Reviewer's report

Title: Why Alternative teenagers self-harm: Exploring the link between non-suicidal self-injury, attempted suicide and adolescent identity

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Reviewer: Imke Baetens

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Reviewer: Dr. Imke Baetens

Title: Why alternative teenagers self-harm: Exploring the link between non-suicidal self-injury, attempted suicide and adolescent identity

Authors: Young, R., Sproeder, N., Groschwitz, R., Preiss, M., & Plener, P.

Source: BMC Psychiatry

I appreciate the opportunity to review this interesting manuscript. Research on the association between self-harm (both NSSI and suicide attempts) and adolescent identity are in current research scarce. The authors address with this manuscript an important gap in research.

Notwithstanding the obvious strengths of this article, I have some major compulsory remarks and several minor essential revisions with regard to method and result section:

Major compulsory remarks:

Method:
1. As the current study includes several tables with multiple comparisons, researchers should control for family wise error rates by using Bonferroni-Holm correction in both Chi-Square and t-test analyses.

Results:
2. Data in one sample t-test analyses should be continuous, according to basic assumptions. Although, the authors describe t-test results (instead of Chi-square) in Table 4 and 5, which is a methodologically incorrect.

3. Please explain FASM results: non-alternative adolescents report higher rates (75.00%) than alternative adolescents (45%)? Either is this a typo, or needs to be addressed in discussion.

Minor essential revisions:

Method:
4. Please provide information about adjusted models in analyses section/tables: which covariates are adjusted for?
5. Please list principal component analyses in statistical analysis section.

6. Please specify which subcultures are included in the analyses as ‘Alternative’? In method section, the authors state that adolescents who identified themselves as at least mildly Goth, Emo, or Punk were classified as Alternative. Although results of their principle components analysis result in a clear three factor solution: why are Metal and Rock not admitted in category ‘Alternative’?

7. A Generic alternative variable was created, but is unclear which identities are omitted in this category, and how this category is justified? (e.g., Skater is described as an example, though is not omitted in principal component analyses).

Results:

8. Explain high prevalence of NSSI according to FASM; a prevalence rate of 45.7% is much higher than to be expected: we would expect the 1-year prevalence of NSSI (FASM) to be lower than the life time prevalence of NSSI (SHBQ).

9. Please provide separate tables for Chi-Square results of differences in NSSI/SI between alternative versus non-alternative adolescents.

Discussion:

10. Elaborate on following limitations: moderate sample size, small number of alternative teenagers, missing data, cross-sectional nature.

Discretionary revisions:

Introduction:

11. Please check abstract for incorrect use of capitals in the “non-suicidal self-injury”. And Alternative versus non-alternative peers

12. The article might benefit from a short overview of previous studies on this specific topic. Example, a short overview of the studies in references 7, 9, 10, 11, and 15 would help the reader understand the rationale of this study, and how this study addresses the gap in research as none of the available article compare the frequency and presence of self-harm across different youth subcultures. Maybe none of the previous studies differentiate between NSSI and suicide attempts?

13. The manuscript might benefit from a clearer description of the concept ‘Alternative identity’ in the introduction. It is unclear for the reader what alternative youth identity includes on a theoretical level.

Method:

14. Please provide Cronbach’s alpha of youth culture questionnaire. Is this questionnaire validated for German population? Can authors provide some psychometric data on validity? From a Belgian perspective, these subtypes of youth cultures seem dated (‘90ies), or incomplete when comparing with contemporary youth subcultures (anno 2014).

15. Do not start sentence with a number. (see method section)
Results:
16. Please describe results of principle components analysis for reasons of self-injury in result section (table 4).

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests