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Gaze Patterns Toward Females and Males

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ABSTRACT

We examined the influence of participant gender, sex of target and task orientation (judging appearance vs. personality) on participants' tendency to exhibit an objectifying gaze. Preliminary results indicate no significant effects for any of the independent variables and no significant interactions.

BACKGROUND

Objectification theory refers to the phenomenon of reducing a person to a mere object through the use of an **objectifying gaze** – the tendency to focus on one's sexual body parts rather than their face (Gervais, Holland, & Dodd, 2013).

Gervais and colleagues demonstrated that both males and females tend to exhibit the objectifying gaze toward women, especially when instructed to focus on their appearance. This objectifying tendency was most pronounced when the women were depicted with "ideal" body types.

The purpose of the current study was to expand on the previous research to include men as potential targets of the objectifying gaze. More specifically, we examined how female and male participants attend to images of same-sex and opposite-sex individuals. We also varied whether participants were asked to rate the target's appearance or personality.

HYPOTHESES

1) Male participants will show a greater overall tendency to attend to the bodies of all models than female participants.

2) Participants will be more likely to attend to the bodies of female models than male models and this tendency will be more pronounced among male participants.

3) Those instructed to judge the appearance of the models will be more likely to focus their attention on body regions than those instructed to judge personality.

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METHODS

A total of 52 college students (28 females, 24 males), ranging in age from 18 to 33 (*M* = 19.65, *SD* = 3.05) participated in the study. Participants viewed images of 14 male and 14 female models for five seconds each. Depending on the condition, subjects were instructed to rate either the appearance or personality of each model using a nine-point scale (*1 = extremely negative*, 9 = *extremely positive*). Participant's eye-movements were tracked while viewing the images.

We calculated the amount of time participants spent examining the body region (as opposed to the face/head) of each model. Consistent with past research, we used this **dwell time** on the body region as our dependent measure and indication of the objectifying gaze.

Sample Images

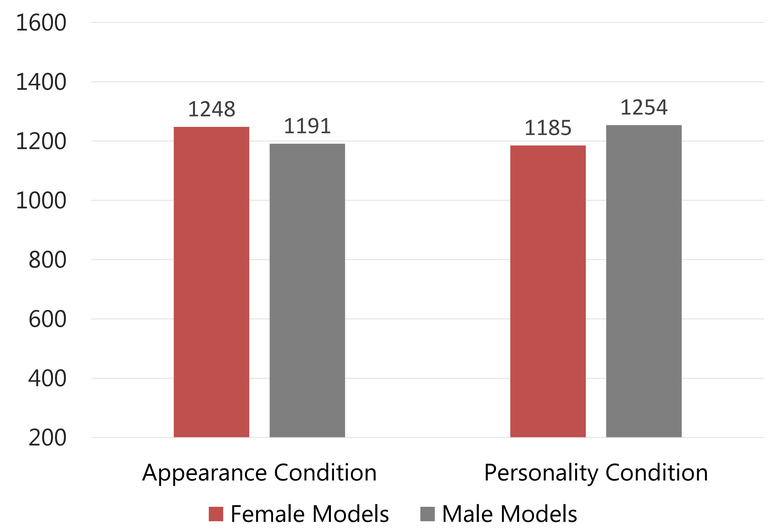
DISCUSSION

We investigated the premise that one of the reasons why males have been shown to attend to the body regions of female targets is because males are more inclined (than females) to attend to the body regions of *all* targets. To date we have found no significant difference in gaze patterns exhibited by males and females. The means, though, are trending in the predicted direction. We were also unable to replicate findings regarding the influence of task instructions (i.e., rating appearance vs. personality). Here again, though, the means are trending in the predicted direction. Insufficient sample size might account for our inability to replicate previous findings and uncover any sex differences in gaze patterns.

RESULTS

Preliminary results indicate no significant main effects for the gender of the participant ($F[1, 48] = 1.30$, $p = .26$), sex of the model ($F[1, 48] = 1.46$, $p = .23$), or condition ($F < 1.0$). In addition, we found no significant interactions between the gender of the participant and sex of the model ($F[1, 48] = 1.83$, $p = .18$), the gender of the participant and condition ($F < 1$), the sex of the model and condition ($F[1, 48] = 1.83$, $p = .18$), or the three-way interaction between variables ($F < 1$).

Mean Dwell Time (in milliseconds) for Female Participants



Mean Dwell Time (in milliseconds) for Male Participants