



Above Average? Perceptions of attractiveness in children and adults

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Background

- Adults and children judge average faces to be attractive^{1,2}
- Adults judge an average created from highly attractive faces to be even more attractive^{3,4}
- *Averageness hypothesis*: average face is most attractive
- *Contrast hypothesis*: above average face on attractiveness dimension is most attractive

Purpose

- To examine whether 5-year-olds also find above average faces on the attractiveness dimension to be most attractive

Stimuli

- Created 2 attractiveness dimensions (1 of male and 1 of female faces)
 - based on the differences between a typical average and an attractive average
 - 21 faces that differed in 50% increments from -500% to +500%

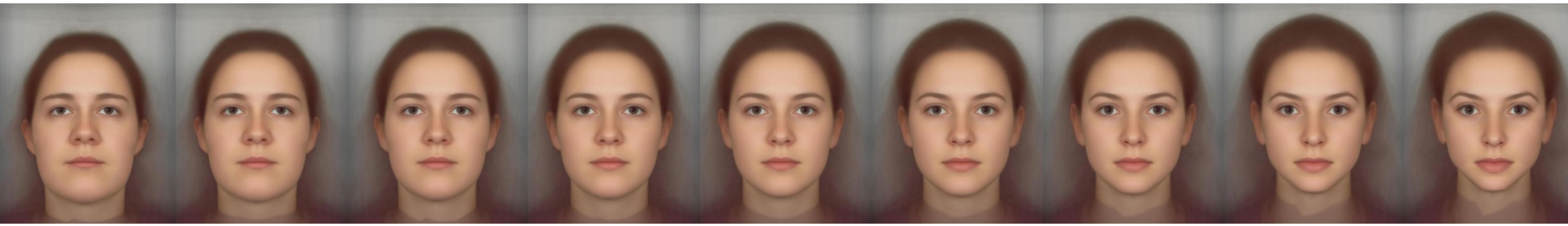
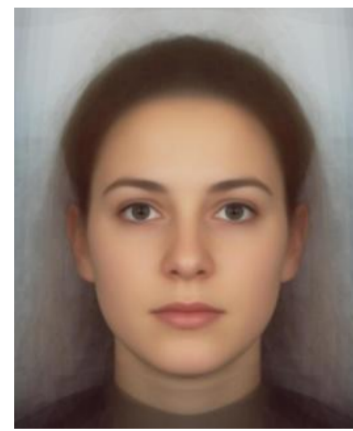
Typical average

60 faces



Attractive average

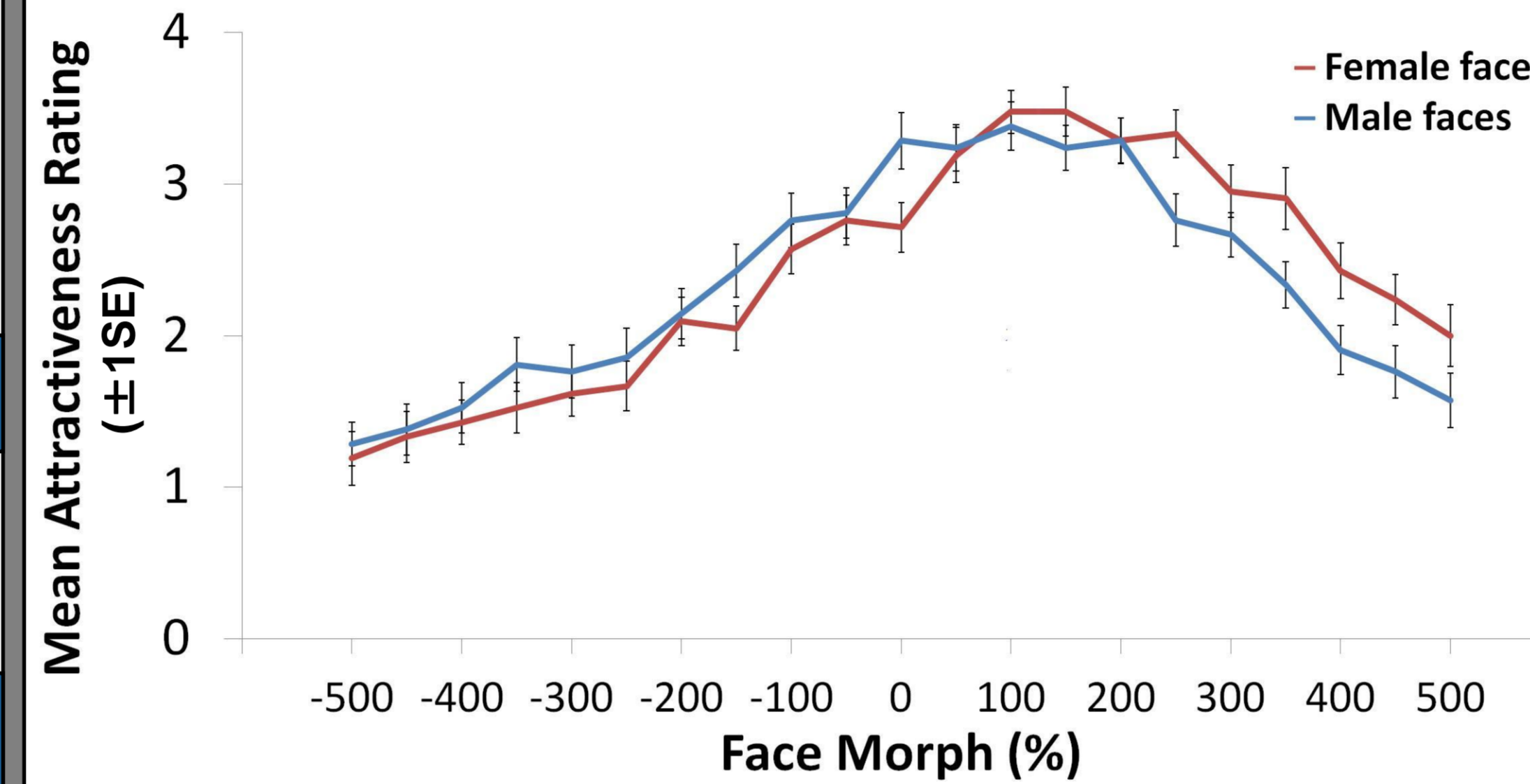
15 most attractive faces



-400% -300% -200% -100% 0% 100% 200% 300% 400%

Experiment 1: Attractiveness Ratings

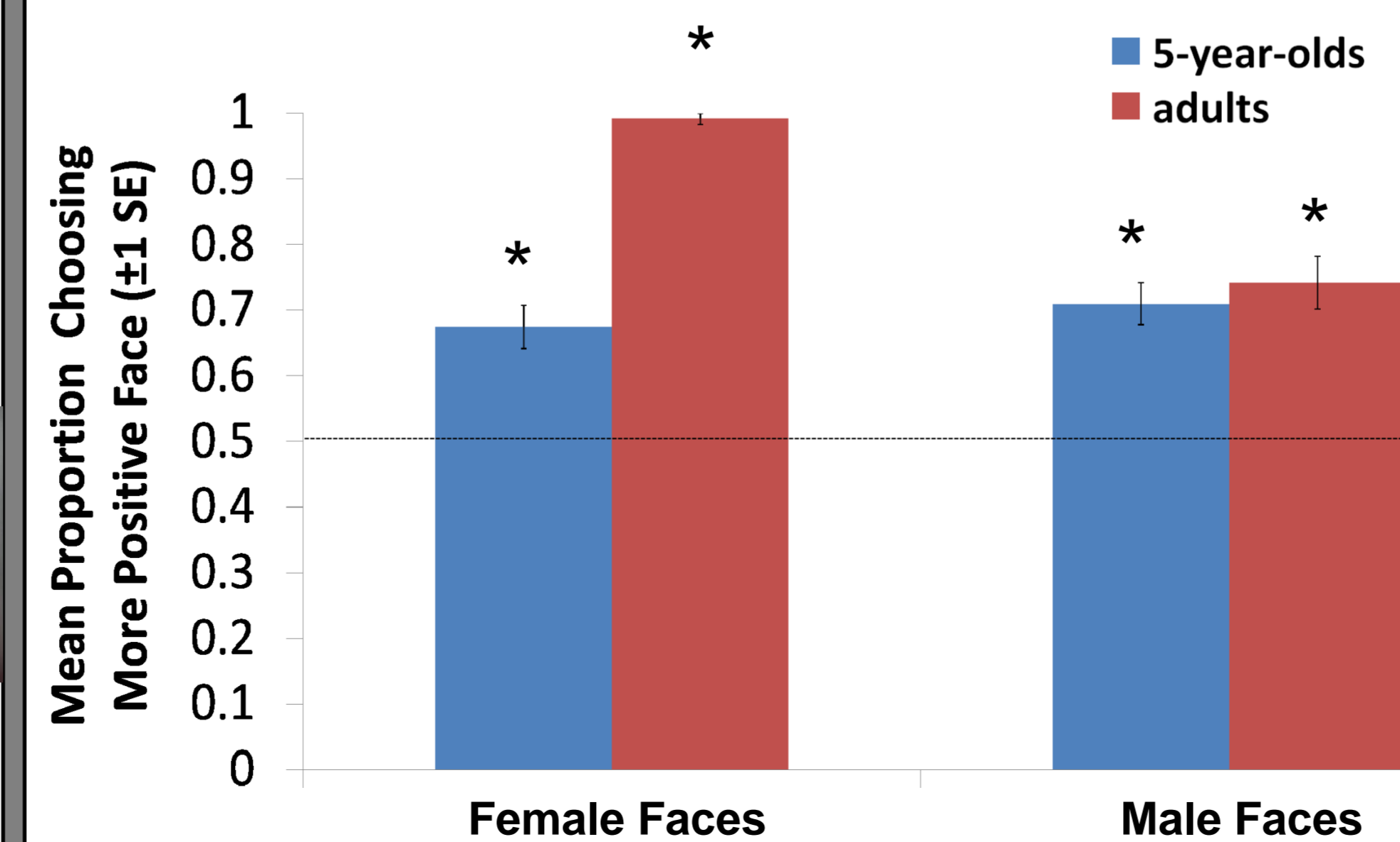
- 20 adults (18-29 yrs) rated the attractiveness of each face on a 4 point scale (1=very unattractive, 4=very attractive)



- Gaussian distributions peaked at 78% (male faces) and 142% (female faces)

Experiment 2A: Equidistant Pairs

- 20 5.5-year-olds (±3 mos) & 20 adults (17-29 yrs) selected which face was more attractive from pairs that were equidistant from 0% average

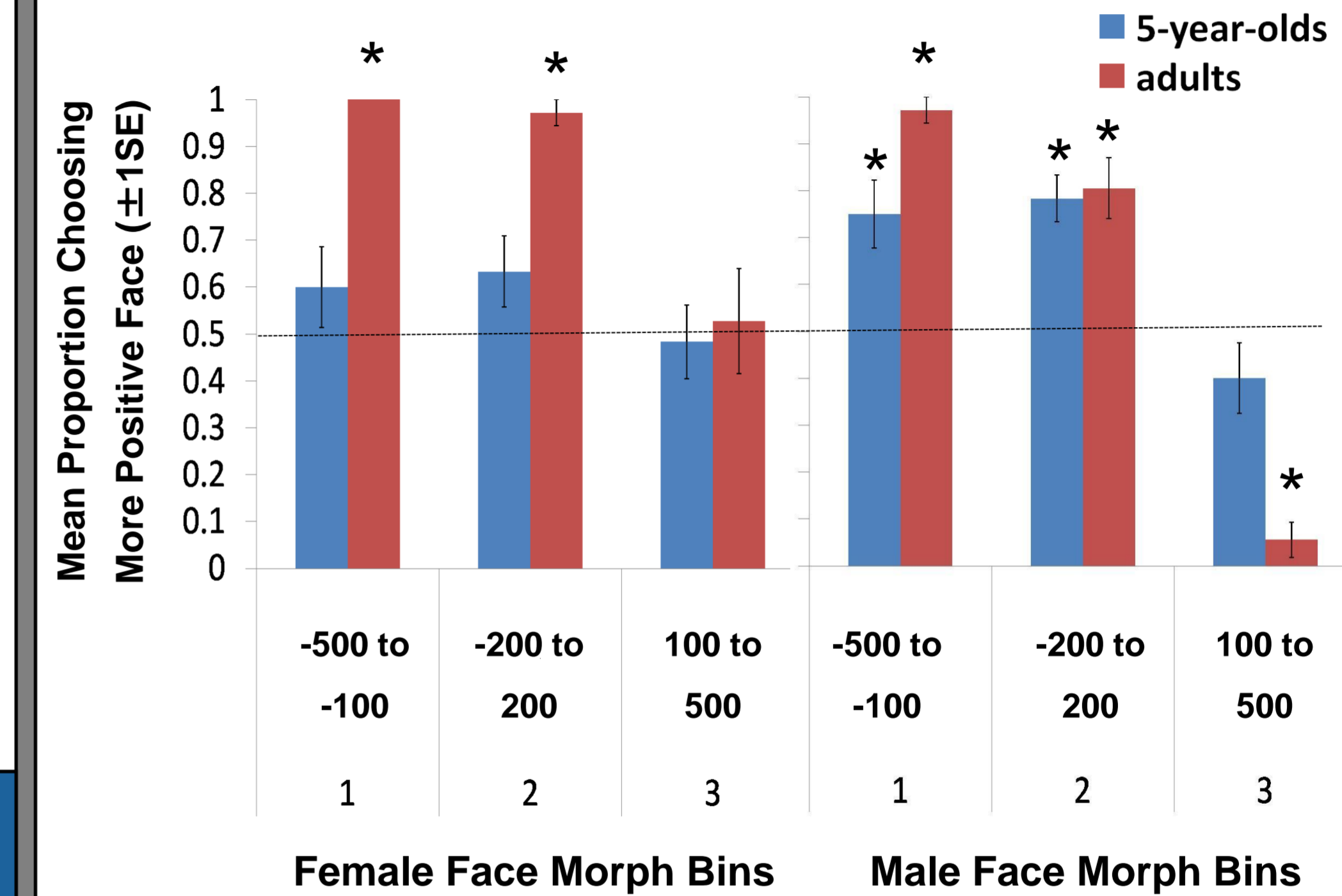


- Adults & 5yos selected the more positive faces more often than chance for male and female faces (all $p_s < .001$)

- Adults selected more positive faces more frequently than 5yos in female ($p < .001$) but not male faces ($p = .740$)

Experiment 2B: Adjacent Pairs

- 20 5.5-year-olds (±3 mos) & 20 adults (17-29 yrs) selected which face was more attractive from pairs that were adjacent to each other in 200% increments



- Bin 2:
 - Adults selected more positive faces more often than chance for male & female faces (both $p_s < .001$)

- 5yos selected more positive faces more often than chance for male ($p < .001$) but not female faces ($p = .096$)

Conclusions

- Attractiveness dimension influenced attractiveness judgments
 - among adults for both male and female faces
 - among 5-year-olds for male, and to a lesser extent, female faces
- Stronger preferences in adults than children may reflect
 - more experience with faces
 - maturation of the visual system
 - greater salience of attractiveness after puberty

References

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- 3 Perrett, D.I., May, K.A., Yoshikawa, S. (1994). *Nature*, 368, 239-242.
- 4 DeBruine, L.M., Jones, B.C., Unger, L., Little, A.C., Feinberg, D.R. (2007). *J Exp Psychol Human*.