Adolescents' Face-to-face Meetings with Online Acquaintances

Research report

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Contents

1. Introduction

Adolescents often use the internet to communicate with family, friends, and other people they know from offline settings. Nevertheless, they also commonly encounter new people they do not know personally. In this report, we call such people **online acquaintances and** examine **adolescents' face-to-face meetings** with them. These are situations where adolescents, for the first time, meet in person with someone they know exclusively from the Internet. In our investigation, we draw on survey data collected in June 2021 from **a representative sample of 2,500 Czech adolescents aged 11-16**.

Talking to new people on the internet and later meeting them in person is often considered risky behavior in public perception. There are widespread fears of 'online predators' and 'cybergrooming'[1], that is, situations where an adolescent meets someone who wants to take advantage of or harm them. These fears are linked to the features of online environments, where it may be easier to hide one's real identity or motives (e.g., pretending to be younger or have friendly intentions).

However, online socializing can also provide adolescents with important benefits. Meeting new people and forming new social relationships (especially with peers) are important to adolescents' psychosocial development. Unsurprisingly, today's adolescents form such new bonds on the Internet. Moreover, socializing online allows adolescents to connect with people they would not meet otherwise (e.g., from other cities or countries). This can be particularly important for adolescents who,

for various reasons, do not have the opportunity to establish satisfactory relationships in their offline environment, have specific interests, or belong to a minority group (e.g., LGBTQ+). Online communication also grants adolescents greater control over what they share about themselves and how they communicate it – they can remain (partially) anonymous or carefully edit their responses. This can make online socializing particularly appealing and beneficial for adolescents who find it difficult to approach others in person (e.g., due to social anxiety). A face-to-face meeting with an online acquaintance can further solidify online relationships, make them 'real,' and transform them into new friendships or partnerships.

This social activity is particularly significant due to the many myths and misconceptions surrounding it, such as how common adverse incidents are during face-to-face meetings. This prompted us to examine these meetings in our project FUTURE (https://irtis.muni.cz/research/projects/future), which more broadly investigated what adolescents do online and how it impacts them.

This report describes Czech adolescents' face-to-face meetings with online acquaintances. We focus on the following questions:

- **How common are these meetings?** Are they equally common among adolescent girls and boys? Younger and older adolescents?
- **What happens before the meeting?** How long do adolescents talk to the other person before they meet face to

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[1]For more on cybergrooming see, e.g.: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/grooming/

face? Why do adolescents go to such meetings – what are their motives?

- **Who do adolescents meet with?** With people of the same or opposite gender? Peers or people of a different age? How often do adolescents meet someone they did not expect?
- **How are these meetings?** Are they mostly pleasant or unpleasant? Which meetings are more likely to be unpleasant? How often do adolescents feel unsafe?
- **Do online relationships continue after a face-to-face meeting?**

For each of these questions, we also examine the differences between:

- **Adolescent girls and boys**
- **Younger and older adolescents**
- **Cross-gender and same-gender meetings** (i.e., meetings between two females/males vs. meetings between a male and a female)

Our findings provide an empirical context for debates about the safety of socializing online. The report is intended for the public and may be particularly relevant for parents, educators, online risk prevention professionals, and researchers.

For detailed information on how we conducted the survey and analyzed the data, see the Methodology section at the end of the report.

Please note that each graph in this report shows how many adolescents responded to the related question (*N*). This number is often lower than that of 2,500 surveyed adolescents, as not all adolescents have met someone from the internet.

2. Key findings

How common are FtF meetings
(all adolescents, N = *2,500)*

- 31.7% of adolescents have met an online acquaintance face-to-face at some point in their life.
- Face-to-face meetings are more common among older adolescents than younger ones and equally common among boys and girls.

How the meeting went
(adolescents who went to a meeting in the last two and a half years, N = *598)*

Online contact before the meeting

- Adolescents most often talked to online acquaintances for a few weeks (33.8%) or longer (40.7%) before meeting them face to face.
- Online contact was typically longer before same-gender meetings than before cross-gender meetings.

Motives for meeting

- Adolescents' most common motive was a friendly one (83.2%). Instrumental (45.4%) and romantic (35.5%) motives were less prevalent. Half of all meetings involved some combination of two or more of these motives.
- Romantic and friendly motives were more common for cross-gender meetings.

Whom the adolescents met with

- Most adolescents met with peers (62.7%). Meetings with people over 20 were uncommon (5.6%), and with those over 30 were rare (1.7%).
- On average, boys met more with slightly younger people, and girls met more with slightly older people.

Expectations vs. reality

- In 96.6% of meetings, adolescents met with people of the expected gender. In 3.4%, a person of a different gender than expected came. This happened more often to younger (5.6%) than to older (1.1%) adolescents.
- In 84% of meetings, adolescents met with people of the expected age. In 6.1%, adolescents met someone younger than they expected, and in 10%, someone older (in 1.2%, a person over 30). However, large deviations from the expected age were rare.
- Online acquaintances behaved the way adolescents expected or better in 88.8% of meetings and looked the way adolescents expected or better in 85.9% of meetings.

Evaluation of the meeting

- Most adolescents rated their face-to-face meetings as pleasant (68.9%) or neutral (23.1%). Very unpleasant meetings were rare (1.5%).
- Pleasant meetings were more often those where adolescents met with someone who behaved better than expected, the motive for the meeting was friendly, online contact before the meeting was longer, or adolescents rated their social skills as better.
- Unpleasant meetings were more often those where adolescents met with someone who behaved worse, looked worse, or was of a different gender than adolescents expected.
- 79.6% of adolescents who met an online acquaintance were not afraid that the person would try to hurt them. While such fear was not uncommon (15%), most adolescents who reported it also rated the meeting as pleasant or neutral.
- This fear of harm was more common among younger adolescents.

Contact after the meeting

- 76.9% of adolescents stayed in contact with online acquaintances after meeting them face to face.

3. How common are face-to-face meetings?

We asked all 2,500 adolescents in our survey the following question:

On the internet, people can have conversations with other people whom they do not know from real life - they have not met in person. These conversations can happen in various places, e.g., on social networks, in games, on dating sites, in internet discussions, etc. We are not talking about "professional" communication (e.g., with e-shop, tutor, helpline).

Some people also meet people they only from the internet face to face – in reality. **How many such meetings have you experienced in your life?** *Here, we do not mean repeated meetings with the same person, but only those meetings where you meet someone new.*

Figure 1 shows the percentage of adolescents who have met at least one online acquaintance. This is a widespread phenomenon – **31.7% of adolescents experienced at least one face-to-face meeting in their lives**. Despite minor variations, we found no significant difference in how common these meetings are among adolescent boys and girls.

However, we did find significant age differences. One-fifth of younger adolescents (11–12) experienced a face-to-face meeting. In comparison, almost half of older adolescents (15–16) reported such meetings. This difference cannot be explained by older adolescents having more time to experience such meetings as it remains even if we focus only on the last year and a half (11–12-year-olds: 12.6%, 13–14-year-olds: 20.5%, 15–16-year-olds: 28.4%). Thus, **older adolescents are more likely to meet online acquaintances face to face**. This is consistent with previous research (Smahel et al., 2020) and insights from developmental psychology. Adolescents typically experiment with their identity, explore their sexuality and intimacy, and establish new relationships (Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2018). Thus, meeting new people matches adolescents' developmental needs, and it is unsurprising that they use the Internet to address these needs. Since psychosocial development is gradual, the need to meet new people likely increases during adolescence, which explains the age differences in the prevalence of face-to-face meetings.

Fig. 1. Prevalence of face-to-face meetings with online acquaintances
% of all surveyed adolescents (*N* = 2 407*)
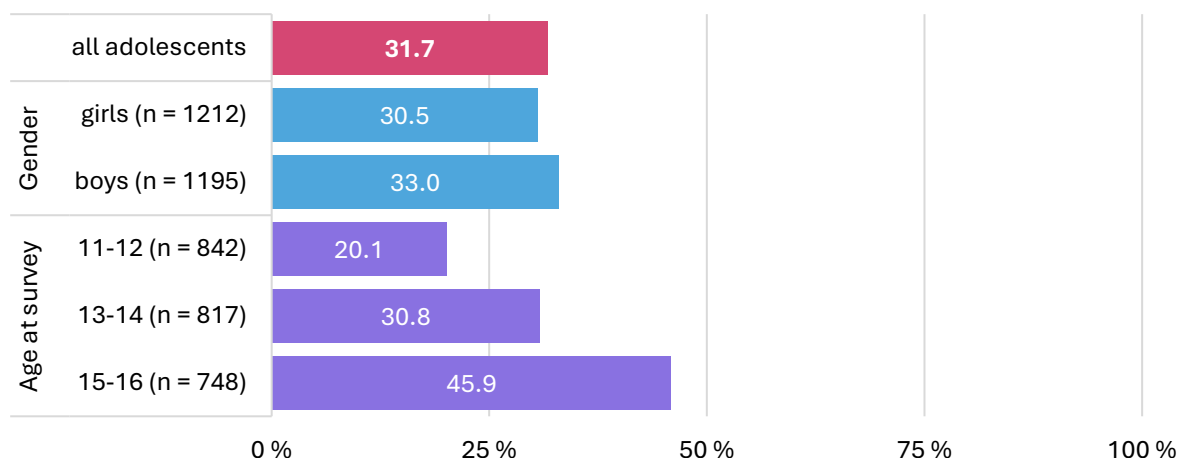
* As we do not include missing responses, the number of adolescents (*N*) differs slightly for each figure.

4. Before the meeting: Length of online contact and adolescents' motives

From this chapter onwards, we investigate various aspects of face-to-face meetings. **Therefore, we use a subsample of 598 adolescents who met someone from the Internet**. We focused on the most recent face-to-face meeting and excluded meetings that took place three or more years before the data collection (i.e., before 2019), as adolescents may have forgotten the details of such meetings. At the same time, we always asked about the first meeting with the online acquaintance. In other words, if adolescents met the person repeatedly, we were interested in what happened when they first saw each other in person. For more information about our procedure, see the Methodology section.

4.1. Length of online contact

Face-to-face meetings with online acquaintances are preceded by a period of online contact. It can range from a few minutes (e.g., a spontaneous date after a quick chat on a location-based app) to several months or even years (e.g., meeting a long-term online friend). We asked the adolescents:
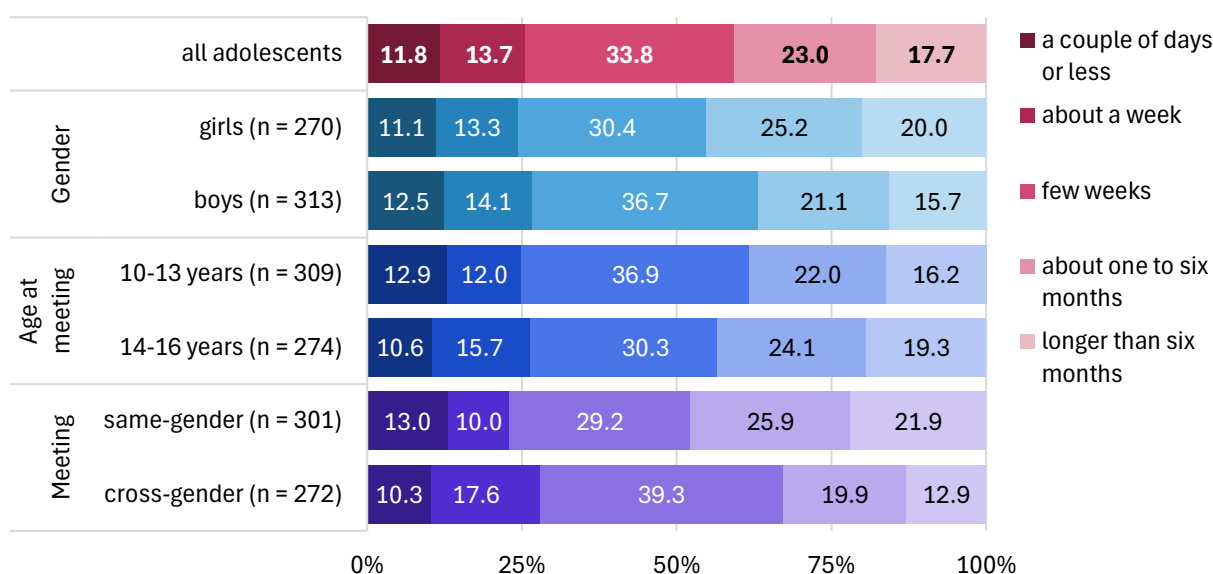
> *How long were you in contact with the person online before meeting them in person for the first time?*

Figure 2 shows that most adolescents have met online acquaintances **after a few weeks of online contact (33.8%) or longer (40.7%).** However, in many cases, the online contact before the meeting lasted only a week or less (25.5%).

The length of online contact did not differ between boys and girls or younger and older adolescents. However, whom adolescents met played an important role. **Same-gender meetings were more often preceded by longer online contact** than meetings with someone of the opposite gender.

> The percentages in Chapters 4-7 no longer refer to the full sample of 2,500 adolescents, but to a subsample of 598 adolescents who met an online acquaintance face to face.

Fig. 2. Length of online contact before face-to-face meetings
% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 583)

		a couple of days or less	about a week	few weeks	about one to six months	longer than six months
	all adolescents	11.8	13.7	33.8	23.0	17.7
Gender	girls (n = 270)	11.1	13.3	30.4	25.2	20.0
	boys (n = 313)	12.5	14.1	36.7	21.1	15.7
Age at meeting	10-13 years (n = 309)	12.9	12.0	36.9	22.0	16.2
	14-16 years (n = 274)	10.6	15.7	30.3	24.1	19.3
Meeting	same-gender (n = 301)	13.0	10.0	29.2	25.9	21.9
	cross-gender (n = 272)	10.3	17.6	39.3	19.9	12.9

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

4.2. Motives for the meeting

Face-to-face meetings include a variety of situations, from friendly encounters with someone who shares the same interest or romantic dates to meetings where adolescents just want to buy/swap clothes. We were interested in how often these differently-motivated meetings occur. We distinguished three broad motives: friendly, romantic, and instrumental. Adolescents could select all three:

There are many reasons for meeting someone from the internet. Choose if the following applies to you. I wanted to:

...talk to someone, meet someone new **friendly motive**

...go on a date, find a girlfriend/boyfriend **romantic motive**

...get tutoring; swap, sell, or buy something (e.g., collectibles, games, clothes) **instrumental motive**

Figure 3 shows that **friendly motive was the most common (83.2%)** by a wide margin. It was followed by the instrumental motive (45.4%), and the romantic motive was the least frequent (35.5%). While this order was the same for boys and girls and for older and younger adolescents, we observed one significant difference – **instrumental motive was more common among boys than girls.** There were also substantial differences between same-gender and cross-gender meetings. **Cross-gender meetings were much more frequently romantically motivated. The friendly motive was also slightly more common in cross-gender meetings.**

Fig. 3   Adolescents' motives for face-to-face meetings
% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 585*)
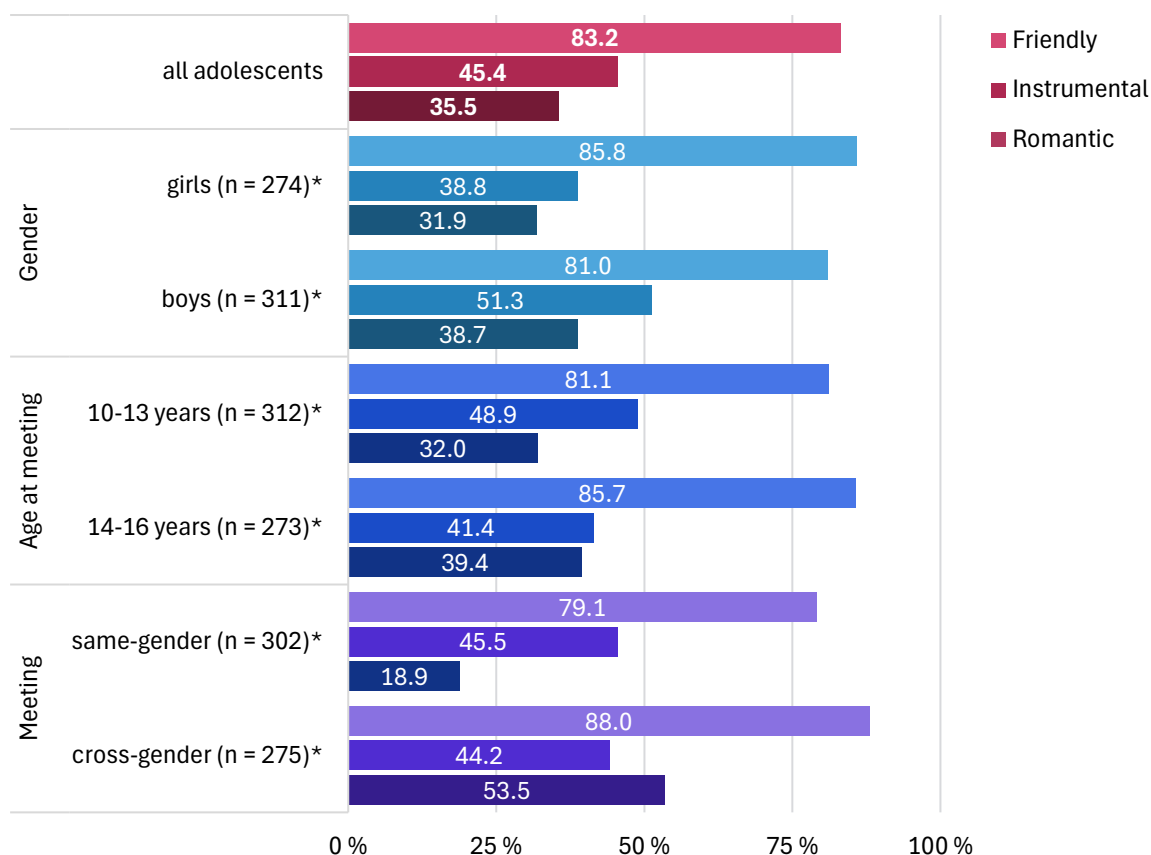
* There was separate yes/no question for each motive. Thus, the percentages in the graph do not add up to 100%. The number of responses (*n*) varied slightly for each question. The graph shows *n* for the friendly motive. The range of *n* across all motives: all adolescents = 575-588, girls = 273-276, boys = 302-312, 11-13 years old = 306-315, 14-16 years old = 269-273, opposite gender = 297-303, same gender = 269-275.

It is essential to consider that some adolescents had multiple motives for attending the meeting. Figure 4 shows all combinations of the three examined motives. The size of each section corresponds to the relative frequency of each combination. **Just under half of adolescents went to the meeting with one distinct motive,** most often a friendly one (35,1 %). Exclusively instrumental (7,2 %) or exclusively romantic (2,1 %) motives were much less common. **Half of the adolescents then reported multiple motives** – the most common combinations included the friendly motive. In 5,6% of the meetings, adolescents did not report any of the three motives.

For more information on how meetings attended with varying motives differ from each other, see the following study:

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-022-01697-z

We have also briefly summarized the results on the IRTIS website:

https://irtis.muni.cz/for-media/why-do-czech-adolescents-meet-face-to-face-with-people-from-the-internet

Fig. 4   Motives for face-to-face meetings: all combinations
% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 567)
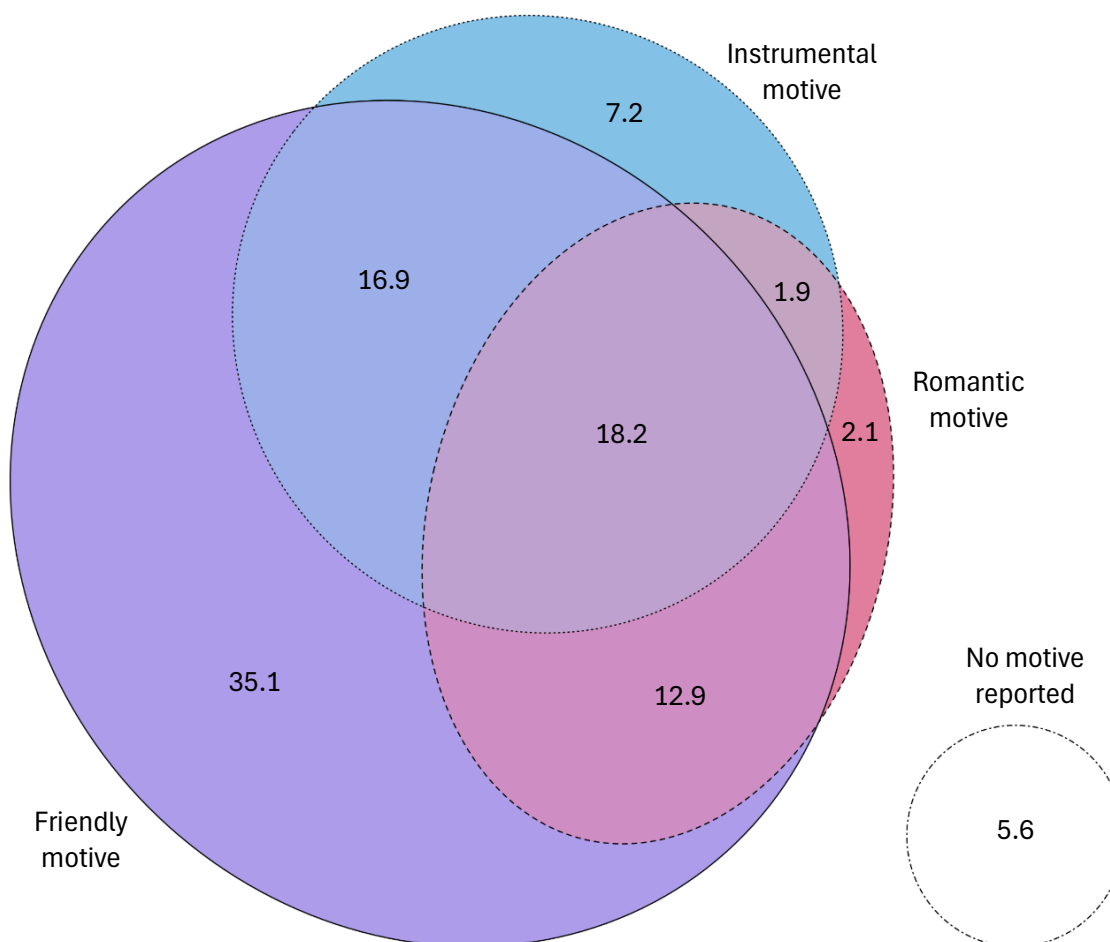
5. Who did adolescents meet with?

In this chapter, we first describe who the adolescents met, that is, what the gender and age of online acquaintances were. We then examine whether adolescents met the person they expected to meet (in terms of age and gender) and to what extent the behavior and appearance of this person matched adolescents' expectations. Again, we work with the subsample of 598 adolescents who experienced a face-to-face meeting.

5.1. Gender and age of online acquaintances

Adolescents met with girls or women (49.8%) and boys or men (50.2%) equally frequently. In this respect, we found no significant differences between boys and girls, older and younger adolescents, or between same-gender and cross-gender meetings. In all cases, meetings with girls/women were as common as with boys/men.

Figure 4 shows the age of online acquaintances relative to the adolescents. **In most cases, adolescents met with peers of the same age (62.7%).** Meetings with older

people under 20 (17.9%) or people younger than adolescents (12.1%) were much less frequent but still relatively common. Meetings with people between 21–30 were uncommon (5.6%), and with people over 30 were rare (1.7%). This general pattern holds across age and gender groups. Despite the slight variations that can be seen in Figure 4, we did not find statistically significant differences between younger and older adolescents or between same-gender and cross-gender meetings. However, there was a significant difference between boys and girls. On average, **girls were more likely to meet older people than boys.** Specifically, more girls met someone older but under 20 (23.9% vs. 12.6% of boys), and fewer girls met someone of the same age (59.8% vs. 65.3% of boys) or younger (9.1% vs. 14.8% of boys). Nevertheless, approximately equal proportions of boys and girls met significantly older people (over the age of 20), and for both boys and girls, most meetings were with peers.

Fig. 5   Age of online acquaintances relative to adolescents' age
% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 593)
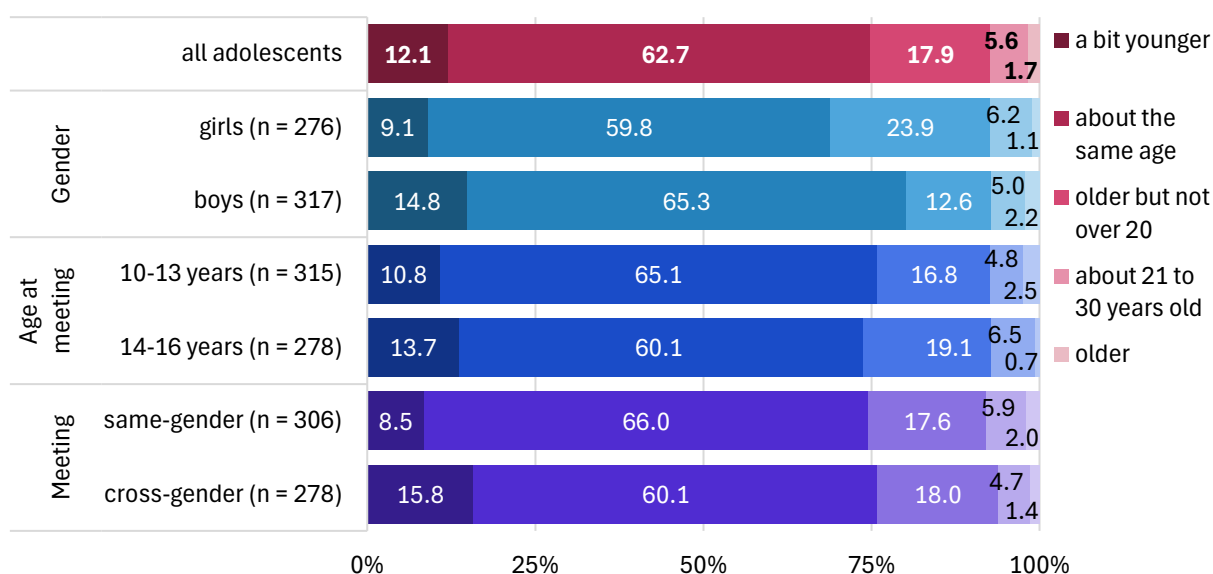
5.2. Who adolescents expected and who came to the meeting

In online communication, hiding certain aspects of one's identity can be easy. This allows adolescents to regulate how much other people online know about them, thus protecting their privacy. However, the people adolescents encounter online may also hide or misrepresent information about themselves. This raises concerns about *cybergrooming*, that is, situations where people lie about their identity (e.g., an adult pretends to be an adolescent) to lure adolescents to a face-to-face meeting.

We therefore asked the adolescents whom they expected and who showed up:

> *From what you knew about the person from the internet, who did you expect?*
>
> *And then, who actually came to the meeting?*
>
> *That they would be: | They were:*

- *girls/woman*
- *boy/man*

That they would be: | They were:

- *a little younger than me*
- *approximately the same age*
- *older than me but younger than 20*
- *approximately 21–30 years old*
- *older*

To see how many adolescents encountered a person of a different age or gender than expected, we compared the responses to these two questions.

Figure 5 shows that **3.4% of adolescents met someone of a different gender than expected.** The proportion was the same for boys and girls and in same-gender and cross-gender meetings. However, there was a significant age difference. **More younger adolescents (5.6%) than older adolescents (1.1%) reported meeting a person of a different gender than they expected.** Still, in most cases, adolescents met a person of the expected gender.

Deviations from the expected age were more common: **10.0% of adolescents reported meeting someone older than expected, while 6.1% met someone younger than expected** (see Figure 6). Boys and girls reported these situations to the same extent. Age differences and differences between same-gender and cross-gender meetings are only minor and not statistically significant. Again, most adolescents met a person who was as old as adolescents expected based on previous online communication.

The 10% (i.e., 59 adolescents) who met someone older than expected deserve

Fig. 5   Expected vs. actual gender of online acquaintances
% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 580)
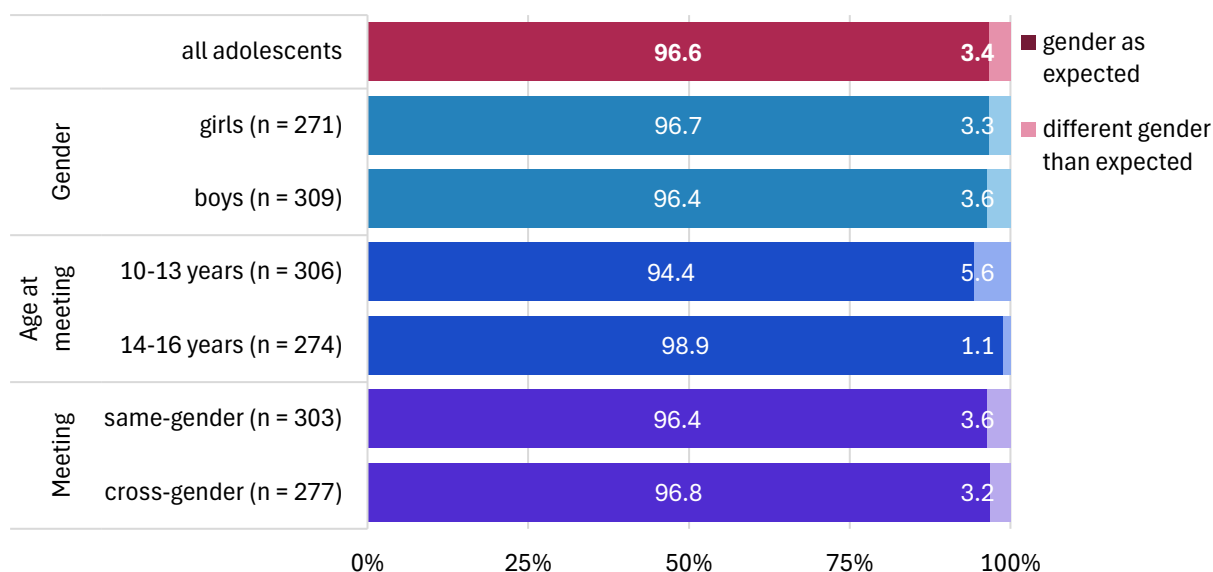
more attention. In these cases, it is important to see how much the actual age differed from the expected age. In most cases (49), the person was older by one category (e.g., *older but younger than 20* instead of the *same age*). Instances, where someone significantly older came (i.e., by two or more categories), were rare (10 out of 592 meetings; see Table 1).

Table 1 Expected vs. actual age of online acquaintances (count)

		Actual age					
		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	Tot.
Expected age	1. Younger	**50**	10	1	2	1	64
	2. Same age	20	**350**	30	3	2	405
	3. Older under 20	1	10	**73**	6	1	91
	4. 21-30 years old	0	2	2	**21**	3	28
	5. Older (30+)	0	0	0	1	**3**	4
	Total	71	372	106	33	10	592

5.3. Behavior and appearance of online acquaintances

Situations where adolescents meet with someone completely different are quite rare (see previous section). However, the person who comes to the meeting may look different or behave differently than the adolescent expected. We therefore asked the adolescents:
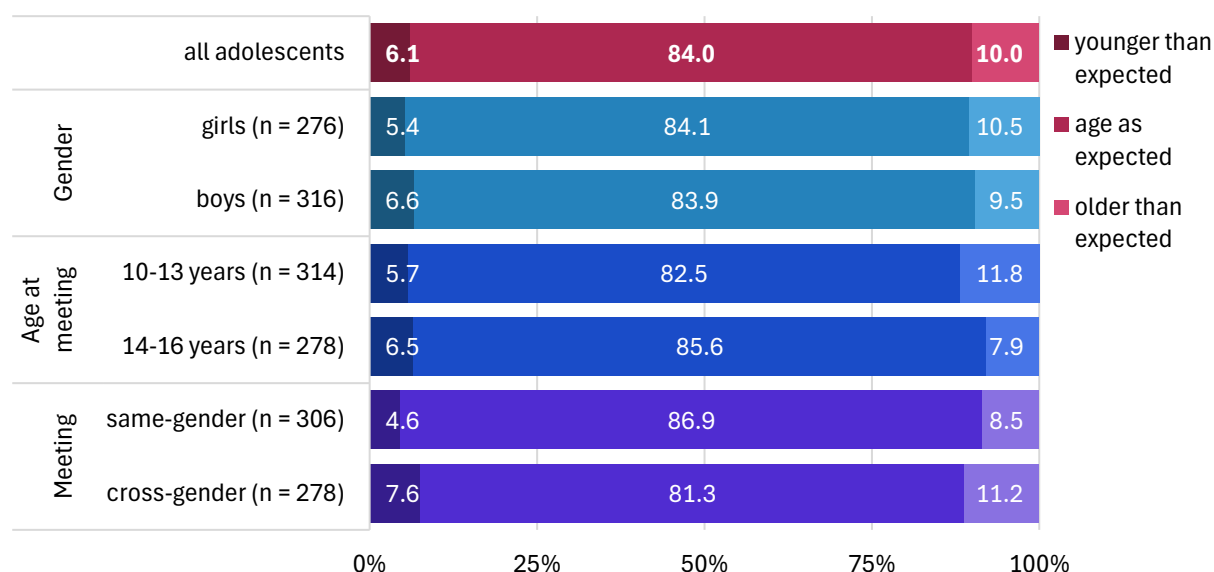
> *And then, who actually came to the meeting?*

> *They behaved: | They looked:*

- *Much worse than I expected*
- *A little worse than I expected*
- *About as I expected*
- *A little better than I expected*
- *Much better than I expected*

In most cases, adolescents met a person who behaved as expected (59.2%; see Figure 7 on the next page). When people's behavior deviated from expectations, it was more often in a positive direction: **29.6% of adolescents said that online acquaintances behaved better** than anticipated, while **11.2% said they behaved worse**. These results are consistent for boys and girls and for younger and older adolescents; the differences between these groups are not significant. However, there are significant differences between same-gender encounters and cross-gender meetings. **It was more common for online acquaintances to behave worse than expected in cross-gender meetings** than in same-gender meetings. Nevertheless, the proportion of meetings where

Fig. 6   Expected vs. actual age of online acquaintances
% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 592)

		younger than expected	age as expected	older than expected
	all adolescents	6.1	84.0	10.0
Gender	girls (n = 276)	5.4	84.1	10.5
	boys (n = 316)	6.6	83.9	9.5
Age at meeting	10-13 years (n = 314)	5.7	82.5	11.8
	14-16 years (n = 278)	6.5	85.6	7.9
Meeting	same-gender (n = 306)	4.6	86.9	8.5
	cross-gender (n = 278)	7.6	81.3	11.2

their behavior exceeded adolescents' expectations was comparable.

Regarding appearance, **two-thirds of adolescents met someone who looked as expected** (67,1 %, see Figure 8). Just under a fifth of adolescents (18.8%) met someone who looked better, and 14.1% met someone who looked worse. We found no significant differences between boys and girls or between older and younger adolescents. However, as with the behavior of online acquaintances, same- and cross-gender meetings differed. **In cross-gender**

meetings, it was more common that adolescents' expectations did not match reality - in both positive and negative ways. More adolescents reported meeting someone who looked worse than they expected (16.9%), but also someone who looked better (24.1%) than in the case of same-gender meetings (11.3% worse, 14.3% better).

Fig. 7   Behavior of online acquaintances relative to adolescents' expectations
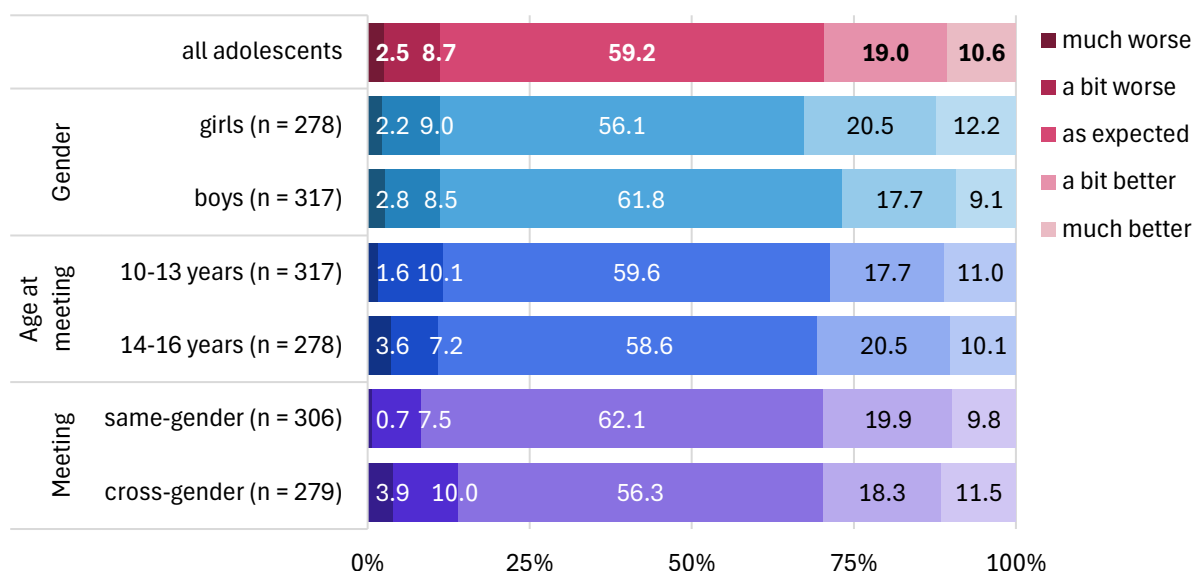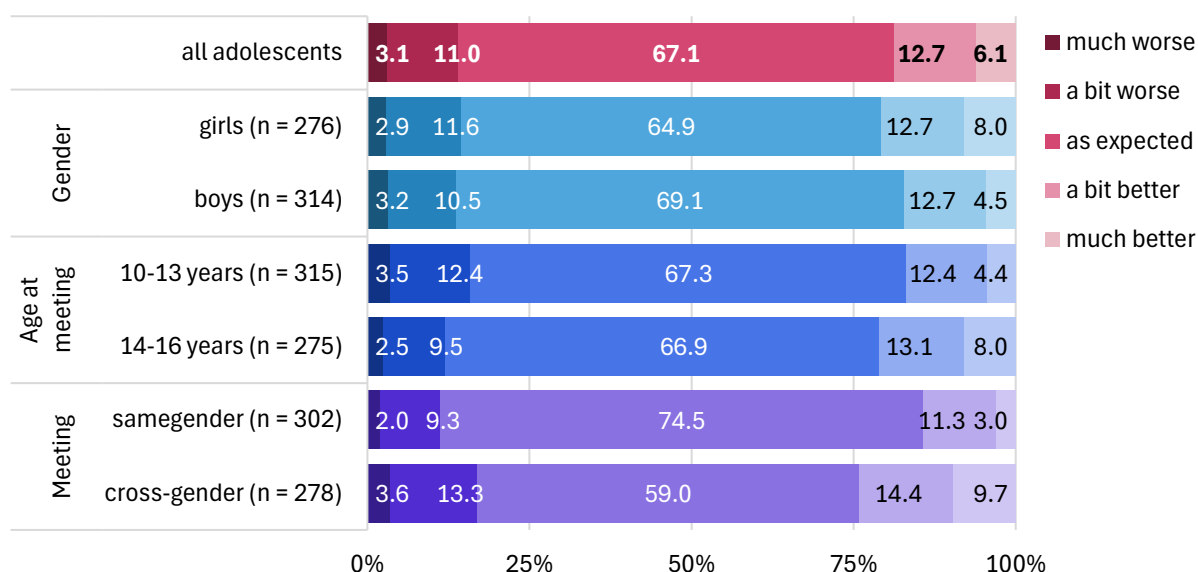% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 595)

Fig. 8   Appearance of online acquaintances relative to adolescents' expectations
% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 590)

6. Feelings after the meeting

Face-to-face meetings with online acquaintances carry potential risks but can also be enjoyable and beneficial for adolescents. In this chapter, we describe how many adolescents felt at risk at the meeting and how many rated the meeting as pleasant or unpleasant.

6.1. Fear of harm

It is difficult to determine which face-to-face meetings were objectively risky for the adolescent. One important indicator is adolescents' perceptions. We therefore asked them to what extent they felt at risk at the meeting:

> *During the meeting, were you afraid that the person would want to hurt you in any way?*

For this question, we also allowed adolescents to express their uncertainty by answering *I am not sure.*

As shown **in Figure 9, most adolescents (79.6%) were not afraid that the person they met would want to harm them** (47,8 % definitely not, 31,8 % rather not). On the other hand, 15.0% of adolescents were concerned. The same proportion of boys and girls reported these, and there were no differences between same-gender and cross-gender meetings either. However, there was a significant difference between younger and older adolescents. **Younger adolescents were more likely to feel threatened at the meetings** and more likely to be unsure.

Notably, the feeling of being at risk does not reflect the actual riskiness of the meeting – some adolescents may have been scared even when they were not at risk, while others may have been in a risky meeting and not felt scared. To provide a more complete picture, we look at how the 15% (i.e., 89 adolescents) who felt at risk at the meeting (answers *rather yes* and *definitely yes*) evaluated the meeting overall. Half (43) found the meeting generally pleasant despite their concerns, a third (32) found it neutral, and a sixth (14) found it unpleasant (see Table 2).

Fig. 9 Fear of harm at the meeting
% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 594)
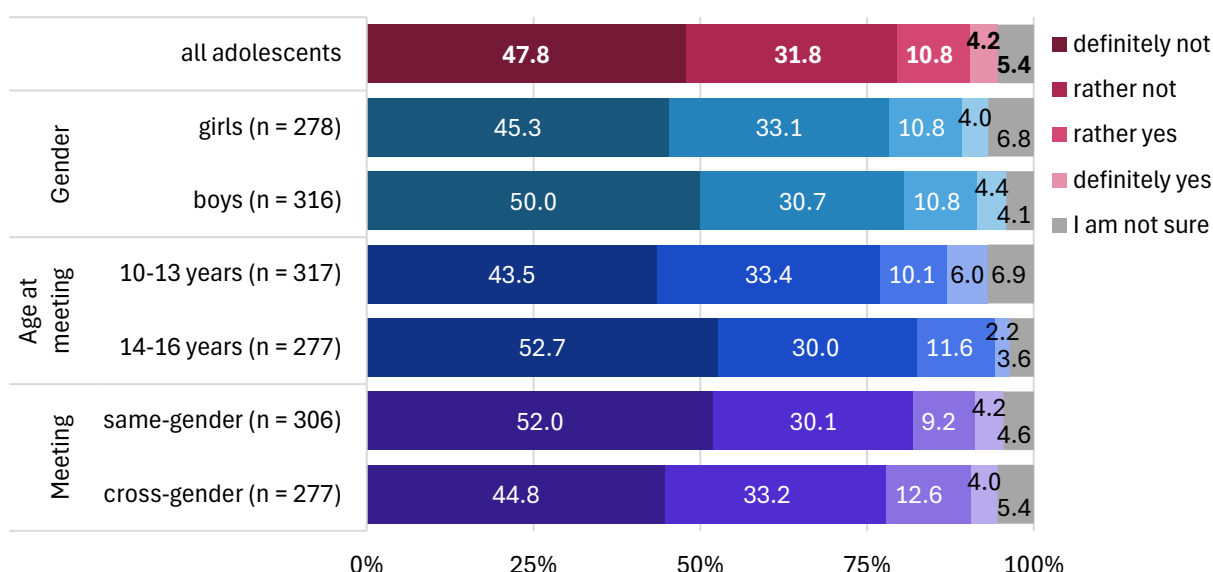
6.2. Meeting evaluation

We asked adolescents how pleasant or unpleasant they found the meeting. The question was phrased as follows:

And how was the meeting for you?

The overwhelming majority of adolescents (92.0%) rated their meeting with an online acquaintance as pleasant (68.9%) or neutral (23.1%). Rather unpleasant meetings were less frequent (6.4%), and very unpleasant meetings were rare (1.5%). Boys and girls did not differ in their evaluations. However, there were differences between younger and older adolescents. **Older adolescents more often reported rather unpleasant and very unpleasant meetings (taken together, 10.1% vs. 6.0% for younger adolescents) and very pleasant meetings (27.5% vs. 20.8% for younger).** Situations where adolescents met a person of the same or opposite gender also differed. **Adolescents more often rated cross-gender meetings as rather unpleasant or very unpleasant (10.5% vs. 5.9% for same-gender) and less often as very pleasant (19.3% vs. 29.0%).**

Again, it should be noted that even the rated (un)pleasantness of the meeting does not reflect its riskiness. The meeting could

have been unpleasant but safe (e.g., a boring meeting) or pleasant but risky. For example, among adolescents who rated the meeting as rather unpleasant or very unpleasant (47), less than two-thirds (28) did not feel at risk, less than one-third felt at risk (14), and one-tenth was unsure (5; see Table 2).

Table 2 Meeting evaluation and fear of harm (count)

		Fear of harm			
		No	Yes	Unsure	Total
Evaluation	Unpleasant	28	14	5	47
	Neutral	88	32	16	136
	Pleasant	354	43	11	408
	Total	470	89	32	591

6.3. Which meetings were (un)pleasant?

In a related study, we investigated the relationships between the aspects of the meeting described in previous chapters and the overall evaluations (Mýlek et al., 2023). Using multinomial logistic regression, we examined what increases or decreases the odds of a meeting being pleasant rather than neutral and unpleasant rather than pleasant.

Fig. 10   How pleasant/unpleasant the meeting was
% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 593)
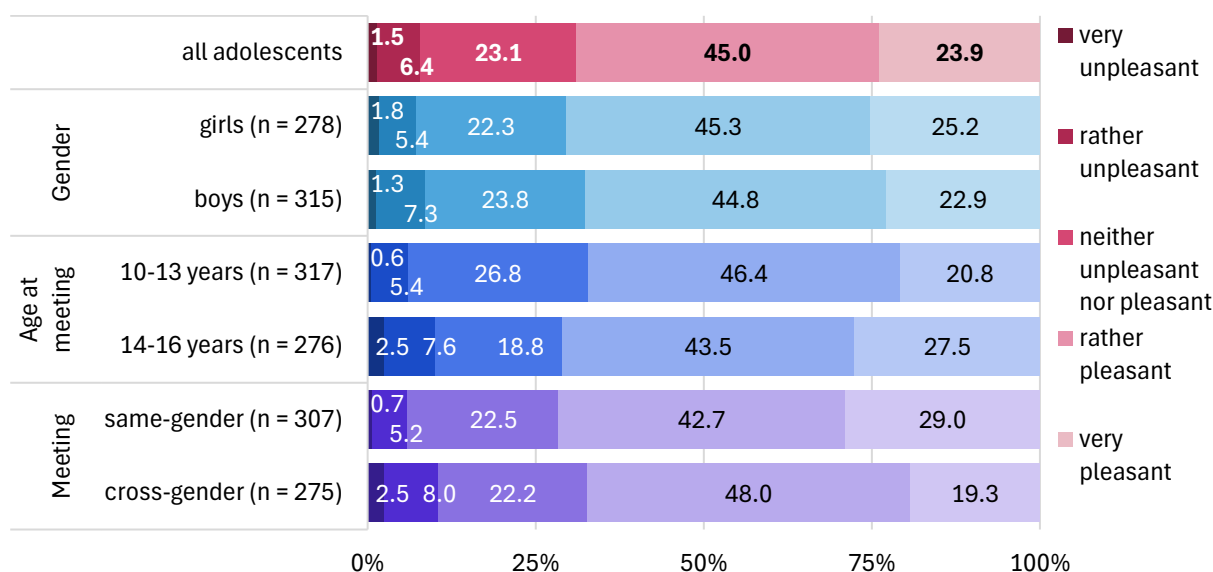
Adolescents' expectations were crucial. A mismatch between adolescents' expectations and who showed up led to unpleasant meetings. When someone of a different gender than the adolescents expected came, the meeting was more likely to be unpleasant (vs. pleasant). Similarly, if the person behaved worse or looked worse than adolescents expected, the meeting was more likely to be unpleasant (vs. pleasant) and less likely to be pleasant (vs. neutral). Specifically for behavior, the reverse was also true: if it exceeded adolescents' expectations, the meeting was more likely to be pleasant.

How long adolescents have been talking online with the person before the meeting also played a role. The longer this online contact was, the greater the chance of a pleasant meeting and the lower the chance of an unpleasant one. The same was true for encounters that adolescents went to with a friendly motive, while other motives were unrelated to the (un)pleasantness of the encounter. Social skills of the adolescents were also important. The better they were (according to self-assessment), the higher the chances of a pleasant meeting. However, they were not related to the chance of an unpleasant meeting.

In the previous section, we described that older adolescents were more likely to report unpleasant encounters. However, the regression analysis results show that **taking all the aspects mentioned above into account, the age of the adolescent is not related to the (un)pleasantness of the meeting.**

Based on these findings, we recommend adolescents should not rush to meet in person. Longer online contact can help them get to know the other person better and give them more opportunities to verify their identity. This can lead to more enjoyable and potentially less risky meetings.

The full study is freely available here:

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-022-01697-z

7. Contact after the meeting

Meeting an online acquaintance in person can be a step in establishing a new friendship or other relationship. Therefore, we were interested in how often adolescents stay in contact with online acquaintances after the first face-to-face meeting. We asked adolescents:
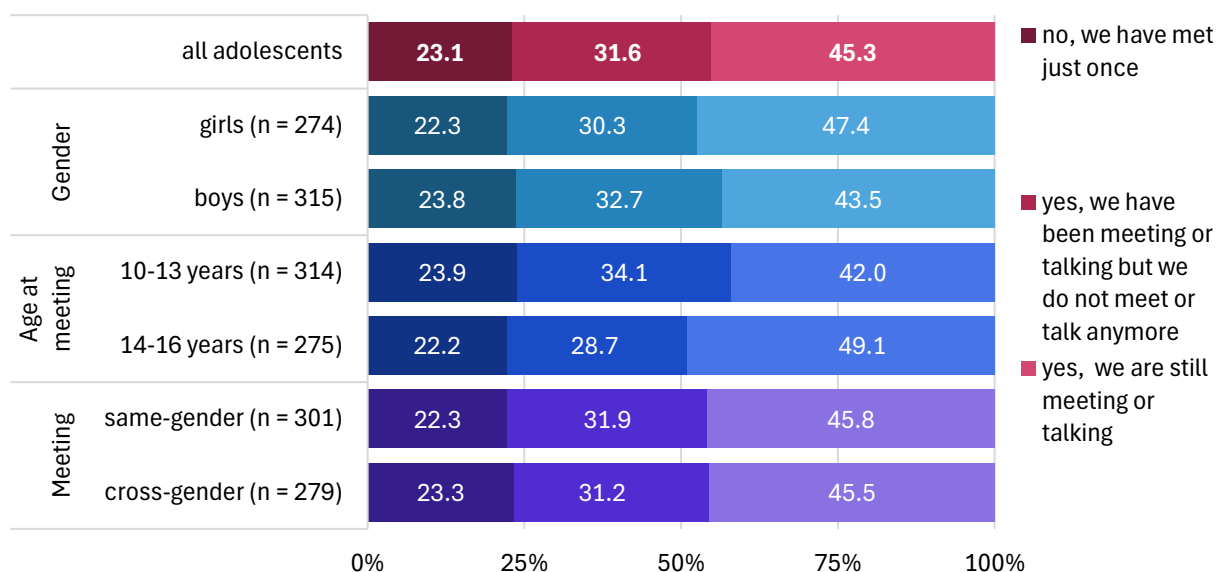
Have you met or talked to this person after your first in-person meeting?

Over three-quarters of adolescents have stayed in touch with online acquaintances after meeting them in person. More specifically, just under half of the adolescents (45.3%) were still in contact with these people at the time of data collection. Less than a third (31.6%) continued to talk to the person after the meeting but were no longer in contact with them when they completed our survey. For the remaining 23.1% of adolescents, the meeting was a one-time encounter, after which they did not talk to the person again. In this respect, boys and girls, younger and older adolescents, and same- and cross-gender meetings did not differ.

Fig. 11 Contact after the meeting
% of adolescents who went to the meeting (*N* = 589)

		no, we have met just once	yes, we have been meeting or talking but we do not meet or talk anymore	yes, we are still meeting or talking
	all adolescents	23.1	31.6	45.3
Gender	girls (n = 274)	22.3	30.3	47.4
Gender	boys (n = 315)	23.8	32.7	43.5
Age at meeting	10-13 years (n = 314)	23.9	34.1	42.0
Age at meeting	14-16 years (n = 275)	22.2	28.7	49.1
Meeting	same-gender (n = 301)	22.3	31.9	45.8
Meeting	cross-gender (n = 279)	23.3	31.2	45.5

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

8. Sources and recommended literature

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Recommended literature

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Mýlek, V. (2022). Why do Czech adolescents meet face-to-face with people from the internet? https://irtis.muni.cz/for-media/why-do-czech-adolescents-meet-face-to-face-with-people-from-the-internet

9. Methodology

9.1. Survey preparation and data collection

This report uses data from the first wave of a longitudinal survey conducted as part of the research project *Modeling the future: Understanding the impact of technology on adolescent's well-being (FUTURE)*. Data were collected in **June 2021** through an online questionnaire (CAWI method) completed separately by adolescents and one of their parents or caregivers.

Sampling, recruitment, and data collection were carried out by the survey agency STEM/MARK in cooperation with Data Collect. Respondents were recruited from three existing online panels (ivyzkumy.cz, MNforce epanel, Kantar; together about 165,000 panelists) and 980 newly recruited households. Quota sampling was used to ensure the sample was representative. This means the composition of households in our sample corresponds to Czech households with children in terms of education of the household head, region (NUTS3, 14 regions), and municipality size; all based on the latest available data from the Czech Statistical Office. Moreover, adolescents of different ages in the 11–16 range were equally represented, and each age group was gender balanced.

To ensure that adolescents understood the questions as we intended, the entire questionnaire underwent cognitive testing in semi-structured interviews with 30 adolescents aged 11–16 and two mothers. We also piloted the questionnaire on 195 adolescents aged 11–16 and 195 parents/caregivers.

9.2. Research sample

In this report, we only use data from adolescents. **Our sample included 2,500 adolescents aged 11–16 years (M = 13.43, SD = 1.70), 50% of whom were girls**. However, in most of this report, we focus on a subsample of adolescents who have first-hand experience with meeting online acquaintances face to face. At least one face-to-face meeting was reported by 764 adolescents, but 66 of them went to this meeting three or more years ago, and 87 did not indicate when the meeting occurred. We excluded these adolescents because their recollection of the details of the meeting might be inaccurate. We also excluded 13 adolescents who were less than ten years old at the time of the meeting and were, therefore, children rather than adolescents. **Thus, the subsample we use in most chapters of this report included 598 adolescents aged 11–16 years (M = 14.10, SD = 1.62), of whom 46.8% were girls.** These adolescents represent 23.9% of the total sample of 2,500 respondents.

9.3. Procedure and ethics

The agency contacted parents by email, which included a description of the research and a link to the questionnaire. Parents who wished to participate first provided the information necessary to check eligibility criteria and quotas. Then, they were asked to consent to their and their adolescent child's participation (parents had access to a PDF with the questions for adolescents). After giving consent, parents let their adolescent child complete their part of the questionnaire in private. Upon completion, the adolescent part was locked (so parents could not access their answers), and parents completed their part of the questionnaire. Participants could close the questionnaire anytime and skip a question by selecting *"I don't want to answer."* Each household received compensation worth CZK 100. STEM/MARK and Data Collect follow SIMAR and ESOMAR standards and codes of ethics. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Masaryk University.

9.4. Data analysis

In the report, we use two types of adolescent age. The **age at survey** is the age adolescents reported in the questionnaire (confirmed by their parents). We use this age to describe the sample and to determine the general prevalence of face-to-face meetings. **Age at meeting** reflects how old the adolescent was when they met the online acquaintances face to face. Some meetings occurred up to two years before our data collection. Thus, for these encounters, age at data collection would not accurately reflect how old the adolescents were at the face-to-face meeting.

We calculated the age at the meeting from the age at data collection and the answer to the question, *„Approximately when did this [last] meeting occur?"*:

Response	Age at meeting
This year (2021)	age at survey
Last year (2020)	age at survey – 1
About two years ago (2019)	age at survey – 2

For each figure, we indicate whether it uses *age at survey* or *age at meeting.*

Each question provided a response option: *"I don't want to answer."* In the analysis, we treated these responses as missing values; they were omitted. Therefore, for each figure or table, we report the specific sample size and the size of each subgroup (e.g., by gender and age).

The report presents the percentage of adolescents who chose a particular answer to a given question. We are comparing boys and girls and adolescents of different ages. We also contrast cross- and same-gender meetings. We tested these differences using **chi-square tests of independence with a significance level of 0.05.** Statistical analysis was performed in the SPSS software, version 29.0.0.0.
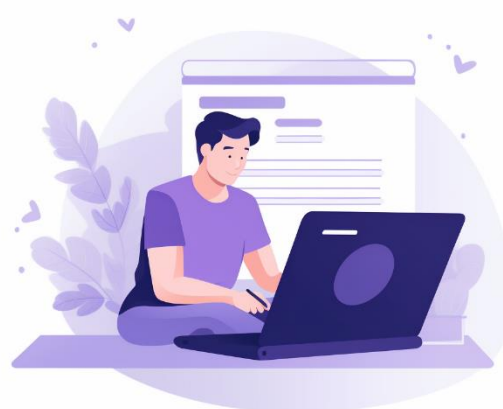
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