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Abstract

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Using Immersive Virtual Reality and Ecological Psychology
to Probe into Child Molesters' Phenomenology

The integrated theory of sexual offending and the extended mind theory say that one must understand the ecological factors to explain sexual offending. Plus, sexual preferences are linked to recidivism amongst sexual offenders. Goal: compare perceptual-motor patterns (PMP) and sexual arousal (SA) responses of child molester (n=13) and sexually non-deviant subjects (n=29). Penile plethysmography (PPG) was used to assess SA. Five computer-generated stimuli (adult female/male, child female/male, neutral) were used to generate SA. Virtual immersion in 3D was obtained with a CAVE-type immersive system and a 3D helmet. PMP were obtained with an eye-tracking system. Three gaze measures were studied: GRAD (gaze radial angular deviation), GRADV (GRAD velocity) and GRADCV (GRAD coefficient of variability). Four ANOVAs were performed. For PPG, an interaction between group and the sexual stimuli was found ($p < .05$). Principal effects for stimuli and groups on all gaze measures were also observed. This shows that virtual reality could be used to assess deviant SA with child molesters while providing an improved ecological validity. The differences found in the child molesters' PMP might be linked to their deviant SA. More research has to be done on the connection between PMP and sexual recidivism, as it seems to moderate SA.