Are Men more Credible than Women?
Examining Expert Witness Credibility as a Function of Eye Contact

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Introduction
• Women and men are perceived differently when their nonverbal behaviors are equivalent (Aguinis & Henle, 2001).
• The implications of these differential perceptions are important for expert witnesses understand as people seek to influence how their nonverbal behaviors may be interpreted, especially when the interpretations may impact a defendant’s life.

Present Study
• Among nonverbal behaviors, eye contact has been found to have a substantial impact on receivers (Brooks et al., 2001; Wheeler et al., 1979; Hemsley & Doob, 1978).
• Eye contact is perceived differently when men and females use the same looking-behaviors: only males are perceived more positively as the amount of eye contact increases (Aguinis & Henle, 2001; Brooks et al., 2001).
• Specifically, Aguinis and Henle (2001) found that direct eye contact by a female employee towards a fellow employee, as compared with indirect eye contact, led to higher ratings of coercive power by observers.
• The current study sought to investigate the differential effect of expert witness eye contact behaviors between the genders on witness credibility and jurors’ decisions in sentencing.

Design
Design: 2 (male and female expert witness) x 3 (low, medium, and high eye contact) between-groups.

Independent Variables: 1) Gender, 2) Eye contact
Dependent Variables: 1) Witness Credibility ratings
2) Percent of substantive agreement with testimony (% likelihood of reoffending)

Primary Hypotheses
1) Credibility and percentage of testimony agreement were hypothesized to be higher for women in the medium eye contact condition than women in the low and high conditions.
2) For men, the credibility and sentencing ratings in the medium and high conditions were not expected to differ, but were each expected to be higher than the ratings for men in the low condition.
3) In the high eye contact condition, women were hypothesized to be rated as less credible and to have lower percentages of testimony agreement than men.

Stimuli
• Six videos were developed to match the 6 conditions.
• The total measure of eye contact consisted of duration and frequency; that is, the length of each contact (duration) between eye shifts (frequency) was totaled for the “amount of eye contact.”
• When the expert looked at the attorney or the camera, it was counted as eye contact. Out of a 5 minute video, the following definitions were used:
  - Low eye contact = ~30 seconds.
  - Medium eye contact = ~2.5 minutes.
  - High eye contact = ~4 minutes.

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Participants
• 232 undergraduates at a large southern university
• Demographics:
  - 37% male, 63% female
  - 77% White, 16% African American, 7% other
  - Mean age: 19.35 years (SD = 2.57)

Results
• HYPOTHESIS 1: Contrary to our first hypothesis, women in the high eye contact condition (M=158.25, SD=33.10) were rated as more credible than women in both the medium (M=144.12, SD=30.15) p = .03 and low conditions (M=145.79, SD=31.77, p = .001 and p = .03 respectively.

Discussion
• These results suggest that:
  1) eye contact is important for credibility.
  2) women may be “allowed” to maintain low levels of eye contact and still be perceived as credible, and
  3) women may also be “allowed” to maintain assertive eye contact and still be perceived as credible, and
  4) men who are testifying as an expert should always strive to maintain high (assertive) levels of eye contact.