Body image and weight control in sexual minority and non-minority youth in Ireland

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- BMI is unrelated to sexual orientation, but sexual minority youth have poorer body image than heterosexual youth (French et al., 1996 – USA)

- Hazardous weight control mechanisms (Hadland et al., 2014 – USA)

- Sexual orientation and body dissatisfaction are risk factors of eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours in LGBT adolescents (Parker & Harriger, 2020 – review from USA, with no reference to geographical distribution)

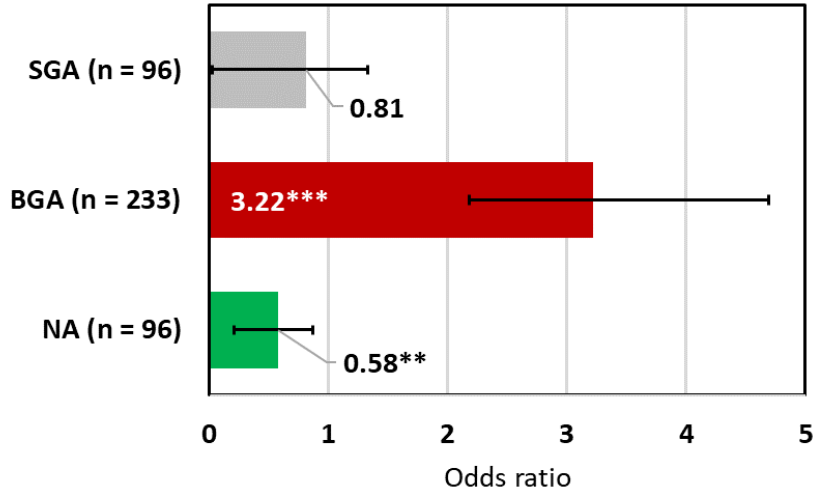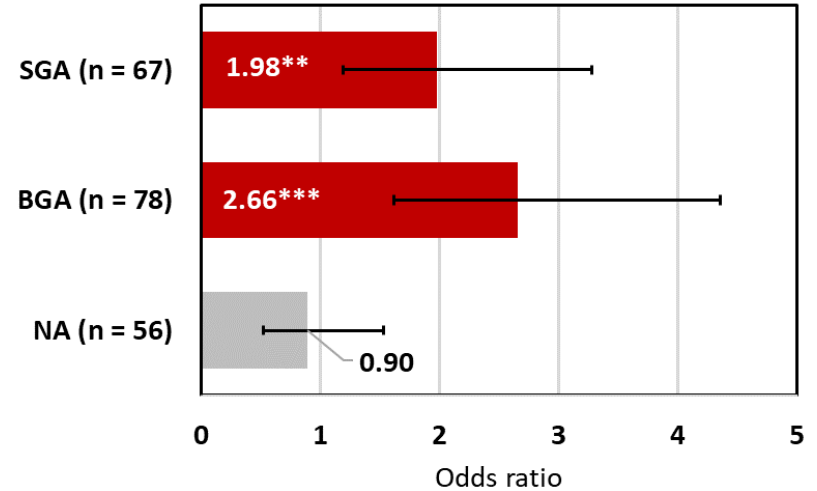- **Are these associations universal?**

Method

- A nationally representative sample of 4816 adolescents aged 14–18 (15.74±1.09 years, 55.4% girls)

- Predictor: romantic attraction (opposite gender: 87.5%, same gender: 2.9%, both gender: 6.5%, not attracted: 3.2%)

- Outcomes: happiness with self (n/y), body satisfaction (too thin/right size; too fat/right size), weight control (y/n)

- Binary logistic regression stratified for gender and controlled for social class

Unhappiness with self (*** *p* < .001, ** *p* < .01, * *p* < .05)

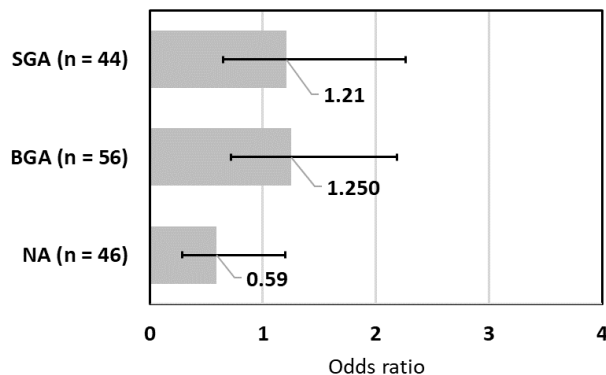GIRLS: Unhappy with self (Opposite-gender attracted OR = 1)

- SGA (n = 96): 0.81
- BGA (n = 233): 3.22***
- NA (n = 96): 0.58**

BOYS: Unhappy with self (Opposite-gender attracted OR = 1)
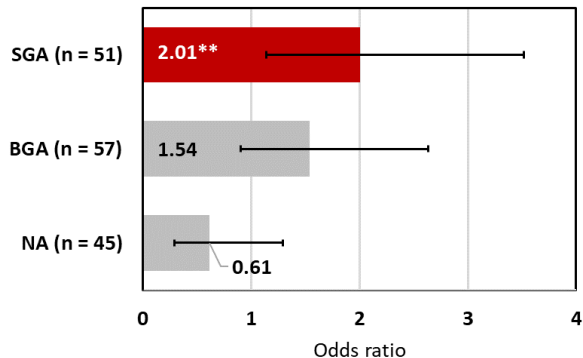
- SGA (n = 67): 1.98**
- BGA (n = 78): 2.66***
- NA (n = 56): 0.90

Odds ratio

SGA: Same-gender attracted
BGA: Both-gender attracted
NA: Not attracted

Body image dissatisfaction and weight control (*** *p* < .001, ** *p* < .01, * *p* < .05)
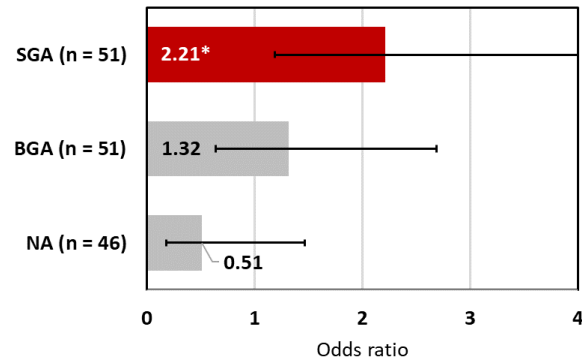

BOYS: Too thin (Opposite-gender attracted OR = 1)

- SGA (n = 44): 1.21
- BGA (n = 56): 1.250
- NA (n = 46): 0.59

BOYS: Too fat (Opposite-gender attracted OR = 1)

- SGA (n = 51): 2.01**
- BGA (n = 57): 1.54
- NA (n = 45): 0.61

BOYS: Weight control (Opposite-gender attracted OR = 1)

- SGA (n = 51): 2.21*
- BGA (n = 51): 1.32
- NA (n = 46): 0.51

GIRLS: Too thin (Opposite-gender attracted OR = 1)

- SGA (n = 34): 1.21
- BGA (n = 97): 2.18**
- NA (n = 51): 0.62

GIRLS: Too fat (Opposite-gender attracted OR = 1)

- SGA (n = 65): 1.41
- BGA (n = 201): 2.00***
- NA (n = 91): 1.05

GIRLS: Weight control (Opposite-gender attracted OR = 1)

- SGA (n = 45): 1.41
- BGA (n = 134): 1.47*
- NA (n = 62): 1.02

Odds ratio
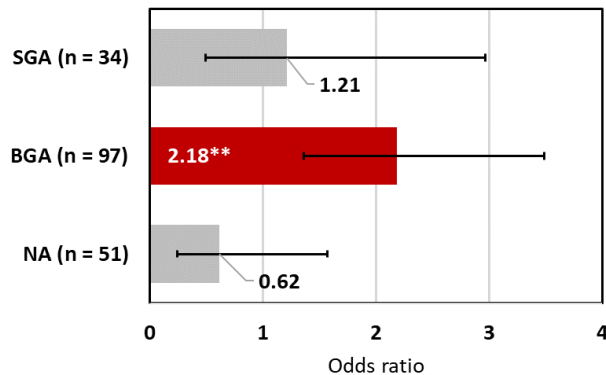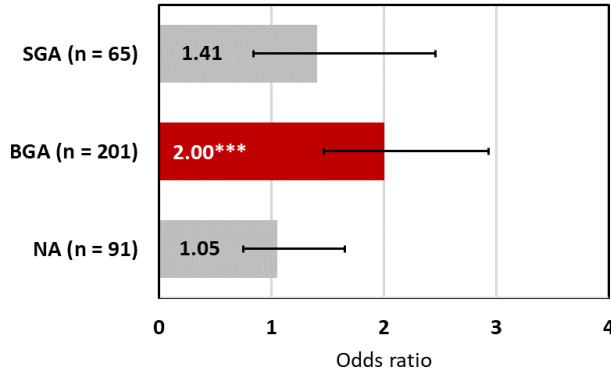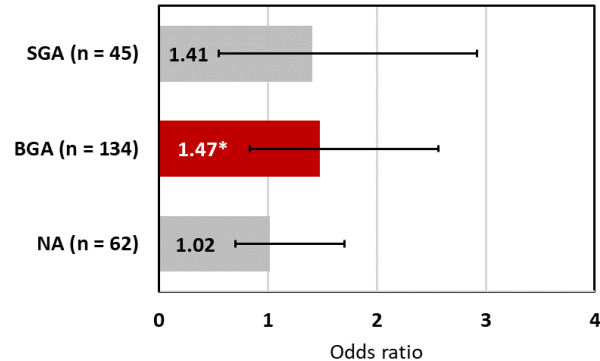
Discussion

- In line with earlier (mainly US) findings
- Gender and SO differences: gay boys and bisexual girls
- Stigma; internalised homo-/binegativity; body objectification; toxic environments (e.g. dating apps)
- Interventions? Self-esteem, stress management, assertiveness, body positivity

- Strengths: international HBSC methodology; nationally representative sample
- Limitations: small subsample sizes; unadjusted for BMI; binary gender
- Next steps: cross-national analysis; oversampling of LGBTI+ friendly schools; new sexual orientation and gender identity items

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