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Attraction to Physical and Psychological Features of Children in Child-Attracted Persons

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ABSTRACT



In an online survey of 274 self-identified child-attracted persons (CAPs), we examined the attraction ratings given to sets of 9 physical and 12 psychological features of children, and asked CAPs to identify additional features that were not listed. We also examined the relationships between these attraction ratings and attraction to children dimensions (age mono-/polymorphism, exclusivity of attraction to children, and gender attraction), history of falling in love with a child, and detected sexual offending history. There was relatively little differentiation across physical features and psychological features; all averages were approximately 4 or higher on a 5-point scale. Attraction ratings were mostly weakly and inconsistently related to our other study variables. The exception was that CAPs who had fallen in love with a child rated 11 out of 12 psychological features as more attractive than CAPs who had not fallen in love with a child, with small to moderate effect sizes. These two groups did not differ in ratings for physical features. Our qualitative content analysis of participant-suggested features revealed six physical themes (inter alia, face and head, children's bodies) and five psychological themes (inter alia, personality, harmlessness) that were important to CAPs' attraction to children.

Child-attracted persons (CAPs)¹ are sexually and/or romantically attracted to prepubescent or pubescent children, typically children under the age of 14. A growing body of literature focuses on sexual attraction among male CAPs, examining the quantitative extent to which CAPs are sexually attracted to children versus adults, including studies using self-report measures (e.g., Bailey, Bernhard, et al., 2016; Bailey, Hsu, et al., 2016; Grundmann et al., 2016), physiological measures of sexual arousal, such as phallometric assessment (McPhail et al., 2019), and indirect measures of sexual interest such as relative viewing time (e.g., Babchishin et al., 2013; Pedneault et al., 2021; Schmidt et al., 2017).

Despite this growing body of literature, a fundamental question has been relatively unexamined: What do CAPs find attractive about children? A greater understanding of what physical and psychological features of children are attractive to CAPs can clarify the etiology and development of attraction to children.

Physical Features and Sexual Attraction


There is extensive research about the physical features that are considered sexually attractive about adults (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 2019; Eastwick et al., 2014; Weeden & Sabini, 2005). Many hypotheses about what physical features are considered attractive – as markers of potential fertility and health – stem from evolutionary psychology research and are largely based on WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich et al., 2010) samples of participants (Weeden & Sabini, 2005). Attractive adult physical features in heterosexual men and women can be gender/sex²-generic (e.g., facial symmetry, smooth skin; Jones et al., 2001) or gender/sex-dimorphic (e.g., facial hair on adult men; low waist-hip ratio in adult women; Buss & Schmitt, 2019; Little et al., 2002; Singh & Randall, 2007). Physical attractiveness plays an important role for men in the initiation of short term (sexual) relationships (Fisman et al., 2006; Li et al., 2013), as well as long-term relationship satisfaction (Meltzer et al., 2014).

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¹There are ongoing debates about terminology to describe people who are attracted to children. "Person with pedohebephilia" or "Pedohebephilic person" is in line with APA's person first language guidelines. Minor Attracted Person (MAP) is endorsed on some of the platforms we surveyed. "Pedophile" or "child lover" were the most endorsed terms in Martijn et al. (2020). While MAP is increasingly being used, this term is not appropriate in this study as we specifically recruited individuals who are attracted to prepubescent and pubescent children, excluding individuals attracted to postpubescent minors, which would include many adolescents. We therefore chose to use "Child Attracted Persons (CAPs)" throughout this manuscript. Much less is known about female or gender diverse CAPs, so we use CAPs in this paper to refer to men who are sexually and/or romantically attracted to children.

²See Schudson et al. (2019) for a discussion of the conceptualization of gender/sex.

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed on the [publisher's website](#)

Clinicians and early researchers inferred that body size and shape are important physical factors in sexual attraction to children (e.g., Freund, 1967a, 1967b; Freund et al., 1991; Langevin et al., 1985). To our knowledge, only one quantitative study has been published that examined subjective descriptions of both physical and psychological features of children that a sample of 77 CAPs found attractive (Wilson & Cox, 1983). The authors found that good looks (unspecified), smooth skin (hairlessness), eyes, and slim stature were endorsed as attractive by the most participants. Wilson and Cox (1983), however, recruited from a small and highly selected sample of members of a grassroots organization, the Pedophile Information Exchange, and the study was conducted almost 40 years ago. Two more recent qualitative studies investigated which physical features of children are considered attractive by CAPs (Goode, 2009; Houtepen et al., 2016), mentioning features such as “their beauty” or “bodily shapes” (Houtepen et al., 2016, p. 7), and “size, proportion, smooth skin, softness and hairlessness” or “undeveloped sex organs” (Goode, 2009, p. 98).

Psychological Features and Sexual Attraction

There is a wide array of psychological features, such as kindness, humor, and honesty that are considered attractive in adults (Lippa, 2007). Some attractive psychological features seem gender/sex-generic (e.g., kindness; Lukaszewski & Roney, 2010), while others are more gender/sex-specific or gender/sex-stereotyped (e.g., assertiveness in men, sensitivity in women; Koenig, 2018; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). While physical features are more important in the evaluation of desirable short-term partners, psychological features are more important in the evaluation of desirable long-term partners (Fletcher et al., 2004; Valentine et al., 2020). Psychological features are especially important for the formation and continuation of long-term mating relationships (Buss & Schmitt, 2019; Regan et al., 2000). In other words, physical features may be more related to sexual attraction, whereas psychological features may be more related to romantic attraction.

The role that psychological features play in attraction to children is unclear. CAPs have identified a broad range of attractive psychological features of children, like “openness, spontaneity, honesty, or naïveté” (Houtepen et al., 2016, p. 7), gentleness, warmth, generosity, and innocence (Li, 1991), and “the playfulness, curiosity, open-mindedness, energy, excitement and pleasure which children are seen to embody” (Goode, 2009, p. 102). Wilson and Cox (1983) reported similar themes, with innocence, openness, curiosity, and spontaneity endorsed most frequently by the CAPs in their sample.

Current Study

The aim of this study was to extend and update research examining the physical and psychological features of children that self-identified CAPs rate as attractive. The current study’s sample partly overlaps with the sample included in Martijn et al. (2020); see the procedure section for more information. As in Martijn et al. (2020), we examined sexual attraction to children across several attraction dimensions – distinguishing between those who were attracted to one minor age category

(monomorphic attraction, i.e., pedophilia) or multiple minor age categories (polymorphic attraction, i.e., pedohebephilia and pedohebe-ephebophilia); those who were exclusively or non-exclusively attracted to children; and those who were attracted to boys, girls, or boys and girls. We also included a history of having fallen in love with a child. Due to its potential clinical and forensic significance, the association between sexual offense history and ratings of physical and psychological attraction was also examined in the current study.

Age Attraction Mono-/Polymorphism

Previous research found that age attraction polymorphism – being attracted to multiple minor age categories – is common among CAPs (Martijn et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2019). Pedophilia (attraction to prepubescent children) on its own (monomorphic attraction) appears to be rare, while pedohebephilia (attraction to both prepubescent and pubescent children) or pedohebe-ephebophilia (attraction to prepubescent children, pubescent children, and post-pubescent adolescents) are more common. Age attraction polymorphism may be relevant to physical and psychological attraction to children, as someone who is attracted to, for example, both prepubescent and pubescent children may be less focused on age-specific features than someone who is sexually attracted to prepubescent children only.

Exclusivity

Individuals who are exclusively attracted to children may rate attraction to physical and psychological features of children differently than individuals who are non-exclusively attracted to children (i.e., attracted to both children and adults). For instance, those who are non-exclusively attracted to children may have relatively lower attraction to physical features and a higher attraction to psychological features than those who are exclusively attracted to children, as non-exclusive CAPs may rate age-generic features higher than age-specific features.

Gender Attraction

Boy- or boy-and-girl attraction is reported much more frequently among CAPs than homo- or bisexual attraction in men attracted to other adults (Hall & Hall, 2007; Martijn et al., 2020). This may be explained by the fact that prepubertal or pubertal boys and girls are physically more alike than adult men and women are (Seto, 2018). This would suggest a similarity in attraction to physical features according to gender attraction among CAPs. This may not be the case for gender attraction and psychological features that are gender-stereotyped. For example, we may expect that boy-attracted CAPs rate vitality and curiosity as more attractive, while girl-attracted CAPs rate warmth and friendliness as more attractive (Koenig, 2018).

Falling in Love with a Child

Two previous studies found that a majority of their internet-recruited samples had fallen in love with a child younger than 14 when they were an adult (Bailey, Bernhard, et al., 2016; Martijn et al., 2020). Given evidence of the importance of psychological attraction for the formation of adult-adult long-term romantic relationships (Lippa, 2007), and when “falling in love” is used as a proxy for romantic feelings, we expect that

CAPs who have fallen in love with a child may rate psychological features as more attractive than CAPs who have not fallen in love with a child.

Sexual Offense History

Many individuals who have sexually offended against children are not CAPs, and some CAPs have not sexually offended against children (Seto, 2018). Attraction and behavior are not synonymous; however, sexual attraction to children is an important motivating factor in sexual offending against children (Seto, 2019), and thus there may also be a relationship between having committed a sexual offense and attraction to certain physical and psychological features. For instance, it is possible that those who rate physical features higher might be more highly motivated to engage in sexual contact, especially if these physical features are child-specific, such as the absence of secondary sex characteristics. Following this, people with a sexual offense history might rate physical features higher than people without a sexual offense history. At the same time, both Bailey, Bernhard, et al. (2016) and Martijn et al. (2020) reported a small to moderate effect size for the association between sexual offending history and falling in love with a child, so we might also expect that those with a sexual offense history rate psychological features higher as well.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited online and could choose to participate in this study, the study described in Martijn et al. (2020), or both. A total of 388 participants responded to this survey; this study used data from 274 self-identified CAPs. Participants were excluded for one or more of the following reasons (exclusion criteria could therefore exceed 100%): 12 (3.1%) withdrew from this survey; 22 (5.7%) participants identified as women, 15 (3.9%) identified as gender non-binary persons, and 7 (1.8%) preferred not to indicate their gender identity³; 23 (5.9%) indicated they experienced higher attraction to adults relative to children; 3 (0.8%) did not pass our age validity check; 3 (0.8%) did not pass our validity check regarding attraction to children 11 or younger (these participants indicated they were attracted to children 11 or younger, but subsequently did not rate any of their features as attractive (i.e., not higher than 1 [*not attractive at all*] on a 5-point Likert scale) and did not offer any additional suggestions; 25 (6.4%) did not pass validity questions suggesting inattentive responding; and 15 (3.9%) were excluded due to disparity in quality between Globaleaks⁴ and Checkbox.

³We decided to only include male CAPs in this study, given the paucity of research on female and gender diverse CAPs, and given the small number of female and gender diverse CAPs in this study precluded meaningful statistical analyses using similar groupings.

⁴We conducted a pilot of this survey on Tor (The Onion Router; <https://www.torproject.org/>), via Globaleaks (<https://www.globaleaks.org/>). Participants perceived several security issues with this platform and the interface did not allow for conditional logic, leading to possible bias and resulting in low response rates ($N = 15$). We therefore decided to discontinue the Tor version and remove those participants from analyses.

Table 1. Demographic information.

Variables	n (%)
Age (n= 274)	18–24
	63 (23.0%)
	25–29
	45 (16.4%)
	30–39
	71 (25.9%)
	40–49
Ethnicity (n= 255)	41 (15.0%)
	50–59
	36 (13.1%)
	60–69
	15 (5.5%)
	70+
	3 (1.1%)
Education (n= 258)	White
	219 (85.9%)
	Black
	5 (2.0%)
	Hispanic/Latinx
	17 (6.7%)
	South-East Asian
Employment (n= 248)	1 (0.4%)
	Indigenous/Aboriginal
	2 (0.8%)
	Mixed ethnicity
	11 (4.3%)
	Primary school
	1 (0.4%)
Relationship (n= 270)	High school
	61 (23.6%)
	Community college
	53 (20.5%)
	BA/Undergraduate degree
	90 (34.9%)
	MA/Graduate degree
Offenses (arrested, charged, convicted) (n= 268)	53 (20.5%)
	Unemployed
	29 (11.7%)
	Part-time employment (< 37.5 h/w)
	31 (12.5%)
	Full-time employment (≥ 37.5 h/w)
	130 (52.4%)
Relationship (n= 270)	Student
	43 (17.3%)
	Retired
	15 (6.0%)
	I have never been in a relationship
	62 (23.0%)
	Single
Offenses (arrested, charged, convicted) (n= 268)	127 (47.0%)
	Relationship (living separately)
	17 (6.3%)
	Relationship (living together)
	12 (4.4%)
	Married/Common law
	31 (11.5%)
Offenses (arrested, charged, convicted) (n= 268)	Separated
	9 (3.3%)
	Divorced
	10 (3.7%)
	Widowed
	2 (0.7%)
	No offense history
Offenses (arrested, charged, convicted) (n= 268)	209 (76.3%)
	Any offense history
	54 (20.1%)
	Property offense, such as theft
	11 (4.1%)
	Offense against a person, such as assault
	6 (2.2%)
Offenses (arrested, charged, convicted) (n= 268)	Any sexual offense history
	41 (15.3%)
	Contact sexual offense
	15 (5.6%)
	Non-contact sexual offense (e.g., voyeurism)
	3 (1.1%)
	Child sexual exploitation material offense
	31 (11.6%)

BA = Bachelor's degree. MA = Master's degree.

Most survey participants were younger than 40 (65%), White (86%), had post-secondary education (76%), were employed (full or part time; 65%), and were not in a relationship (77%; single, separated, divorced, widowed, or never been in a relationship; see Table 1).

Measures

Attraction Dimensions

Participants rated their sexual attraction toward children relative to adults on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 = *exclusively attracted to children*, 4 = *equally attracted to children and adults*, and 7 = *exclusively attracted to adults*. Then, participants rated their attraction to boys and girls on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 = *exclusively attracted to boys*, 4 = *equally attracted to boys and girls*, and 7 = *exclusively attracted to girls*. Next, depending on indicated interest in boys, girls, or both, participants rated how attracted they were to boys and/or girls ages 0 to 3, 4 to 7, 8 to 11, 12 to 14, and 15 to 18 on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = *not attractive at all* and 5 = *very attractive*. Last,

participants indicated whether they had ever fallen in love with a child 14 or younger while they themselves were 18 or older.

Physical Features

Participants rated 9 physical features for children 11 years old or younger on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = *not attractive at all* to 5 = *very attractive*. The options for physical features were partly informed by features highlighted in past qualitative and quantitative literature (Goode, 2009; Houtepen et al., 2016; Wilson & Cox, 1983) and included buttocks, complexion, face shape, height, look of the sex organs, slimness, smooth skin, voice pitch, and weight. Participants were also given the opportunity to indicate any additional physical features they found attractive.

Psychological Features

Participants rated 12 psychological features for children 11 years old or younger on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = *not attractive at all* to 5 = *very attractive*. The options for psychological features were partly informed by features highlighted in past qualitative and quantitative literature (Goode, 2009; Houtepen et al., 2016; Li, 1991; Wilson & Cox, 1983) and included charm, companionship, curiosity, friendliness, honesty, innocence, lack of inhibition, openness, sense of humor, spontaneity, vitality/enthusiasm, and warmth/affection. Participants were also given the opportunity to indicate any additional psychological features they found attractive.

Procedure

The study was advertised on 10 internet platforms (list available on request) and recruited CAPs who were attracted to children 14 or younger from December 2017 to March 2018. The platforms were found through online searches and referrals. Some participants independently cross-posted the survey to other platforms. Moderators of several platforms reviewed the questionnaire before posting, but no changes were requested or made. The questionnaire was hosted on Checkbox, as this software allows for non-tracking of IP addresses and is hosted on a server owned by the research group, to ensure physical security. Upon entering the introductory survey page, participants could choose to either participate in this study, the study described in Martijn et al. (2020), or both. After giving informed consent, participants proceeded to the survey. Questions regarding age and attraction indicators (age attraction mono-/polymorphism, exclusivity, gender attraction, and history of having fallen in love with a child) were mandatory, and all other questions were optional. Ethical approval for this study was granted by The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research Ethics Board (REB number 2017040).

Data Analysis

This study used both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the data. For the quantitative analysis, means and standard deviations were calculated for each physical and psychological feature, according to their specific attraction dimensions (age attraction mono-/polymorphism, exclusivity, and gender attraction), history of having fallen in love with a child, and sexual offense history. All quantitative analyses

were conducted by both the first and fourth author to ensure accuracy. Effect sizes for all comparisons were reported using Cohen's *d*. Considering the paucity of research in this area, we were not able to use research informed Cohen's *d* thresholds, so we used the thresholds suggested by Cohen (1988) for small ($d = 0.20$), moderate ($d = 0.50$), and large ($d = 0.70$) effect sizes when interpreting the results. Between-features effect sizes can be found in Tables S1 and S2 of the Online Supplementary Materials. Interpretation focused on magnitude of effect sizes.

The purpose of the qualitative analysis was to supplement the quantitative findings by conducting a content analysis, providing a descriptive overview of the qualitative data. The first and fourth author analyzed the data from 143 (52%) participants who provided additional suggestions of physical and psychological features that they found attractive. The first step was detailed readings of the data, then identifying and documenting descriptive codes, patterns, and frequencies within the data. The descriptive codes were organized thematically, and themes were discussed and fine-tuned until consensus was reached. We conducted chi-square analyses to investigate whether any of the attraction dimensions (age attraction mono-/polymorphism, exclusivity of attraction, and gender attraction), history of having fallen in love with a child, and sexual offense history were related to the likelihood of adding suggestions to either the physical or psychological features. To examine the strength of the association we used Cramer's *V*; values of .06, .17 and .29 represent small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

Results

Attraction dimensions, history of having falling in love with a child, and sexual offense history

Age Attraction Mono-/Polymorphism

All participants were attracted to prepubescent children, pubescent children, or both. Some participants were also attracted to postpubescent adolescents and/or adults. We defined pedophilia as those with a sexual interest in children aged 0 to 11, hebephilia as those with a sexual interest in children aged 12 to 14, and ephebophilia as those with a sexual interest in ages 15 to 18, recognizing that age is an imperfect proxy of pubertal status (Tanner, 1990) and thus the relevant chronophilia (age attraction; see Seto, 2017). Of the 274 participants, 254 (93%) could be classified in one of three categories: 26% ($n = 72$) as pedophilic, 41% ($n = 111$) as pedohebephilic, and 26% ($n = 71$) as pedohebe-ephebophilic. The remaining 7% could be classified as hebephilic (2%; $n = 5$), hebe-ephebophilic (5%; $n = 13$), or pedo-ephebophilic (1%; $n = 2$). To facilitate meaningful comparisons, analyses involving age attraction mono-/polymorphism were based on the sample of 254 participants classified into pedo-, pedohebe-, or pedohebe-ephebophilia groups.

Exclusivity

The majority (79%) of participants were non-exclusively attracted to children, whereas 21% ($n = 57$) were exclusively attracted to children. The largest group (43%; $n = 119$) was strongly attracted to children. Furthermore, 23% ($n = 62$) was preferentially attracted to children, and the smallest

group (13%, $n = 36$) were equally attracted to children and adults.

Gender Attraction

Half of the participants were attracted to boys as well as girls (49%; $n = 134$). Approximately one quarter of participants were exclusively attracted to boys (27%; $n = 73$), and the rest were exclusively attracted to girls (24%; $n = 67$).

History of Having Fallen in Love with a Child

The majority of the participants had fallen in love with a child aged 14 years or younger while they themselves were 18 years or older, at least once in their lifetime (74%; $n = 202$).

Sexual Offense History

Most (98%, $n = 268/274$) participants answered questions regarding their offense history. Fifty-four participants (20%) had a history of being arrested, charged, or convicted of any offense, whether sexual or nonsexual. Forty-one participants (15%) had a history of any sexual offense: 15 participants (6%) had been arrested, charged, or convicted for a contact sexual offense; 3 (1%) for a non-contact sexual offense, such as voyeurism; and 31 (12%) for a child sexual exploitation material offense (legally known in Canada and the United States as a child pornography offense); some participants committed multiple types of sexual offenses. To increase power in the following analyses, we combined the 41 participants with any sexual offense history.

Physical Features

Effect sizes for the ratings of physical features across attraction dimensions, history of having fallen in love with a child, and sexual offense history can be found in the Online Supplementary Materials S3–S7. Ratings were highest for smooth skin ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.64$) and lowest for height

($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.01$). Physical features from highest to lowest in ratings were smooth skin, face shape, slimness, buttocks, complexion, voice pitch, look of the sex organs, weight, and height (see Table 2; more information on the effect sizes of the relative differences between all physical features can be found in the Online Supplementary Materials Table S1).

Age Attraction Mono-/Polymorphism

Effect sizes for physical features across age preferences (pedo-, pedohebe-, and pedohebe-ephebophilia) were negligible to small, with no discernable patterns. Cohen's d ranged from -0.23 to 0.28 (absolute⁵ d 25th percentile $d = 0.04$, 50th percentile $d = 0.08$, 75th percentile $d = 0.15$; see Table S3 and Figure S1 in the Online Supplementary Materials).

Exclusivity

Effect sizes for physical feature ratings across exclusivity revealed no discernable patterns. Effect sizes ranged from negligible to moderate, with ds from -0.57 to 0.53 (absolute d 25th percentile $d = 0.08$, 50th percentile $d = 0.19$, 75th percentile $d = 0.28$; see Table S4 and Figure S2 in the Online Supplementary Materials).

Gender Attraction

Effect sizes across gender attraction for physical features ranged from negligible to moderate, with ds ranging from -0.52 to 0.58 (absolute d 25th percentile $d = 0.10$, 50th percentile $d = 0.13$, 75th percentile $d = 0.28$; see Table S5 and Figure S3 in the Online Supplementary Materials).

History of Having Fallen in Love with a Child

Effect sizes for physical feature ratings across history of having fallen in love with a child (yes/no) were generally small, with no discernable patterns, ranging from $d = -0.19$ to $d = 0.34$ (absolute d 25th percentile $d = 0.07$, 50th percentile $d = 0.09$, 75th percentile $d = 0.16$); see Table S6 and Figure S4 in the Online Supplementary Materials).

Sexual Offense History

Overall, participants without a sexual offense history rated 7 out of 9 physical features as more attractive than participants with a sexual offense history, with negligible to small effect sizes (ranging from $d = -0.19$ to $d = 0.15$, absolute d 25th percentile $d = 0.06$, 50th percentile $d = 0.15$, 75th percentile $d = 0.16$; see Table S7 and Figure S5 of the Online Supplementary Materials).

Psychological Features

All effect sizes describing psychological feature ratings across attraction dimensions, history of having fallen in love with a child, and sexual offense history can be found in Tables S8–S12 of the Online Supplementary Materials. Ratings were highest for warmth/affection ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.68$) and lowest for lack of inhibition ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.06$). Highest to lowest ratings of psychological features were warmth/affection, curiosity, vitality/enthusiasm, friendliness, openness, companionship, charm, spontaneity, honesty, sense of humor, innocence, and lack of inhibition (see Table 2; more information on the

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and median overall ratings of physical and psychological features.

Physical Feature	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Median
Smooth skin ($n = 274$)	4.68 (0.64)	5
Face shape ($n = 274$)	4.46 (0.78)	5
Slimness ($n = 274$)	4.31 (0.88)	5
Buttocks ($n = 272$)	4.24 (1.03)	5
Complexion ($n = 271$)	4.21 (0.92)	4
Voice pitch ($n = 274$)	4.15 (0.99)	4
Look of the sex organs ($n = 270$)	4.04 (1.25)	5
Weight ($n = 274$)	4.02 (0.96)	4
Height ($n = 274$)	3.99 (1.01)	4
Psychological Feature	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Median
Warmth/affection ($n = 274$)	4.67 (0.68)	5
Curiosity ($n = 274$)	4.59 (0.72)	5
Vitality/enthusiasm ($n = 274$)	4.55 (0.75)	5
Friendliness ($n = 273$)	4.48 (0.79)	5
Openness ($n = 274$)	4.45 (0.80)	5
Companionship ($n = 274$)	4.35 (0.91)	5
Charm ($n = 273$)	4.34 (0.88)	5
Spontaneity ($n = 274$)	4.32 (0.92)	5
Honesty ($n = 274$)	4.14 (1.02)	4
Sense of humor ($n = 273$)	4.03 (1.05)	4
Innocence ($n = 270$)	3.99 (1.21)	4
Lack of inhibition ($n = 270$)	3.97 (1.06)	4

⁵Distribution of the effect sizes throughout the results uses absolute d values.

effect sizes of the relative differences between all psychological features can be found in the Online Supplementary Materials Table S2).

Age Attraction Mono-/Polymorphism

Pedohebephilic participants had the highest attraction ratings on 10 out of 12 psychological features compared to pedophilic or pedohebe-ephebophilic participants, with mostly small effect sizes. Effect sizes ranged from $d = -0.28$ to $d = 0.41$ (absolute d 25th percentile $d = 0.06$, 50th percentile $d = 0.12$, 75th percentile $d = 0.23$; see Table S8 and Figure S6 in the Online Supplementary Materials).

Exclusivity

The highest attraction ratings were given by participants exclusively attracted to children on 8 out of 12 psychological features compared to the other exclusivity groups. Effect sizes ranged from small to moderate, $d = -0.33$ to $d = 0.58$ (absolute d 25th percentile $d = 0.10$, 50th percentile $d = 0.17$, 75th percentile $d = 0.33$; see Table S9 and Figure S7 in the Online Supplementary Materials).

Gender Attraction

Boy-attracted participants had the highest ratings for psychological features for 8 out of 12 features when compared to the other gender attraction groups, with mostly small effect sizes (d s ranging from -0.33 to 0.38 , absolute d 25th percentile $d = 0.11$, 50th percentile $d = 0.18$, 75th percentile $d = 0.22$; see Table S10 and Figure S8 in the Online Supplementary Materials).

History of Having Fallen in Love with a Child

Participants with a history of having fallen in love with a child rated 11 out of 12 psychological features (all features except innocence) as more attractive than participants without a history of having fallen in love with a child. Effect sizes ranged from small to moderate ($d = -0.14$ to 0.55 , absolute d 25th percentile $d = 0.28$, 50th percentile $d = 0.37$, 75th percentile $d = 0.41$; see Table S11 and Figure S9 in the Online Supplementary Materials).

Sexual Offense History

Overall, those with a sexual offense history rated 11 out of 12 psychological features as more attractive than those without a sexual offense history, with effect sizes indicating negligible to small differences ($d = -0.02$ to 0.42 , absolute d 25th percentile $d = 0.06$, 50th percentile $d = 0.14$, 75th percentile $d = 0.22$; see Table S12 and Figure S10 in the Online Supplementary Materials).

Qualitative Analysis

Participants had the option to suggest any physical or psychological features they found attractive about children 11 or younger that were not already listed. In total, 143 (52%) offered additional suggestions: 136 (50%) participants suggested additional physical features and 44 (16%) participants suggested additional psychological features (within these, 38 [14%]

participants suggested both additional physical and psychological features). Participants who added suggestions did not differ from participants who did not add suggestions on attraction dimensions (age attraction mono-/polymorphism, exclusivity of attraction, and gender attraction), history of having fallen in love with a child, and sexual offense history (See Tables S13 and S14 in the Online Supplementary Materials; V ranging from .01 to .10, absolute V 25th percentile $V = .02$, 50th percentile $V = .06$, 75th percentile $V = .07$).

Additional Physical Suggestions

There were 352 additional physical suggestions by 136 participants. Of these, 327 (93%) could be classified into six overarching themes, further divided into 29 descriptive codes (see Table 3). The theme *face and head* (number of suggestions [k] = 114; number of participants [n] = 57) could be divided into six descriptive codes, including eyes, hair, mouth/lips, teeth, nose, and ears; the theme *body parts* ($k = 92$; $n = 48$) could be divided into ten descriptive codes related to the body from the neck down, including limbs, feet, belly, hands, chest, neck, shoulders, waist/hips, genitalia, and back. *Children's bodies* ($k = 50$; $n = 36$) refer to bodily features that are specific to children's bodies, with four descriptive codes: the absence or development of the breasts, absence of facial, body, or pubic hair, head-to-body-ratio of children, and deciduous teeth. The theme *body shape* ($k = 32$; $n = 26$) comprised three descriptive codes that described more overall encompassing features of the body, indicating a certain compositionality of one body part relating to another body part: body composition (e.g., chubbiness, muscularity, leanness), overarching facial features, and the curviness of the body. The theme *body movement* ($k = 25$; $n = 21$) included three descriptive codes: smile, gait, and facial expressions; and last, the *other* theme ($k = 14$; $n = 13$), comprised three descriptive codes, namely accessories and clothing, "everything," and smell.

Responding Style. Within these categories, three distinctive styles emerged on *how* these physical features were described. Not all physical feature suggestions fit these three styles. The *simple* style encompassed simple descriptions, for instance, "hair," "smile," "legs (shorter legs proportionate to the rest of the body)," or "absence of body hair." Descriptions in the *descriptive* style were more detailed, for instance, by adding adjectives to the nouns, such as "long hair," "slender limbs," "chipped and/or mismatched nail polish," or "eyes (and sincere look in their eyes)." The *lyrical* style comprised descriptions of children that were elaborate, describing children's physical features in an esthetic, erotic, or doting way. These descriptions were explicitly about children. Examples were "The way the light and shadows play with her shoulder-blades," "I love a tight, muscular body, especially the butt"; or "I absolutely adore the way boys smile, that big cheeky grin or that small, delicate smile."

Additional Psychological Suggestions

There were 94 additional suggestions for psychological features from 44 participants. Of these, 90 (96%) could be classified within five overarching themes made up of ten descriptive codes (see Table 4). The *personality* theme ($k = 43$; $n = 26$)

Table 3. Qualitative analysis and examples of direct quotes of physical features suggested by participants.^a

Theme	Descriptive code	Simple Responses	Descriptive Responses	Lyrical Responses
Face and head k= 114; n = 57	Eyes (k= 45) Hair (k= 42) Mouth/lips (k= 12) Teeth (k= 7) Nose (k= 5)	Eyes Hair	Bright eyes High ponytail swishing around	Eyes. There is a certain innocence in children eyes I find attractive. Hair seems to be a big part of my attractions. The fact that blonde hair normally starts out almost white before getting darker as time goes on is awesome. I like other hair colors too; every face shape and hair color can put on a cool hair style.
Body parts k= 92; n = 48	Limbs (k= 23) Feet (k= 15) Belly (k= 15) Hands (k= 12) Chest (k= 8) Neck (k= 7) Shoulders (k= 5) Waist/hips (k= 5) Genitalia (k= 2) Back (k= 2)	Hands and feet Belly	Hairy legs and arms as evidence of not shaving. Bare feet and smooth legs	I love the look of his neck and the smoothness all over his entire body. At the risk of appearing unseemly, the size differential of a fully developed, fully matured, and fully aroused male member's accommodation by his small friend's anatomic proportions
Children's bodies k= 50; n= 36	Chest development (k= 18) Hair growth (k= 18) Body proportions (k= 7) Deciduous teeth (k= 7)	Absence of facial and body hair. Head-to-body ratio	Lack of body hair (particularly, pubic hair) breast/chest size (mostly flat) as compared to older girls/adults	I absolutely adore the way boys smile, that big cheeky grin or that small, delicate smile. I think it's super cute when they start losing their baby teeth and they give me that gap-toothed grin. Having rarely seen prepubescent vulvae, i cannot say it's a main feature i'd find attractive, but there is hair there and if i were to fantasize about that age, their downy pubic hair would be very attractive to me. I tend to be attracted to kids who are slender but athletically built – tight abs and a bit of muscularity to the chest. Not just the face shape, but also a child's features. Their nose, their eyes, their mouth ... those subtle things that you never realize are so immensely attractive until they're out of whack. Finally and totally their smile. Bubbiness; the energetics that radiates from girls
Body shape k= 32; n = 26	Body composition (k= 20) Facial features/Size of facial features (k= 7) Curviness (k= 5)	Athletic build Facial features	Nice curve in lumbar region Lack of bigger muscles	
Body movement k= 25; n = 21	Laugh/smile (k= 11) The way they move (k= 11) Facial expressions (k= 3)	Smile Gait	Gait. eg. skipping, dancing	
Other k= 14; n = 13	Accessories (k= 6) Everything (k= 5) Smell/pheromones (k= 3)	Glasses Everything	Chipped and/or mismatched nail polish Childish clothing.	The way he is dressed, his confidence, his x-factor if you will. I just love everything about a young boys body from his head to his toes. I am so very drawn to them in a physical and sexual way.

^ak= number of suggestions. n = number of participants.

*italicized responses in tables per theme are examples of direct quotes of suggestions given by participants and are not an exhaustive list of all relevant quotes.

Table 4. Qualitative analysis and examples of direct quotes of psychological features suggested by participants.^a

Theme	Descriptive code	Simple Responses	Lyrical Responses
Personality <i>k</i> = 43; <i>n</i> = 26	Boldness (<i>k</i> = 15)	Bossy	If I think about qualities that make me desire a girl, then I am definitely drawn to super-confident, extraverted, super-elegant, dominant, almost bratty but composed and yet full of energy, spoiled, posh girls with a sense of entitlement. I love it when a child is intelligent, but not overly-open about it – I don't like it when they're actively trying to be, I love it when they just naturally are, when sometimes not even they know it.
	Inventiveness (<i>k</i> = 12)	Smart	I am particularly attracted to those who are more sensitive: the loud, unfiltered class clowns are not psychologically attractive.
	Sensitivity (<i>k</i> = 11)	Sensitivity, thoughtfulness, imagination	I like kids that are not cute more like tomboys, or Pippi Longstocking. No puppets but exploring and powerful persons. Some children want and need a companion. I myself have a soft spot for girls who are lonely or mis-understood. I can identify with their experiences and offer helpful advice or just a shoulder to hug and cry on when needed.
Role-of-importance in child's life <i>k</i> = 16; <i>n</i> = 10	Playfulness (<i>k</i> = 5)	Desire for adventure	Like curiosity, their ability to be molded (I would like to coin the phrase 'teachability' to describe it). I like the thought of a friend I can teach about the world. And I mean this in a non-sexual way.
	Vulnerability (<i>k</i> = 9)	Need for companionship.	Their laugh is just so calming, and they are so innocent and are genuine in what they say and do. They don't want to do harm, just play and help. I love them.
	Teachability (<i>k</i> = 7)	Manipulability.	Lack of inhibition as regards nudity, showing their body and hugging.
Harmlessness <i>k</i> = 11; <i>n</i> = 10		I also enjoy their willingness to learn.	
		Lack of preconceptions and prejudices	
		High sex drive, child's fascination with genitals	
Children's sexuality <i>k</i> = 6; <i>n</i> = 3	Children's sexuality (<i>k</i> = 6)		I love that young boys that I am attracted to lack everything that an adult has, I love that boys are so themselves and haven't learned to be fake like adults always seem to be.
	Adult-opposed (<i>k</i> = 11)	Lack of drama, they experience negative emotion, but get over it quickly	
	Adult-likeness (<i>k</i> = 3)	Willingness to participate in adult activities and others	Psychologically, I prefer more mature personalities over less mature personalities. Certain aspects of this chart are signs of more maturity rather than less maturity, such as honesty or curiosity, given the context I'm aware of

^a*k* = number of suggestions, *n* = number of participants.

^bItalicized responses in tables per theme are examples of direct quotes of suggestions given by participants and are not an exhaustive list of all relevant quotes.

spanned character traits related to four descriptive codes: the descriptive code *boldness* encompasses examples of the child being "bratty," dominant, and exerting confidence, "... When it comes to desire I am most fired up by incompatibility, a clear imbalance of power in the girl's favor. Basically, I desire a dominant girl." The descriptive code *inventiveness* describes children as being inventive, intelligent, and creative, "I love it when a child is intelligent, but not overly-open about it – I don't like it when they're actively trying to be, I love it when they just naturally are, when sometimes not even they know it." The descriptive code of *sensitivity* describes shyness, sensitivity, and kindness in children, for instance, "I am particularly attracted to those who are more sensitive: the loud, unfiltered class clowns are not psychologically attractive." Last, *playfulness* describes an attraction to children who are playful, energetic, and adventurous, for example, "I like kids that are not cute more like tomboys, or Pippi Longstocking. No puppets but exploring and powerful persons."

The theme *role-of-importance in child's life* (*k* = 16; *n* = 10) describes participants' attraction to playing a role of importance in children's lives in two descriptive codes. The descriptive code *vulnerability* describes the dyadic interaction of protecting or supporting vulnerable or dependable children, for example, "Some children want and need a companion. I myself have a soft spot for girls who are lonely or mis-understood. I can identify with their experiences and offer helpful advice or just a shoulder to hug and cry on when needed." The other emergent descriptive code was *teachability*, describing how participants liked to be a teacher or mentor in a child's life, teaching them certain skills or molding their development, for instance, "Their ability to be molded (I would like to coin the phrase 'teachability' to describe it). I like the thought of a friend I can teach about the world. And I mean this in a non-sexual way."

The theme *harmlessness* (*k* = 11; *n* = 10) describes attraction to children because of their perceived harmlessness, innocence, and being non-judgmental. Participants described children as kind and without ill-intent, "Their laugh is just so calming, and they are so innocent and are genuine in what they say and do. They don't want to do harm, just play and help."

The theme *children's sexuality* (*k* = 6; *n* = 3) included descriptions of anything that had to do with children having their own sexuality or interest in sex, "High sex drive, child's fascination with genitals."

The theme *adult-comparisons* (*k* = 14; *n* = 11) had two descriptive codes: the descriptive code *adult-opposed* describes an attraction to qualities that are seen as opposed to adults. This could be in the realm of aversion, for example, "I love that young boys that I am attracted to lack everything that an adult has, I love that boys are so themselves and haven't learned to be fake like adults always seem to be." *Adult-likeness* described attraction to qualities of maturity and adult-likeness in children: "Psychologically, I prefer more mature personalities over less mature personalities."

Responding Style. Unlike the physical feature suggestions, psychological feature suggestions often clustered together and the delineation between themes and descriptive codes was not always clear. Another difference was that the majority of participants gave extensive descriptions in their suggestions of psychological features (rather than simple or one-word

answers); further inspection of the data revealed that these same participants also gave extensive descriptions in their suggestions of physical features.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore and describe physical and psychological features that are rated as attractive in a survey of men who reported attraction to prepubescent and/or pubescent children. The current study partially replicated previous research by Wilson and Cox (1983), Freund (1967a, 1967b, 1991), and Langevin et al. (1985). We extended this research by examining the association of attraction ratings to different attraction dimensions, history of falling in love with a child, and sexual offense history, and by qualitatively examining additional physical and psychological feature suggestions.

Physical Features

Ratings across physical features were high overall, with little spread, and did not vary substantially across attraction dimensions. The absence of robust differentiation might be explained by the inclusion of both physical features describing differences between children and adults, such as height, weight, and look of the sex organs – physical features deemed most important by experts like Freund (1967a, 1967b) and Langevin et al. (1985), and as most attractive in Wilson and Cox's (1983) study – and features that could be described as age-generic (smooth skin, face shape). There might be differences in how CAPs rate attractive features that differentiate between children and adults (e.g., height) or that are age-generic (e.g., facial symmetry), and idiosyncratic preferences of CAPs to specific features *within* children as a group (such as, blonde hair, deciduous teeth, or chubbiness).

To illustrate this point by analogy, asking straight men what they find physically attractive about adult women compared to adult men might identify body size, shape, and appearance of the genitals as important features. But asking straight men what they find physically attractive among adult women might identify hair color, breast size, and curviness as important. Similarly, CAPs in our study may have been thinking more about within-child preferences, where differences between children and adults were presumed. Youthfulness cues and neotenous facial features could be particularly important in pedophilic attraction (Quinsey & Lalumière, 1995), which may explain the extensive suggestions by CAPs regarding facial features (especially eyes) in children.

The qualitative analysis condensed the participants' suggestions into six physical themes: face and head, body parts, children's bodies, body shape, body movement, and other. Most suggestions were about face and body parts, such as eyes or limbs, while other suggestions were child-age-specific, such as deciduous teeth, head-to-body-ratio, and absence of breast development. Notable was the different ways in which these suggestions were described, from simple, one-word answers to lyrical descriptions of children. These lyrical descriptions of children by CAPs were also remarked on by Goode (2009) and Li (1991). Inherent to these descriptions were the differences between adults and children; for example, mentioning the smallness of children's features or underlining that the described features

were specifically attractive in children. CAPs who added physical feature suggestions did not differ on attraction dimensions, history of falling in love with a child, or sexual offense history from CAPs who did not add physical feature suggestions.

Psychological Features

Mirroring the findings for physical features, ratings across psychological features were high overall, with no robust differentiation across attraction dimensions. While pedohebephilic, exclusively attracted, and boy-attracted CAPs rated psychological features somewhat higher than their respective comparison groups, the effect sizes were small.

The qualitative analysis condensed the participants' suggestions into five psychological themes: personality, role-of-importance in child's life, harmlessness, children's sexuality, and adult-comparisons, with distinctive differences in description styles. CAPs who added psychological feature suggestions did not differ on attraction dimensions, history of falling in love with a child, or sexual offense history from CAPs who did not add psychological feature suggestions.

Participants had fewer additional psychological suggestions than physical suggestions. The simplest explanation for this is that we captured more psychological features, as we listed 12 psychological features versus 9 physical features. Another possibility is that the vocabulary to describe psychological features is more abstract than vocabulary to describe physical features, for instance, the concept of "hair" is easy to describe, while an attraction to nurturance is a more difficult concept to convey.

While there were some additional psychological suggestions pertaining to children's sexuality, most of the psychological suggestions were on an emotional and relational level, describing children in a lyrical way, often underlining perceptions of how children are different from adults. One notable topic was the relationship of the CAP to the child, describing a desire to fill a role of importance in the child's life, as a teacher or mentor. The descriptions of psychological features also align with our understanding of emotional congruence with children, which refers to an exaggerated cognitive and emotional affiliation with children that can be expressed as admiring children more than adults, preferring the company of children, and being interested in child-oriented culture. Emotional congruence with children is significantly associated with sexual attraction to children, as well as risk of sexual recidivism among individuals who have sexually offended against children (McPhail et al., 2018).

History of Falling in Love with a Child

CAPs who reported having fallen in love with a child rated 11 out of 12 psychological features as more attractive than CAPs who had not fallen in love with a child, with small to moderate effect sizes, whereas there was little group difference in ratings of physical features. This finding is consistent with the supposition that physical features are more linked to sexual attraction whereas psychological features are more linked to romantic attraction (Buss & Schmitt, 2019; Regan et al., 2000).

Sexual Offense History

Contrary to our expectations, CAPs with a sexual offense history rated physical features lower than CAPs without a sexual offense history, though effect sizes were small. The reverse was found for psychological features, as CAPs with a sexual offense history rated psychological features higher than CAPs without a sexual offense history, though effect sizes were small as well.

Limitations

Ratings of attractiveness were limited by a restricted range of responses, with almost all ratings at an average score of 4 or higher on a 5-point Likert scale, and most standard deviations below 1. Although an interesting finding in itself, this likely produced ceiling effects and therefore reduced our statistical power to detect significant effects; indeed, effect sizes that were moderate or large in magnitude tended to reach traditional statistical significance thresholds whereas those that were smaller in size ($d < 0.30$) tended not to reach statistical significance. Allowing participants to rate all features on a 5-point scale without constraints also prevented us from looking at relative importance, because someone could rate all physical and psychological features equally.

Like Wilson and Cox (1983), this study used a highly selective recruitment strategy for CAPs, in this case recruiting from online forums for persons who are attracted to minors. Digital activism has been shown to influence public perception (Anderson et al., 2018), and may have contributed to a desire within the participant communities to influence public perceptions of attraction to children. Some participants may have responded in a socially desirable way, such as rating the look of the sex organs and innocence as less attractive because they may have expected that rating these traits highly is seen negatively. To mitigate socially desirable answers and to protect the identity of the participants, we took steps to safeguard anonymity by promoting security precautions for data collection and attempted a trial survey on Tor. Considering the rapid development of internet-based studies, we hope to see a development of even more highly secure survey platforms.

Due to the wording of the survey questions about sexual offense history, we could not identify whether reported histories of contact and non-contact sexual offenses were committed against children or adults. It may be possible some participants who reported a sexual offense history were arrested, charged, or convicted of a sexual offense against an adult, with the exception of those arrested, charged, or convicted of child sexual exploitation material offenses.

The survey did not directly address the age-specificity of physical or psychological features. Though some physical features could be classified as age-specific (e.g., height, appearance of genitals, innocence), most features we examined could be described as age-generic. Specifically including a balanced list of age-specific and age-generic physical and psychological features would allow us to look more closely at the relative importance of these two categories. We may find, for example, that exclusivity of attraction to children has a stronger effect for age-specific compared to age-generic features. In addition, we asked participants to answer questions regarding different age

groups, where age group is correlated with but does not directly map onto sexual maturity status. A child who is 12 years old, for example, could be prepubescent, pubescent, or even postpubescent in appearance.

The small number of female and non-binary CAPs in this sample precluded us from conducting meaningful analyses on these groups. There is a strong need to include more female and gender diverse CAPs in research. Research on normative sexuality increasingly illustrates that men and women show both similarities and differences (see Chivers, 2017); we do not have a good understanding of how gender diverse persons compare.

Finally, it is unknown whether participants' ratings were about children in their real life, children they had fallen in love with, children they had sexually offended against, boys, girls, or both, or children in general. We asked about physical and psychological features in general, but the relative importance of these features could depend on a range of contextual factors.

Future Directions

We would advise future researchers to use clear descriptions of both physical and psychological features, distinguishing between age-generic, child-specific, and adult-specific features. Using a ranking or points allocation paradigm would reveal relative importance, and would prevent ceiling effects.

Rapid developments in digital technology could enhance future studies. A recent example of this is the study by Schmidt and Imhoff (2020), who asked predominantly heterosexual adult-attracted men to rate a virtually designed doll where head size, eye size, breast size, and waist-to-hip-ratio could be separately manipulated experimentally. Including visual representations of children in future studies would also counteract the limitation of using age ranges as proxies for prepubescence, pubescence, and postpubescence.

The role that attraction to physical and psychological features of children play in sexual offending remains unclear. It would be interesting if future studies could do more in-depth analyses with CAPs who have committed sexual offenses involving children, for instance, asking whether they were in love with the child, or what they found attractive about that child.

An interesting topic for future studies are CAPs who have fallen in love with a child who stay romantically attracted to this child when they grow into adolescence and eventually adulthood, as the child's physical features change and what was initially sexually attractive to the CAP might no longer be present. Parallels could be drawn to adult couples who experience initial strong physical attraction when they get together, and stay together, despite aging and becoming less physically attractive to each other. The adult research literature suggests psychological features are more important in adult long-term relationships, but the importance of physical relative to psychological attraction in CAPs remains to be further examined.

Conclusion

Some of the most basic questions concerning attraction to children remain unanswered: Do all CAPs have the potential

to fall in love with children? Do non-exclusive CAPs fall out of love or stay in love with children when they grow older? What roles do physical and psychological features of children play in general and idiosyncratic sexual and romantic preferences for children? We found a wide array of attractive idiosyncratic, age-specific, as well as age-generic physical and psychological features in children 11 or younger among 274 self-identified male CAPs. The results of this study point toward attraction to children being a complex and multifaceted sexual and romantic phenomenon, as we find with the complex construct of sexual orientation for gender.

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Data Availability Statement

Due to the nature of this research, participants of this study did not agree to their data being shared publicly.

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