

Abstract

Introduction: Previous research suggests link between higher social anxiety and gaze aversion (Horley et al., 2004; Hietanen et al., 2008) yet this has been difficult to capture in observational studies (e.g., Walters & Hope, 1998)

Method: Participants completed a self-report packet and a social interaction with another participant.

Results: Higher social anxiety related to less eye contact by self- and partner-report.

Discussion: Individuals with higher social anxiety make less eye contact during a casual conversation and this is detected by conversation partners.

Introduction

- Evidence for relationship between gaze aversion and social anxiety from eyetracking and brain imaging studies (Horley et al., 2004; Moukheiber et al., 2010)
- Behavioral observation studies have produced mixed results (Farabee et al., 1993; Walters & Hope, 1998; Weeks et al., 2011)
- The Gaze Aversion Rating Scale (GARS; Schneier et al., 2011) was created to measure gaze aversion within social anxiety
- Previous research indicates gender differences in eye contact (Exline et al., 1965).
- In the current study we:
 - Tested the relationship between social anxiety and self- and partner-report of eye contact during two short social interactions
 - Tested the predictive validity of the GARS
- Hypotheses:
 - Higher social anxiety and higher GARS scores will relate to lower levels of eye contact by self- and partner-report
 - Gender differences in eye contact

Participants

- Participants were 127 undergraduates at Washington University. Majority were:
 - Women ($n = 79$; 63.2%)
 - White ($n = 73$; 59.3%)
 - Mean age of 18.92 ($SD = 1.74$)

Measures

- Straightforward Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (S-SIAS;** Mattick & Clarke, 1998; Rodebaugh et al., 2004)
- 20-item measure of anxiety across a variety of social situations.
- Gaze Aversion Rating Scale (GARS;** Schneier et al., 2011)
- 34-item measure of amount of anxiety and avoidance related to eye contact across various situations.
- 17 situations; anxiety and avoidance subscales highly correlated ($r = .68, p < .001$).
- Similar format to Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale
- Post-task Questionnaire**
- 17-item measure of eye contact for self and partner
 - Assessed with three questions: overall, first interaction, and second interaction
- Also assessed perceptions of the partner

Procedure

- Two participants per session
- Participants completed self-report questionnaires
- Participants completed two 5 minute *get-to-know-you* conversations with each other. Eye contact was manipulated through instructions at halfway point.
- Rated self and partner's eye contact.
- Due to the interdependency in the dataset, analyses focus on one participant from each dyad.

Results: Gender Differences

	Self-report	Partner-report	Report on partner
Men	M = 4.88 SD = 1.31	M = 4.46* SD = 1.30	M = 4.52* SD = 1.33
Women	M = 5.23 SD = 1.03	M = 5.38* SD = 1.15	M = 5.44* SD = .96

*= Significant difference, $p < .01$

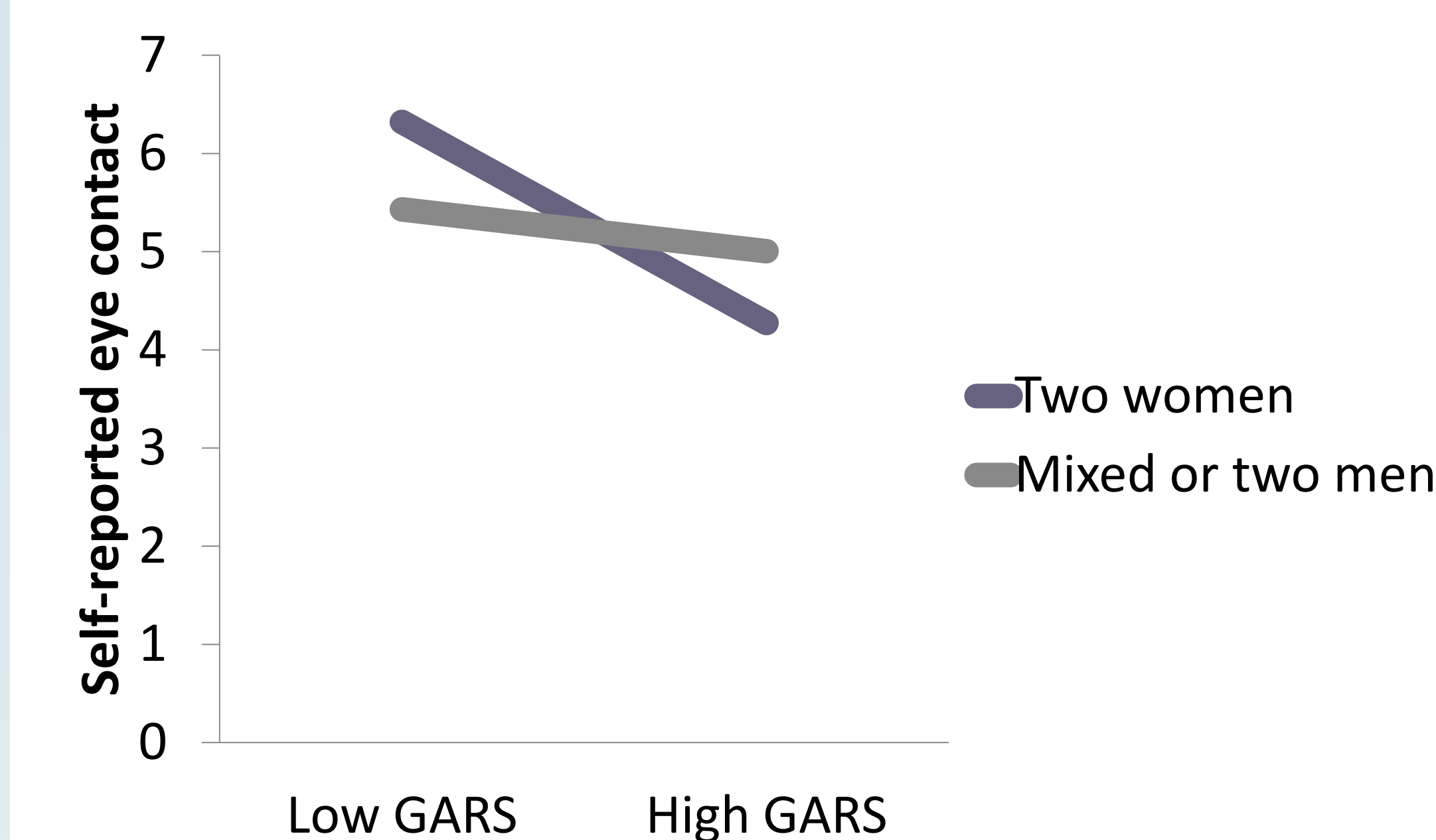
- Significant interaction between dyad type and GARS in predicting self-reported eye contact, $p = .03$.
- Dyads with two women tended to differ in eye contact by GARS score, whereas other dyad types did not (figure at right).

Results: Intercorrelations among Eye Contact and Social Anxiety

	GARS	S-SIAS	EC SR	EC SR 1 st	EC SR 2 nd	EC PR	EC PR 1 st	EC PR 2 nd	KB PR	L PR
GARS	.90									
S-SIAS	.67***	.91								
EC SR	-.28**	-.37**	n/a							
EC SR 1 st	-.24*	-.24**	.40***	n/a						
EC SR 2 nd	-.20	-.26**	.81***	-.02	n/a					
EC PR	-.08	-.30**	.38***	.30**	.23*	n/a				
EC PR 1 st	.01	-.14	.12	.23*	.06	.62***	n/a			
EC PR 2 nd	-.07	-.26**	.26**	.26*	.40***	.66***	.19	n/a		
KB PR	-.12	-.34***	.09	-.09	.11	.18	.07	.28**	n/a	
L PR	-.30**	-.40**	.19	-.01	.18	.26**	.17	.32**	.77***	n/a

Note. GARS = Gaze Aversion Rating Scale; S-SIAS = Straightforward Social Interaction Anxiety Scale; EC SR = overall eye contact self-report; EC SR 1st = eye contact self-report in first interaction; EC SR 2nd = eye contact self-report in second interaction; EC PR = overall eye contact partner's rating; EC PR 1st = eye contact partner rating in first interaction; EC PR 2nd = eye contact partner rating in second interaction; KB PR = want to get to know better partner's rating; L PR = liking partner's rating. Internal consistency is listed on the diagonal. * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$. As hypothesized; Against hypothesis.

Results: Gender Differences



Discussion

- Found support for an association between social anxiety and self-report of overall eye contact and partner-report of overall eye contact.
- Predictive validity of GARS partially supported
- Both the GARS and the SIAS were related to the partner's liking
- Women reported more eye contact than men
- Self-report of gaze anxiety and avoidance may relate more strongly to eye contact behavior when two women interact compared to two men or mixed gender
- Next steps:
 - Use independent observer coding of eye contact
 - Investigate influence of different types of interactions or partners.