GAZE AND TACTILE BEHAVIOUR IN SPONTANEOUS INFANT-PARENT INTERACTION: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY

Tsantali E., Kokkinaki T.

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Crete, Rethymno, Greece

Keywords: parental gender, infant age, culture, inter-subjectivity

Background and Aim: Previous studies investigating patterns of gaze and tactile behavior in early infant-parent interaction focused either on differences between mother-infant and father-infant interactions in one culture, or comparisons between cultures were carried out solely for one parent gender. There is no longitudinal, naturalistic and cross-cultural study comparing gaze and tactile behavior according to parent gender. To fill this gap, within the theoretical framework of the theory of innate intersubjectivity, this case study investigated the relationship between culture, parental gender and infant age with patterns of gaze and tactile behavior in spontaneous dyadic infant-parent interactions. Method: Two infants, one coming from Greece and one coming from Scotland, were video-recorded at home in spontaneous dyadic interactions with their mother and father from the second to the sixth month after birth at 15-day intervals. Within well-defined units and subunits of analysis, we micro-analyzed patterns of gaze and tactile behavior. Gaze behavior was analyzed according to gaze direction [partner’s face, body, eyes, elsewhere (gaze aversion)]. Tactile behavior was analyzed according to the direction (face, body) and the kind of touch (care touch, game touch). The duration of gaze and tactile interactions was analyzed too. Results: This study provided the following evidence: a) Gaze and tactile interaction predominated in mother-infant dyads compared to father-infant dyads; b) Gaze and tactile interaction lasted longer in parent-infant dyads from Greece, but the frequency of gaze and tactile behaviors were higher for parent-infant pairs from Scotland; c) Infant age, culture and parental gender were related to the developmental trajectory of gaze behavior, while the developmental course of tactile behavior was correlated to infant age, but not to parental gender or culture. Conclusion: The results of this study will be discussed and interpreted in the frame of the theory of innate inter-subjectivity.