

This Week's Citation Classic

Exline R, Gray D & Schuette D. Visual behavior in a dyad as affected by interview content and sex of respondent. *J. Personal. Soc. Psychol.* 1:201-9, 1965. [University of Delaware, Newark, DE]

Male and female interviewers asking only personal or impersonal questions while gazing attentively at interviewees received more mutual gazes from women than from men. Data replicated and extended earlier findings of sex differences in mutual gaze. All interviewees gazed less on personal questions and looked more when listening than speaking. [The Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI®) indicates that this paper has been cited over 155 times since 1966.]

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"This study represents a line of research which grew out of a serendipitous observation made in a study designed for another purpose. Before coming to the University of Delaware, where my studies of social gaze behavior originated and continue, I had found that women in discussion groups were better than men in judging interpersonal attraction within the group. Given the evidence that women, on the average, scored higher on tests of affiliation motives than did men, I decided to compose like-sex groups, homogeneous as to high or low affiliation, to test the prediction that affiliation differences rather than sex explained accuracy in judging interpersonal attraction.

"Results were interesting and complex, but, more important, we observed a striking, unanticipated discussion phenomenon. Regardless of sex, members of high affiliation groups appeared to look long into each other's line of regard while low affiliators appeared to avoid each other's gaze. In affiliative groups it was as if several pairs of searchlights focused upon the speaker, who, in turn, would slowly traverse the group as he/she talked, engaging in mutual looks with first one and then another

of his/her listeners. In contrast, mutual gaze in nonaffiliative groups was sporadic —looks would flicker here and there, a gaze caught and held would soon be broken by either speaker or listener. The contrast was so marked I embarked on a series of studies designed to explore systematically the phenomenon of social visual attention —the looks, glances, stares, glares, and gaze avoidances which characterize the interaction of specified kinds of persons, in specified roles, and in specified situations.

"The cited study was a follow-up of my initial study of gaze behavior¹ in which sex, affiliation motive, and the competitiveness of the situation were found to affect differentially the amount of mutual gazing. It generalized the earlier found sex differences in gaze from like-sex to cross-sex interaction; it demonstrated that, on the whole, one gives less social visual attention when speaking than when listening to another; it suggested that gaze avoidance could well be a way of 'distancing' oneself from another (see Argyle and Cook's development of this point in their discussion of Argyle's affiliative conflict theory in *Gaze and Mutual Gaze*²); and it strongly suggested that the observed sex differences were indeed a function of person-oriented personality attributes —possibly stemming from socialization practices.

"Why has this study been frequently cited? Perhaps readers had already experienced the relevance and power of social gaze behavior in their personal lives, and this early study showed that it could be investigated in experiments. The study suggested that gaze could be reliably measured, appearing to connect or separate people, and to lend itself to precise experimental manipulation.³ In addition, the research appealed to those interested in integrating verbal and nonverbal aspects of interpersonal communication.⁴ Finally, the article appeared in an important, widely read journal."

1. Exline R V. Explorations in the process of person perception: visual interaction in relation to competition, sex, and need for affiliation. *J Personality* 31:1-20, 1963.
2. Argyle M & Cook M. *Gaze and mutual gaze*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1976. 210 p.
3. Ellsworth P C. Direct gaze as a social stimulus. (Pliner P, Krames L & Alloway T, eds.) *Advances in the study of communication and affect*. New York: Plenum Press, 1975. Vol. 2. p. 53-76.
4. Exline R V & Fehr B J. Applications of semiosis to the study of visual interaction. (Siegman A W & Feldstein S, eds.) *Nonverbal behavior and communication*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1978. p. 117-58.