Men and women see things differently

Washington - Men and women focus on different things when paying attention and are drawn away by different types of distractions, a new study by researchers at the University of Southern California has found.

The study, authored by Dr. Laurent Itti, an associate professor of computer science at the University of Southern California and doctoral student John Shen, challenges the way scientists generally conceive of attention, or how sensory information is prioritized.

While previous study of vision and attention had disregarded individual factors such as sex, race and age, Itti and Shen demonstrated that men and women pay visual attention in different ways.

Dr. Itti's lab studied 34 participants as they watched videos of people being interviewed. Behind the subjects, within the video frame, pedestrians, bicycles and cars passed by - distractions included to pull attention away from the filmed conversation.

While participants watched and listened to the interview, another camera was pointed at participants' eyes, recording the movement of their pupils as they glanced across the screen.

Researchers discovered that men, when focused on the person being interviewed, parked their eyes on the speaker's mouth. They tended to be most distracted by distinctive movement behind the interview subjects, but women shift their focus between the interview subject's eyes and body. They tended to be most distracted by distinctive movement behind the interview subject's eyes.

When women were distracted, it was typically by other people entering the video frame.

The findings were published in the journal Vision Research.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Girls Are Constantly At Risk</th>
<th>This Level Of Technology Shouldn't Exist!</th>
<th>Top Female Poker Players</th>
<th>3 Minutes Of Romney Episode Were Cut Off?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body Shape Attraction</td>
<td>Guys Consider This Girl To Be Perfect...</td>
<td>Bollywood Without Makeup</td>
<td>Real Arabian Beauty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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