

B4QR

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Preface by Russell Dick, B4U-ACT Chair and Cofounder



It is with pride, honor, and enthusiasm that I introduce the debut issue of B4U-ACT's Quarterly Research Review.

When Michael Melsheimer and I co-founded B4U-ACT, we had no idea that within just 18 years we would have a team of researchers from numerous countries under the leadership of a MAP (Allen Bishop, Editor-in-Chief) producing a quarterly review of scientific research concerning minor-attracted persons (MAPs). Even more momentous is the reviewers' commitment to focusing on how relevant and interesting the publications are with regards to the issues of MAP well-being, self-identity, social supports, sources of fulfillment, and other humanizing aspects of this misunderstood and stigmatized minority group.

I want to thank Allen Bishop for proposing this new project and for all the research students and academics who are contributing to these quarterly reviews. I look forward to the new research helping to define a new paradigm for understanding and responding to MAPs living within our communities.

Russell Dick, MSW
Chairperson and Co-Founder
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Preface by Allen Bishop, Editor-in-Chief

Welcome to this first edition of the B4U-ACT Quarterly Review (B4QR).

I remember my life as a PhD student. My workload was not exactly “light”, but I was still expected to keep up to date with the latest research in my area of specialization. In that context, quarterly review journals became a life saver. No one has time to read everything, but short critical summaries are usually straightforward and painless. So, when I first proposed this idea of a quarterly review journal for academic publications concerning minor attraction, I was inspired by all the graduate students on B4U-ACT’s research email group with whom I have the privilege to interact on a regular basis.

But this project should be beneficial to a much wider audience than graduate students and university professors. Well beyond academia, many individuals and groups have an interest in the topic of minor attraction, especially professionals such as therapists and social workers. Other beneficiaries of this project are MAPs themselves. This journal is not merely about MAPs: it is partly done by MAPs and with a concern for their dignity and well-being.

A common prejudice that the review committee did not wish to reinforce is the conflation of child sexual abuse (CSA) with minor attraction. This led the committee to examine whether publications that are primarily focused on CSA and those who have committed it should be excluded from its reviews. It was determined that it was better to include these publications – so long as they at least incorporate a discussion of minor attraction. Since so many of the scientific articles that are published on the topic of minor attraction involve a forensic perspective, excluding all CSA articles from our reviews would result in a very short and noncomprehensive journal. Our reviewers will make sure to flag any prejudicial or stigmatizing assumptions that are not well-supported.

I conclude this introduction to the first edition of B4QR with a big thank you to our courageous pioneers: Kailey Roche, Maria Sklavou, and Max Geradt. They were the first to volunteer to join the research review committee after the project was introduced to B4U-ACT’s research email group. It was a true pleasure working with each of them, and I hope you will enjoy the fruit of our collaboration. I also wish to thank Maggie Ingram, who agreed to be our first honored young scholar for the “Meet the New Generation” section of the journal. As she explains herself in her text, Maggie deeply cares about the mental health of MAPs for its own sake. People such as Maggie – as well as Kailey, Maria, Max, and so many others – give me faith in the future of this field. Finally, thank you to David Ertz, our director of public relations, who has generously given his time to design this journal, and to B4U-ACT’s board of directors, for agreeing to embark on this new adventure.

We hope you find the B4U-ACT Quarterly Review informative and helpful.

Allen Bishop,
B4U-ACT Science Director
B4QR Editor-in-Chief

Reviewed Publications

Brain Abnormalities Associated with Pedophilic Disorder: Implications for Retribution and Rehabilitation.

Berryessa, C. M. (2020)

The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy and Science of Punishment (pp.231-245), Chapter 19. Routledge.

This chapter from the Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy and Science of Punishment, written by Assistant Professor at Rutgers School of Criminal Justice Colleen Berryessa, is concerned with the impact that neurobiological research regarding the “brain abnormalities” of MAPs who have engaged in illegal sexual behavior could have on the criminal justice principles of retribution and rehabilitation.

The chapter is neatly organized in four distinct parts. First, the author makes key conceptual and diagnostic clarifications, distinguishing between “pedophilia” and “pedophilic disorder” (as per the guidelines of DSM-5), “pedophilia” and “child sexual offending”, and “acquired” and “non-acquired” pedophilia. Despite acknowledging those distinctions, the author chooses to use the term “pedophilia” throughout this piece to refer to “sex offenders with non-acquired pedophilic disorder”. Even though she justifies her choice by arguing that “pedophilia” was used long before “pedophilic disorder” to denote what the latter term signifies now, this still creates some confusion, and does not

help toward addressing the stigma and overall misconceptions associated with this field.

The second part of the chapter comprises a succinct overview of relevant structural and functional neuroimaging literature, whereas the third and fourth parts move on to examining the possible ways that such research can influence perceptions of retribution and rehabilitation, respectively. Although the language used is at times highly technical, due to the nature of this type of research, the author clearly communicates the main argument of this work: that knowledge of the structural and functional “neural abnormalities” (mostly associated with the amygdala and the frontal areas of the brain) in MAPs who have engaged in illegal sexual behavior, together with a continuous advancement of relevant treatment options, has the potential to swing the pendulum from (solely) punishing them in court to (also) rehabilitating them, and can even challenge some of the stigma associated with pedophilia.

The rationale behind this argument is that judges and (where applicable) jurors could, “[d]epending on

how open and receptive” (p.24) they are, be convinced that MAPs who have engaged in illegal sexual behavior are “victims of ‘broken brains’ and are less morally blameworthy” (p.15). Colleen Berryessa is hopeful that, eventually, “treatment options” such as real-time functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) Brain Computer Interface (BCI) neurofeedback systems, Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), and Berlin Dissexuality Therapy (BEDIT), could be imaginable in the criminal justice system “instead of or in addition to retributive punishments” (p.18).

However, one point that the author has not considered is that, historically, “rehabilitation” has been disproportionately used in addition to rather than instead of retributive punishments, especially when it comes to MAPs who have engaged in illegal sexual behavior, and can therefore end up prolonging the effects of punishment and pursuing incapacitation, rather than providing “treatment” that is actually beneficial to the individual. Additionally, such “noninvasive rehabilitative treatments” (p.24), although not involving breaking into one’s skin per

se, could still be very much invasive, in many other ways.

As the author herself reflexively admits, neuroscientific evidence can be a “double-edged sword” (p.14) and turn out to induce more (rather than less) punitive attitudes by courts, because these individuals who have broken the law may in fact be perceived as more dangerous. A similar argument could be made in relation to stigma: simply shifting the conceptualization of pedophilic individuals who have behaved sexually with children, from rational criminals to sick persons with abnormal brains, does not mitigate, but only differentiates, or could even aggravate the stigma that they face. On the one hand, the advancement of relevant neuroimaging research could potentially be a worthwhile task that would hopefully have a positive influence on traditionally punitive criminal justice principles, but, on the other hand, it still leaves one wondering whether this will be substantially any different from the last century, when the so-called sexual psychopath laws gained momentum.

Should Behavior Harmful to Others Be a Sufficient Criterion of Mental Disorders? Conceptual Problems of the Diagnoses of Antisocial Personality Disorder and Pedophilic Disorder.

Münch, R. Walther, and H. Müller, S. (2020)

Front Psychiatry, 11:558655.

This article by Münch et al. aims at elucidating a puzzling category of “mental disorders” that appear in both the DSM-5 and the ICD-10 – the two official diagnostic manuals in psychiatry. Although the manuals offer slightly diverging definitions of “mental disorder”, they propose very similar taxonomies and consider the same general factors as relevant to the categorization of a psychological trait or disposition as a “disorder”. These factors are largely in line with Wakefield’s “Harmful Dysfunction” model, which (as its name suggests) stipulates that a condition is a “disorder” only (1) if it can accurately be construed as a “dysfunction”, and (2) if that dysfunction causes harm to the individual.

Münch et al. note that two diagnoses found in the manuals fall short of Wakefield’s model, namely, “pedophilic disorder” and “antisocial personality disorder” (ASPD) – formerly classified as “psychopathy”. The manuals add an additional criterion for these two diagnoses: the presence of harm caused to others. This criterion is a necessary one in the case of ASPD and a sufficient one in the case of pedophilic disorder.

On its face, this is clearly counterintuitive. It simply is not part of our concept of a “disease” or “disorder”, whether in their technical or everyday usage, that something can be a disease or disorder because it causes harm to others. Münch et al. try to make sense of this additional criterion and to see whether it can avoid the charge of conceptual gerrymandering – not to say of a blatant form of medicalization of morality. In what follows, we will focus on the analysis of the “pedophilic disorder”.

The DSM-5 distinguishes between a “pedophilic attraction” and a “pedophilic disorder”. Mere attraction to children does not constitute a disorder. It can become a disorder if “[t]he individual has acted on [their] sexual urges, or the sexual urges or fantasies cause marked distress or interpersonal difficulty.” (APA, 2013). This is a clear departure from the previous DSM, which did not include “having acted on one’s sexual urges” as a relevant criterion.

How can “acting on one’s sexual urges” possibly turn a non-psychiatric condition into a full-blown mental disorder? Münch et al. offer an illuminating analysis. They argue that the idea ultimately does not stand scrutiny. They consider a variety of models

of “mental disorders” and conclude that none can make sense of the inclusion of this “harm to others” criterion. Their examination is thorough, wide-ranging, and avoids common pitfalls found in similar articles. Most importantly, they do not let the clearly controversial nature of their topic influence their analysis.

Or at least this is the impression we get until we reach the very end of the article.

For some reason, despite the “harm to others” criterion being deemed irrelevant, the authors conclude that we should still let non-medical considerations guide our pedophilia-related categories in the DSM. They (strangely) reach a different conclusion in the case of the “antisocial personality disorder” (ASPD), for which they advocate for the simple removal from the DSM. ASPD, they claim, is “more of a social than a mere health-related problem” (p. 11), especially given the apparent lack of distress of people with ASPD. Yet, for some reason, in the case of pedophilia, the fact that something is “more of a social problem” ceases to be a decisive factor.

In addition to “pedophilic attraction” and “pedophilic disorder”, the authors propose to include a third category, which is “pedophilia with mental abnormality”. This concept of “mental abnormality” is transparently forensic, as the authors admit. It refers to those pedophiles who are “neither

distressed nor impaired by [their] pedophilic condition” (p. 12). The motivation behind the inclusion of this third category is to clearly “separate the medical aspects of Pedophilic Disorder from the societal and forensic implications.” (ibid).

The reader will naturally ask: how can one and the same motivation (to properly separate medical from non-medical considerations in psychiatric taxonomies) lead the authors to advocate for such different treatments of the ASPD disorder and the pedophilic disorder? No clear answer is offered. The authors mention various practical considerations, such as the claim that ASPD can be addressed outside of the health system. But ultimately none of the reasons put forth suffice to outweigh this age-old epistemic principle: like cases should be treated alike.

Another slight disappointment is the limited treatment of the “harm” criterion (as opposed to the “harm to others” criterion) with regards to pedophilia. The authors agree that feeling distress towards one’s sexual desires suffices to treat a pedophilic attraction as a disorder. But surely, the fact that this distress can largely be attributed to the social stigma around pedophilia counts against the use of this distress as a criterion of mental disorder. It is not pedophilia as such that causes the distress and suffering, but rather society’s attitudes towards pedophilia. Since the cause of the suffering is extrinsic to pedophilia, using this criterion to

categorize the attraction as a disorder seems unjustified. It goes against Wakefield's "Harmful Dysfunction" model, insofar as the harm does not result from the "dysfunction" itself. (The notion of a "sexual dysfunction" is problematic as well, but the authors actually acknowledge this point.)

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the article is well worth the read. Its extensive discussion of the different models of mental disorder and its clear conceptual analysis make it a valuable contribution to the field.

Meta-analyses of fraternal and sororal birth order effects in homosexual pedophiles, hebephiles, and teleiophiles.

Blanchard, R., Beier, K. M., Gomez Jimenez, F. R., Grundmann, D., Krupp, J., Semanya, S. W., and Vasey, P. L. (2020)

Archives of Sexual Behavior: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-020-01819-3>

The meta-analysis by Blanchard et al. (2020) explores the fraternal and sororal birth order effects in those with sexual attraction to children (pedohebephiles) as well as those with sexual attraction to adults (teleiophiles). The fraternal birth order effect (FBOE) is the association between having a greater number of older brothers and a higher probability of homosexuality in the later-born males. The sororal birth order effect (SBOE) is based on the idea that having older sisters may similarly show an association with higher probability of homosexuality in later-born males, though a weaker association than the FBOE. Readers who are interested in learning more about the FBOE and SBOE hypotheses should see Blanchard (2004) and Blanchard and Lippa (2020), respectively.

Traditionally, the FBOE and the SBOE have explored the relationship between birth order and homosexuality in teleiophilic men. This is the first study that has examined birth order effects in those who are sexually attracted to children. This is an interesting look at the etiology of sexual attraction to children as it supposes that, as with homosexuality, sexual attraction to children can be viewed as an orientation.

The first finding of the meta-analysis is that in a sample of pedohebephilic individuals, the ratio of older brothers to other siblings is 40% greater for those who are homosexual than those who are heterosexual. In teleiophilic individuals, the ratio of older brothers to other siblings is 27% greater for those who are homosexual than those who are heterosexual. There is no significant difference between the pedohebephilic and teleiophilic groups and when considered together, the ratio of older brothers to other siblings is 28% greater for those who are homosexual than those who are heterosexual.

The results for the SBOE are similar to the findings for the FBOE. In a sample of pedohebephilic individuals, the ratio of older sisters to other siblings is 15% greater for those who are homosexual than those who are heterosexual, however this finding is non-significant. In a teleiophilic sample, the ratio of older sisters to other siblings is 11% greater for homosexuals when compared with heterosexuals. There is no significant sub-group difference and taken together, the ratio of older sisters to other

siblings is 11% greater for homosexuals than for heterosexuals.

Prior to this study, it was assumed that the underlying factors influencing pedohebephilia were different from those factors influencing homosexuality. Blanchard et al. argue that based on the results of this meta-analysis, this assumption is incorrect. The authors further state that the finding that the FBOE impacts orientation equally in pedohebephiles and teleiophiles suggests that, “the connection between older brothers and homosexuality is mediated by an innate erotic response or a heightened stimulus sensitivity to another male’s penis” (pg. 12). Whether this assumption is true remains to be seen and would need to be empirically tested, and the authors acknowledge that there are arguments against this hypothesis, such as the fact that the penis of a child and a mature man look different, and that homosexual teleiophilic men are attracted to a mature penis and not a pre-pubescent or pubescent penis.

Limitations discussed by the authors include the subjects not being homogenized (e.g., by hand preference, with the idea being that FBOE is more common in right-handed men and pedohebephilic individuals displaying higher instances of non-right handedness); the communicability of the results with odds ratios; the accuracy of classifying erotic age preference; the potential for the SBOE results to be statistical artifacts; and the statistical power.

We would argue that another limitation that should be addressed is the use of both clinical and forensic samples and volunteers. Arguably, those who have engaged in illegal sexual behavior (whether with an adult or a child) may differ from those who are not known to have done so. Further, those who struggle with their sexual attraction (attraction to children, hypersexual behaviour, etc.) may differ from those non-clinical samples.

Sex Doll Ownership: An Agenda for Research

Harper C. A. and Lievesley R. (2020)

Current Psychiatry Reports, 22:54: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-020-01177-w>

This article sets out to critically review the arguments that have been presented so far in the existing literature in relation to: 1) the motivations of persons who own sex dolls (and sex robots), and 2) the implications of such ownership and use. Then, based on the conclusions of this overview, an agenda for future relevant research is proposed. The main argument presented throughout is that current scholarship on sex dolls is not evidence-based, but rather rooted in moralistic and “philosophical” ideas.

In their informative first section about the motivations of sex doll owners, the authors do not limit themselves to the “popular” argument of sexual satisfaction; rather, they point to research suggesting that the reasons for owning or using a sex doll are not always (purely) sexual, but also pertain to other purposes, such as emotional satisfaction, companionship, friendship, or even artistic interests, like photography. There is further mention of individuals who may own sex dolls “for medical or psychotherapeutic reasons”, although this line of argumentation is mostly reserved for those who have “sexual anxiety” or “erectile dysfunction”, rather than those who have “problematic sexual arousal” - whatever the latter may entail (p.2).

The following section about the potential implications of sex dolls comprises a succinct outline of the prevalent literature, according to which the potential effects of sex dolls are: 1) the objectification of women (and children), 2) the intensification of certain stereotypes of beauty and attractiveness, and 3) the normalization or promotion of sexual abuse. The writers take a step further here, by usefully contrasting each one of those arguments with counterarguments (also drawn from existing research). For example, the prominent idea that sex dolls promote sexual violence is balanced out by the indication that, in fact, “there is no research that directly examines a causal link between sex doll ownership and a proclivity to engage in sexual aggression”, and that sex dolls may even have a “cathartic effect” instead (p.3).

Next, an entire section is dedicated to “Child-Like Sex Dolls, Pedophilia, and Child Sexual Abuse”. The authors mention that (most) arguments in relation to the use of child-like sex dolls stem from theories like legal moralism, purporting that it is alright to prohibit something based solely on its perceived immorality. The writers draw a contrast between literature grounded in moralistic positions, on the one hand, and research on child sexual abuse prevention, on the other hand (i.e. that “dolls and

robots offer a sexual outlet without a victim” [p.4]). Although the authors do call for an “open mind on the potential for both benefits and risks” of child-like sex dolls (p.5), they do not seem to consider any arguments outside the scopes of (im)morality and risk-management (prevention) when it comes to the owners of such dolls. Perhaps this is because there are not many such arguments to be found within the existing literature in the first place and, even when potential therapeutic benefits are mentioned, this is almost always done in the context of child sexual abuse prevention, and not with a focus on personal wellbeing. In relation to this, the authors could have (even briefly) considered the underlying assumptions behind why arguments against child-like sex dolls seem to make such “logical sense” (p.4).

The article concludes that empirical research that will draw on both cross-sectional and longitudinal,

as well as qualitative and quantitative research designs, is needed in three main areas: 1) what motivates sex doll and sex robot owners, 2) what the effects of sex doll and sex robot ownership and use are, and 3) what the relevant societal responses are. Overall, the article offers a quite comprehensive and critical review of the extant scholarship on this emerging topic-area, and some very useful guidelines for future research. It may be true that more evidence-based studies are needed; however, the “philosophical” positions, which the authors appear at times to dismiss, are arguably of equal (and some would even say greater) importance, as they are the ones guiding all empirical studies. No research is ever done in a vacuum, after all. Not all “philosophical positions” are moralistic and narrow-minded, but some (existing or even future ones) may well provide a fertile ground for open-minded debates on sex dolls and sex robots.

Identifying the Coping Strategies of Nonoffending Pedophilic and Hebephilic Individuals From Their Online Forum Posts.

Jones S.J., Ó Ciardha C and Elliott I. A. (2020)

Sexual Abuse.

This article by Jones et al. (2020) provides a qualitative analysis of coping strategies employed by individuals using the Virtuous Pedophiles forums. They report on three overarching themes: accepting and living with pedohebephilia, staying safe, and “when I get that feeling”.

In the first theme, “accepting and living with pedohebephilia,” individuals posted about accepting their sexual attraction to children, dealing with feelings of guilt and shame, and how to look at their sexual attraction in a positive light. Acceptance and positivity toward one’s attraction is something rarely discussed in literature regarding this population. With sexual attraction to children being unchangeable, it is important for individuals to come to terms with their attraction and to embrace who they are as a whole.

The second theme, “staying safe”, involves users sharing strategies that they employ to keep themselves and children safe. Strategies include: having contact rules (e.g., if alone with a child, act as you would if their parents were there); mentally preparing for challenging situations (e.g., imagining tempting situations and rehearsing how they should act); using distraction (e.g., engaging in hobbies);

using avoidance (e.g., avoiding locations where there are many children); removing temptation (e.g., limiting social media use); and considering the consequences to both the child and themselves.

The final theme is centered around how users satisfy their sexual needs. This includes using legal outlets (e.g., adult relationships, pornography featuring youthful looking adults, masturbating to non-pornographic images of children) and masturbating to fantasies of children. Interestingly, there appeared to be some contention even within the forum on whether users should engage in fantasy. Some stated that this could act as a reinforcer and intensify their interests. In general, there is little consensus among clinicians and researchers as to whether the use of alternative sexual outlets either increases or decreases risks of engaging in illegal sexual behavior. This is something that will need to be explored more in the future.

Overall, the article provides useful information about the coping strategies of people who are sexually attracted to children. However, it does exhibit some minor issues.

In their literature review, the authors discuss the lack of literature on individuals who are sexually attracted to children and have never committed a sexual crime. They posit that extending research in this population can better inform the strategies that these individuals use to remain within the law. While the authors begin the paper with the important distinction between sexual interest in children and child sexual abuse, they appear to make the assumption that those with sexual interest in children need to seek treatment for managing these interests. While it is true that some individuals struggle to manage their attraction to children, it is important to note that many feel no such struggle (e.g., Levenson & Grady, 2018). Many minor-attracted people want better access to mental health services to help manage their general mental health concerns (e.g., depression, anxiety), without specifically focusing on sexual attraction. While the intent of this article was to focus on coping with sexual interest in children, it is important for researchers not to ignore the more general mental health needs of MAPs.

With regard to the methodology, the authors provide clear details concerning data collection and thematic analysis. However, when it comes to the results of the analysis, there appears to be overlap between

some of their subthemes. For example, the exact difference between the three sub-themes (accepting sexual interest; not beating themselves up; being positive about pedohebephilia) of the first theme (accepting and living with pedohebephilia) is not very clear. The same could be said about “using legal outlets” and “masturbating to child fantasies” in theme three.

Lastly, in the discussion section, the authors infer that forum users imposing restrictions on themselves in their interactions with children is due to their lack of confidence in controlling themselves and an implicit belief that the world itself is uncontrollable. But what the authors interpret as a fear of losing control can also be a fear of negative social reactions to their interactions with a child. This is especially true if people know about an individual’s sexual attraction or suspect that they have such an attraction.

Overall, this study was well constructed, and informative. While the findings (and topics in general) of this study may be controversial, further research in this area would seem essential for providing effective professional services for MAPs seeking help in managing their sexual attractions.

Validation of the Sexual Grooming Model of Child Sexual Abusers.

Winters GM, Jeglic EL, Kaylor LE. (2020)

Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 29 (7), p.1-21. PMID: 33006502

The article defines grooming as behavior with a “deviant intention” to enable child sexual abuse (CSA) and avoid its detection. A number of behaviors are listed that could be considered grooming, sorted in five categories (victim selection, gaining access and isolation, trust development, desensitization to sexual content and physical contact, and post-abuse maintenance behavior). A small sample of 18 experts are asked to rate whether they feel these behaviors are “relevant” for grooming and in which of the five categories these behaviors should be sorted. “Relevance” is not clearly defined; presumably it refers to the behavior's importance in enabling CSA or to its correlation with CSA.

Although a Likert scale is used, data are dichotomized and reported simply by calculating the proportion of “yes” responses. Roughly half of the behaviors are rated as “relevant” (by a 78% cut-off), with roughly a fifth not even reaching 50% agreement. Categories are mostly confirmed. The fact that the term “relevant” is not clearly defined makes findings extraordinarily difficult if not impossible to interpret. The authors may wish to reconsider their conceptualization of “relevance.” The authors clearly state that the “relevance” of a behavior does not mean the behavior in itself could

lead to harm or should be considered an example of “grooming,” since malicious intent is a defining criterion. However, the authors seem to insinuate that a combination of multiple such behaviors may be indicative for CSA, for which no evidence is provided, and in fact the opposite seems plausible for many of the behaviors in the list. Also, the article gives no insight on whether the behavior de facto is relevant, since (as they state in their limitations) they presented their predetermined model without providing empirical or theoretical support for it, and with no option for respondents to add their own potentially more relevant behaviors.

The authors do not consider the case of a positive interaction between an MAP and a child. Most likely, a large portion (albeit not all) of their listed behaviors would appear in such a situation as well. However, they do talk about “usual behaviors between adults and children” without clarifying what those could be. One can infer from the context that positive MAP-child interaction is not what they have in mind, but it may still be compatible with their theoretical model. It would be interesting to see whether some of these behaviors are indicative for CSA in total, and when controlling for the sexual orientation of the adult involved.

Convergent and predictive associations of three measures of pedophilic interest.

McPhail, I. V., Olver, M. E., Nicholaichuk, T. P., & Haynes, A. (2020)

Sexual Abuse: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1079063220968042>

This article by McPhail et al. (2020) examines the convergent and predictive validity of three measures of pedophilic interest: phallometric assessment, the Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interest (SSPI), and the Violence Risk Scale – Sexual Offense (VRS-SO) version. For reference, convergent validity refers to the degree to which two assessments measure the same construct. Predictive validity refers to a measure's ability to predict an outcome (in this case, sexual recidivism). Specifically, the authors sought to determine whether the three measures added incremental validity to the Static-99's prediction of recidivism. Further, as recent research has suggested that there is not always a stable association between pedophilic attractions and recidivism, the study tested the validity of latent structure models from taxometric analyses of pedophilic interests.

The sample in this study includes 261 men convicted of illegal sexual behavior who underwent assessment and treatment at a psychological center in Saskatoon. Of the 261 men, 91 had been convicted only for sexual behaviors involving people under the age of 14, and 170 had been convicted of sexual behaviors involving people over the age of 14.

For the purpose of this study, the authors define sexual recidivism as a conviction for a new sexual offense post-release. Most other studies choose to include charges (rather than convictions) in their definition of recidivism. However, due to high base rates, the authors in this study were able to rely on criminal convictions and not (mere) criminal charges. This is beneficial as it allows for a higher degree of certainty that the individual did in fact commit the offense.

The results show that while there is a high degree of convergent validity between the VRS-SO and phallometric testing, the same cannot be said for the SSPI and phallometric testing. This is also the case when considering sexual recidivism; both phallometric testing and the VRS-SO are significantly able to predict recidivism, while the SSPI is not significantly associated with the same. The authors explain that while the SSPI measures behaviors associated with pedophilic interest, the sexual deviance factor of the VRS-SO assesses broader constructs associated with sexual recidivism.

In terms of modelling, the authors found most support for a two-factor trichotomous latent structure, grouping individuals into those with

preferential pedophilic interest, and those with non-preferential or no pedophilic interest.

A limitation that came to mind when reading this article was later discussed by the authors themselves; that is, there is now an updated version of the SSPI (SSPI-2; Seto et al., 2017). Unlike the SSPI, the SSPI-2 incorporates an item related to possession of child sexual exploitation material. As the SSPI-2 is quite new, the authors were understandably unable to score this measure due to not having access to a CSEM variable within their data.

Although it is important for researchers to continue to assess the validity of the measures that are used to

predict sexual recidivism, one should note that these types of assessments can only be used to predict illegal sexual behaviors in those who have already been convicted for similar behaviors.

More generally, research relating to risk-assessment tools, which considers pedophilia as a risk-factor for (future) illegal behavior, rarely mentions that, in fact, the recidivism rate for sexual offenses is quite low – not just overall, but also in comparison with the recidivism rate for non-sexual crimes. In this respect, the invasiveness of certain measures (like the phallometric test) may be hard to justify in terms of proportionality.

Sexual preference for pubescent children is associated with enhanced processing of child faces in juveniles.

Speer, L., Schuler M., Keil, J., Moran, J. K., Pantazidis, P., Amelung, T., Florack, J. Beier, M. K. and Senkowski, D. (2020)

European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-020-01684-4>

This article sets out to expand neuroscientific understandings of pedophilic juveniles. Based on the 2014 research by Ponseti and colleagues, the authors carried out an experiment, using electroencephalography (EEG), in order to see the differences in event-related potentials (ERPs) between their experimental and control groups, i.e. how participants' brain responses to the stimuli that the authors used differed. The study found "evidence for enhanced neural processing of child face stimuli" in juveniles who are attracted to (younger) children.

Instead of opting for stimuli like naked pictures of adults and children, which could be construed as ethically dubious, the authors used facial stimuli of children (aged 2-8 years) and adults (aged 18-40 years) and showed them to the participants after processing them accordingly (e.g. converting them to greyscale, setting them against a grey background, etc.). Their experimental group comprised 25 participants from the Berlin Project for Primary Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse by Juveniles (PPJ), which is the equivalent of PPD (Prevention Project Dunkelfeld), with the difference that the former is targeted to juveniles aged 12-18, while the latter is addressed to adults. The control group

comprised 22 participants from the "addiction of video gaming and pathological media use" ward of the Vivantes clinic in Berlin. Participants (from both groups) were aged between 14-18 (18 included) years.

The article's premise seems to follow the following rationale:

- 1) "Child Sexual Abuse Offenses (CSOs) have a severe ethical and socioeconomic burden for society";
- 2) A large percentage of such offenses are committed by juveniles;
- 3) "A major risk factor for committing CSOs is the sexual preference for prepubescent children";
- 4) Based on this, juveniles and adults who have that preference are at risk of offending;
- 5) So far, although there has been a great deal of research on pedophilic adult men in other areas, there is a lack of neuroscientific understandings, leaving the "neural signatures" of these individuals largely unaccounted for. This research gap is even more prominent when it comes to juveniles, which is what the authors try to address.

The authors provide significant detail regarding their overall research design. However, their language is highly technical, which unfortunately is likely to make their article fully intelligible only to those researchers with a relevant neuroscience specialization.

The authors have also taken rigorous steps to ensure research validity and reliability, for example by including catch trials. These were instances where no stimulus at all was presented to participants and where participants were asked to press the space bar, to make sure that they were paying attention. They also presented each photograph of a face three times, and they pseudo-randomized the trials.

It is also to the authors' credit that they make clear mention of what they think were some limitations to their study. For example, they note that their control group comprised only heterosexual individuals, whereas the experimental group comprised heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual pedophilic juveniles.

It is possible to detect other issues with this work. As a starting point, it is unclear how exactly the "aberrant neural responses" that the authors found in

the juvenile pedophilic group are operationalized. Also, it is quite puzzling – especially given participants' young age (14-18 years) – that the attractiveness recorded of children (2-8 years) is considered "aberrant", but the attractiveness recorded of adults (with ages here ranging from 18-40 years) is considered "age-adequate" (emphasis added).

Moreover, the ability of the underage participants to give voluntary consent is questionable. Even though consent was obtained from both the juveniles and their parents, this does not necessarily guarantee that these participants did not take part in this experimental study simply because they felt compelled to do so.

Overall, this study demonstrates that a neuro-scientific approach could shed light on the development of sexual attraction to children, and possibly on the development of sexual attraction in general. However, the study suffers from two related problems: inadequate comparisons with youth whose neuro-sexual development is considered normal, and an unclear conceptualization of normal vs. "aberrant" neuro-sexual responses.

Meet the New Generation

(In this section, we present a young scholar from the MAP-research community, typically a PhD student who is on B4U-ACT's email group for researchers. This is a way for B4U-ACT to honor individuals who demonstrate an authentic concern for the respect, dignity, mental health, and well-being of MAPs.)

**Maggie Ingram, PhD Candidate
Johns Hopkins University
Bloomberg School of Public Health**



Maggie Ingram is a 4th year PhD candidate in the department of Mental Health at Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. She has volunteered for B4U-ACT for several years, moderating the Friends and Family of MAPs forum and helping to coordinate the annual workshops. Her research interests include the impact of stigma on mental and physical health; the prevention of suicidal thoughts and behavior, especially among stigmatized populations; the mental health of adults who are attracted to children; and the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

She earned a Master of Health Science from Johns Hopkins in 2017 with her thesis titled “Experiences during adolescence among adults who are attracted to children,” which she has presented at several research conferences, including the Healthy Teens Network Annual Conference and B4U-ACT’s 2018 Research Symposium. This research highlighted significant mental health issues associated with the discovery of attraction to children during adolescence, prompting Maggie to further explore factors associated with mental health within this population in her doctoral research. Her dissertation is a mixed-methods analysis exploring the role of perceived social support, internalized stigma, and self-esteem in the mental health of adults who are attracted to children. She collected both quantitative and qualitative data in a sample recruited through B4U-ACT, Virtuous Pedophiles, and Twitter. She is currently in the analysis phase of this project and is scheduled to defend her dissertation in late March 2021.

Following a (hopefully!) successful defense, she will submit her dissertation research for publication and begin a postdoctoral fellowship at Johns Hopkins University in the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse. In her postdoctoral position, she will work on a project evaluating programs aimed at the primary prevention of child sexual abuse. She also plans to explore additional themes found in her dissertation data that

were beyond the scope of the project and expand her training in suicide prevention, stigma, and mixed methods. Her long-term career goal is to work for a university and conduct research aimed at developing interventions to prevent depression and suicide in stigmatized populations.

Maggie is committed to countering false narratives about attraction to children and improving mental health among the vulnerable and misunderstood population of people who are attracted to children but who do not engage in illegal sexual behavior. She came into this work through the lens of child sexual abuse prevention, and quickly learned through her own research, the research of colleagues in the field, and the perspectives and accounts of individuals who themselves are attracted to children, that many adults who are attracted to children don't struggle with staying within the law. Instead, they struggle with a lack of support, acceptance, and/or access to ethical mental health care that could help them address issues like social anxiety or isolation, self-esteem issues, depression, and suicidal ideation, which can be caused or exacerbated by the extreme stigma associated with attraction to children. Though she is still committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect, she is passionate about researching and addressing mental health of adults who are attracted to children for its own sake and countering the conflation of attraction to children with child sexual abuse through research and advocacy.

Maggie feels very fortunate to have found B4U-ACT and learned so much from this incredible community. She is eternally grateful to Richard, Russell, Elliot, Finlay, and Michael, who served on a Community Advisory Board for her dissertation and contributed invaluable insight to the project, and to all the participants who opened up to her and shared their stories in order to raise awareness and help others who are attracted to children.

B4U-ACT Resources

B4U-ACT is a 501(c)3 organization established to publicly promote professional services and resources for self-identified individuals who are sexually attracted to children and desire such assistance, and to educate mental health providers regarding approaches needed in understanding and responding to such individuals.

Our organization assists researchers from around the world, especially PhD students (<https://www.b4uact.org/research/research-collaboration/>). If you would like us to collaborate with you or your team on a project, and if you share our research ethos (<https://www.b4uact.org/about-us/statements-and-policies/research-ethos/>), contact us at science@b4uact.org. You can also email us if you would like to join our researcher email group.

We provide several additional services to support therapists, researchers, students, MAPs, and their family members:

- Workshops for professionals, researchers, and minor-attracted individuals (<https://www.b4uact.org/get-involved/attend-a-workshop/>)
- Advocacy/education (<https://www.b4uact.org/know-the-facts/>)
- Advice for MAPs seeking mental health services, including referral to approved professionals (<https://www.b4uact.org/attracted-to-minors/professional-support/>)
- Guidelines for therapists (<https://www.b4uact.org/psychotherapy-for-the-map/>)
- Online discussion group for professionals, researchers, and minor-attracted individuals (<https://www.b4uact.org/?event=dialog-on-therapy>)
- Peer support groups for MAPs (<https://www.b4uact.org/attracted-to-minors/peer-support/>) and their families (<https://www.b4uact.org/attracted-to-minors/support-for-family-friends-2/>)