

Analysing gaze following behaviour could help in understanding gender stereotypes

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During social interactions our attention is automatically attracted by our interlocutor gaze, and we are compelled to follow it: this phenomenon, called joint attention, sees one of its key features in the so-called gaze-following behaviour (GFB) paradigm. The tendency to follow other people's gaze can be suppressed, at the cost of delayed reaction times, according to social categorization dynamics. In the process of automatic categorization, a recent study demonstrated the role of second-order facial features (e.g. makeup for women and beard for men), in enhancing the activation of gender stereotypes. Starting from these premises we wanted to study the GFB paradigm in conjunction with different second order features, to explore the role of gender stereotypes in joint attention processes. To achieve this, we developed a set of female and male faces that were modified by their second-order features (i.e. hair color, hair length, glasses, makeup/beard). Participants were asked to perform a left or right saccade, according to the instructions received, while the to-be-ignored face (woman or man) gazing right or left appeared at the centre of the screen. The direction of the gaze could be either congruent or incongruent with the instruction. Results confirmed the GFB (more errors in the incongruent condition and slower time-to-saccade for correct answer in the incongruent condition) and show a tendency to follow faces with more pronounced second-order features suggesting a prominent role of perceptual saliency overriding gender stereotyping.

Are you currently an Early Career Researcher?

Yes, I am still a student or have not yet received my Ph.D.

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