

Brief descriptions of presentation at:

*Pedophilia, Minor-Attracted Persons, and the DSM: Issues and Controversies*  
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## Identifying the Psychobiological Correlates of Pedophilic Desire and Behavior: How Can We Generalize Our Knowledge Beyond Forensic Samples?

Lisa J. Cohen, Ph.D. and Igor I. Galynker, M.D., Ph.D.

Director of Research for Psychology and Psychiatry, Professor of Clinical Psychiatry and

Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

Beth Israel Medical Center, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York, NY

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**Objective:** At present the DSM definition of pedophilia is highly rudimentary, consistent with significant limitations in our scientific knowledge about sexual attraction to prepubescent children. A solid understanding of the psychobiology of pedophilia is critical to inform treatment, prevention and public policy. Likewise, development of effective diagnostic systems, as in DSM V, is dependent on comprehensive research. However, the vast majority of research on pedophilia has relied on samples from forensic populations. This results in a skewed understanding of the phenomena of pedophilia and pedophilic desire, such that the specific correlates of pedophilic feelings are conflated with the traits of individuals who commit illegal acts. The purpose of this talk is twofold: 1) to present data from a research program studying the psychological correlates of pedophilia and 2) to consider future research directions in order to separate the factors contributing to the existence of pedophilic desire from the factors contributing to the acting on such desires. Elucidation of such factors should support the development of more precise and clinically meaningful diagnostic systems.

**Background:** Pedophilic urges and behavior may be attributed to either aberrant motivation, inadequate inhibition or a combination of the two. The classification of pedophilia into true vs. opportunistic subgroups (also known as fixated vs. regressed or preferential vs. situational) may reflect the centrality of either motivational or inhibitory difficulties, respectively.

**Methods:** A total of 51 subjects with pedophilia recruited from an outpatient center specializing in the treatment of sexual offenders, 53 opiate addicted individuals serving as patient controls, and 84 healthy controls were evaluated in a series of studies assessing personality traits, neuropsychological function and phallometry. Opiate addicted individuals were included as patient controls as we were interested in the concept of sexual addictions. Psychobiological and historical traits potentially associated with aberrant motivation include traits related to social anxiety and altered sexual history and function, including history of childhood sexual abuse (CSA), lowered sexual arousal threshold, and reduced erotic differentiation. Traits putatively associated with impaired inhibition include impulsivity, propensity towards cognitive distortions, and psychopathy.

**Results:** Our findings supported increased prevalence of CSA along with elevated propensity towards cognitive distortions and psychopathy in individuals with pedophilia vs. healthy controls. Pedophiles did not differ from controls in impulsivity. Compared to opiate addicted individuals, individuals with pedophilia had higher rates of CSA, more schizoid traits, and lower impulsivity and behavioral psychopathy scores. Pedophiles did not differ from opiate addicts on social anxiety measures, but did score higher than controls. On phallometry, individuals with pedophilia showed higher erectile response overall but no evidence of reduced erotic discrimination, with clear preference for pedophilic vs. adult female stimuli.

**Discussion:** Individuals with pedophilia drawn from an outpatient forensic sample showed elevations both in traits related to aberrant motivation and to impaired inhibition, although there was less evidence of elevated impulsivity. Heterogeneity among these traits may reflect the degree to which pedophilic urges and behavior pertain to either aberrant motivation or impaired inhibition. Future research could evaluate a non-forensic population, particularly individuals with pedophilic desires who have never acted on their desires, in order to determine what psychobiological correlates can be linked to pedophilic desire in the absence of inhibitory failure.

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### References

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