The Validity of a Viewing Time Measure of Sexual Interest in Children
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Introduction
Sexual interest in children is an important cause of child sexual abuse and an integral part of the assessment and treatment of child molesters. Commonly used methods to assess sexual interest in children are self-report measures and penile plethysmography (PPG). An indirect measure can offer a supplement to other more commonly used measures.

Method
Measures administered during testing session:
- Viewing time: Presented pictures of nude individuals from the Not Real People Stimuli (Gress & Laws, 2004) Participants rated the attractiveness of each individual depicted in the pictures on a 7-point Likert scale (very unattractive to very attractive). Each picture represented a specific Tanner stage:
  - Tanner 1 (approximately 0 to 3 years of age), Tanner 2 (approximately 4 to 7 years of age), Tanner 3 (approximately 8 to 12 years of age), Tanner 4 (approximately 13 to 15 years of age), or Tanner 5 (approximately 16 years of age and older). Each Tanner stage was represented by eight pictures (four per gender).
  - Viewing time: The time between the presentation of the stimuli and when the rating was obtained.

Measures gathered from offenders’ criminal files:
- Screening Scale for Pedophilic Interest (SSPI; Seta & Lalumière, 2001): File-based measure of sexual deviance.
- Static-99 (Hanson & Thornton, 1999): Risk of sexual recidivism.

Samples Descriptives

Participants
- Thirty-two child molesters with an index offence against a victim under the age of 12 and 30 non-molesters (20 non-sex offenders without any history of sexual offences and 10 sexual offenders with an index offence against a victim 18 years of age or older).
- Adult male inmates in federal prisons in Ontario, Canada.

Table 1. Sample Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Child Molesters</th>
<th>Non-Molesters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate Sentence Length</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starch-99</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Violent Convictions</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-sexual Violent Convictions</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Sample size fluctuates as a function of missing data. Eleven child molesters (34.4%) and 11 non-molesters (36.7%) were serving indeterminate sentences. Total number of convictions include both index and prior convictions.

Results

- Male Pictures: Child molesters consistently viewed pictures of males longer than the comparison group, t(60) = 2.9, p < .01, t(60) = 3.2, p = .002, t(60) = 4.0, p < .001, t(60) = 3.0, p = .003, t(60) = 2.6, p = .01, respectively.

Figure 1. Average Viewing Time for each Female Tanner Stage

Discussion
- Consistent with past research, viewing time discriminated between child molesters and non-molesters.
- Child molesters that were higher risk to sexual reoffend (as measured by the Static-99) tended to view pictures of children, relative to adults, longer than those at lower risk. This correlation, however, only approached statistical significance.
- The relationship between viewing time and PPG did not correspond to previous findings (e.g., Abel et al., 1998). However, only a small sample of child molesters had PPG scores, 8 of which were defined as low-responders (i.e., less than three millimeter change).
- Excluding the low responders, the relationship between PPG and viewing time differential was small, r(12) = .06, p = .85.
- The current study generally supports the convergent validity of viewing time measures, however, further research is required to gain a more complete understanding.

References


Harris, R. G., Rice, Quinsey, & Chaplin. (1996). The relationship between viewing time and PPG does not correspond to previous findings (e.g., Abel et al., 1998). However, only a small sample of child molesters had PPG scores.


Seto, M. C., & Lalumière, M. L. (2001). Age of onset and conviction measures, however, only approached statistical significance.

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Note: SIPS pedophilia score is the mean response of the pedophilia and incest subscales. Only the child molester group was included for the analyses involving PPG, Static-99, and SSPI.