

Social Awareness about Pedophiles through the Artworks of Graham Ovenden and Patricia Piccinini

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Abstract

This research examines the contradictory approaches to pedophilia in contemporary art by focusing on artworks by an English painter Graham Ovenden and hyper-realistic multi-media Australian artist Patricia Piccinini. A brief historiography on pedophilia demonstrates pedophilia as a critical social issue which should be diagnosed and treated. The examination of the artworks by Ovenden and Piccinini questions the extent to which artwork can be used to study the psychopathology of pedophilia. Ovenden, himself a convicted pedophile, propagates these ideas while Piccinini alerts us about the appalling nature of pedophilia. Ovenden produces work that depicts nude children and portraits that are sexually alluring. Why is there a demand for the artwork of a convicted pedophile who exploits children's innocence? Patricia Piccinini's hyper-realistic 3-D artworks portray figures of children being coddled, soothed, and otherwise interacting with figures which resemble otherworldly animals or monsters. Unlike Ovenden's artwork, Piccinini's work captures the innocent essence of the child within opportunistic adult-child relationships to teach the audience about the hideous and deceitful nature of pedophiles. This comparative research makes use of studies on pedophilia and art historical sources, as well as of formal examination of the artworks, to advance the study on the significance of visual language in challenging the normalcy of pedophilia in society.

Keywords: Pedophilia, Ovenden, Piccinini, DSM-IV

1. A Brief Historiography on Pedophilia

Pedophilia, in its strictest meaning, is described as experiencing persistent sexual attraction to prepubescent children. Pedophilia is often used to describe attraction to minors or underage teenagers as well. However, as classified by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or the DSM-IV, the term pedophilia only describes sexual attraction to prepubescent children.¹ Pedophilia is often diagnosed in the absence of pedophilic behaviors. If a person is a pedophile it does not directly mean that they have committed a sex crime or acted on their desires in any way.² Those that have committed sex crimes or acted out on their desires tend to justify their behaviors by normalizing and rationalizing their own interactions with children. Pedophilia can be treated, but there isn't a cure. Long-term counseling, cognitive-behavioral treatments, and hormonal treatments can be used to reduce the risk of sexual recidivism.³

Most studies of pedophilia have been procured by studying known sex offenders and primarily focused on North America, Australian, and European males.⁴ However, only about half of child sex offenders are true pedophiles that demonstrate attraction to prepubescent children. These kinds of pedophiles tend to be motivated by psychological factors, including neurological and developmental abnormalities and cognitive distortions. Some opportunistic pedophiles do not demonstrate focused sexual attraction to children but instead pursue sexual engagement with children. The motivation of opportunistic pedophiles relies largely on casualty and circumstances of a situation, such

as the availability of a child victim, the abuser's failure to inhibit impulses, social anxieties, and the abuser's sexual frustrations in their struggle to connect with an adult sexual partner. These bits of information are important when considering the conflicting conclusions of pedophile research.⁵

Assessments in the diagnostics of pedophile research require accurate assessment methods. Researchers and clinicians have utilized three significant forms of assessment: self-report, sexual behavior, and psychopathological responses such as polygraphy and phallometry.⁶ With self-report, sexual histories are explored through personal interviews. Interviewees are asked about their sexual interests and behavior, their interest in age-appropriate partners versus children, and the amount of time they may spend with children and their emotional connections or relationships with them. Issues often arise with self-report interviews, as the interviewees may be elusive or dishonest in their answers because of the nature of their crimes and the repercussions that they may face if they acknowledge their illicit behaviors.⁷ These sexual behavior assessments can determine the number of sexual contacts with children and determine a possession of child pornography.

Polygraphy, a psychophysiological method for determining changes in heart rate, blood pressure, and control or change in respiration, is used to verify self-reported information. It is most used with correctional and clinical professionals who work with sex offenders. The polygraphic mode of assessment utilizes the control-question test and the guilty-knowledge test. In the control-question test, the offenders are asked control questions about neutral topics and relevant questions about their behavior in question. In the guilty-knowledge test, an offender is asked about details of a relevant crime which only the investigators and the guilty would know about. Both tests examine the physiological changes of an offender when challenged between control and variable questions.⁸

Phallometry is the last psychophysiological method for diagnosing pedophilia. It involves the penile responses to sexual stimuli that vary in aspects of sexual interest, such as the age or sex of the figures that are presented. The responses are recorded by a strain gauge placed over the shaft of the penis and record the increase of penile circumference or volume. The advantage to this mode of assessment is that the responses collected are purely sexual, and therefore more accurate in the assessment of pedophilic tendencies.⁹ In a recent collection of seven studies which amounted to examination of 5,000 sex offenders, it is found that phallometry is the best predictor for sexual recidivism when compared to the other modes utilized in the study.¹⁰

Next, we will discuss the etiological models of pedophilia, such as neurodevelopmental and other developmental factors. Brain abnormalities has been suspected of being the cause of pedophilia throughout many studies. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) has found through extensive examinations of diagnosed pedophilic offenders were more likely to report that they had experienced head injuries before the age of 13. The group also found that sex offenders with child victims would often score lower on intelligence quotient exams when compared to those who were not pedophilic offenders. It was found that the number of child victims under the age of 12 would correlate negatively to the IQ result. If the offender had victims older than 12 years old, the IQ would still correlate negatively, but not to the same degree. These examinations found that pedophiles differed not only from non-pedophiles but also from other sex offenders in their neurodevelopment.¹¹

Other developmental factors have included sexual victimization, interpersonal deficits, and masturbatory conditioning. A meta-analysis of 14 studies found that sex offenders with child victims were more likely to have lower heterosocial competence when compared to other sex offenders.¹² However, it is important to note that it is not known if heterosocial incompetence is cause or consequence of pedophilic tendencies. It has also been found that poor child-parent attachments could be a precursor of sexual interests in children. This interest could also be a way of coping with the adverse effects of negative early experiences. With masturbatory conditioning, it is suggested that sex offenders tend to masturbate more often than other men and therefore condition themselves to their own sexual desires. Masturbating to the idea of children could involve the psychological gathering of power and control and presents feelings of identification with perpetrators of their own childhood sexual abuse. Masturbatory conditioning can also be utilized in the treatment of pedophilia, helping the offender become acquainted with the idea of age-appropriate sexual partners and begin to prefer them in time.¹³

The abused-abuser theory proposes that sex offenders who were sexually abused in their childhood are more likely to commit sexual offenses. A randomly selected survey of men found that those with early childhood sexual abuse experiences were 40 times more likely to report having sexual contact with a prepubescent child. The results show that a history of sexual abuse can play a large role in developing pedophilic behaviors.¹⁴ The result has also proposed a psychological identification the victim feels for the aggressor and a resulting normalized attitude towards sexual relations with adults. In sum, research has proven through numerous studies that the personality traits of a pedophilic adult personality can constitute from cognitive distortions and personal histories of sexual abuse and shows moderately consistent evidence for avoidant and antisocial personality traits and some forms of neuropsychological impairment.¹⁵

Treatment exist for pedophiles to help them live normal and law-abiding lives, though the nature of pedophilia is not curable. According to Dr. Lisa J. Cohen and Dr. Igor Galkynder, treatment for pedophilia is most effective when it is multimodal, long-term, or even court-mandated. Cognitive-behavioral treatments have been used to reduce pedophilic behavior and increase interest in age-appropriate adult sex partners. These methods can include associative conditioning like aversive conditioning and masturbatory conditioning. The progress of the changes in the offender's arousal patterns through these treatments are tested via plethysmographic feedback. Seeing physical proof of the effectiveness of intervention can help minimize feelings of denial, which is helpful in the progression of treatment.¹⁶ Those with antisocial or hetero-socially incompetent behaviors can also benefit from training in interpersonal skills, assertiveness, and empathy. These practices also help enhance relationships with adults and strengthen their inhibition to pedophilic behaviors.¹⁷ Other treatments can also include individual and group support counseling.

It may be interesting to note that in some countries, where a particular sex offender may be at a high risk of sexual recidivism, hormonal treatments such as anti-androgens are available. The anti-androgen agent is available for use in Europe and in Canada but not in the United States. Other hormonal treatments are available in other countries such as the luteinizing hormone-releasing hormone (LHRH). Hormonal treatments are often court-mandated and work by reducing global sex drive and not just the pedophilic sex drive.¹⁸

The following discussion addresses the notion of pedophilia through the representation of children in contemporary art, which often enrages the public and social institutions.¹⁹ When debating the idea of nude children's bodies in artwork, people will often tout freedom of expression. Such has been Sally Mann's discussion around the proclamation of controversies in her work. As an artist who is known for the nude photography of her children, she is well recognized amongst any who discusses censorship.²⁰ According to the Index on Censorship, the exercise of the freedoms of expression should be subject to restrictions in laws made necessary to live in a safe and democratic society.²¹ These laws prevent disorder and to protect the health, rights, and morals within our communities. There is often enagement that comes from the public and social institutions when child pornography in art is obvious. However, there is often enagement from the public and social institutions when child pornography in art is blatant. In general, people often have trouble identifying the lines between exploited children and depictions of nude children, as demonstrated in this study.

2. Graham Ovenden

Graham Ovenden is an English painter, photographer, and convicted pedophile, born on February 11, 1943. Ovenden has had his works hung at many galleries across the globe and had his works published through his years as an art professional. His works portray nude children in what he claims to be their "state of grace." However, a quick look at these children's depictions will have the viewers realize that the children are sexualized and provocative. Not surprisingly, Ovenden has been found guilty of six counts of indecency with children and one account of assaulting a child, all girls between the ages of six and fourteen. This includes allegations made by four witnesses, now adult women. Clearly, these allegations have "shown a light" onto the nature of his paintings and hurt his status in the art world. Thirty-four pieces of his works have been removed from the Tate Gallery in London, which had stood by him and displayed his artwork for many years. These artworks are no longer accessible on their website or even by appointment.²²



Figure 1 - "Lolita Recumbent" Graham Ovenden, Intaglio Print on Paper, 273x368 mm, 1975.
http://notthetate.blogspot.com/2009/10/graham-ovenden-born-1943-lolita_23.html



Figure 2 - "Lolita Meditating" Graham Ovenden, Intaglio Print on Paper, 13 1/4 x 17 1/4 in, 1975.
Lolita Meditating as depicted in <https://www.bidsquare.com/online-auctions/stair-galleries/graham-ovenden-b-1943-lolita-meditating-and-lolita-seductive-758334>

Ovenden's *Lolita* series includes nine etchings of nude girls in provocative postures, as demonstrated in figures 1 and 2. The girls have clothes draping off their shoulders or have dresses hiked up high to expose most of their thighs. The girls' facial expressions often appear sleepy and affectionate with downward glances or daringly seductive with upwards glances. Most disturbing of all is how light and delicate the lines, contours, and values are, and the soft texture that can be seen within the drawings. While looking at these drawings, the viewers are invited to get closer to the images, creating a feeling of a forced intimacy between the viewer and the figure. This intimacy with nude girls engages the viewers with their own voyeurism. While such participation may make a casual viewer uncomfortable, his exhibitions' popularity points out the existing demand among the public for the seductively posed nude girls, even if such images are created by the convicted pedophile.

Graham Ovenden's *Lolita* series is a loud proclamation of his pedophilic tendencies. Ovenden states that his artworks depict children is their "state of grace" - just a child being as they are without the implementations of social confinements, such as clothing. But children do not stare at onlookers seductively and let their clothes hang loosely in intentional, provocative matters. This is not the "state of grace" that the artist claims to attempt to present because he exploits children's innocence and inability to oppose such practices.

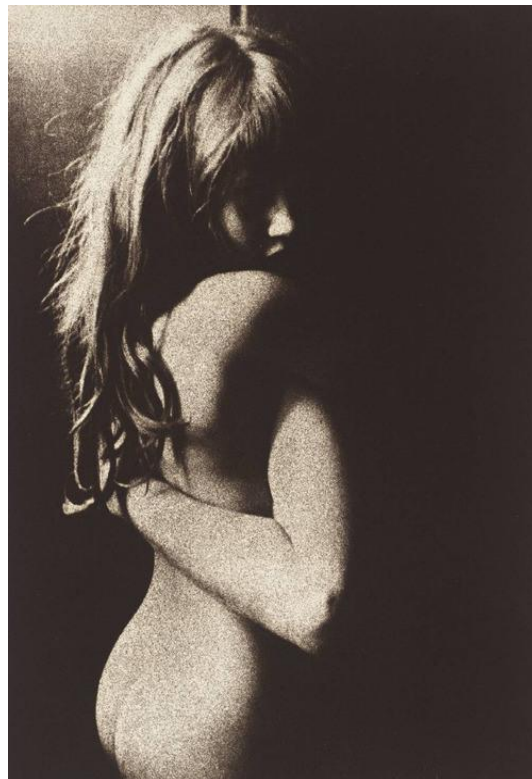


Figure 3 - "Little Lorraine," Graham Ovenden, Photograph, 1970.

http://www.artnet.com/artists/graham-ovenden/children-BFyCvC_hAvBqsG7Sifej1w2

Ovenden also exhibits his pedophilia in photography, as demonstrated in *Little Lorraine*, depicted in figure 3. The above photograph depicts a small female child embraced by an arm of invisible person. The image's left side displays the light reflected from her hair and body, with the rest of the backdrop and the right side of the image in black. Here, the contrast between light and dark helps bring forth the image's subject - the girl's body that is in an embrace. Note that there is no discernable expression within the young girl's face. Her face is covered in black shadows and the light of her hair. When we lose her face, we lose a sense of her identity, and we no longer ask who the figure is - instead, all we see is the light reflected on the back of the figure. Once again, Ovenden forces us to focus on what he believes is essential, an innocent body.

The evidence compiled against Graham Ovenden, which includes pedophilic allegations and the illicit nature of his work, strongly supports the symptomatic nature of pedophilia. The nature of his pedophilia appears to stem more

from a developmental nature rather than an opportunistic nature. This can be inferred from the intensity of his work and the span of years his body of work has encompassed. Traditionally, an opportunistic pedophile will correlate with spontaneous instances of sexual child abuse, rather than have a long-standing attraction to children. Not all pedophiles are outright physical abusers. However, when evidence suggests the existence of this behavior within a person, this person needs to be aided in counseling and therapy, especially when the court system fails to keep pedophiles away from communities that include children.

One essential idea to note from Ovenden's work is that Ovenden is not the only person who enjoys the work that he makes. In analyzing the art and the overall situation surrounding it, we find that Ovenden is not the only pedophilic denominator. Here we find that the audience has played a role in Ovenden's bluntly pedophilic creations, as Ovenden is responding to an audience's needs. Though the audience itself has not proven itself abusive, it has been disturbingly intrigued and moved by his works in the past. Currently, it is difficult to assess whether the audience represents opportunistic pedophiles who pursue sexual engagement with children. Studies of pedophilia focus on individuals, and polygraphy and phallometry assessments do not consider the unconscious group's pedophilia or the audience's voyeuristic tendencies.

3. Patricia Piccinini

Patricia Piccinini is an Australian-born mixed-media artist who is known for her disturbing, hyper realistic silicone and fiberglass 3D creatures. Unlike Graham Ovenden, Patricia Piccinini herself is not a convicted pedophile or sex offender but utilizes her sculptures to alert the audience to the dark nature of relationship between the "monsters" in children's lives, including opportunistic people such as pedophiles, and the children themselves. Rather than propagate pedophilic artwork as Graham Ovenden did, Piccinini addresses the issue of pedophilia by creating artworks that expose the pedophilic relationship.



Figure 4 - "The Welcome Guest," Patricia Piccinini, silicone, fiberglass, human hair, taxidermied peacocks, 2011.

[https://ocula.com/art-galleries/tolarno-galleries/artworks/patricia-piccinini/the-welcome-guest-\(detail\)/](https://ocula.com/art-galleries/tolarno-galleries/artworks/patricia-piccinini/the-welcome-guest-(detail)/)

Figure 4 is titled *The Welcome Guest* and portrays a small girl standing on her bed, in her pajamas, looking up at a thin, bald creature with long fingernails that stand on the nails of its toes. Her soft smile, her puffy, bright eyes, and the state of the bedsheets gives a domestic feel that suggests that the creature has just woken her up. The culmination of these attributes gives the piece a very homely and caring feel. However, everything else that surrounds or interacts with her seems out of place. The creature that is facing the girls is wrapping its long fingernails around her as if to enclose her, which suggests that the creature is attempting to create an emotional and physical attachment. This is a visual metaphor to the act of child grooming through which an older person attempts to create an emotional connection with a child (and often the child's family) in order to lower the child's inhibitions and gain the child's trust with the end objective of sexually abusing the child. Behind them, a peacock watches them as it stands on the

bed's headboard. It personifies the feelings of foreignness that might be associated within an adult-child relationship. To a pedophile, the intimacy that is felt with a child is foreign and exotic, yet exciting.

The image's overall message is a strong and unapologetic depiction of the dark nature of an adult-child relationship. Where a child might trust and feel protected and assured within the initial stages of the grooming process, the monster is still a monster, and will attempt to hide its true intentions in whichever way possible until they have obtained that trust.



Figure 5 - "Perhaps the World is Fine Tonight," Patricia Piccinini, Silicone, Fiberglass, Taxidermied Animals, Mixed Media, 2009.

<https://tolarnogalleries.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Installation-view-Diaorma-2-TMAG.jpg>

Patricia Piccinini further explores the children's vulnerability in her installation titled *Perhaps the World is Fine Tonight* (figure 5). Within the installation, a child is found at the middle of page in a pose most widely known to yoga practitioners as "child's pose." It is a pose that signifies the surrender and acceptance of the present moment, which is befitting of title of the art piece. The child is nestled upon a rock, with larger rocks surrounding him as if to protect him. When one notices the large chicken-shaped object in the right corner, one can notice that the piece begins to look as if the child is a single egg, nestled in his nest. The chicken-shaped object is an imposing and frightening entity, which can be justified by the warped shape, the stoic and nonexistent expression, and sullen color.

The installation does not solely represent the idea of pedophilia, but the large, disorderly, and haywire world that surrounds innocent children. The child is resting while the world around him appears to run rampant and chaotic. Though he appears to look safe, that is not always the case. The child operates in the only perspective they know - their own, which is generally innocent and uncorrupted. The parental or caring figures of the child's life, which can be symbolized by the rock border in the image, will generally do whatever they can to protect their child from corruption, but ultimately need to prepare them to face the world.

Unlike Ovenden, Piccinini utilizes the monstrous imagery to dehumanize the wrongful nature of people toward children. Her artwork forces the viewer to become engaged due to the puzzling imagery. In turn, it leaves the average viewer questioning the nature of opportunistic relationships. When analyzing Piccinini's artwork, we can view Ovenden's involvement from Piccinini's point of view. Ovenden, who sexualizes the bodies of children in his work, is no longer seen as a once-esteemed fine artist, but instead now as a fiend. By analyzing his work, we can begin to understand his overt pedophilic tendencies and why he felt that his actions were not shameful prior to his

court proceedings. The approval of Ovenden's audience allowed him to create and showcase more of the same artworks, creating a cycle for supply and demand. Patricia Piccinini's work helps us to visualize and understand opportunistic relationships from an outside view, therefore giving the ability to educate and raise awareness on the matter.

4. Conclusion

The study of pedophilia as a crucial threat is essential as it is often manifested in unexpected ways. The convicted pedophile, such as Ovenden, could continue with his artistic practice in the galleries as he represented the values of the audience. Puccinini, on the other hand, alerts the public of the predatory nature of pedophiles. Since the artworks can permit or condemn the notion of pedophilia in society, the teaching about pedophilia through art and its treatment and assessments are critical. The art of Graham Ovenden and Patricia Piccinini are excellent examples to help explore the minds of pedophiles and the scope and nature of sexual and opportunistic adult-child relationships. Ovenden's work is a blatant reflection of the mind of pedophiles, hidden from the view of society, but impersonated by the audience. Piccinini brings the hidden nature of pedophiles to the viewers' attention. Therefore, social awareness about the pedophile permits understanding this concept in artworks and among the audience, which create a demand-and-supply for them. This research contributes to a discussion as to what extent the gallery space and artist positions can change social norms and draw a line between pedophilic practices and artistic production and who can do so.

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