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Authors

Spaniol, Malin

Wehrle, Simon

Vogeley, Kai

et al.

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Interactions between autistic adults offer a new perspective on social gaze

Malin Spaniol
University Hospital Cologne, Köln, NRW, Germany

Simon Wehrle
University of Cologne, Köln, NRW, Germany

Kai Vogeley
University Hospital Cologne, Köln, NRW, Germany

Martine Grice
University of Cologne, Köln, NRW, Germany

Abstract

Face-to-face communication is highly complex, with information being transmitted via multiple channels simultaneously. Social gaze can regulate conversation, express emotions, and signal interest or disinterest, and eye contact, or a lack thereof, is a powerful visual cue that influences the dynamics of communication. While previous research has shed light on gaze in autism in general, there remains a lack of 1) evidence on interactions in dialogue between autistic adults (rather than mixed dialogues) and 2) investigations on the influence of gaze on conversational dynamics and interpersonal rapport. We have developed a novel setup with mobile dual eye-tracking glasses that allows for the automatic detection of mutual eye contact. Our exploratory analyses of conversations in homogeneous autistic dyads provide new insights into autistic gaze dynamics and their interrelation with rapport, ultimately helping to advance the current understanding of cognitive diversity and of the fundamental elements of social interaction.