

Investigating Compulsive Staring behavior in Men: A gender sensitive examination of Socio-cultural and Psychological Influences

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Abstract

Examining psychological, sociological, and cultural aspects, this study investigates the complicated phenomenon of compulsive staring. A person's inner self (Psyche), the people in immediate environment (Society), and certain customs or traditions (Culture) may have a significant influence in enhancing or diminishing this behavior. Students pursuing bachelors and master's degrees from highly populated universities in Rawalpindi and Islamabad participated in this qualitative study. Focus groups and interviews were done with the use of snowball sampling. To create themes from the data analysis, open and axial codes were extracted, and themes were generated. The results show that connections, social obstacles, and the social environment all have a big impact on compulsive staring. Cultural traditions can cause this behavior, such as when objectification becomes normative, although they have less effect than social and psychological elements. The psychological components of compulsive staring, such as suppressed feelings, urges, and coping mechanisms, are also major contributors. It is important to uncover further details or root causes of this behavior to have a deep understanding, which may help us to understand how to deal with the person exhibiting this behavior and if someone has tendencies to develop it, how to counsel him to get rid of it. All of these efforts are necessary to make this world a beautiful place to live in.

Keywords: Social environment, Snowball sampling, Focus Group discussions, Cultural traditions, Psychological components

Introduction

According to Kulkarni (2020), staring is regarded as a mental ritual linked to obsessions and compulsions. In the "Indian journal of Private Psychiatry" Kulkarni describes compulsive staring as a form of mental checking accompanied by incessant doubt.

It is also note that staring is a way to demonstrate aggression or dominance, which can cause unease and discomfort. Additionally, pleasant attitudes and verbal interactions, particularly smiling, can mitigate this tendency (Ellsworth et al., 1972).

Hegemonic views on gender performances led to the normalization and acceptance of the objectification of the objectification of women in media portrayals (Yiran, 2021). These views reinforce cultural norms of femininity "outlining specific beauty standards women are expected to follow" The objectification of women in media portrayals is a result of one

of the prevailing attitudes about gender performances in popular media, which maintains that women must adhere to a particular beauty standard to gain acclaim. Because of this, women's bodies and appearances are subjected to control under the dominant male gaze.

Samuel et al. (1983) described a case study involving a 52-year-old woman with frequent, compulsive staring rituals utilized self-monitoring and thought-stopping tactics taught through made-up instructions. As she refrained from her compulsive rituals during the treatment session, thought-stopping was creatively portrayed. Results showed that these techniques effectively addressed several target behaviors.. The study shows that patients with OCD-related cognitive rituals that are hard to replicate in a therapy session, imaginatively depicted thought-stopping can be a valuable therapeutic tool.

Gaze behavior—a social attention-centering behavior—influences romantic and sexual interactions. The term "male gaze" refers to men examining women with their eyes often focusing on their genitalia. Benjamin et al. (2016) studied the factors influencing men's gaze behavior, acceptance of the behavior, and satisfaction derived from it. The study focused on theories on gender perspectives (ambivalent sexism theory) and sexual preferences (sociosexuality) to justify men's gaze behavior. The study showed that male gaze was affected by five factors: frequency of glance, the unacceptability of stare, male pleasure of staring, perceived female contentment of being glanced at, and awareness of gaze behavior. The results demonstrated that men's views toward immediate sex, need for short-term sex, and hostile sexist ideas were the best predictors of men's frequency of staring at women as well as their assessments of the behavior's acceptance and enjoyment. The objectification hypothesis, which holds that women are commonly seen as the victims of male sexual attraction, sociosexuality, and multiple sexism hypotheses, explained the findings. The primary conclusion of the study was that men's attitudes toward casual sex and their sexist beliefs significantly influenced how they behaved and thought about themselves when looked at whom?

Social, cultural and psychological factors of compulsive staring

According to Thomson (2009), compulsive staring has been connected to social behaviors like information gathering and rudeness. Cultural factors, such as eye contact and personal space also influence this behavior (Colombatto et al., 2020). Furthermore, compulsive staring may disrupt typical cognitive processes, leading to perplexity, ambiguity, and derealization—a state in which a person perceives their surroundings are not real (Hout et al., 2008).

Background

Compulsive staring defined as an ongoing obsession with a person or objects and combines psychological, cultural and social elements. In order to recognize its influence

on social interactions and mental health, this research attempts to explore its intricate psychological foundations, cultural variations, and social implications. Compulsive staring has not received enough scholarly attention despite being present in a variety of contexts, especially when it comes to the obsessive aspect that distinguishes it from other forms of staring. Studies that have already been done examine many facets of staring, but they do not concentrate on the compulsive staring.

Operational definition

Staring

Typically, "staring" is the act of looking intensively at someone or something. It might be a normal and infrequent activity, when someone is engrossed in something fascinating (Garland, 2009).

Compulsive staring

A prolonged, intense fixation, intense fixation on a particular subject or person that frequently lasts longer than socially acceptable periods of time is known as compulsive gazing, and it can cause discomfort or anxiety for the person being observed. Compulsive gazing is a phenomenon that has not received much scientific attention, but it has been related to problems related to psychological health, personal boundaries, and social norms.

Theoretical perspective

Psychodynamic theory

The idea of compulsive staring can be connected to psychodynamic theory, especially when we consider how psychodynamic concepts relate to the root causes and processes of this behavior. Psychodynamic theory views obsessive staring as an expression of unconscious needs, conflicts, or desires that remain unmet; the act of maintaining a prolonged look acts as a conduit or metaphor for these unspoken needs and emotions. This conduct could be an outward manifestation of suppressed emotions that are transferred onto the target of the stare, such as desire, envy, or fascination. According to psychodynamic theory, we can comprehend the psychological foundations and underlying causes of compulsive staring better by examining the unconscious dynamics and motivations (Zeanah, et al. 1989).

Objectives of the study

- To understand the role of social, psychological, and cultural factors in shaping the behaviors associated with compulsive staring

- To establish connections between psychological, cultural, and social providing a comprehensive and well-rounded explanation of compulsive staring.

Significance

Staring is one of the most fundamental and widespread human actions. We glance at objects that catch our attention, at each other, and around us. But when staring turns from an infrequent, fleeting glance into continuous, compulsive activity, it becomes more complex and nuanced, necessitating deeper exploration. A condition at the intersection of psychology, culture, and society known as compulsive gazing is typified by a strong and enduring fixation on a single object or person.

From a societal perspective, compulsive gazing can have serious consequences. People subjected to prolonged stares may experience unease, harassment, or even discrimination, which can have an impact on their mental health. As a society, we also need to think about things like consent, privacy, and the ethics of staring in public. Examining the wider societal effects of excessive gazing is essential to foster more polite and inclusive relationships in the society.

Research Question

How do social, psychological, or cultural elements influence an individual's complicated behavior of compulsive staring?

Methodology

Research Approach

The study areas for this semi-structured questionnaire survey were the most populated universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. In order to gather comprehensive data and public opinion regarding compulsive staring behavior, a qualitative research approach was employed

Research Design

Three complex compulsive staring behavior categories were identified for this qualitative analysis in order to better understand the causes of compulsive staring. Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students from various universities in the Twin Cities (Islamabad & Rawalpindi). To gather information, in-depth one-on-one interviews were done with every student. The researcher developed an interview guide based on the literature study before conducting these interviews. This guide was developed with explicit regard for the experiences and factors related to compulsive staring as reported by the pilot interview participants.

Sampling method

Snowball sampling was employed to recruit participants. This method was chosen because it is effective for accessing niche or hard-to-reach populations-to-reach communities. Initially, just a few individuals who met the study's criteria were found. After the interviews, they were asked to recommend other individuals who met the same criteria. This method was repeated until the required sample size (12 respondents) was reached ensuring a representative and diverse sample.

Instruments or Tool

To gather information, ten open-ended questions from a semi-structured interview guide were asked. This guide was designed to extract comprehensive responses pertaining to compulsive staring behavior.

Data analysis technique

Data was organized and analyzed after completing semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Initially, a variety of open codes were chosen from the entire set of data, and then those codes were dispersed across three distinct dimensions: social, cultural, and psychological. Repetitive codes were eliminated and similar codes were grouped together. Following that, an axial code was created from four to five open codes, which helped create a theme. Afterwards, distinct verbatim quotes were identified to support the themes. For the cultural and psychological components, the same method was used.

Ethical considerations

By following the ethical guidelines established by the FJWU Ethics Committee, this qualitative study guaranteed participant debriefing, informed consent, and confidentiality. Transparency and reflexivity among researchers on potential conflicts of interest were maintained during the course of the study. Ethical issues were included into the results report, and the limitations and ethical challenges encountered were thoroughly examined. The sincere appreciation of the contributions made by the participants underlined the researchers' commitment to upholding ethical standards in all research projects.

Analysis

Table 1

Social factors that affect compulsive staring behavior

Open codes	Axial codes	Themes	Verbatim
Common issue Social influence	Socio-economic and environmental influence		“Look how beautiful she is”

Surrounding environment Public areas Friends circle		Social dimensions and media influence	“We are just looking, there is nothing wrong in it”
Way of communication Unemployment Type of job Bad social networking			
Educated parents Joint family Social Media	Media and relationship impact		“Girls wear bold to being stared”
Late marriages Marital Conflicts Careless Unhealthy relationships			
Attraction for beauty Bold dress	Visually appeal		

Table 2
 Cultural factors that affect compulsive staring behavior

Open codes	Axial codes	Themes	Verbatim
Norms Enjoying Dominance Having Power	Cultural impacts	Traditions and values	“Man can stare. There is nothing wrong in it”
Moral values Dress code Date promoting culture Western style dressing	Cultural values		
Poetry Diplomatic words Bold language	Language		“Girls should cover themselves to not being stared”

Table 3
 Psychological factors that affect compulsive staring behavior

Open codes	Axial codes	Themes	Verbatim
Realities of life Insecurities Unfulfilled desires Emotional distress Not social Inferiority complex	Psychological experience		“People can’t control themselves to stare others”

Objectifying female Misinterpreting words Wish to harass Good way for sexual health	Personal Growth and sexual behavior	Regulating emotions	“It is normal to stare beautiful women”
Habitual or fun Free time activity Short-term pleasure Inner satisfaction	Activities for pleasure	Coping strategies	“People think they have the right to stare”

Discussion and conclusion

Whenever we aim to eradicate problems or issues negatively affecting our society it is essential to identify their root causes or contributing factors. Different social factors such as friends’ circle, economic conditions, surrounding environment plays a very important role. Most of our respondents mentioned the importance of controlling the environment in which individuals live to prevent behaviors like compulsive staring from being triggered. Beauty or physical attraction is also considered as an excuse by those who engage in staring, but this excuse is ignored by most of the respondents as they think that women wearing abaya or hijab are also stared at or harassed, this means that physical appearance alone cannot explain the compulsive staring behavior.”

Culture also plays an important role as in many cultures women are and staring at them is not considered inappropriate In most of the patriarchal systems, men are permitted to do whatever they want, which exacerbates the problem of unequal gender rights. One of the respondents mentioned that in some cultures it is normalized to stare:

“He is a man; he can do whatever he wants”

Psychological factors like unconscious desires, suppressed emotions and the pursuit of short-term pleasure activities are the factors that lead to this behavior. The respondents also said that men who want to harass women do stare first to feel women uncomfortable and check what she will do in response.

In conclusion, it is important to do further research further research to uncover more relevant causes of compulsive staring. Understanding these factors can help develop effective strategies to address and control social issues that result from such behaviors.

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