

Does physical attractiveness matter? Gender differences in self-rated physical attractiveness and its relation to mental health across adolescence

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Patientennah – Engagiert – Vernetzt

Background

- **Association between body dissatisfaction and increased risk for mental health issues** in adolescents (Blashill & Wilhelm, 2014; Sharpe et al., 2018)
 - Link between **body attitudes/feelings, suicidal ideation and self harming-behaviour** (Muehlenkamp & Brausch, 2012; Oktan, 2017)
 - **Gender differences:** females tend to internalize a thin appearance ideal; males idealize lean and muscular bodies (McCreary & Sasse, 2000)
 - **Gender disparity** in the chronology of body dissatisfaction and depressive symptoms (Ferreiro, Seoane, & Senera, 2014; Morken et al., 2018; Vaughan & Halpern, 2010)
- **Body dissatisfaction can have a major influence on adolescents' development with long-lasting effects!**

Research questions

Cross-sectional research questions:

1. Is self-rated physical attractiveness associated with **gender**?
2. Is self-rated physical attractiveness associated with **BMI**?
3. Is self-rated physical attractiveness associated with **internalizing behaviour, suicidal ideation and self-injury**?

Longitudinal research questions:

1. The **stability** of these **associations** across two time-points (**M=15.4 years** and **M=17.4 years** of age)

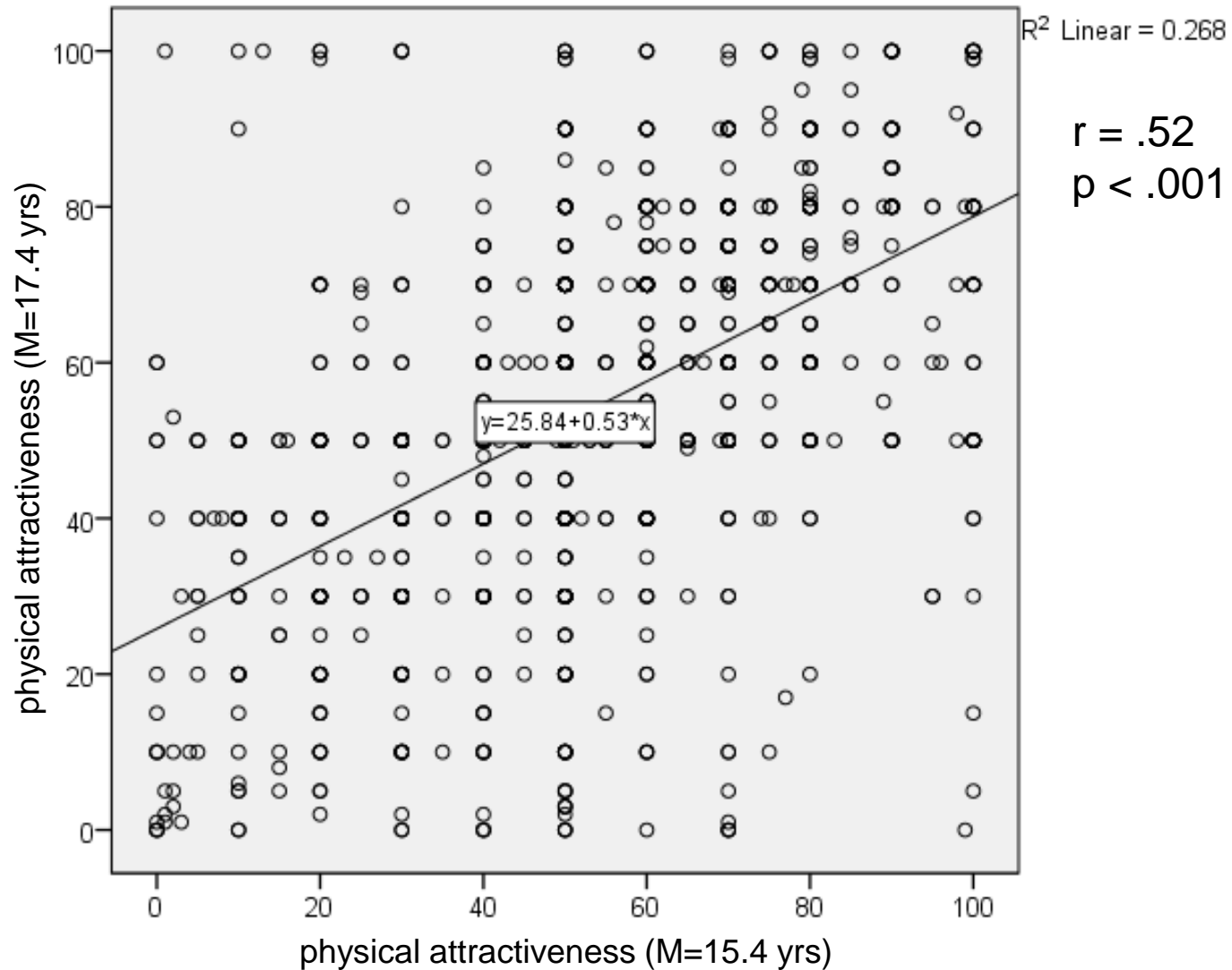
Sample

- Data from the **z-proso longitudinal study**, including **two measurement waves**
- **N = 1257** (♀ = 625 / ♂ = 632)
- **Wave at $M = 15.4$ years**
- **Wave at $M = 17.4$ years**
- Focus on self-reports / questionnaire data provided by the adolescent participants

Variables of interest

Variables of interest	Assessment
gender	
self-rated physical attractiveness	<i>"Out of 100 girls/boys my age, I am more attractive than _____ (between 0 and 100) of them"</i>
self-rated BMI	weight (in kg) and size (in cm)
internalizing behaviour	8 items from the SBQ focusing on depression and anxiety (composite score) (reference: last month)
suicidal ideation	<i>"I thought about killing myself"</i> (reference: last month)
self-injury	<i>"I harmed myself on purpose (e.g. cut my arm, tore wounds open, hit my head, tore out my hair)"</i> (reference: last month)

Physical attractiveness



Self-rated physical attractiveness for male and female adolescents at M=15.4 years and at M=17.4 years

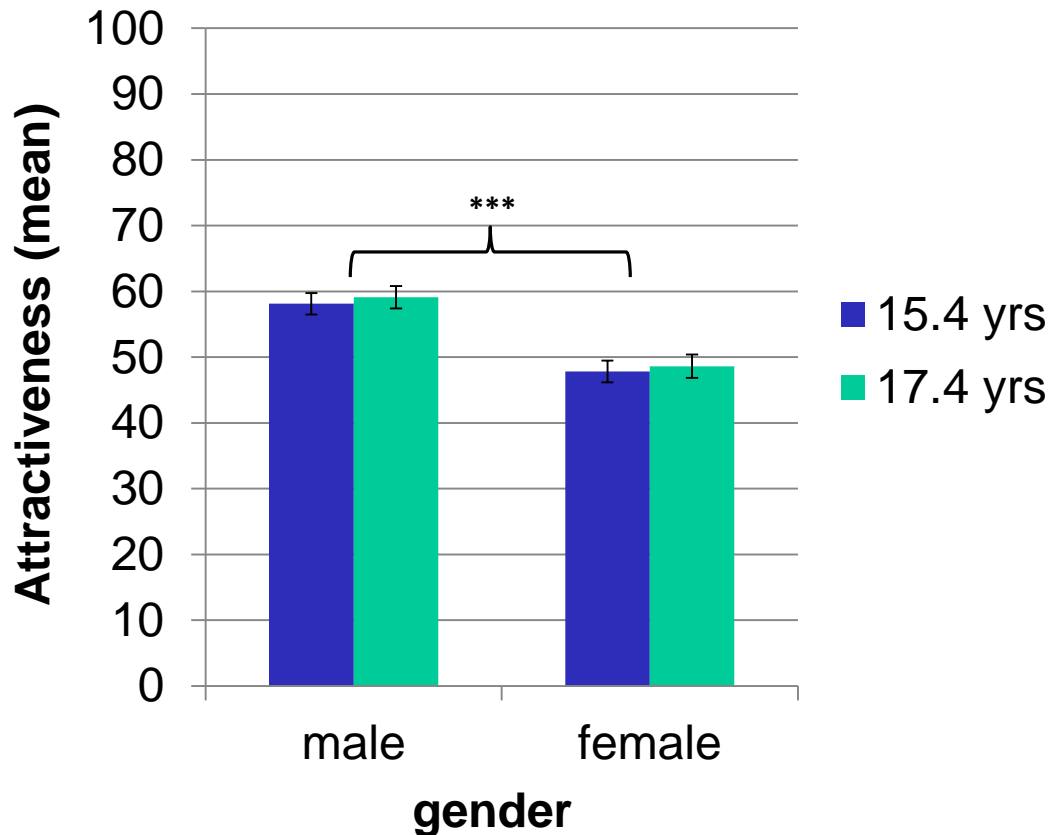


Figure 1. Means and 95% CI for self-rated attractiveness in males and females for the two time-points (15.4 and 17.4 yrs of age)

Attractiveness and BMI

Self-rated physical attractiveness and its relation to BMI at M=15.4 years and at M=17.4 years

	M=15.4 years		M=17.4 years	
overall	$r = -.14, p < .001$	$\leftarrow p = .26 \rightarrow$	$r = -.11, p < .001$	overall
female	$r = -.19, p < .001$	$\leftarrow p = .36 \rightarrow$	$r = -.21, p < .001$	female
male	$r = -.13, p < .001$	$\leftarrow p = .13 \rightarrow$	$r = -.08, p = .06$	male

$p < .01$

Attractiveness and mental health

Self-rated physical attractiveness and its relation to internalizing behaviour, suicidal ideation and self-injury at M=15.4 years and at M=17.4 years

	M=15.4 years		M=17.4 years	
internalizing	$r = -.17, p < .001$	$\longleftrightarrow p = .07$	$r = -.22, p < .001$	internalizing
suicidal id.	$r = -.09, p < .01$	$\longleftrightarrow p = .33$	$r = -.10, p < .001$	suicidal id.
self-injury	$r = -.09, p < .01$	$\longleftrightarrow p = .41$	$r = -.10, p < .001$	self-injury

Attractiveness and mental health: Females

Self-rated physical attractiveness and its relation to internalizing behaviour, suicidal ideation and self-injury in **females** at M=15.4 years and at M=17.4 years

	Females (M=15.4 yrs)		Females (M=17.4 yrs)	
internalizing	$r = -.10, p < .05$	$p = .19$	$r = -.15, p < .001$	internalizing
suicidal id.	$r = -.08, p < .05$	$p = .19$	$r = -.13, p < .01$	suicidal id.
self-injury	$r = -.09, p < .05$	$p = .26$	$r = -.12, p < .01$	self-injury

Attractiveness and mental health: Males

Self-rated physical attractiveness and its relation to internalizing behaviour, suicidal ideation and self-injury in **males** at M=15.4 years and at M=17.4 years

	Males (M=15.4 yrs)		Males (M=17.4 yrs)	
internalizing	$r = -.06, p < .05$	$\longleftrightarrow p = .07$	$r = -.14, p < .001$	internalizing
suicidal id.	$r = .01, p = .91$	$\longleftrightarrow p = .47$	$r = .01, p = .88$	suicidal id.
self-injury	$r = -.02, p = .57$	$\longleftrightarrow p = .27$	$r = .02, p = .70$	self-injury

Summary main results

- Adolescent boys repeatedly provide higher attractiveness ratings than adolescent girls (stability over time)
- BMI is negatively associated with self-rated physical attractiveness in both genders at 15.4 years; stronger relation in females compared to males at 17.4 years
- Negative associations between self-rated physical attractiveness, internalizing behaviour, suicidal ideation and self-injury (effects largely based on females)
 - stable effects (no sig. difference between M=15.4 years and M=17.4 years)

→ Generally small effects!

Discussion

- Why is there a **gender disparity in self-rated physical attractiveness** of adolescents?
 - Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 2004)
 - Different physiological development in adolescence
- Why is it important to know whether **adolescent girls and boys differ in their perceived attractiveness**?
 - self-perception in the treatment of depression / mood disorders
 - the role of body image in therapy (e.g., eating disorders, trauma)
 - different psychiatric disorders (e.g., borderline PD)

- Are there other **individual-related factors** which might be (more strongly) associated with internalizing behaviour, suicidal ideation and self-injury?
 - sexual orientation?
 - self-control?
 - self-efficacy?
 - optimism?
- Are there **social factors** which are potentially related to internalizing behaviour, suicidal ideation and self-injury?
 - social support (resilience) from *peers*?
 - social support (resilience) from *adults*?

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References

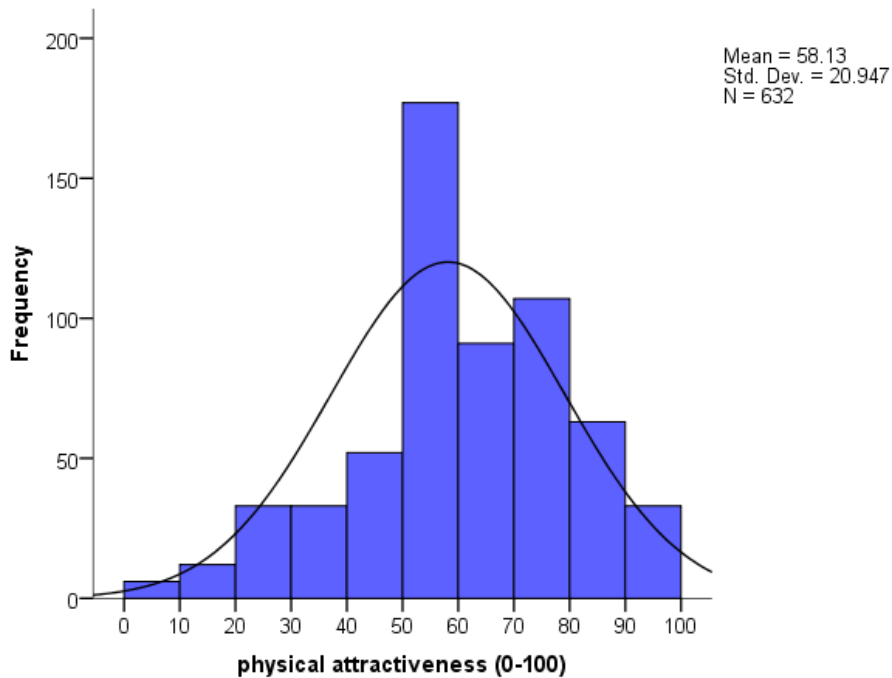
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Discussion

Distribution of physical attractiveness (15.4 yrs)

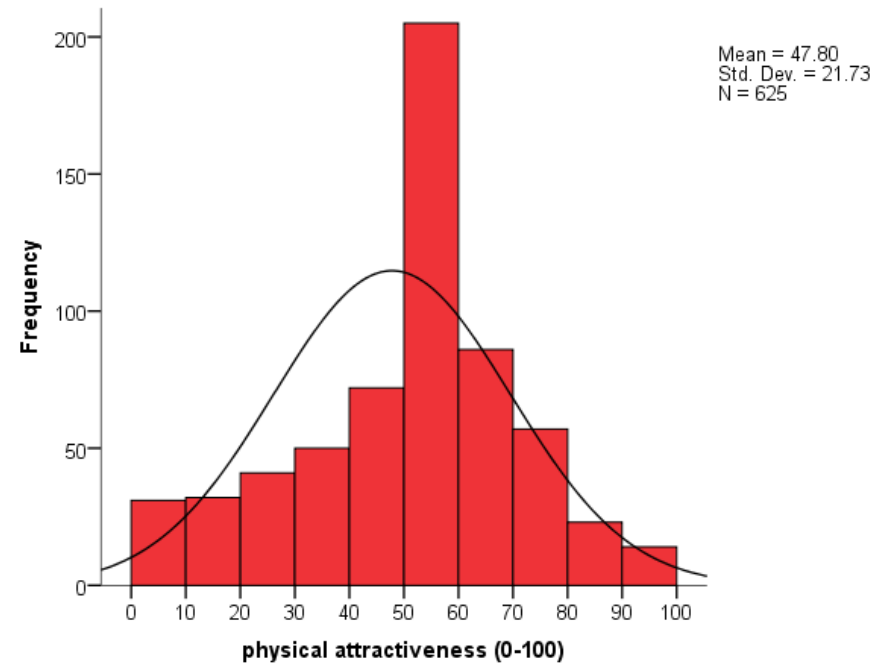
Males

self-rated physical attractiveness in males (15.4 yrs)



Females

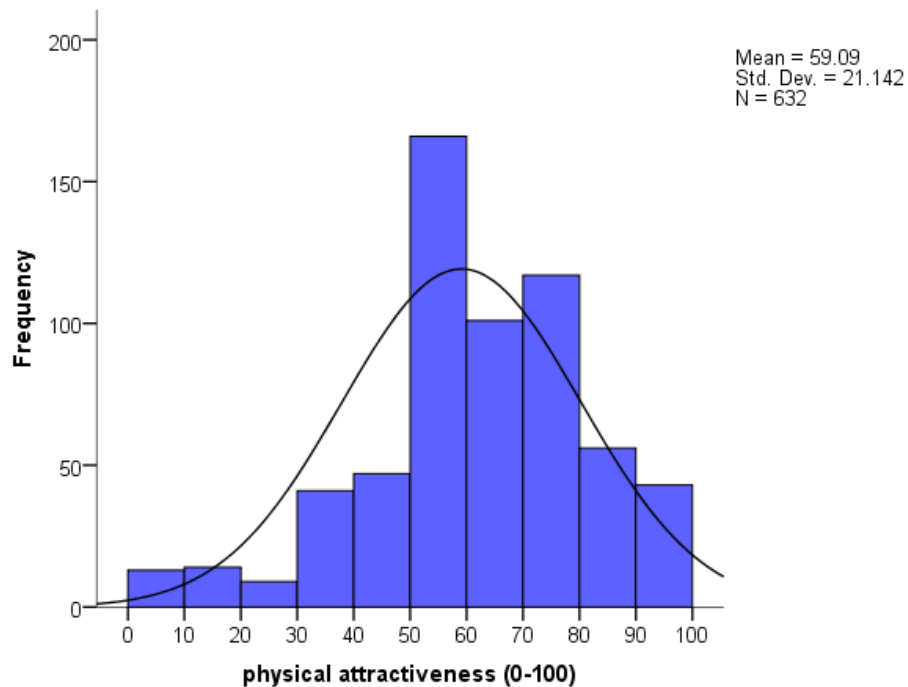
self-rated physical attractiveness in females (15.4 yrs)



Distribution of physical attractiveness (17.4 yrs)

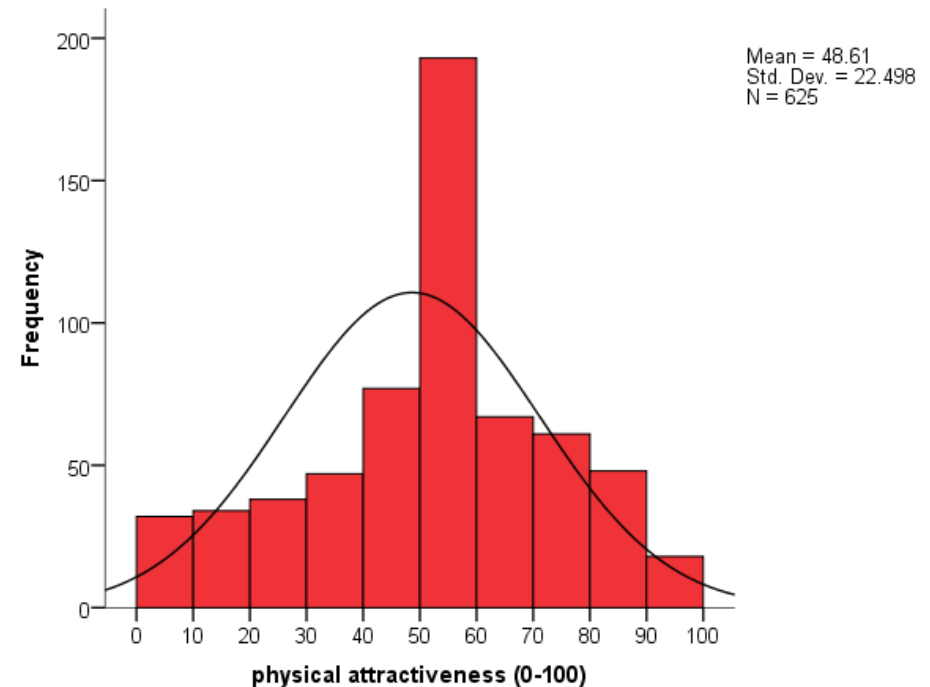
Males

self-rated physical attractiveness in males (17.4 yrs)



Females

self-rated physical attractiveness in females (17.4 yrs)



Scatter plot BMI

