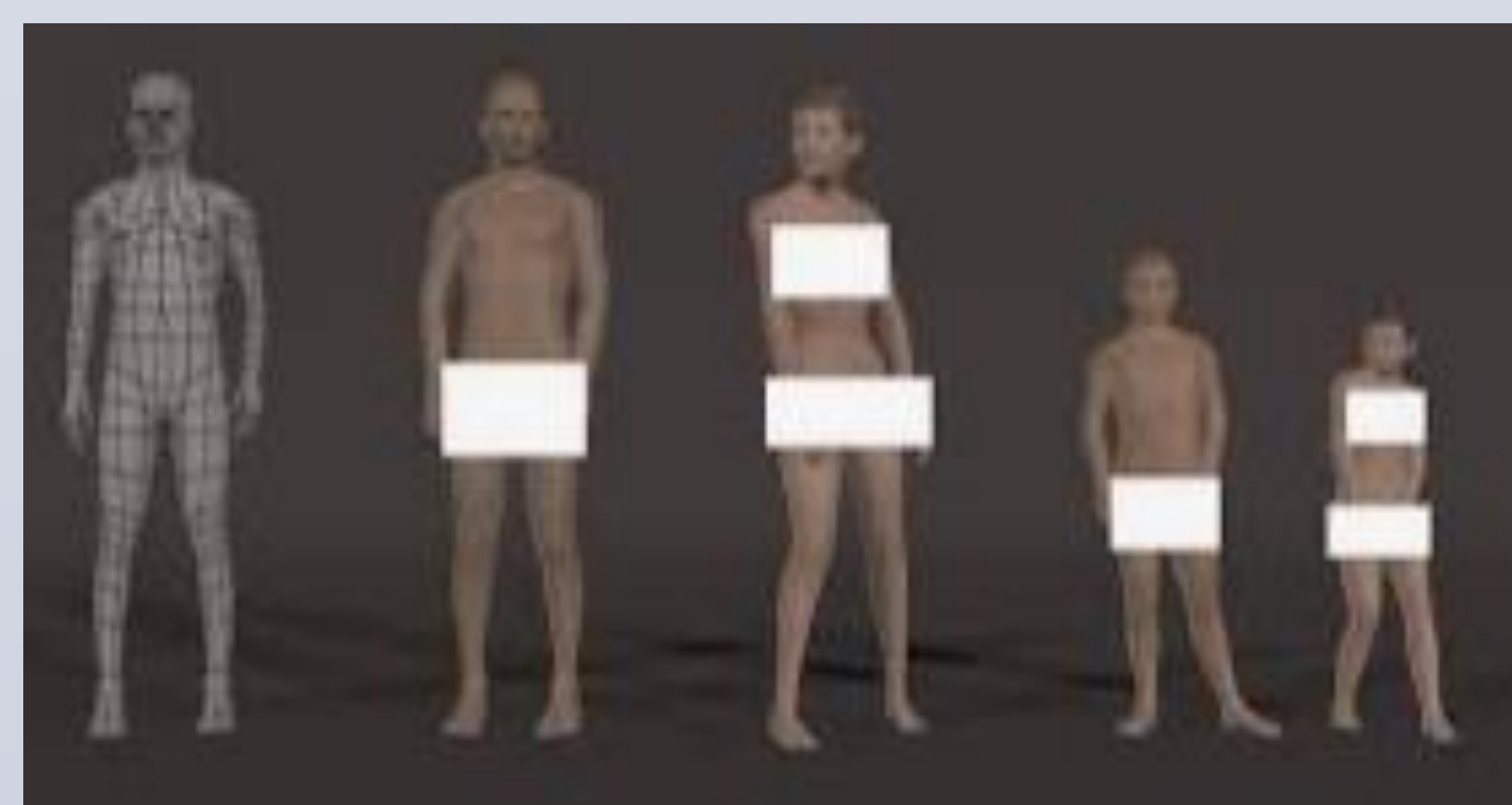


Morgan Baumgartner, MSW, & Kristine M. Jacquin, PhD

Introduction

- Phallometric tests are used in forensic settings to evidence sexual interests in the sex offender population
- Audio and visual stimuli of people of varying ages, genders, and stages of undress are used in phallometric testing
- Penile arousal responses evidence target(s) of sexual interest
- Phallometric tests aid in specifying treatment interventions and directing risk reduction strategies
- Phallometric test stimuli depicting nude juveniles is illegal, but photos of children in other stages of undress are used
- This poster examines the ethical implications of producing and using stimuli of real juvenile individuals



In Favor of the Use of Juvenile Stimuli

- Card and Olsen (1996) wrote most fervently in favor of the production and use of real juveniles in stimuli
- The authors argued that the images and audio files used are not significantly different from those used in other research or clinical purposes that are widely accepted such as in medical journals or textbooks
- It was argued that using the images is morally advisable if clinicians handle the stimuli ethically
- Because the images are not being used for personal or masturbatory purposes, but for sexual arousal in a controlled setting, the scientific benefits are argued to be greater than the risks
- The authors asserted there is a moral imperative to use the images to benefit society, and also to refrain from distributing the images or using the stimuli for nefarious purposes.
- Card and Olsen (1996) noted that the faces of the children can be digitally altered to protect them

Against the Use of Juvenile Stimuli

- Using images of juveniles to elicit arousal can be viewed as victimization (Laws & Gress, 2004; Leah et al., 2020)
- The process of producing the images used for phallometric testing is also argued to be unethical (Marshall, 1996)
- Juveniles cannot ethically consent to participate in the production and use of their collected images for the purposes of phallometric testing (Marshall-Levesque et al., 2018)
- Using images of juveniles may provide a distorted sense of permission to engage in acts that are illegal and socially unacceptable (Marshall, 1996)
- The use of images of real-life women or juveniles perpetuates the view of them as sexual objects, which is detrimental to rehabilitation (Marshall, 1996)
- Another argument is that the ends do not justify the means as data collected from phallometric testing is not empirically valuable enough to permit the continued sexualization of juveniles (Marshall, 1996)

Recommendations

- Computer generated stimuli is a viable option that eliminates the continued victimization of juveniles depicted in test stimuli (Dennis et al., 2014)
- Audio stimuli can be produced by adults and altered using computers. Audio stimuli can be used increasingly as opposed to depending upon visual stimuli (Abel et al., 1998; Bickle et al., 2021; Kalmus & Beech, 2005)
- Using virtual reality as a medium for phallometric testing is promising and would eliminate the ethical conundrum of using stimuli of real-life people (Renaud et al., 2002)

References

- Abel, G. G., Huffman, J., Warberg, B., & Holland, C. L. (1998). Visual reaction time and plethysmography as measures of sexual interest in child molesters. *Sexual Abuse: Journal of Research and Treatment, 10*(2), 81-95. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022063214826>
- Bickle, A., Cameron, C., Hassan, T., Safdar, H., & Khalifa, N. (2021). International overview of phallometric testing for sexual offending behaviour and sexual risk. *BJPsych International, 18*(4) <https://doi.org/10.1192/bji.2021.17>
- Card, R. D., & Olsen, S. E. (1996). Visual plethysmograph stimuli involving children: Rethinking some quasi-logical issues. *Sexual Abuse, 8*(4), 267-271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107906329600800402>
- Dennis, E., Rouleau, J., Renaud, P., Nolet, K., & Saumur, C. (2014). A pilot development of virtual stimuli depicting affective dispositions for penile plethysmography assessment of sex offenders. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 23*(3), 200-208. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2529>
- Laws, D. R., & Gress, C. L. Z. (2004). Seeing things differently: The viewing time alternative to penile plethysmography. *Legal and Criminological Psychology, 9*(2), 183-196. <https://doi.org/10.1348/1355325041719338>
- Kalmus, E., Beech, A. R., & Warberg, B. (2009). Forensic assessment of sexual interest: A review. In D. T. Wilcox (Ed.), *The use of the polygraph in assessing, treating and supervising sex offenders: A practitioner's guide; the use of the polygraph in assessing, treating and supervising sex offenders: A practitioner's guide* (pp. 296-322). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Leah, R., Curry, S., Murphy, L., Bradford, J. B., & Paul, F. J. (2020). A comparison of sexual arousal in men exposed to visual stimuli with and without facial blurring. *Sexual Abuse, 32*(6), 619-633. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063219828784>
- Marshall, W. L. (1996). Assessment, treatment, and theorizing about sex offenders: Developments during the past twenty years and future directions. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 23*(1), 162-199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854896023001011>
- Marshall-Lévesque, S., Rouleau, J., & Renaud, P. (2018). Increasing valid profiles in phallometric assessment of sex offenders with child victims: Combining the strengths of audio stimuli and synthetic characters. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 47*(2), 417-428. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-017-1053-y>
- Renaud, P., Rouleau, J. L., Granger, L., Barsetti, I., & Bouchard, S. (2002). Measuring sexual preference in virtual reality: A pilot study. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 5*(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1089/109493102753685836>