant woman, often associated with the image of a mature, well-groomed woman who emphasizes her physical appearance and attitude. She is seen as a person with presence and presence, her image is often linked to classic clothing style and accessories such as hats and beads.

The attractive man. The perception of the attractive man varies according to age. Young women associate it with physical traits such as height and muscles, while older women

value attitude, charisma, and masculinity. Men, regardless of age, define the attractive man as intelligent, financially successful, confident and imposing.

In terms of ideal models of femininity and masculinity, young women associate the feminine ideal with actresses such as Anne Hathaway and Angelina Jolie, while more mature women find inspiration in iconic figures such as Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana. Young men admire male figures such as Morgan Freeman and Cristiano Ronaldo, and older men are inspired by personalities such as Florin Piersic and Al Pacino.

The construction of erotic capital

The construction of erotic capital, similar to any type of capital, involves a continuous process of development and maintenance, in which beauty, attractiveness and other associated attributes are cultivated and valued in social interactions. Focus group participants highlighted that beauty can be built and maintained through self-education, self-care, appropriate clothing and behavior management. Self-care and self-confidence have been highlighted as essential elements in defining attractiveness, especially for women.

Participants' perceptions of women's attractiveness vary significantly by age: **At the age of 20**, women are considered attractive primarily because of their physical appearance and youthful energy. However, they are also perceived as naïve, inexperienced, and "cut off from true reality" by older participants. **At 30**, women are seen as at the peak of femininity, combining physical attractiveness with life experience and emotional intelligence. They are perceived as more confident, independent and more aware of their values. **At 40**, women are associated with experience and maturity. They are appreciated for their wisdom and understanding, but there is also the perception that physical attractiveness begins to decrease, leaving only traces of femininity and elegance.

An interesting aspect observed in the discussions is that participants tend to talk about women using the present tense until the age of 40, after which they move on to the past tense, suggesting that the peak of a woman's attractiveness is perceived to be up to this age.

Opinions on the influence of marriage and motherhood on a woman's attractiveness are diverse. After marriage, young women find that attractiveness decreases due to increased responsibilities and lack of time for themselves. However, mature men emphasize that, depending on the partner, a woman can become even more attractive after marriage, if she is supported and appreciated by her husband. **Motherhood** is seen by young men as a factor that can emphasize a woman's care and empathy, adding a layer of attractiveness associated with maternal instinct. Older men appreciate women who, after 40 years, know their self well and show patience and maturity.

The participants recognized that although erotic capital can be built and maintained, it is subject to loss over time, either due to neglect, aging or life problems that can "extinguish" a woman's femininity and attractiveness. They also stressed the importance of avoiding false or arrogant behaviors, which could compromise the perception of beauty and attractiveness.

The impact of motherhood on erotic capital

Young women believe that attractiveness can be maintained even after the birth of children, but emphasizes the importance of support from their partner. Without this support, they believe that their priorities will change, putting children first and leaving less time for their own care. Women over 30, most of whom were already mothers, emphasized the idea of fulfillment that motherhood brings. They perceived the birth of children as a moment that makes them feel complete and fulfilled, which gives them a new kind of beauty and attractiveness. The child is seen as an extension of the self, so caring for the child is perceived as a form of self-care.

Young men see women's attractiveness before childbirth as predominantly physical, but after childbirth, it becomes more focused on emotions and empathy. They perceive women with children as less flirtatious and more concerned about their role as mothers. More mature men notice that after giving birth, women become more independent and strong, assigning them a protective role in the relationship. They suggest that motherhood changes the power dynamic in the couple, making women the dominant figures over men.

It should be noted that absolutely all respondents considered that motherhood influences the way women perceive and care for their beauty. Although some women focus more on children, seeing this as an integral part of their self, other women manage to maintain or even improve their energy and self-care.

Respondents were asked to think about how a woman would invest a large amount of money to improve her physical appearance. Among the options mentioned, dental care was seen as a priority, being essential for a beautiful smile and self-confidence. Other preferred investments included the purchase of quality clothes and stylist services, which would help build confidence and develop a career. Cooking classes and cosmetic surgeries were not considered a priority. Cooking has been seen as an activity that can be delegated or simplified in the modern context, and cosmetic surgeries have been viewed with skepticism, being considered necessary only in cases of health or accidents, not as a standard way to increase attractiveness.

Emotional power versus physical power

During the focus group discussions, we highlighted how erotic capital intersects with the notion of power, both for women and men. There are several forms of power.

The power associated with men. Men are traditionally associated with physical strength. In all focus groups, participants emphasized that an ideal man is seen as tall, well-built, courageous, and able to provide protection and safety to those around him. This image of physical strength is often seen as an essential element of masculinity.

The power associated with women. Unlike men, women are perceived as having a different kind of power – an emotional and psychological one. Attractive women are considered strong not because of their physical strength, but because of their ability to influence and convince those around them. This emotional power includes the ability to cope with life's hardships and maintain emotional balance in difficult situations. Women are also seen as having a superior ability to manipulate and negotiate through the strength of their character and not through physical means.

A relevant aspect that emerged in the study was given by the power to be reborn. Women in their 30s discussed the power of being "reborn" after traumatic experiences, such as a divorce. This ability to reinvent themselves, to become stronger, more feminine and more independent is seen as a manifestation of a deep power, which allows them to overcome adversity and rebuild their identity and erotic capital.

Differences in perception between genders have also been revealed in two clear dichotomies: on the one hand, physical power versus emotional power, with men being associated with physical power, necessary to provide protection, while women are seen as having an emotional and psychological power, which allows them to influence and manipulate situations in their favor. On the other hand, another dyad is between men's physical strength and women's physical endurance. One participant noted that physical strength in women manifests itself in their resilience to biological and physical challenges such as menstruation, childbirth, and breastfeeding, which are often underestimated but involve a significant form of strength.

Benefits and Costs of Erotic Capital

During the research, focus group discussions highlighted that, like any form of capital, erotic capital also comes with a number of advantages and disadvantages. Most of the participants recognized the fact that, in today's Romanian society, attractiveness is considered a form of capital, and the benefits associated with it are obvious.

The main benefits of erotic capital highlighted in the discussions were the following: capturing attention, power of persuasion, priority in various specific situations including in the public space or in professional settings, positive feedback and increased self-appreciation. Beyond these main elements, in all the focus groups were highlighted other indirect advantages that are directly related to the capitalization of erotic capital through other forms of capital, especially social capital.

I was also interested in analyzing the costs of erotic capital. These were mentioned in both men and women, regardless of the age of the participants. Synthetically, these factors refer to:

Discrediting other qualities. A major disadvantage mentioned by participants, especially men, is the fact that attractiveness can lead to the discrediting of other qualities, such as intelligence or professional competence.

Envy and gossip. Both men and women have recognized that envy and gossip are a significant cost of erotic capital. Attractive women are often the target of gossip and rumors, which can lead to emotional imbalance and social difficulties. Also in this context, especially women mentioned that unpleasant advances and inoculation of misperceptions are another important relational cost.

The participants admitted that attractive men also benefit from erotic capital, but to a lesser extent than women. Attractive men are not perceived as "helpless" and therefore do not receive the same preferential treatment. However, the professional success of an attractive man is often recognized and respected, without being discredited based on his appearance. At the same time, in the case of men, the disadvantages of erotic capital are less obvious.

Erotic capital is recognized as an important asset both in social interactions and in the professional context. Both men and women believe that it is beneficial to develop this type of capital and even if in different proportions and with different approaches, most of them considered that it is necessary for women and men to invest in this type of capital.

Various elements and mechanisms of erotic capital were mentioned and extensively analyzed and themes such as: the role of the social dimension in erotic capital compared to the physical dimension, the moderate role of age in the dynamics of erotic capital, the role of motherhood, but also of the family.

At the same time, the special problem of the moral limits of the use of erotic capital was mentioned. There was a clear awareness of the fact that the excessive capitalization of erotic capital can be perceived negatively, especially among women. This perception is influenced by social norms and the fear of being associated with practices considered immoral.

Finally, self-confidence is seen as the central element that sustains erotic capital. This not only amplifies a person's attractiveness, but also contributes to overall well-being and personal and professional success.

The research highlighted the complexity of erotic capital and how it is perceived and capitalized on according to gender and social context. Although erotic capital can bring significant advantages, there is a strong awareness of moral limits and the risk of being perceived negatively if these advantages are exploited excessively. Self-confidence and authenticity remain essential in the management of this type of capital, directly influencing personal and professional success and well-being.

Concluding remarks

Within the thesis, several aspects of erotic capital were validated, including the fact that it is a complex social construct, which interacts with other forms of capital and can bring significant benefits, but also costs. The research also highlighted aspects that were different or contrary to Hakim's theory, emphasizing, for example, the central role of self-confidence and identifying mechanisms for repressing erotic capital, such as the influence of conservative institutions or ideologies.

Another point of interest was the identification of the costs that women can bear in capitalizing on erotic capital, an aspect less discussed in the literature. The research also showed that perceptions of erotic capital and the influence of age on it vary not only negatively, contrary to Hakim's view that this capital degrades over time.

The mapping of the results showed significant differences between the historical regions of Romania, emphasizing that the study of erotic capital cannot be generalized and that a more detailed analysis is needed in the specific context of each region.

In conclusion, the thesis emphasizes the complexity of erotic capital and the need for further research to develop appropriate measurement tools and fully understand its social and cultural implications.