

Note on looking time: Experimenter and instruction effects

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In a recent article (Leckart, Gehres, & Thornton, 1970), it was reported that the presence of E inhibits Ss' looking time. The authors found a significant decrement in the E-present as compared to the E-absent condition and interpreted their results by suggesting that the decrease might be due to Ss' fear that long looking times might reveal something self-intimidating to the E.

Alternative explanations for this effect are provided by considering the presence of another person as a source of arousal. Evidence that the presence of other organisms increases arousal has been demonstrated on an infrahuman level (e.g., Thiessen, 1964; Christian & Davis, 1964).

Assuming that this is also the case with humans and that S is attempting to maintain an optimal level of cortical arousal, S would need less environmental stimulation when E was present to serve as a source of arousal. Hence, E's presence should be reflected in a looking time decrease.

A second explanation is provided by Zajonc (Zajonc, 1965; Zajonc & Sales, 1966). This author accepts the presence of others as a source of arousal and combines this with a drive theory. He concludes that the presence of others increases dominant or high-probability responses, and inhibits subordinate or low-probability ones.

Assuming that looking at slides is a low-probability response, this approach would suggest that E's presence should reduce the duration of looking behavior.

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