

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

INFANT GAZE AVERTING
DURING SOCIAL INTERACTION

A Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Psychology
at Massey University

Joanna Mary Therese Taylor

1988

Massey University Library

Thesis Copyright Form

Title of thesis: INFANT GAZE AVERTING DURING SOCIAL INTERACTION

- (1) (a) ~~I give permission for my thesis to be made available to readers in the Massey University Library under conditions determined by the Librarian.~~
- (b) I do not wish my thesis to be made available to readers without my written consent for 24 months.
- (2) (a) ~~I agree that my thesis, or a copy, may be sent to another institution under conditions determined by the Librarian.~~
- (b) I do not wish my thesis, or a copy, to be sent to another institution without my written consent for 24 months.
- (3) (a) ~~I agree that my thesis may be copied for Library use.~~
- (b) I do not wish my thesis to be copied for Library use for 24 months.

Signed

J.M. Taylor

Date

23-8-88

The copyright of this thesis belongs to the author. Readers must sign their name in the space below to show that they recognise this. They are asked to add their permanent address.

NAME AND ADDRESS

DATE

ABSTRACT

The general aim of the present research was to investigate infant gaze averting during social interaction. Two preliminary hypotheses were examined: first, that infant gaze averting would occur spontaneously during social interaction, and second that any gaze averting would increase alongside developmental progress.

A short-term (nine week) longitudinal case-study approach with home visits was planned. Conducting the research in the participants' homes was novel for this area of study. Prior studies had all been conducted in a laboratory setting. Six mother-infant dyads agreed to participate. The primiparous mothers were all full-time caregivers with an age range of 21-26 years. The healthy, full-term infants were all aged approximately three months at commencement. There were three of each gender.

Visits to each pair occurred every nine/ten days. The following three sources of data collection were implemented: interview, observation and daily diary recording by the mother. Target behaviours noted were: episodes of active gaze averting and new developmental milestones (according to a developmental checklist formulated for the present study). Other relevant qualitative information was also gathered at each visit.

Although basically a qualitative study, quantitative data was incorporated in the form of graphs of each infant's gaze averting frequency and developmental progress. The main findings here were:

infant gaze averting did occur during interaction with mother and other caregivers for all six cases; the prediction that there is a relationship between gaze averting and developmental progress was not supported. Descriptive data provided an interesting and unexpected outcome. This was the discovery of three separate styles of gaze averting. These were described, their various criteria identified, and a classification system developed.

The results of the present study have important practical implications. They present a challenge to one current theory of psychopathology which maintains that gaze averting is abnormal and may be a precursor of autism. This has ramifications for the present diagnostic system and treatment of some childhood psychopathologies. The findings of the present study indicate that a re-think of perspectives regarding gaze averting (of all styles) may be required.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to a number of people, without whose support this thesis could not have eventuated.

A big vote of appreciation must go to the six families, especially the mothers and babies, who freely participated, generously gave so much of themselves and, above all, allowed the intrusion!

My two Supervisors, Cheryl Woolley and John Kirkland, deserve a special acknowledgement for providing me with insight and strategies with which to attack the next task. I appreciate their sacrifices of time and energy. In particular, thanks to Cheryl for her constant and calming support, and thanks to John for the challenge.

My gratitude also goes to Glennis, for all her efficient and patient typing; to Shane for his diligent work with the graphics; to our child/home helpers over the last year, especially Gwen, for being my "lifesavers."

In addition I have been helped and supported by my family and friends, in ways too numerous to mention. I wish each individual concerned to treat this acknowledgement as a personal "thankyou."

To our three young children, James, Laura and Liam; thank you for "putting up" with a student mother throughout your lives thus far! Especially Liam, our "thesis baby," who hasn't yet known life without a thesis!

Above all, my thanks and gratitude go to Peter, my husband and my best friend, for living through this project of mine and its inconveniences to family life, spurring me on by reminding me of its importance, and for always being there.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | | Page |
|---------|---|------|
| ONE | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| | The Social Infant | 1 |
| | Gaze | 3 |
| | Gaze Averting | 5 |
| | Incidental Reports of Gaze Averting | 6 |
| | Laboratory-based Studies | 14 |
| | Theoretical Perspectives | 16 |
| | The Present Research | 28 |
| TWO | METHOD | 31 |
| | Participants | 31 |
| | Materials | 33 |
| | Procedure | 34 |
| THREE | RESULTS | 38 |
| | Section One: Frequency of Gaze Averting | 38 |
| | Section Two: Developmental Progress | 43 |
| | Section Three: Styles of Gaze Averting | 55 |
| FOUR | DISCUSSION | 72 |
| | Examination of Results | 72 |
| | Methodological Limitations | 80 |
| | Theoretical Implications | 82 |
| | Practical Implications | 86 |
| | Future Research | 92 |

| | Page |
|------------------------------|------|
| Summary of Conclusions | 95 |
| REFERENCES | 97 |
| APPENDIX A | 109 |
| APPENDIX B | 112 |
| APPENDIX C | 113 |
| APPENDIX D | 114 |
| APPENDIX E | 115 |
| APPENDIX F | 120 |
| APPENDIX G | 123 |

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

| FIGURE | | Page |
|--------|---|------|
| 1 | Frequency of gaze averting over time for all six infants | 42 |

FIGURE

Page

| | | |
|---|--|----|
| 2 | Progress of gross motor development and gaze averting over time for all six infants | 46 |
| 3 | Progress of fine motor development and gaze averting over time for all six infants | 49 |
| 4 | Progress of social-emotional development and gaze averting over time for all six infants | 51 |
| 5 | Progress of cognitive-perceptual development and gaze averting over time for all six infants ... | 54 |
| 6 | Frequency of the three styles of gaze averting for all six infants | 57 |
| 7 | Three bi-polar dimensions for classifying buffering(B), distracted-business(DB), and play(P) | 74 |

TABLE

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | The date of birth, age at introductory visit and age at final visit of each baby | 32 |
| 2 | Styles of gaze averting exhibited by the six infants | 56 |

TABLE

Page

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| G1 | Frequency of gaze averting episodes and number of developmental steps gained for Case A | 123 |
| G2 | Frequency of gaze averting episodes and number of developmental steps gained for Case B | 123 |
| G3 | Frequency of gaze averting episodes and number of developmental steps gained for Case C | 124 |
| G4 | Frequency of gaze averting episodes and number of developmental steps gained for Case D | 124 |
| G5 | Frequency of gaze averting episodes and number of developmental steps gained for Case E | 125 |
| G6 | Frequency of gaze averting episodes and number of developmental steps gained for Case F | 125 |
| G7 | Individual and total frequencies of the three styles of gaze averting for all six infants ... | 126 |