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*Review of publications from
September 2022 to June 2023*

Table of Contents

Introduction by Allen Bishop, Editor-in-Chief	3
Reviewed Publications.....	5
Exploring the ownership of child-like sex dolls	5
The Self-Reported Sexual Real-World Consequences of Sex Doll Use.....	11
Unconventional harm reduction interventions for Minor-attracted persons	15
Public Stigmatizing Reactions Toward Nonoffending Pedophilic Individuals	
Seeking to Relieve Sexual Arousal	20
The Potential for Anti-Stigma Interventions to Change Public Attitudes Toward	
Minor-Attracted Persons: A Replication and Extension of Jara and Jeglic’s Study	25
What can the eyes tell us about atypical sexual preferences as a function of sex and age?	
Linking eye movements with child-related chronophilias	29
Author Responses	35
Response by Eveline Schippers to review of Schippers et al. (2023) in B4QR 3 (2)	35
Meet the New Generation: Étienne Garant	38
B4U-ACT Resources.....	39

Introduction by Allen Bishop, Editor-in-Chief

Welcome to the 2023 Summer issue of B4QR. This third edition of our third volume can be described as the *Technology Edition*, as most of our reviewed articles explore the role, meaning, and impact of new technologies in the lives of minor-attracted people.

Our first two articles are similar but complementary. They explore topics around the ownership of sex dolls, which is an industry that has truly taken off in recent years, with some very sophisticated life-like dolls being produced worldwide, resulting in multiple jurisdictions – e.g., the United States, Canada, South Korea, Australia, and more recently Germany – outlawing child-like sex dolls. Harper and Lievesley (2022) examined international samples of child-like sex doll owners and a sample of MAPs who do not own such dolls in order to “compare their psychological characteristics and propensity for sexual offending and to test three possible models of sex doll ownership (dolls as protective, dolls as risk-enhancing, dolls as functional).” The authors found no evidence supporting the idea (often put forth to justify criminalization) that owning such dolls increases the risk of acting sexually with a real child. Desbuleux and Fuss (2023) focused more on the effects of dolls on the sexuality of their owners and the meaning they attach to their dolls. Their sample of 224 owners recruited online, around 10% of which were pedo-hebephilic, divided almost evenly between those who considered their dolls to be artificial companions, if not lovers, and those who thought of them as mere sex toys. The researchers also found no link between sex doll usage and problematic sexual behavior.

Our next two articles expand the discussion of child sex dolls and related technologies. Appel (2022) analyzes the ethical implications for society of the development of new technologies such as realistic child-like sex dolls, child sex robots, “synthetic” child sexual images, and “virtual sex” with false children using immersive virtual reality. He argues that society has a moral obligation to make such technologies available to minor-attracted people, not in the name of the right to sexual satisfaction for MAPs – a consideration which he unfortunately tends to dismiss – but in the name of the prevention of child sexual abuse. Lehmann et al. (2023) conducted two studies to investigate public reactions toward MAPs who use child sex dolls for sexual satisfaction, compared to other means of “seeking to relieve sexual arousal,” such as using non-sexual images of children and, more drastically, chemical castration. Consistent with their hypothesis, they found that people reacted most unfavorably to the use of sex dolls, followed closely by the viewing of non-sexual images – both activities being judged much more negatively than chemical castration.

The fifth article reviewed here also discusses public stigmatizing attitudes toward MAPs. McKillop and Price (2023) tried to replicate a 2021 study by Jara and Jeglic¹, which had found that online participants, after an intervention that dispelled myths and presented facts about MAPs, ended up with *worse* opinions

¹ Reviewed in B4QR 1 (2): <https://b4uact.org/b4qr/1/2>.

about this population than did a control group. These surprising results were not replicated in this new study by McKillop and Price. Their 178 Australian participants showed a positive change in perceptions toward MAPs regardless of the specific intervention they were a part of (facts only, facts vs myths, or video presentation). However, a different surprising finding that emerged from this study was that older participants (60+ years) had less negative attitudes toward MAPs than younger participants (18-39 years) did.

Our sixth and final review addresses a very different type of technology: eye-tracking tools used to detect the sexual preferences of individuals. Vásquez-Amézquita *et al.* (2023) present a theoretical-empirical review of such technologies and argue for their usefulness and efficiency in the context of “atypical sexualities” such as attraction to children.

In addition to these six reviews, this issue includes a written response from Eveline Schippers to our review, in B4QR 3 (2), of “Pedophilia is associated with lower sexual interest in adults: Meta-analyses and a systematic review with men who had sexually offend ed against children”. Schippers responds to three key points raised in our review, one of which is the suggestion that there exists “a growing consensus in the field of research” that attraction to children is unchangeable, a claim that Schippers rejects. This objection by Schippers was shared with members of the B4U-ACT email group for researchers, and it led to a very engaging discussion among our more than 80 MAP-research specialists. Most participants in this discussion agreed that it is the *majority view* in the field (if not a consensus) that attraction to children cannot be changed. Among the many interesting points raised, one member noted that in their network of researchers and clinicians, there appeared to be a clear split between people who have been trained in cognitive behavioral therapy vs psychodynamic approaches, the former being much more skeptical of the possible mutability of attraction to children.

We conclude this issue with the “Meet the New Generation” section. Our honored young scholar is Étienne Garant, a criminology PhD candidate at the Université de Montréal. Étienne’s government-funded PhD project explores the challenges that MAPs may face in their daily lives, and how they navigate the negative consequences related to their attraction. Étienne has also been a reviewer for our journal for over a year.

We hope you find this special technological edition of our journal engaging.

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

Reviewed Publications

Exploring the ownership of child-like sex dolls

Harper, C. A., & Lievesley, R. (2022).

Archives of sexual behavior, 51(8), 4141-4156., DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-022-02422-4>

In their article, Harper & Lievesley examine two samples of adults – one sample of adults who own child-like sex dolls (N = 85) and one sample of minor-attracted people (MAPs) who do not own dolls (N = 120) – to compare their psychological characteristics and propensity for sexual offending and to test three possible models of sex doll ownership (dolls as protective, dolls as risk-enhancing, dolls as functional). This international sub-sample, inherited from a previous study by Harper et al. (2022), comprises a total of 205 men recruited either from online forums frequented by people who own sex dolls or from forums for people sexually and/or romantically attracted to children.²

As a conceptual framework, the authors adopt the motivation-facilitation model of sexual offending developed by Seto (2019), complemented by three potential models commonly found both in the general population and in the scientific literature regarding the ownership of child-like sex dolls. The first model posits that the ownership of such a doll may act as a protective factor against the

perpetration of sexual crimes involving children. From this perspective, the doll would be seen as a safe sexual surrogate with which MAPs could satisfy their sexual arousal, thereby diminishing their interest in engaging in sexual activities with a child. Despite the lack of empirical validation, the authors maintain that there are studies³ supporting the idea that consuming mainstream pornography is associated with a reduction in violent sexual behavior within society. Furthermore, the authors argue that there is no correlation between consuming illegal images of children and subsequently engaging in sexual acts with a child, as indicated by studies conducted by Diamond et al. (2011), Seto & Eke (2005), and Seto et al. (2011). Therefore, these findings could provide a foundation for adopting the perspective that the doll serves as a protective factor against committing sexual crimes involving children.

The second model described by the researchers is that owning such a doll may increase risk for engaging in sexual activities involving a child. This model posits that owning a child-like sex doll would be a risk-enhancer for committing sexual crimes

² According to the authors, “No definitions of ‘adult’ and ‘child’ were given in relation to sexual orientation for age.”

³ Ferguson & Hartley, 2009, 2022

involving children in the sense that, in addition to reinforcing the individual's attraction to children (conditioning effect), the individual would gradually require greater sexual stimulation in order to achieve the same level of sexual satisfaction initially provided by the doll (desensitization and gradation effects). Under this model, the doll could also contribute to reinforcing the individual's "implicit theories," such as the need to have sex when sexually aroused, or even blurring the understanding of the limits of sexual consent. Yet, there is a lack of empirical evidence supporting this argument, which can only be found in theoretical and judicial writings concerning the legal ownership status of this particular type of doll.⁴

Finally, the third model presented by the authors is that the doll would occupy a role as a life tool in the daily functioning of their owners and may not "reflect any association (positive or negative) with risks for offending." Under this model, the doll may serve a sexual function, but it may also fulfill emotional and affective needs. For example, owning a child-like sex doll could enable the individual to respond to the absence of a partner, or to simulate a parental relationship by having a substitute to care for. Rather than being a risk and/or protective factor in the perpetration of a sexual offense, the doll would be understood here as a relational tool that would enable the individual to achieve a sense of life satisfaction and general well-being.

To conduct their study, the researchers collected a range of information, mainly using psychometric tests targeting the following dimensions: demographics, doll's characteristics, sexuality, personality traits, emotional experiences, attachment styles, sexual objectification, proclivity to commit sexual crimes, and previous offending behaviors. In order to compare participants' psychological characteristics and propensities to commit sexual crimes, the analyses were divided into three stages. In the first stage, the researchers mapped out the reasons for owning child-like sex dolls. Secondly, a series of Chi-squares and t-tests were performed to compare the group owning child-like sex dolls with the group of MAPs who did not own such dolls. Thirdly, the researchers conducted a series of logistic regressions to see whether participants' membership to one of the two groups could be predicted on the basis of their personality characteristics, and also to explore whether there was empirical support for a relationship between owning a child-like sex doll and risk of perpetrating a sexual crime.

In the case of the first set of analyses, the researchers found that the reasons behind owning a child-like sex doll are varied. Doll usage was equally attributed to sexual reasons, emotional reasons, and "other reasons" (e.g., photography and art (20%), non-sexual intimacy (20%), hobbies (9.4%). Only 1.2% of doll owners mentioned using their dolls to prevent themselves from committing a sexual crime.

⁴ See Brown & Shelling, 2019; Chatterjee, 2020; Danaher, 2017

Also, the frequency of sexual intercourse per month with a doll was significantly higher than with an adult sexual partner, aligning “with the broader sexological literature that suggests solitary masturbation is more frequent than partnered sexual activity.” Further, 79.2% of MAPs who didn't own a doll mentioned an interest in acquiring one to achieve sexual satisfaction.

For the second set of analyses, the researchers found that both samples exhibited comparable proportions of participants who acknowledged engaging in previous sexual crimes. Also, the proportion of participants exclusively attracted to adults among doll owners and the proportion exclusively attracted to children among non-doll owners were higher than expected. In terms of differences between the two groups, doll owners were significantly less likely to express a propensity for engaging in sexual activities with a child, to be hypothetically aroused by sexual contact with a child, or to present an anxious attachment style, compared to MAPs who did not own dolls. However, doll owners showed more obsessive-compulsive personality traits than MAPs who did not own dolls.

Regarding the third set of analyses, the ability to predict whether participants belonged to one of the two groups based on their personality traits was statistically significant and accurate 90.6% of the time. In the case of doll owners, they were significantly older and more likely to have

schizotypal personality traits and engage in objectifying behaviors (such as staring at someone's body or evaluating their physical appearance) than MAPs who did not own dolls. However, they were less preoccupied with sexuality, less likely to have an anxious attachment style, had fewer antisocial traits, and reported lower levels of sexual arousal in a hypothetical case of sexual contact with a child than MAPs who did not own dolls. Finally, by conducting analyses on six predictor variables, the researchers concluded that no evidence was found in their study to support the idea that owning a child-like sex doll increases the risk of engaging in sexual activities with a child. In the context of their study, the authors conclude that the model developed by Seto (2019) may not apply to individuals who own a child-like sex doll. From a personality perspective, the researchers interpret their findings by suggesting that the strong presence of schizotypal personality traits and a low level of antisociality and anxious attachment style may explain doll ownership as a result of people's difficulties in forming interpersonal relationships. Also, a need for independence and a low need to feel reassured by someone else may contribute to the acquisition of a doll.

This study has many positive features. First of all, the authors have shown great sensitivity in tackling what is a highly controversial subject. In addition to providing a detailed, well-supported presentation of the different perspectives on child-like sex doll

ownership, Harper & Lievesley maintain a commendable neutrality towards their subject. Given its contentious nature, it would have been easy for the authors to take a stance or inadvertently let a positive or negative bias towards child-like sex doll ownership become apparent. However, they have managed to avoid this trap. The inclusion of literature conceptualizing attraction to children as more than just sexual, and the discussion of sexual fulfillment as a means to improve well-being rather than solely as a means of abuse prevention, are also noteworthy. Their research objectives, the structure of their literature review, methodology and discussion are coherent and clear. While scientific research generally addresses an academic readership, the authors succeed in making their work accessible to a wider audience, which is important given that it deals with a highly controversial and contentious subject.

Nevertheless, despite these positive elements, the authors' work could have benefited from clarification in some areas. One aspect that we feel is important, and which the authors themselves note in the limitation section of their study, is the absence of a clear definition of what is understood to be a "sex doll." A nuance could have been added so that participants themselves clarify the type of sex dolls they use (exclusively physical and inanimate, exclusively artificial intelligence software, a combination of the two, etc.). Although the authors acknowledge the role that artificial intelligence can

play in their participants' pursuit for sexual and emotional fulfillment, it would have been beneficial to examine this aspect in more detail. For instance, investigating if the various types of child-like sex dolls previously mentioned affects the relationship between ownership and perpetration of sexual crimes examined in the study could have been interesting. Furthermore, exploring a broader relational context would have provided insights into the relative satisfaction obtained from an inanimate but physical sex doll compared to an AI sex doll, as well as the distinct attributes each type possesses.

Another element which the authors could have explored relates to the emotional experience of the participants in the weeks preceding completion of the questionnaire. Whether to validate or invalidate the hypotheses concerning the impact of doll use on the perpetration or non-perpetration of a sexual crime (risk factor and protective factor hypotheses), it would have been relevant to include measures in the hours preceding sexual intercourse. Various research in the field of pathways leading to sexual offending have focused on this type of measurement to examine the emotional motivations underlying the offense committed by individuals⁵. Additionally, incorporating such measures would have enabled the exploration of the specific emotions that drive participants to engage in sexual or non-sexual interactions with their dolls. This investigation could have shed light on whether such behavior arises from feelings of loneliness and sadness or,

⁵ See Beauregard et al., 2014; Leclerc et al., 2014

conversely, from a sense of happiness. Ultimately, focusing on emotions in the hours before having intercourse with their doll could have facilitated a broader conversation about sexuality, extending beyond the scope of potential sexual offenses perpetrated by individuals who own child-like sex dolls.

Finally, it would have been interesting if the authors had expanded on the utilization of the qualitative data collected in the free-text input sections. Giving concrete examples by presenting quotes from participants in connection with the dolls' functions for owners would perhaps have been richer than a

systematic categorization on the part of the authors. In the absence of explanations provided by the participants as to why they acquired a sex doll, the researchers provide answers to these questions through the interpretation of psychometric test results.

Aside from these few minor criticisms, there is nothing which undermines the overall high quality of their work. And, with this topic so sparse in empirically falsifiable research, the limitations the authors point out are not so much flaws as possibilities to uncover more data on this deeply controversial feature of human sexuality.

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The Self-Reported Sexual Real-World Consequences of Sex Doll Use

Desbuleux, J.C. and Fuss, J. (2023)

The Journal of Sex Research, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2023.2199727>

In this article, Jeanne C. Desbuleux and Johannes Fuss study the effects of sex dolls on the sexuality and sexual behavior of their users. The authors hope it will provide some hard data to inform the emotionally charged ethical and legal debates currently taking place. Results do not suggest a link between sex doll usage and problematic sexual behavior, for teleiophilic and pedo-hebephilic users alike, although the use of retrospective data, as the authors mention, make these findings inconclusive. The article concludes with a discussion of the philosophical implications of this study and suggests future directions for research.

The sample consisted of a total of 224 sex doll owners, recruited by invitations on online forums. About 90% of participants identified as male and 4.0% as female (4.9% identified as non-binary or other). About 67% identified as heterosexual and 17% as bi- or pansexual. About 10% identified as pedophilic and/or hebephilic (82.6% of whom reported attraction to girls and 13.4% reported attraction to boys and girls). Participants had a mean age of 42.7 years (SD = 12.9). Some questions related to participants' relationships to their sex dolls, such as whether they thought of them as a sex toy, a surrogate partner, or an ideal romantic partner. Participants were also asked general sexuality

related questions, such as on their visitation of sex workers, masturbation habits, pornography consumption, and fantasies involving illegal sexual activities. Finally, participants were asked two open-ended questions: "What fantasies can you act out with dolls that you cannot act out with humans?" and "How do you think owning and using dolls has affected your sexual practices, fantasies, interests [in terms of sex with human partners and dolls]?"

Ultimately, the authors found that users were divided almost evenly between those who considered their sex doll to be an artificial companion (AC; 52.3%) and those who thought of their dolls as a sex toy (toy; 47.3%). Those who claimed that their sex doll was their ideal partner and those who claimed that their sex doll was a surrogate partner in lieu of a human were coded together in the artificial companion (AC) category. However, the term "surrogate partner" used by the authors makes it unclear whether participants viewed the doll as a surrogate romantic or sexual partner. The AC group appears to be centered around having an emotional connection with the doll, so if many of the participants who said the doll was simply a surrogate partner until they can find a human were viewing it as a surrogate sexual partner, then they should have been grouped with the toy category. Participants in

the AC category owned on average more dolls than those in the toy category.

There were no statistical differences between the pedo-hebephilic and teleiophilic participants on whether they saw their doll as a sex toy or an artificial companion. Pedo-hebephilic participants were more likely to be single than teleiophilic participants (65.2% vs. 51.3%) and less likely to be married or in a relationship (26% vs. 28.2%). Interestingly, a significant percentage of teleiophilic participants (18.6%) were widowed, compared to 4.3% of pedo-hebephilic participants. All female-identified doll owners (4.0%) were teleiophilic. Finally, the mean age of first use of a sex doll was nearly the same for each pedo-hebephilic and teleiophilic participants, 30.9 and 31.0 respectively.

In terms of self-reported changes in behavior since initiation of doll use, those in the AC category reported a significant decrease in pornography consumption, as well as a decrease in “sexually compulsive behavior” (although this term was not defined by the authors). Those in the AC-group were more likely to be single than those in the toy-group, and were more likely to report being in love with their doll. Motivations for purchasing a sex doll differed between the AC-group and the toy-group as well, with the former more likely to report finding the bodies of potential human partners less attractive, and to report having been disappointed by

real people too many times. Of the doll owners in a relationship with a human person, 47% told their partners nearly everything about their doll use, while 32.5% did not tell their partners anything.

The pedo-hebephilic participants reported a significant decrease in “compulsive sexual behavior” compared to teleiophilic participants. Furthermore, pedo-hebephilic participants reported more frequently than teleiophilic participants that they used their sex dolls as an alternative sexual outlet due to the fact that they could not legally enact their sexual desires with another person. Finally, pedo-hebephilic participants were more likely to report a loss of interest in engaging in sexual intimacy with humans as a consequence of doll use compared to teleiophilic participants.

The authors note that this study had several limitations. One limitation they cite is the possibility that some participants, particularly those who are pedo-hebephilic, were positively biased in their responses for the purposes of influencing legislation regarding the legality of child sex dolls. Child sex dolls, or otherwise sex dolls with “childlike appearances,” are currently outlawed in the US, UK, Canada, South Korea, Australia, and since 2021, Germany. To claim that the responses of pedo-hebephilic participants in this survey may have been singularly unreliable might sound somewhat demeaning to minor-attracted people, however, considering the minimal opportunities MAPs have to

voice their opinions in society. Another limitation the authors point out relates to the highly sensitive nature of many of the questions participants were asked, especially those regarding fantasies of illegal sexual activities. Although participants were guaranteed anonymity, stigma and fear of legal repercussions may have influenced responses.

A third limitation, according to the authors, is the possibility that the number of participants who reported being in a relationship with their sex dolls may have been overrepresented due to social acceptability bias. Participants may have felt compelled to defend their usage of sex dolls by contextualizing it as part of an intimate relationship. This idea, however, is dubious, since it is unlikely that a person being in a relationship with a sex doll is more socially acceptable than a person who uses a sex doll as they would any other sex toy.

The authors conclude on a philosophical note, writing:

We have reached a point where, perhaps for the first time, we no longer need a human counterpart to experience some kind of partnership. Now that the link between sexuality and reproduction has been disconnected by the accessibility of contraception, the link between partnered intimacy and human-to-human interaction may also be disconnected. Thus, fantasies that previously

required a counterpart to be realized may now be able to be realized without a human counterpart.

The authors acknowledge that this may cause many people anxiety, particularly when the forms of intimacy in question are of a sort that tests societies' moral sentiments, such as sex with minors, but they add: "We hope that our work will contribute to a more informed and less moralistic debate on the issue of the (functional) use of (sex) dolls, not only for pedohebephilic participants."

While this article offers a broad exploration of the self-reported effects of sex doll use, and does not concentrate primarily on MAPs and their ownership of child sex dolls, the specific implications for MAPs is apparent, and there is a tone of cautious optimism in the text that this technology can have a vital role to play in improving their sexual health.

Relatedly, an avenue of future exploration that the authors did not mention is the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for the purposes of facilitating romantic relationships for minor-attracted people. Via machine learning, synthetic minors may be developed who can communicate and emotionally connect with program users. This, in conjunction with child sex dolls, may further improve the sexual and mental well-being of MAPs. Studies have explored relationships between people and their AI partners, but thus far there has been no real discussion of its application for minor-attracted

people. Likely legal barriers will make such research difficult, but it is worth considering.

Returning to the article in question, the authors kept it notably free from stigmatizing language relating to MAPs (although MAPs were not the primary focus of this study). As can be expected, at several points the authors alluded to the alleged risks of MAPs becoming “acclimated” to the idea of engaging in sexual activity with a real minor through their use of sex dolls. However, this was mentioned primarily in reference to the ongoing debates around this issue. Otherwise, when discussing MAPs’ motivations to acquire and use child sex dolls, the authors take the

“functional” perspective recommended by Harper and Lievesley (2022), in that such dolls satisfy a functional need.

The potential of technology to benefit people with sexual orientations and desires which cannot be expressed legally with another person is a compelling concept for many, and a cause for concern for many more. This study helped fill in the spaces of speculation with some concrete data, and will hopefully encourage other researchers to do the same.

Unconventional harm reduction interventions for Minor-attracted persons

Appel, J. M. (2022)

Clinical Ethics, 18 (2), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14777509221117981>

This bioethics article posits several proposals for interventions which aim to reduce the problem of child sexual abuse (CSA). Appel argues that several emerging technologies, such as child sex robots, immersive virtual reality, and "synthetic" child sexual images, could be utilized to combat CSA by using them to fulfill the desires of minor-attracted persons (MAPs), primarily those which are sexual in nature. He compares this to the concept of harm reduction used in other areas of public health policy such as illicit and dangerous drug use, arguing that while some of these technologies may cause moral disgust in the general population, they are nevertheless preferable to the alternative. Appel also discusses other related topics, such as the role of disgust in legislating, how any of these technologies might be practically implemented, and his responses to anticipated objections.

The article has some positive characteristics, such as the fact that it correctly states that MAPs and child abusers are separate categories, and that it argues against laws that are purely based on personal feelings of disgust. However, it also contains several major issues, some of which undermine the aforementioned positive points. The largest of these can be seen in the premise of the article: MAPs are constantly portrayed as a problem in need of

management and as inherent dangers to children, which reduces MAPs to the status of "potential child abusers." It constantly presents the topic through a fear-based and highly stigmatizing view of MAPs. This important problem, along with various others, will be discussed later in this review.

Appel begins by introducing the topics of minor attraction, CSA, and how he views the relationship between the two. He cites a study which claims that 10% of American men and 4% of American women admit to having an interest in having sex with children or viewing sexual images of children if it were free from consequences, along with some similar studies done in other countries. Appel says this evidence of widespread sexual interest in children, along with his view that "the conduct of [MAPs] is likely responsible for... a substantial plurality" of CSA cases in the United States, means that society should create interventions which enable MAPs who do not "act on their feelings" to avoid doing so in the future. He expresses skepticism of traditional methods of CSA primary prevention, saying there is little evidence for their effectiveness. To protect children, he says, society should consider alternative methods that have so far been overlooked because of society's moral disgust over them.

The concept of harm reduction is the primary justification for Appel's proposal. He argues that, while there may be some public backlash and some ethical concerns, protecting children should be the primary concern for legislators. He pushes back against using disgust as a lone justification for legislation, saying that, whether or not simply having romantic and/or sexual feelings for children can be considered immoral, the prevention of CSA should be paramount. Appel also speculates about other potential benefits, such as content moderators being able to rest in the knowledge that the sexual images they are tasked with moderating (explained in greater detail below) were artificially generated, the ability of governments to regulate and direct "inevitable" technology, and saving money otherwise spent on tracking down, arresting, and imprisoning those who might have otherwise been prevented from having sexual activity with children. He denies that this is weighing the wellbeing of MAPs against the wellbeing of children, arguing that the safety of children is his only concern. Appel hopes that, over time, the successes of these preventive measures will "generate public acceptance" of things they were once resistant to.

He proposes three main alternative "interventions" for MAPs, all centered around satisfying their sexual desires with various substitutes for sexual interaction with real children. First, he proposes the use of child sex robots. He includes the decriminalization of non-mechanical child sex dolls in this category,

arguing that legislators should get past their initial disgust and focus on the practical implications of these bans, specifically that they might be endangering children. Appel also proposes AI child robots, somewhat similar to sex robots already being developed. He speculates that these would help would-be abusers meet their needs in alternative ways, or at least meet enough of them that they would not take on the risk of breaking the law to do so. Appel preempts criticism of this point on the grounds of robotic rights by saying that whatever rights these robots may have would be superseded by the child protection imperative.

The second intervention proposal is immersive VR. Appel proposes that with a combination of immersive peripheral devices, including haptic feedback, MAPs might be able to simulate sexual encounters with virtual minors. He also suggests that state employees or private individuals could "take on the identity of a child" and have virtual sexual interactions with MAPs. He admits that this could cause some level of trauma on the part of those facilitating these interactions, but argues that it is a preferable outcome to CSA.

The third proposed intervention is using generative AI to create "synthetic" child sexual content (not to be confused with drawn images, sometimes referred to with similar terminology). Appel proposes that a machine learning algorithm could be trained to create realistic but artificial images that MAPs could

use in place of content with actual children. He suggests that "specially watermarked" (presumably to differentiate it if found on a device) synthetic content could flood the "market," hopefully outcompeting content involving real children and "cater[ing] to the needs of potential abusers." Alternatively, he suggests the government could sell it for a small fee and use the money to compensate CSA victims.

Despite his earlier skepticism of traditional primary prevention approaches, Appel suggests that these interventions and harm reduction tactics could work in tandem with traditional methods to great effect. He suggests, for example, that those who are deemed to be at a higher risk of committing a crime could be directed to one of these alternative interventions and rewarded for remaining law-abiding. He also suggests that group therapy modeled on those for drug users could have similar benefits, though he qualifies it as being the case in conjunction with his proposed secondary interventions.

Of course, the solutions Appel proposes would need implementation. He expresses skepticism of both purely private and state-led ventures. Private ventures, he argues, might be prone to "poor oversight and profit driven abuses," though he does not specify what those abuses might be. Government funded initiatives, he says, would be subject to intense public backlash as taxpayers would object to their tax dollars being used for harm reduction

initiatives that generate disgust. Appel recommends that a body implementing such initiatives be on a "public-private partnership model," specifically recommending the Organ Procurement and Transportation Network as a possible template, operating largely privately but with heavy government involvement and funding for individuals who want to access services but cannot afford it. He also muses on who should work in such industries, whether they be MAPs, non-MAPs who are not bothered by the work, or non-MAPs who can "subordinate their disgust" with a singular focus on protecting children.

Appel recommends that the efficacy of these intervention possibilities be studied to ensure they are adopted if effective. However, he also advises caution and regulation, giving three suggestions for possible safeguards. First, he suggests that the government should retain ultimate control of any of these intervention types, being able to disable or discontinue them as needed. Second, he suggests such interventions be rolled out gradually and their effects studied, initially with "low risk" MAPs, then gradually introducing them to "higher risk" ones. Third, he recommends closely monitoring their use for abnormal behavior which might signal the user has decided to go on to commit a crime.

Appel concludes by responding to criticisms and restating his thesis. The four main objections he responds to are minimizing distress in production

and distribution of these technologies, the possibility the interventions are not effective or are neutral but cause other societal ills, the possibility that the knowledge of such interventions could retraumatize CSA survivors, and the perceived moral injury to society by producing products which appear to enable socially unacceptable behavior. To each of these he responds that if these measures protect children they are worth the downsides, and if they are neutrally effective, there is no ground on which to prohibit them as long as they are not causing other significant harm. Appel urges those in power not to dismiss the possibility of these technologies because of their gut reaction, but instead implores them to think of the harm that could be prevented.

Unfortunately, this article has several serious flaws, the largest of which is contained in its core premise. It constantly frames MAPs as a problem to be managed, as "potential abusers." Appel explicitly states that society has "failed to protect children from MAPs," which is a highly problematic framing. Children do not need to be protected from MAPs; they need to be protected from individuals exhibiting predatory behavior - whether or not they are MAPs. The article is also consistently unconcerned with MAPs' wellbeing, going so far as to repeatedly and explicitly insist that the measures it proposes have nothing to do with the wellbeing of MAPs, but solely to do with protecting children. While this may play better with some audiences, it reinforces the social norm of seeing MAP issues as unimportant.

Appel intentionally makes no consideration of the needs and rights of MAPs, such as having legal avenues for the expression of their sexuality. This might communicate to MAPs that they are still not valued as people. It is unlikely that programs conceived under such a mentality would be able to appeal to MAPs, as it might cause resentment and fail to empathize with the population they are attempting to work with.

Appel's proposed interventions also have various issues. While some of them might be of interest to MAPs, they are unrealistic for a variety of reasons.. Firstly, they are based on highly speculative technologies which may or may not be viable for practical use in the future. Despite the "hype" surrounding AI-based technologies, it still remains to be seen if they will live up to the promises of tech firms. Appel also focuses on these technologies being tightly regulated and monitored by the state, which will be a dealbreaker for many, if not most, MAPs. MAPs are a notoriously private population who are understandably skeptical of institutional surveillance and control, especially where their sexual attractions are concerned. Offering them "solutions" which are ultimately controlled by the state rather than open-source and independent is unlikely to catch on.

Each of these solutions also has its own individual strengths and weaknesses. Childlike companion robots, if sapient or romantic near-sapient as is

implied by his concern for their possible rights, might be able to fulfill both the and/or sexual desires of MAPs. However, this is also likely not going to be a reality in the near-term if ever, and Appel does not give a justification as to how a sapient being under the legal ownership of another person (slavery) is justifiable under the guise of "protecting children." VR, while more realistic, also has its own issues. While private, consensual sex work is unproblematic, the concept of bringing government workers into it is not only unlikely to appeal to MAPs, it's potentially highly problematic for the workers involved if they feel it is a moral obligation and not something they choose to do of their own volition. Machine-generated simulated child sexual content, as defined by Appel, is both unrealistic and does not solve the ethical issues involved. Not only are AI-generated images often uncanny, they require real images to draw from for their generation. It is impossible to hold both that

real sexual images of children are unethical to use and that AI-generated ones are ethical, as AI images are rearranged from existing material.

Overall, while Appel makes a convincing argument against disgust-based policy making, the article demonstrates a lack of understanding of the issues involved - both of MAPs and their motivations, and of the technologies he is advocating. Framing MAPs as potential abusers reinforces incorrect negative stereotypes and demonstrates that the author is not familiar with the population he is attempting to propose "solutions" for. His explicit disregard for the needs of MAPs is also highly problematic, as it communicates that they are not worthy of ethical consideration in and of themselves. While the technologies Appel discusses may yet find use in the future, any such applications must be couched in both realistic expectations and basic respect for MAPs.

Public Stigmatizing Reactions Toward Nonoffending Pedophilic Individuals Seeking to Relieve Sexual Arousal

Lehmann et al. (2023)

Journal of Sex Research, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2023.2198512>

In their article, Lehmann and colleagues (2023) conducted two studies to investigate public reactions towards legal methods of relieving sexual arousal employed by minor-attracted people.

The authors begin by giving the reader a summary of previous literature discussing attraction to children as a stigmatized characteristic and the potential sources of the public stigma reaction, including the psychology of disgust. They investigate extant literature on potential legal approaches for minor-attracted people to experience sexual gratification, including masturbating to legal pictures of children in non-sexual situations, utilizing child sex dolls, and taking testosterone-lowering medication, otherwise referred to as chemical castration. The authors note that there is a lack of research on public reactions towards legal methods of relieving sexual arousal to minors, which they write are important to understand because public reactions “can have important effects on policies (such as the recent criminalization of child sex doll ownership in Germany)” and “may also fuel public opposition to treatment approaches and/or child sexual abuse prevention projects for non-offending people with pedophilia, which may entail strategies to find alternative ways of relieving sexual arousal

without harming children.” They aim to bridge that gap via two studies. What the authors describe as a “scholarly (or better, morally fueled) debate” (p. 3) around child sex dolls / robots, has so far seen scholars draw speculative and incendiary conclusions with what Harper and Lievesley (2020) describe as a “total lack of evidence in either direction” (p. 54).

The first of the two studies discussed in this article seeks to investigate public reactions to minor-attracted individuals on cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels in response to their chosen method of sexual relief: non-sexual pictures of children (NSP), child sex dolls (CSD), or chemical castration (CC). The authors hypothesize that the most positive reactions would be towards chemical castration medication, and the most negative reactions would be towards the use of child sex dolls.

The researchers conducted a power analysis but greatly surpassed the minimum sample size ($N = 43$) necessary, recruiting 143 participants via an online survey as well as a pen-and-paper survey. Participants ranged from 18 to 75 years of age ($M = 39.73$), the majority of which were female (59.4%).

Approximately half the sample had children (48.3%) and 18.2% had children younger than 14. Participants were surveyed using a 7-point Likert scale (0–6) ranging from “Completely disagree” to “Completely agree.” They used items from previous research (Jahnke, Imhoff et al., 2015), including four items from the Social Distance Scale to measure stigma; four items assessing affective levels of fear, anger, pity, and disgust; and three items from the Dangerousness Scale assessing perceived dangerousness to children, adolescents, and adults. Although the study aimed to focus on attraction to prepubescent children, the authors acknowledge that the participants did not appear to differentiate between dangerousness to children versus adolescents.

Results of the first study found significant main effects of condition (NSP, CSD, or CC) on dangerousness to children and adolescents, with the most favorable reactions being towards CC ($M = 3.59$), followed by NSP ($M = 4.59$), and with the most negative reactions to CSD ($M = 4.90$). The effect of condition (NSP, CSD, or CC) on dangerousness to adults showed a similar trend, with the most positive reactions for CC ($M = 2.03$), followed by NSP ($M = 2.23$) and CSD ($M = 2.48$). On an affective level, they found large main effects

for anger and disgust, and moderate main effects for fear. The trend of most positive reactions for CC, followed by NSP, and CSD was present for all effects except for pity, where the ratings were inverse. Finally, on a behavioral level, small main effects were found for social distance scores, with CC incurring the most positive ratings ($M = 3.62$), followed by NSP ($M = 4.27$) and CSD ($M = 4.42$). However, the differences between NSP and CSD were not significant. Based on these results, the authors confirmed their hypothesis that the least negative responses would be found for chemical castration. However, this was not the case between the non-sexual pictures condition and the child sex doll condition, where the differences were most often insignificant.

In order to investigate whether the effects found were driven by the stimuli (child vs. adult) or by sexual gratification (denial vs. relief), the authors opted to conduct a second study whereby they implemented adult stimuli in addition to the child stimuli. This new stimulus condition included a fantasy-driven sexual gratification condition (adult-as-schoolgirl pornography; AAS) and a contact-driven sexual gratification condition (adult-with-childlike-appearance; ACA) for adults in addition to the child stimuli (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview study design.

		Sexual gratification		
		fantasy-driven	contact-driven	none
stimulus	child adult	nonsexual picture ^{a, b} Adult-as-schoolgirl porn ^b	Child sex doll ^a Adult-childlike-appearance ^b	Chemical castration ^{a, b}

^aincluded in Study 1.

^bincluded in Study 2.

The authors did not use the child sex doll stimuli in Study 2 due to them being newly banned in Germany by the time of study. As the authors note, this legal change “ruled out their use as therapeutic tools”, and “might have had temporary effects on the public perception of child sex dolls” after high-profile media reports (p. 6). Because the legal situation and potential public perception had changed between the two studies, the conditions of Study 2 apropos child sex dolls would not have made for a reasonable control group or comparison with Study 1.

The authors expected to find the highest stigmatization in the child-stimuli/sexual gratification condition (NSP), and the lowest in the no stimulus/no gratification condition (CC). They also expected that, should the results of the first study have been determined by disapproval of child-stimuli, there would be less negative reactions to adult-stimuli regardless of the sexual gratification variable. By contrast, should the results have been determined by disapproval of sexual gratification in general, there would be no difference between the adult vs. child conditions.

For the second study, the authors recruited 151 German participants from 18 to 80 years of age ($M = 27.97$), the majority of which were female (57.62%) and had children (80.8%), 8.6% of which had children under the age of 14. Data was collected via an online survey, this time also including five new

items developed by two of the authors, regarding the attitudes toward the relief of sexual arousal in people attracted to children.

The results of Study 2 showed that the majority of participants thought that all people should have the right to sexual gratification regardless of their sexual orientation (68.2%), that people with a sexual interest in children should be able to achieve sexual gratification if they do not hurt children (59.6%), and an overwhelming majority agreed that all people should be able to achieve sexual gratification if it does not bring harm to someone else (98%). A very small minority agreed that people with a sexual interest in children should not be allowed to have sex even with adult partners (1.3%), or to masturbate (2%).

On a cognitive level, there were main effects of condition (NSP, CSD, or CC) for dangerousness to children/adolescents, with NSP having the most unfavorable results ($M = 4.66$), followed by AAS ($M = 3.76$), ACA ($M = 3.42$), and CC ($M = 3.07$). There was also a main effect for dangerousness to adults, with a similar trend for NSP ($M = 2.34$). On the affective level, there were large main effects for anger, pity, and disgust, and a moderate effect for fear. The trend whereby NSP had the most unfavorable results was present for anger ($M = 3.95$), fear ($M = 3.70$), and disgust ($M = 4.99$). The only exception to this was pity, where CC had the highest mean ($M = 4.78$). Finally, on a behavioral

level, there was a moderate main effect of condition (NSP, CSD, or CC) on social distance scores, with NSP scoring highest ($M = 3.96$), followed by AAS ($M = 3.22$), ACA ($M = 2.99$), and CC ($M = 2.84$).

The authors note that the results of Study 2 seem to support those of Study 1, that there are more favorable responses towards CC (i.e. no gratification) compared to the gratification and child stimuli conditions. Study 2 also demonstrated that stigma towards pedophilic individuals is greatly reduced if they are able to achieve sexual gratification with an adult partner. The authors go on to discuss the results and their bearing on potential risks and therapeutic benefits of people attracted to children achieving sexual gratification. They also discuss how public misconceptions of minor-attracted people as synonymous with sex offenders may have impacted results, as participants could have been suspicious of the motive behind sexual gratification, assuming this could lead to sexual offenses. In contrast, in the CC condition, they would have perceived the minor-attracted individual as wanting to remove their arousal completely, and this may have led to more favorable perceptions. The authors identify limitations of their study, such as the use of single items to assess affect, as well as not identifying participants' motives for the ratings. They underline that, because of these limitations, the findings should be treated as hypothetical until future research can address these concerns.

The article represents a valuable contribution to the literature, in that it sheds light on the under-explored topic of legal sexual gratification among people attracted to children and thoughtfully discusses concepts such as stigma and disgust. However, we make two criticisms intended to aid future researchers studying this community. First, the authors use a variety of terms throughout the manuscript to describe people who are attracted to children, including “pedophilic individuals/men/persons,” “people with pedophilia,” “non-offending pedophilic men,” “nonoffending people with a pedophilic interest,” “people with a sexual interest in children,” “people who are sexually interested in children,” “nonoffending pedophilic individuals,” and “community men with pedophilia.” While the authors elected to use such terms as opposed to “minor-attracted people” to reflect their specific focus on attraction to prepubescent children, some of the terms used are problematic. For example, terms such as “people with pedophilia” may unintentionally imply pathology (further reflected by the authors' use of the phrase “affected individuals” when talking about people attracted to children). The term “sexual interest” may suggest that attraction is a choice that can be changed, or it may minimize the importance of sexuality to one's identity or life by suggesting it constitutes a fetish or is similar in significance to a hobby or leisure activity. Finally, while occasionally necessary to use because of the public's assumption that all people attracted to children have committed

or will commit crimes against children, the term “non-offending” as a qualifier may unintentionally imply that “offending” is the default status for this community. For these reasons, when “minor-attracted people” is too broad of a description to accurately reflect a study’s aims, B4U-ACT recommends the use of the term “child-attracted people” or “people attracted to children.”

A perhaps larger problem is that, while the authors did take care to discuss and address the impacts of stigma and the inaccuracy of conflating attraction to children with sexual crimes against children, including the notion that all people attracted to children are “offenders-in-waiting,” some of the language used by the authors may unintentionally reinforce these misperceptions. For example, despite beginning the article by describing sexual gratification as an important predictor of quality of life, the authors often describe legal methods to achieve sexual gratification as an alternative to harming children, rather than a means to improve well-being and fulfillment. Not only might this imply that avoiding criminal offenses is the main or only goal of achieving gratification, but it could also unintentionally imply that all people attracted to children are at risk of engaging in sexual contact with children if they cannot find legal ways to

achieve sexual fulfillment or gratification. Along the same lines, the authors describe informing study participants that the fictional people attracted to children in the study vignettes had not “so far” broken laws related to sexual contact with children, potentially contributing to the “offender-in-waiting” perception they were attempting to combat.

These criticisms are not meant to detract from the overall value or quality of the manuscript, nor are they meant to imply that the authors intended any stigmatizing impact. The manuscript reflected a desire by the authors to understand and combat misinformation and stigma related to this community. We raise these criticisms to aid researchers in this area in identifying ways they may unintentionally reinforce the very misperceptions their research attempts to address.

Overall, the authors achieved their objective of shedding some light on the public’s reactions to minor-attracted people seeking to achieve sexual gratification and the factors that help form these reactions, potentially helping pave the way towards accepted sexual therapies and outlets for minor-attracted people. This was demonstrated via sound and rigorous methodology, explanations of the phenomena involved, and awareness of the impacts of stigma related to attraction to minors.

The Potential for Anti-Stigma Interventions to Change Public Attitudes Toward Minor-Attracted Persons: A Replication and Extension of Jara and Jeglic's Study

McKillop, N. and Price, S. (2023)

Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2023.2204864>

McKillop and Price set out to replicate and expand on a 2021 study by Jara and Jeglic, in which the latter two USA-based researchers aimed to assess public attitudes toward minor-attracted people (MAPs) in their country, and whether stigma against them can be effectively addressed through a psychoeducational intervention in the form of a text presenting several “myths” about MAPs, which were then countered by research “facts.” To that end, Jara and Jeglic used a measuring scale that they adapted, called Attitudes Toward Minor Attracted Persons (ATMAP), comprising 39 items in the form of statements, with which participants were asked to rate statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1): “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”, with higher scores indicating more negative attitudes toward MAPs. Jara and Jeglic concluded that their psychoeducational intervention had, in fact, opposite results than those initially hypothesized, since participants who were exposed to the intervention had more negative attitudes towards MAPs than those who were not exposed to it.

McKillop and Price situate their article within the broader – and increasingly prominent – public health approach to child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention.

When focusing on reducing stigma as an approach to CSA prevention, it is important for authors to ensure that they are not themselves spreading stigmatizing messages. Research focused on reducing stigma against MAPs has become increasingly prevalent in recent years; however, as these campaigns are almost exclusively attached to prevention of CSA, they give the impression that the only reason to reduce stigma is for prevention, and not for the well-being of MAPs. As such, researchers who choose this approach should ensure that they do so mindfully, to not contribute to such stigmatizing attitudes.

In this area, the article by McKillop & Price sometimes falls short. While the authors emphasize that MAPs are not destined to offend, they use stigmatizing phrases such as “yet to offend” and “abstaining from offending.” The first implies that a MAP who has not yet offended will one day do so, and the second implies that MAPs by default will have sexual contact with minors and must put forth a great deal of effort to avoid doing so. This use of stigmatizing language is unfortunate in an article focused on anti-stigma messaging.

Similarly to Jara and Jeglic, McKillop and Rice use the ATMAP on a sample of 178 participants,

recruited via a Qualtrics XM online survey platform; all participants were over 18 years of age, lived in Australia, with their age ranging from 18 to 84 years (mean age= 47.57 years) and with 88 of them identifying as “male”, 88 as “female”, and two identifying as neither. These last two were excluded from the analyses, as the sample size would be too small to draw any meaningful conclusions from their experiences.

All participants completed the ATMAP scale before and after the intervention, and were randomly assigned to one of four conditions, three experimental ones (1. written text intervention in the form of presenting facts only [40 participants], 2. written text intervention in the form of presenting myths countered by facts [45 participants], 3. video educational intervention [45 participants]), and 1 control group (48 participants) – in the case of the control group, participants completed the ATMAP scale two consecutive times, and in the case of the experimental groups, participants were also asked to complete comprehension tests to make sure they paid attention to the interventions.

The authors argue that they extended the Jara and Jeglic (2021) study in 3 ways: 1) by including a pre-post design; 2) by examining the impact that gender and age may have on attitudes toward MAPs, which is a crucial addition, with the potential of showing whether some groups of people might need to be targeted differently in the context of

de-stigmatization interventions, and 3) by also including an educational intervention in a video format, which, again, is important in drawing attention to different possible ways of disseminating educational messages and the perhaps varying impacts that each one has.

Data analysis revealed that while all three intervention efforts showed a positive change in perceptions toward MAPs pre- to post-intervention, there were no significant differences between them. The authors, therefore, conclude that educating the public might indeed decrease stigma against MAPs, but more knowledge is needed about how to do so. Additionally, to the authors’ surprise, the control group also showed a positive change in perceptions toward MAPs. The change in the attitudes of the control group could, according to the authors, be attributed to participants’ possible open-mindedness and recognition of the issue, even after being exposed to it very briefly, or to a bias pertinent to what participants thought the researchers were seeking.

The authors mention that they “adopted the minor-attracted psychoeducational text developed by Jara and Jeglic (2021)” (p. 7). Of note, the original study by Jara and Jeglic defined MAPs as “people who feel sexual attraction towards prepubescent children [...] regardless of whether the person has acted on their attraction or not” (2021, p. 310) – a definition which may not necessarily be universally

accepted (e.g., by the MAP community), for at least three reasons: 1) it is limiting itself to the sexual aspect of the attraction, without recognizing the emotional and romantic ones, 2) it excludes MAPs attracted to children in puberty, and 3) it explicitly refers to “acting out” and “sexual urges” without operationalizing either phrase, leading the reader to assume the worst. By adopting this language, the authors are at risk of unnecessarily perpetuating some aspects of stigma against MAPs, rather than challenging stigmatizing attitudes.

Within the authors’ limited conception of MAPs as potential risks to children and toward whom CSA-prevention interventions should be targeted, the authors acknowledge that “acceptance of prevention and early intervention (and thus support for initiatives) is largely driven by community sentiment (and thus political appetite)” (p. 4). While this is an insightful recognition within that limited perspective, the authors do not always provide an equally contextualized interpretation of their own findings. For example, a significant finding of the study was that older participants (60+ years) were less negative in their attitudes toward MAPs in comparison to younger ones (18-39 years), even in the pre-treatment stage, which the authors interpreted as “unexpected” and “counterintuitive”, “[g]iven the landscape for open discussion and tolerance about sex, sexuality, and inclusion among millennials” (p. 14). However, a more contextualized interpretation here would have also taken into

consideration historical elements pointing to more “liberal” or “indifferent” attitudes toward intergenerational sex in the 1960s and 1970s, increasingly replaced by growing public concerns around pedophilia and child sexual abuse in the late 20th century.⁶ As opposed to age, gender was not found to have an impact on participants’ attitudes toward MAPs.

The authors are otherwise thorough in their identification of potential limitations of their study, and have included considerations about the need to ascertain any longer-term impacts of educational interventions on public attitudes, issues of generalizability, whether findings would be influenced if the educational intervention was not gender-neutral, or by cultural factors depending on participants’ background. These are all important points and, indeed, despite its limitations, this study contributes to our understanding of the potential effects of educational interventions to counteract stigma directed against MAPs.

⁶ E.g., Angelides, 2005; Hacking, 1991; Jenkins, 1998.

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What can the eyes tell us about atypical sexual preferences as a function of sex and age? Linking eye movements with child-related chronophilias

Vásquez-Amézquita, M., Leongómez, J. D., Salvador, A., & Seto, M. C. (2023).

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Vásquez-Amézquita and colleagues offer a theoretical-empirical review of eye-tracking techniques in the study of (what they call) typical and atypical sexual interests and preferences. Their goals were to: (1) explain the relationship between eye movements and sexual preferences using a visual attention-based conceptual model of sexual processing (see the Information Processing Model of Sexual Arousal⁷), and (2) substantiate eye-tracking as a useful indirect measure of sexual preferences accordingly, namely in relation to the sex and age of stimuli.

Throughout this review, the terms “sexual interest” and “sexual preference” used by the authors are replaced by “sexual attraction.” While the former terms are commonly used in this field of research, they are often seen as stigmatizing by minor-attracted persons (MAPs) because they are not typically used to describe attraction to adults, and these terms suggest that attraction to minors is readily mutable.

The authors begin with a discussion of eye-tracking as a tool to investigate cognitive processing of visual information, such as sexual stimuli. They offer a

brief summary of how eye trackers work, including the parts and movements of the eye involved and the neurophysiological structures and pathways implicated in visual perception and attention. The authors then address their first aim: to explain visual attention as an indicator of sexual attraction using the conceptual Information Processing Model of Sexual Arousal by Spiering and colleagues (2004, 2007). They clarify that the mechanisms of visual attention are bottom-up, involving automatic/preconscious processing of visual input such as brightness and color, as well as top-down, involving controlled/conscious interpretation of visual input based on cognitive factors such as goals and moods. Similarly, sexual arousal as described by the Information Processing Model also involves both bottom-up and top-down mechanisms: the automatic and preconscious experience of becoming physically/objectively sexually aroused, and the more controlled and conscious experience of becoming cognitively/subjectively sexually aroused. The authors propose that automatic visual attention paid to a sexual stimulus indicates a response of physical sexual arousal, and that controlled visual attention paid to a sexual stimulus indicates a response of subjective sexual arousal.

⁷ Spiering et al., 2004; Spiering & Everaerd, 2007

To address their second aim of substantiating eye-tracking as a useful indirect measure of sexual attractions, the authors explain that eye-tracking is able to assess both bottom-up and top-down mechanisms of visual attention, and thus in theory, both bottom-up and top-down sexual response. Specifically, eye-tracking techniques can measure location and duration of first fixations (i.e., fixed/stationary gazes), which are relatively automatic and preconscious, and indicate “early attention” to a stimulus as opposed to a competing stimulus. The authors suggest that one’s first fixation typically lands on a sexual stimulus that activates implicit memories of sexual reward. In addition, eye-tracking techniques can measure total duration and number of fixations until a stimulus disappears, which are more controlled/conscious processes, and indicate “late attention” to a stimulus. The authors suggest that one’s intentional gazes typically land on a sexual stimulus that is appraised as likely to result in sexual reward based on explicit memories of sexual scripts, experiences, attitudes, fantasies, and expectations of reward or cost. They conclude that early and late attention to sexual stimuli may be regarded as indirect indicators of objective and subjective sexual attraction, respectively. They then review empirical evidence, citing studies that employed eye-tracking techniques to assess both typical and atypical sexual attractions based on sex or age of the stimuli. Based on this evidence, the authors propose an estimated/hypothetical model of

typical and atypical sexual attractions that integrates both age and sex of the stimuli.

Throughout the paper, the authors highlight advantages of eye-tracking over other popular measures of sexual attraction, including genital arousal measures (e.g., plethysmography), physiological arousal measures (e.g., pupillometry), self-report measures, and behavioral measures. Namely, as mentioned earlier, eye tracking may be able to offer assessment of subjective (i.e., cognitive-affective) arousal as opposed to strictly physical sexual arousal, and particularly precise information regarding sexual prioritization (e.g., attention to specific body regions). This technique is also relatively lower cost, less invasive, more accessible, and less susceptible to manipulation than popular alternatives. The authors emphasize that this last advantage may be especially relevant for measurement of taboo atypical sexual attractions such as sexual attraction to children, which may otherwise elicit socially desirable responding.

However, the authors acknowledge that the use of eye-tracking to measure sexual attractions also has limitations. They highlight several, such as insufficient validation of specific visual stimuli to accurately capture idiosyncratic sexual attractions; limited existing evidence of the validity and test-retest reliability of eye-tracking as a measure of sexual attractions—especially atypical attractions; and eye-tracking being susceptible to conscious

control (e.g., aversion of gaze away from atypical sexual stimuli).

The authors conclude that eye-tracking has been key to testing theories of sexual arousal that focus on the role of attention, and on the interaction between automatic and controlled cognitive processes involved in human sexual response. They reiterate that, while the technique's limitations must be considered, eye-tracking is a promising method of assessing atypical sexual attractions such as pedophilia and other chronophilias. They recommend that eye-tracking research continue using diverse samples, such as people belonging to different chronophilic categories, both general and clinical samples of people attracted to children, and both non-forensic and forensic samples of people attracted to children. They highlight that eye-tracking could be useful in the clinical or forensic assessment of sexual attraction to children, including for diagnostic purposes, for testing theories of attentional bias stemming from implicit and explicit memories of atypical sexual stimuli such as children. Similarly, they suggest eye-tracking could be used to monitor the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral treatments designed to increase self-regulation of sexual arousal when presented with atypical sexual stimuli (e.g., decreasing controlled "late attention" paid to child stimuli).

Overall, this paper offers a helpful review of research investigating eye-tracking as a measure of sexual attractions. The authors are thorough and balanced in their discussion of both the strengths and shortcomings of this method. Further, their review is unique in that it contextualizes research findings and proposed theories using an existing conceptual model (i.e., the Information Processing Model of Sexual Arousal). The authors make compelling arguments for further use of eye-tracking in the measurement of atypical sexual attractions, in particular. They offer numerous specific recommendations for future research accordingly.

This said, the paper has limitations. The contents were at times challenging to understand and follow. For instance, it was often difficult to distinguish between when the authors were proposing their own ideas versus summarizing ideas from the Information Processing Model of Sexual Arousal. A clear description of this model, as well as other referenced conceptual models, would have been helpful. In addition, while the paper argues for the use of eye-tracking to measure pedophilia and other chronophilias, in particular, it remains unclear why eye-tracking would be especially useful for this over measurement of other atypical or typical sexual attractions that are not associated with age. Relatedly, while the authors' proposed hypothetical model of variations in sexual attractions according to age and sex of stimuli was certainly informative, it seemed out of place and perhaps premature. The

model is not evidently related to the authors' primary aims of the article, and the authors acknowledge that eye-tracking evidence regarding specific chronophilias is limited or nonexistent.

Importantly, the authors present some potentially stigmatizing ideas, particularly within their concluding discussion of future directions. They insinuate that MAPs' tendency to pay "early attention" to child stimuli suggests that MAPs have atypical implicit memories of children as sexual. While this is not implausible, the authors could have included acknowledgement that there is also a genetic and stable/immutable component to minor-attraction that exists independent of past experiences.⁸ In addition, the authors imply that eye-tracking might be used as a complimentary tool alongside other psychometrically valid measures for "diagnostic" purposes related to pedophilia. Although eye-tracking may indeed help to identify an individual's sexual attraction to prepubescent children, it would have been helpful to clarify that this sexual attraction alone does not warrant a diagnosis. A diagnosis of "pedophilic disorder" is made only if the sexual attraction is accompanied by marked distress, interpersonal difficulty, or sexual behavior involving children—none of which eye-tracking is able to assess.⁹ Also, the authors often reiterate that one advantage of eye-tracking over other measures of atypical sexual attractions, such as pedophilia, is that it is less susceptible to

manipulation including socially desirable responding. This is a fair point, but its repeated emphasis could reinforce the stigmatizing belief that MAPs are particularly prone to manipulating and being dishonest.¹⁰ Further, the point implies that researchers or treatment providers could use eye-tracking as a tool to "trick" MAPs into unintentionally revealing their sexual attraction to children, which poses serious ethical questions in the coercive context of the criminal legal system that the authors seem to ignore, namely, forcing the person to reveal their reviled and innermost sexual feelings against their will. Finally, although the authors acknowledge that many MAPs have not committed a child sexual offense, they maintain heavy focus on the ethically problematic use of eye-tracking for prevention or correctional/punishment purposes in clinical and forensic settings. It would have been pertinent to include further discussion of potential uses of the tool among MAPs that are independent of prevention or punishment efforts, especially since it's hard to see how such uses are even possible.

Taken altogether, as the authors themselves acknowledge, more research is needed to establish the use of eye-tracking in the measurement of atypical sexual attractions. While the authors rightfully advocate for more research, they fail to note that improvement in the technology without

⁸ e.g., Alanko et al., 2013, 2016; Beier et al., 2015

⁹ American Psychiatric Association, 2013

¹⁰ One could plausibly argue that in a judicial context, many MAPs are prone to manipulating evaluation results. However, this is not because MAPs are inherently more dishonest, but rather because the criminal legal system will unethically punish them more harshly for being attracted to children.

carefully considering the ethical problems surrounding its application could reinforce or increase the stigma and injustice faced by those with atypical sexual attractions.

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Author Responses

Response by Eveline Schippers to review of Schippers et al. (2023) in B4QR 3 (2)

Thank you for choosing our article for a critical review. We are glad that our efforts are acknowledged and appreciated and thank you for the opportunity to respond. Three key points will be discussed in the following.

First, the critical review rightly notes the limitation of including various measures to assess sexual attraction towards children. Including various measures increases variance and thus uncertainty about the results. Our study goal was to provide a “proof of principle”: pedophilia does not merely reflect a strong attraction to children, but, also, a lack of attraction to adults. We expected this to not only be true for one very specific type of instrument, but over all measures. This approach places confidence in our findings. If this principle is true in these conditions, it is expected to be even more pronounced in better (more precise) conditions.

Second, the critical review emphasizes that people who have sexually offended against children (PSOC) are not the same as people with pedophilia. This is an important point that is usually overlooked in media and has serious consequences for the understanding of both pedophilia and sexual offenses against children. As we stated in the introduction, our original aim was to research pedophilia, not convicted people. This, however, is

limited by the state of the literature. Precisely because we recognize that sexual attraction does not equal sexual offending, we tried to find a way to research pedophilia in absence of nonoffending pedophilic samples. The SSPI is merely a proxy for pedophilia, but it is the only measure that could be used based on the information available in the primary studies. It does rely on offending behavior, but is the best available measure we had. Again, this approach places confidence in our findings. If the current results are found using only a derivative of pedophilia, they are expected to be more pronounced if we could measure actual pedophilia.

Third, the critical review claims that there is “a growing consensus in the field of research” that sexual attraction is not a malleable trait, but rather, remains unchanged over time. The critical review refers to research that is inconclusive. Seto (2016) notes he relies on retrospective self-report (which is not the most reliable source) and he does not make firm conclusions about the changeability of pedophilia, but, rather, admits that conclusive evidence is lacking. We believe there is no consensus at all in the field. There is no dominant theory explaining the development of sexual deviance in general or pedophilia specifically (Craig & Bartels, 2021; Schmidt & Imhoff, 2021). Nondelinquent participants with pedophilia may

display rather normal neurobiology (Krüger & Kneer, 2021; van Kessel et al., 2023). Research shows that sexual attractions in general can be modulated, e.g., by means of arousal transfer from emotions (Schippers et al., 2022), conditioning (Brom et al., 2014; Hoffmann, 2017), or social learning (Walker & Kuperberg, 2022). This remains to be researched in nonoffending samples with pedophilia.

We cannot and should not exclude the possibility that in some people pedophilia is unchangeable. We also cannot and should not exclude the possibility that in some people it is malleable to some extent.

The truth may lie in between: pedophilia may have unchangeable components as well as some changeable components (Schippers, Hoogsteder, et al., 2023). We are of the opinion that people who are at peace with their sexual attractions and do not hurt anybody, should not be considered a problem. Therefore, change is not always necessary, but if so desired, treatment might be helpful. While treatment may not change the very nature of an attraction, it may diminish its impact or strength. It is only logical to keep an open mind to possible new treatment options.

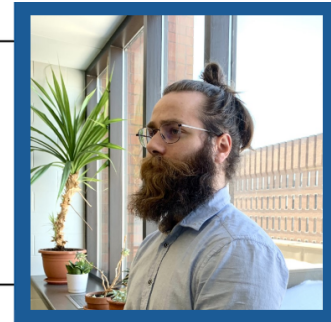
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Meet the New Generation

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.

Étienne Garant, PhD Candidate
School of Criminology
Université de Montréal, Canada



Etienne Garant is a fourth-year doctoral student in criminology at Université de Montréal, supervised by Dr. Jean Proulx.

After completing a Bachelor's degree with honors (Magna Cum Laude) and a Master's degree in criminology at the University of Ottawa, Etienne decided to pursue his doctoral studies at the Université de Montréal. Following his clinical experience with individuals who have committed a sexual offense, Etienne decided to focus his research interests on sexual delinquency and sexual attractions commonly labeled as "deviant".

In addition to his affiliation with the Pôle d'expertise et de recherche en santé et bien-être des hommes (PERSBEH), which facilitates communication between research on men's well-being and clinical centers providing services to men, Etienne serves as a research coordinator for the Sex Offender Research Group at the Université de Montréal. Moreover, for the past four years, he has been a lecturer at the Université de Montréal's School of Criminology.

Funded by the Fonds de recherche du Québec - Société et Culture (FRQSC), Etienne's research project focuses on challenges minor attracted persons (MAPs) may face in their daily lives, and how they navigate the negative consequences related to their sexual attraction. More specifically, Etienne is interested in the resilience trajectories of MAPs and the coping mechanisms they employ in order to live fulfilling lives. More generally, Etienne also seeks to challenge certain assertions in the field of sexual offending research, and to pave the way for more accurate and nuanced research that does not confuse sexual attraction to children with child sex offending.

Etienne has been a reviewer for the B4QR journal for almost a year now. He's very grateful for this opportunity, as he's constantly learning new things about MAPs, enabling him to keep up to date with the challenges that may affect them. Through his involvement, Etienne also wants to help people who may be marginalized to overcome adversity. Etienne would like to seize this opportunity to thank Allen, Richard and Maggie for providing him with this incredible opportunity and placing their confidence in his doctoral research journey.

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>)