

Introduction

The ability to understand our mental states and those of others, or Theory of Mind (ToM), is an important skill to learn during the formative years of emerging adolescence.

Literature Review

- Past studies suggest that ToM understanding has been positively associated to language development and social cognition (i.e. perspective-taking, empathy, self-perception) although limited research has addressed the *role* of language in emerging adolescence.
- Current research suggests differences favouring girls' understanding of interpretive mental thoughts over boys'; furthermore, females in early adolescence outperform males in the understanding of thoughts and emotions in others (Bialecka-Pikul et al., 2017, Bosacki and Astington, 1999; Weimer et al., 2017).
- Females' self-perception of better social and language abilities contrasts males' self-perception of better physical and mathematical abilities and males' more positive view of their own physical appearance (Harter, 2012; Wigfield, Battle, Keller, & Eccles, 2002 as cited in Tatlow-Golden et al., 2017).

Current Study

- Are there any relations between ToM, self-perceptions and language in emerging adolescence?
- Do gendered developmental relations exist between ToM and self-perceptions in emerging adolescence?

Method

Participants

- 296 Grade 6 and 8 students (173 girls, 117 boys; $M_{age} = 12.7$ years, $SD = 0.99$)
- 13 schools in Ontario, Canada and 11 schools (plus additional lab participants) in Quebec, Canada

Measures

- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – Third Edition (WIAT-III)[†]
- Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RME)*
- Self-Perception Profile for Children*
 - Physical Appearance Subscale
 - Behavioural Conduct Subscale
 - Global Self-Worth Subscale

[†] Administered by researcher.

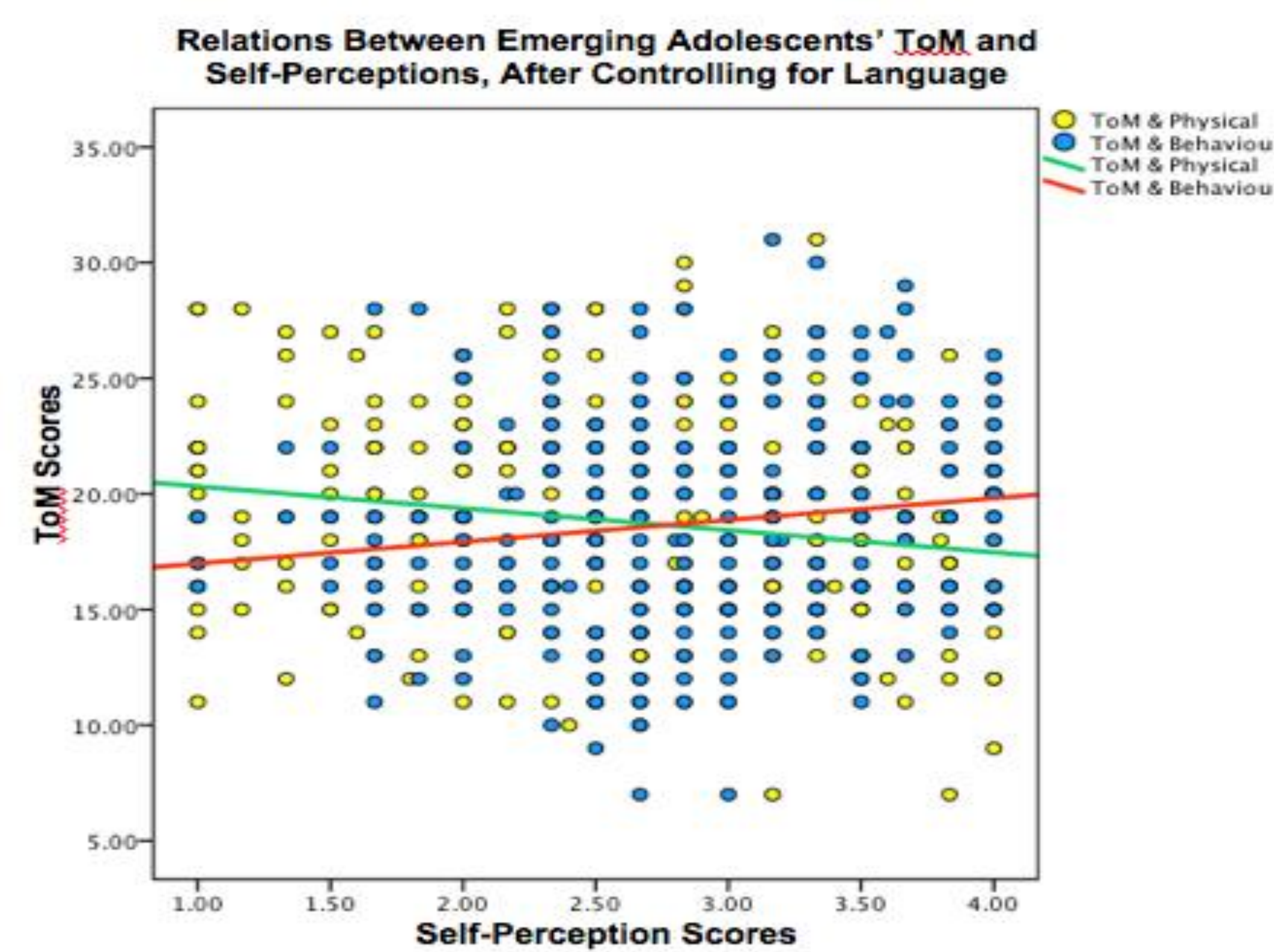
*Self-reported pencil and paper task.

Procedure

- Data taken from Year 1 of five-year longitudinal study on ToM development in emerging adolescence.

Contact Us: Dr. Sandra Bosacki (sbosacki@brocku.ca), Dr. Victoria Talwar (victoria.talwar@mcgill.ca),
Valentina Sitnik (vs13nt@brocku.ca), Shanen Smith (ssmith11@brocku.ca)

Results

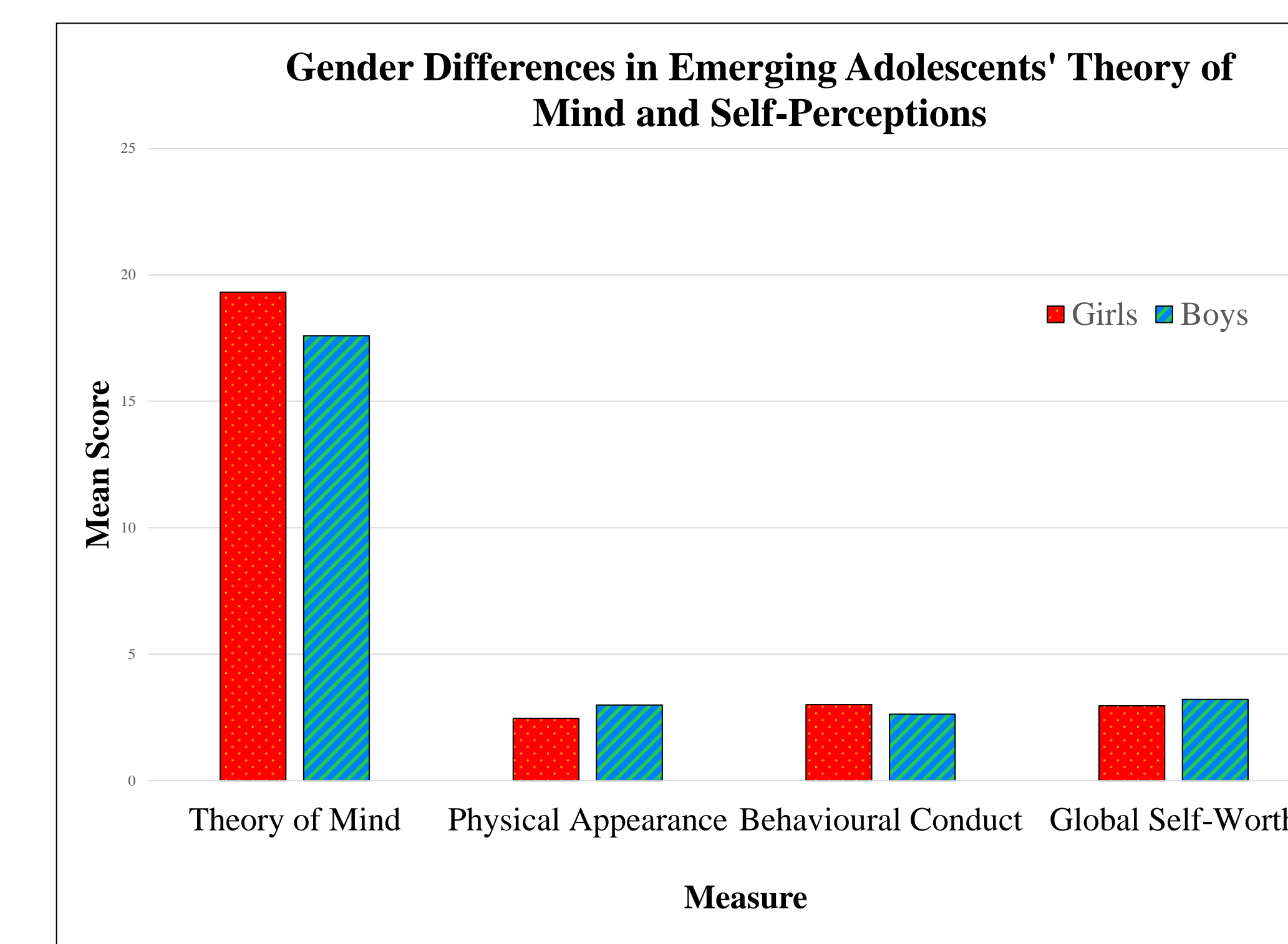


Gender Differences

- Girls: ↑ RME ($p = .001$) & ↑ Behavioural ($p = .000$) – after WIAT-III.
- Boys: ↑ Physical ($p = .000$) & ↑ Global ($p = .008$) – after WIAT-III.

Correlations

- RME & Physical (-ve, $p = .051$) – marginal after WIAT-III.
- RME & Behavioural (+ve, $p = .067$) – marginal after WIAT-III.



Discussion

- Emerging adolescents' ToM was related to their perceptions of their physical appearance and behavioural conduct. Accordingly, emerging adolescents with more advanced ToM tended to perceive their behaviour in a positive light while perceiving their physical appearance as lacking.
- Girls were more likely to have a greater understanding of others' thoughts and emotions compared to boys.
- Girls were more inclined to view themselves as better behaved and more likely to follow the rules than boys.
- Boys were more likely to report positive perceptions about their physical appearance than girls.
- Boys were more inclined to rate themselves as being happier with themselves in general than girls.

Implications and Future Directions

- *Theoretical* – further research is needed on the relations between ToM and self-understanding across childhood and adolescence
- *Practical* – our results promote the creation of inclusive and developmentally-appropriate educational programs for youth that foster social-cognitive skills and healthy self-concept

Limitations

- *Correlational design* – no causation or directionality can be inferred in the relations reported.
- *Sampling* – participants gleaned from diverse school and geographical contexts.

Visit us: <https://brocku.ca/theory-of-mind-lab>