CAN IMAGES OF "WATCHING EYES" KICK-START DONATIONS TO CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGNS?

Senior Project in Cognitive Science

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ABSTRACT

Eye gaze has well-documented and surprisingly profound effects on human behavior. Cues of being watched promote prosocial and altruistic decision-making in a number of different contexts. I examine this effect in an as-yet-unstudied domain: online crowdfunding campaigns. I designed an experiment to investigate whether campaigns that display an image of eyes are more financially successful than campaigns that do not. My hypothesis was that the presence of subtle cues of being watched will increase the amount of money that participants donate. I found that people who scored high on a scale measuring tendency to conform donated significantly more money to campaign pages that had a picture of "watching eyes."

Keywords: eye gaze, conformity, altruism, charitable giving

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Eyes are often revered ("the window to the soul") or feared ("Big Brother is watching you"). Eye gaze plays a subtle but incredibly important role in everyday social interactions. In fact, the human brain is hard-wired to pay close attention to the gaze of others. Research in evolutionary psychology indicates that gaze perception is a primitive and fundamental perceptual ability in both humans and primates (Hoffman & Haxby 2000). It is therefore no surprise that eye gaze can have profound effects on human behavior.

One of the more robust findings in the field of social psychology is that people modify their behavior when they are observed by others (Markus 1978; Zajonc, Heingartner, & Herman 1969; Bandiera et al. 2005). Eye gaze can motivate people to act more charitably and gain a good reputation (van Bommel, van Prooijen, Elffers, & van Lange 2014; van Vugt, Roberts, & Hardy 2007). In recent years, multiple laboratory and field studies have found that even subtle cues of being watched can promote altruistic behavior in a wide variety of contexts including bicycle theft (Nettle, Nott, & Bateson 2012), littering (Haley & Fessler 2005; Erneston-Jones, Nettle, & Bateson 2011), and charitable giving (Ekström 2012). Pfattheicher and Keller (2015) conducted two studies that point to a potential moderator of the "watching eyes" effect. They found that

individuals who are particularly concerned about their reputation "show more prosocial behavior under conditions of watching eyes."

However, there is one especially notable gap in the research on eye gaze: no work has been conducted on how cues of being watched influence altruistic behavior in a digital context. Nowadays, a high proportion of charitable giving takes place on crowdfunding websites like Kickstarter, GoFundMe, and Indiegogo. It is important to determine if cues of being watched can influence people's willingness to donate to these campaigns. This investigation also contributes to the theoretical literature on the Watching Eyes Effect by testing it in a new domain and investigating a new potential underlying mechanism.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. An overview of prior research leads to the prediction that the presence of watching eyes will increase the amount of money that subjects are willing to donate to philanthropic crowdfunding campaigns. My hypothesis is that this effect will be more pronounced among subjects who are more susceptible to peer pressure (i.e. conformists will donate more money in the presence of subtle cues of being watched). I will present an experiment that tests this prediction and propose a mechanism that underlies the Watching Eyes Effect. The aim of this paper is to bridge the gap between academic research on eye gaze and the fast-growing field of crowdfunding campaign design.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a number of studies that suggest cues of being watched can promote prosocial behavior. In what is perhaps the most well-known experiment on "watching eyes," Bateson, Nettle, & Roberts (2006) found that contributions to a coffee-room honesty box increased by 176% during weeks when a picture of human eyes was posted on the payment instruction notice, as compared to weeks when a control picture not featuring eyes was posted in the same place. In a similar study, Ernest-Jones, Nettle, & Bateson (2011) found that university students were half as likely to litter in the presence of posters featuring eyes, as compared to posters featuring flowers. This effect was independent of whether the poster promoted cleaning up or contained an unrelated message, which suggests that the effect of eye images cannot be explained by their drawing attention to written instructions. Bateson et al. (2013) replicated this finding on a different university campus.

Subtle cues of being watched also affect the amount of money that participants allocate to their partners in dictator games (Haley & Fessler 2005). Players in the Eyespots conditions used computers displaying two stylized eye-like shapes on the desktop background, along with familiar desktop icons. This subtle cue was enough to produce a significant increase in mean allocation amounts. Oda et al. (2010) also find that the presence of an eye-like painting increases the amount of money that participants offer recipients in dictator games. Rigdon et al. (2009) report that even three

dots in a "watching-eyes" configuration (suggestive of a schematic face) increase giving behavior in a dictator game.

Ekström (2012) conducted a massive field study to determine if a picture of watching eyes affects unconditional giving in a natural environment, where the recipient is a charity organization. He posted a picture of human eyes on recycling machines at 38 stores. After analyzing 16,775 individual choices, Ekström found that the picture of eyes increased donation amounts by 30% during days when relatively few other people visited the store.

Cues of being watched can also affect behavior even if the watching eyes are not human eyes. In a laboratory experiment, subjects played a public goods game, and those who were "watched" by a robot contributed 29% more to the public good than did subjects in the same setting who were not being "watched" (Burnham & Hare 2007).

Pfattheicher and Keller (2015) attempted to address the questions of how and under what conditions subtle cues of being watched operate. They draw on long-standing evidence that individuals modify their behavior when being observed by others (Leary & Kowalski 1990; Schlenker 1980; Sparks & Barclay 2013; Fehr & Schneider 2010; Izuma 2012; Oda, Iwa, Honma, & Hiraishi 2011). Some people "possess strong chronic public self-awareness" and are more concerned about how they appear in the eyes of others. Pfattheicher and Keller's studies suggest that public self-awareness moderates the watching eyes phenomenon. Participants in their study had the opportunity to donate

some of the money they received as compensation for their participation to an organization for HIV-positive individuals. Half of the participants received an instruction sheet that included stylized eyes. The control group was not presented with eyes. They found that watching eyes significantly increased donations, but only for those with a relatively strong chronic public-awareness.

Mifune et al. (2010) also found that a painting of eyes enhanced participant's altruistic behavior toward in-group members, but not towards out-group members, which suggests that the watching-eyes effect is moderated in part by a desire to maintain one's reputation.

2.1. POTENTIAL CONFOUNDS

There are several limitations to the field and laboratory studies described above. One such limitation is called the *social multiplier effect*. As Ekström (2012) explains, if some fraction of participants responds to the eyes, "other subjects will notice this and respond to the shift in *real* behavior by peers *not* because of the picture of the eyes." This is a problem for researchers who want to run field studies on eye gaze because it renders them incapable of isolating the effect of watching eyes from the social multiplier effect.

Another limitation of these studies is referred to as the *reminder effect*. A side-effect of watching-eyes is that they remind the decision-maker of the person directly affected by his/her action (i.e. the recipient in a dictator game, a colleague in the honesty box

experiment, or the cafeteria staff who will have to clean up after students' litter). The reminder effect could then "increase giving even though the feeling of being observed is unchanged" (Ekström 2012).

A third limitation is that the eyes used in these studies often look suspicious and somewhat out of place. Watching eyes do not really belong on vending machines, walls, or instruction sheets. It's therefore possible that there is a demand effect at play in these experiments.

Conveniently, the domain of crowdfunding campaigns is not subject to these limitations. First, there can be no social multiplier effect because subjects are required to complete the task in isolation. This means that participants are responding to the picture of the eyes rather than simply "hopping on the bandwagon." While it is true that crowdfunding campaigns usually indicate how many people have already donated, I isolate the effect of watching eyes in this research by holding constant the number of "backers" between my two test conditions.

Second, my experimental design avoids the reminder effect in two ways. (1) The fact that the recipient is a charity weakens the direct link between the picture of the eyes and the organization, therefore reducing the possibility of the reminder effect. (2) I deliberately chose eye gaze images that are unrelated to the campaigns. For example, the "Pop Up Restaurant for the Homeless" campaign contains an image of a well-dressed, middle-aged woman.

Third, watching eyes do not look very out of place on a crowdfunding website. The campaigns used in this study are designed to look extremely realistic. It is not at all uncommon to see a picture that contains eyes on a Kickstarter, Indiegogo, or GoFundMe page. Participants in this study viewed crowdfunding campaigns that are very similar to those they might encounter in the real world.

3. THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The goal of this study is to determine if the Watching Eyes Effect has an impact on the amount of money that people are willing to donate to online crowdfunding campaigns. I also aim to determine if participants who have strong conformist tendencies are more susceptible to the Watching Eyes Effect than participants who are more independent.

3.1. METHODS

3.1.1. Subjects

Eighty-one subjects (33 female), aged 20–62 years (M = 32.51, SD = 9.15) were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants completed an online survey administered through Qualtrics. Experimenters were not involved in the recruitment process, and each participant was paid $1.50.

3.1.2. Stimuli

Using Adobe Illustrator, I designed 5 different mockups of crowdfunding campaigns. These campaigns are based on real fundraisers found on three of the most popular crowdfunding websites: Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and GoFundMe. I used three different websites so that the results from this research will be somewhat generalizable, rather than specific to only one site. Four of the five campaigns have a humanitarian bent because previous research suggests that eye gaze has an especially profound effect on charitable giving. The fifth campaign is decidedly non-humanitarian.

Each campaign was accompanied by a two-sentence description. Using Adobe Illustrator, I edited some of the statistics on each campaign's page. I standardized (1) the amount of money the campaign has raised; (2) the number of funders the campaign has accumulated; and (3) the number of days left in the campaign. The purpose of editing these statistics was to prevent unnecessary noise in the dataset and isolate the effect of eye gaze on donation amount. I designed two versions of each campaign: one for the Watching Eyes condition and the other for the Control condition. Each campaign was presented as a 770px-wide screenshot that included the number of backers, the amount of money raised, the number of days left, a donate button, and the featured photo.

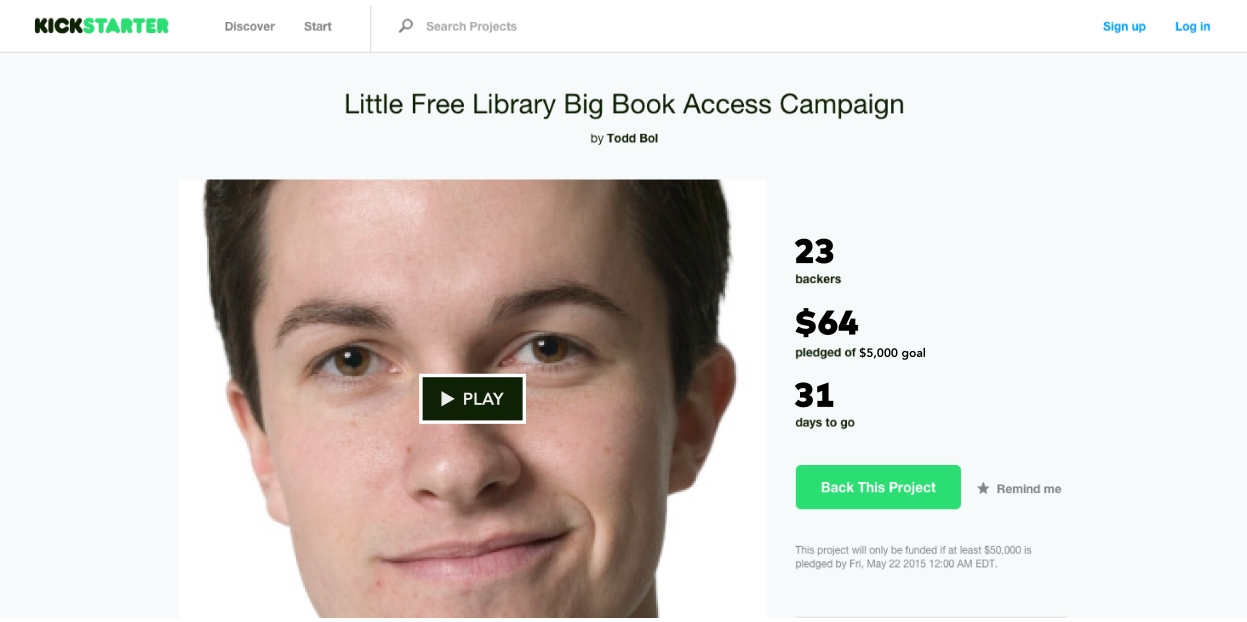

Figure 1. A screenshot of a crowdfunding campaign that participants were asked to evaluate as part of this study.

3.1.3. Procedure

All procedures took place under conditions of strict anonymity. Information about the identities of the participants was not available to other participants or to experimenters. Participants were first shown consent documents and instructions. The rules and procedures made it clear that participation was anonymous.

All participants were asked to evaluate 5 different online crowdfunding campaigns. For each campaign, participants completed three tasks. First, they read a two-sentence description of the campaign. Then, they viewed a screenshot of the campaign's website. Lastly, they answered the question, "How much money would you be willing to donate to this campaign?"

Each participant was randomly assigned to one of two conditions: Watching Eyes or Control. All 5 campaigns in the Watching Eyes condition included an image of eyes. All 5 campaigns in the Control condition did *not* include subtle cues of being watched. There is an important reason that participants were exposed to only one type of campaign: if they saw campaigns with *and* without eyes, it's possible that the effect of seeing an image of eyes would carry over to another campaign that did *not* have eyes.

After evaluating all 5 campaigns, participants in both conditions were then asked to complete a "short questionnaire about [their] personality and individual traits." Subjects were instructed, "try to describe yourself accurately and generally (that is, the way you are actually in most situations—not the way you would hope to be)." This questionnaire was an 11-item conformity scale created by Mehrabian and Stefl (1995). The scale is designed to identify the extent to which participants exhibit "characteristic willingness to identify with others and emulate them, to give in to others to avoid conflict, and generally, to be a follower rather than a leader in terms of ideas, values, and behaviors" (Mehrabian & Stefl 1995).

Lastly, subjects were asked to report their age, gender, and level of education.

3.1.4. Crowdfunding Campaigns

The 5 campaigns differed with respect to the location of the eyes and the image of eyes that was used. In this section, I will describe the ways in which each campaign was altered for this experiment. (See the appendix for images of these campaigns.)

Little Free Library Book Access Campaign (1). In the Watching Eyes condition, the campaign's featured photo was replaced with a close-up of a middle-aged male who is looking directly at the camera. In the Control condition, the campaign's featured photo was replaced with an image of a stack of books.

Help Prevent Youth Violence (2). In both the Watching Eyes condition and the Control condition, the campaign's featured photo was a playground. In the Watching Eyes condition, I added an image of eyes approximately 20px below the donate button. This image is ostensibly a 320px × 200px advertisement for contact lenses. The ad offers a convincing cover story for the presence of eyes on the page and is a fairly subtle and believable intervention. In the Control condition, the campaign page simply does not include the contact lenses advertisement.

Popup Restaurant for the Homeless (3). In the Watching Eyes condition, the campaign's featured photo was replaced with an image of a middle-aged woman who is looking directly at the camera. The eyes are not as close to the camera as in the first campaign. In the Control condition, the campaign's featured photo is an image of a dining room table in a warehouse. I chose to use a woman's eyes on this campaign page in order to determine whether gender is an important variable for the Watching Eyes Effect. (If, for example, watching eyes affect donation amounts in campaign 1, but not campaign 3, it would be reasonable to suggest that gender plays some sort of role).

Range: Food and Safe Places for Youth (4). In both the Watching Eyes condition and the Control condition, the campaign's featured photo was an image of food at a farmers' market. In the Watching Eyes condition, I inserted a 1170px × 400px image of eyes between the navigation bar and the title of the campaign. Again, this image is ostensibly a banner advertisement for contact lenses. In the Control condition, the campaign page simply does not include the contact lenses advertisement.

Better Beanie (5). This was the only campaign that could not be characterized as philanthropic or humanitarian. In the Control condition, the campaign's featured photo was replaced with an image of several different winter hats. In the Watching Eyes condition, the featured photo was replaced with an image of two individuals (one man and one woman) staring directly at the camera. Previous research suggests that watching eyes only influence behavior when one's reputation is on the line. I used an image with *two* pairs of eyes in order to test this hypothesis. If my (relatively) extreme manipulation has no effect on donation amount, then it is safe to conclude that watching eyes do not affect behavior in the domain of non-charitable giving.

3.2. PREDICTIONS

I predicted that participants in the Watching Eyes condition would donate more money on average to each campaign (with the exception of the non-philanthropic campaign) than participants in the Control condition. The non-philanthropic campaign is excepted

because participants feel they can donate small amounts to the non-philanthropic campaign without damaging their reputations. Additionally, I predicted that there would be an interaction effect between conformity score and condition. Specifically, my prediction was that participants who rated themselves as more conformist would donate more money to campaigns with watching eyes than participants who rated themselves as less conformist.

I also predicted that the effect of watching eyes would be stronger in campaigns 1 and 3 (i.e. the campaigns in which the eyes are prominently displayed in the featured photo). The watching eyes in campaigns 2 and 4 (i.e. the contact lenses ads) may be too subtle to impact participants' willingness to donate. Lastly, I predicted that the watching eyes would have a larger effect when placed near the donate button (as in campaign 2) than when placed far away from the donate button (as in campaign 4).

4. RESULTS

Data from a total of 78 subjects were analyzed. Two participants did not successfully complete the survey, and one did not properly follow the instructions.

For all four charitable campaigns, the mean donation amount was greater in the Watching Eyes condition than the Control condition. However, these differences were not significant. In campaign 1, there was a significant interaction effect between conformity score and condition (Watching Eyes vs. Control). As predicted, the presence

of watching eyes increased the average donation amount among participants who rated themselves as more conformist. I found no significant effects of gender on donation amount.

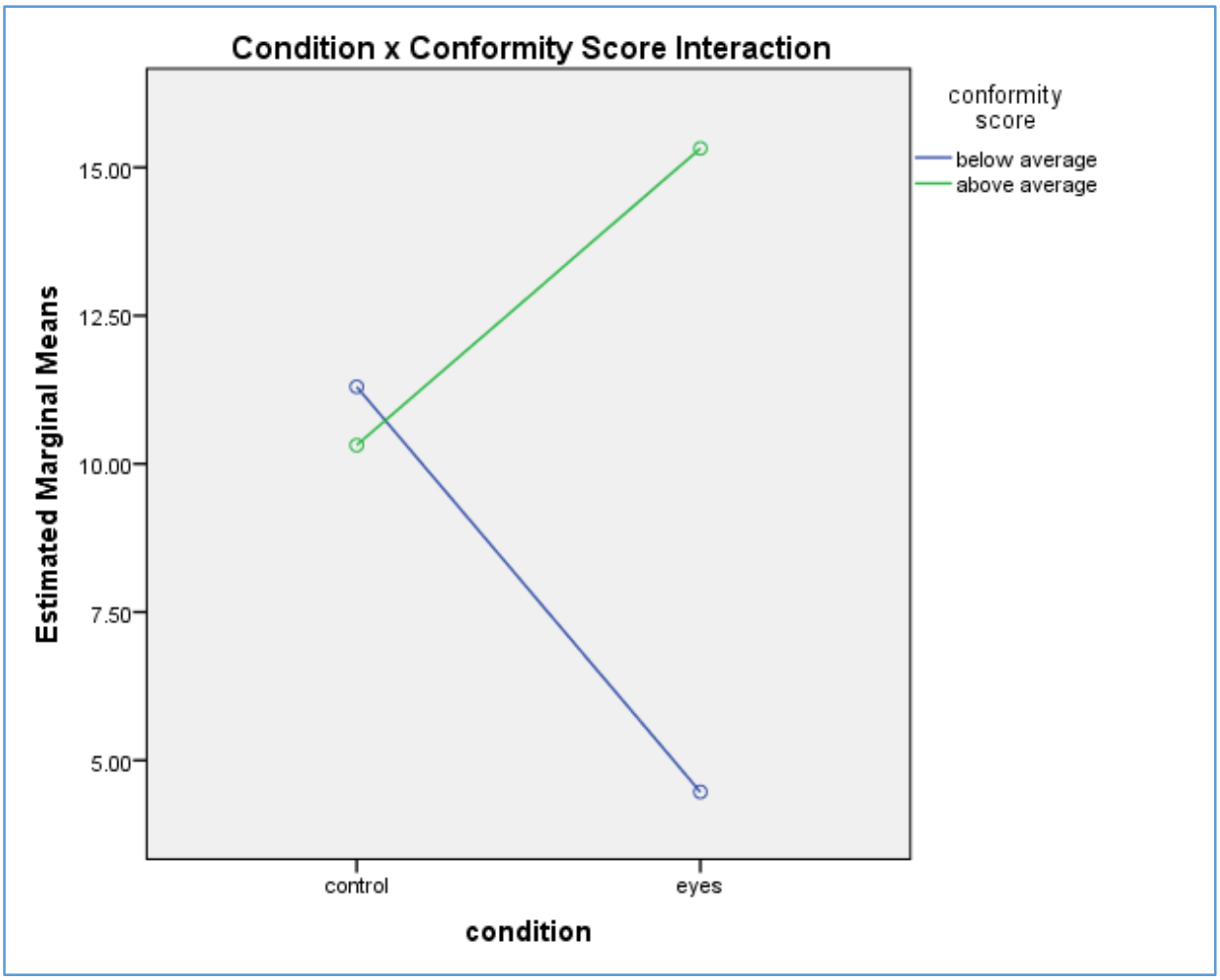

Figure 2. The interaction between condition (Watching Eyes vs. control) and conformity score (above average vs. below average) in campaign 1. Graphic shows that participants who score higher on the conformity scale donated significantly more money in the Watching Eyes condition than in the Control condition.

In order to analyze the effect of willingness-to-conform on donation amount, I calculated the mean conformity scale score and split participants into two groups:

above-average conformists and below-average conformists. I then conducted a 2 (condition: Watching Eyes vs. Control) × 2 (conformity score: above average vs. below average) analysis of variance. Below, I report the results for each campaign.

4.1. LITTLE FREE LIBRARY BOOK ACCESS CAMPAIGN

Results from an independent-samples *t* test indicated that participants in the eye gaze condition (M = \$11.25, SD = 13.46, N = 40) did not donate significantly more money than than participants in the eye condition (M = \$10.82, SD = 13.31, N = 39), t(77) = .143, p = .887, two-tailed.

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted that examined the influence of two independent variables (condition, conformity scale score) on the amount of money donated to the campaign. Condition included two levels (Watching Eyes, Control) and conformity scale score consisted of two levels (above the mean, below the mean). There was a statistically significant interaction between the conformity scale score and condition on donation amount, $F(1, 75) = 3.956$, $p = .05$. The main effect for condition was not significant, $F(1, 75) = .094$, $p = .759$. The main effect for conformity scale score was also insignificant, $F(1, 75) = 2.75$, $p = .101$.

4.2. HELP PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE

Results from an independent-samples *t* test indicated that participants in the eye gaze condition (*M* = $10.23, *SD* = 16.66, *N* = 40) did not donate significantly more money than than participants in the control condition (*M* = $8.90, *SD* = 11.21, *N* = 39), t(77) = .415, p = .680, two-tailed.

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted that examined the influence of two independent variables (condition, conformity scale score) on the amount of money donated to the campaign. Condition included two levels (Watching Eyes, Control) and conformity scale score consisted of two levels (above the mean, below the mean). There was not a significant interaction between the conformity scale score and condition on donation amount, $F(1, 74) = 2.679$, $p = .106$. The main effect for condition was not significant, $F(1, 74) = 0.00$, $p = .992$. The main effect for conformity scale score was also insignificant, $F(1, 74) = 1.29$, $p = .260$.

4.3. POPUP RESTAURANT FOR THE HOMELESS

Results from an independent-samples *t* test indicated that participants in the eye gaze condition (*M* = $14.18, *SD* =17.77, *N* = 40) did not donate significantly more money than than participants in the control condition (*M* = $13.77, *SD* = 17.48, *N* = 39), t(77) = .102, p = .919, two-tailed.

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted that examined the influence of two independent variables (condition, conformity scale score) on the amount of money donated to the campaign. Condition included two levels (Watching Eyes, Control) and conformity scale score consisted of two levels (above the mean, below the mean). There was not a significant interaction between the conformity scale score and condition on donation amount, $F(1, 75) = 1.614$, $p = .208$. The main effect for condition was not significant, $F(1, 75) = 0.30$, $p = .864$. The main effect for conformity scale score was also insignificant, $F(1, 75) = .900$, $p = .346$.

4.4. RANGE: FOOD AND SAFE PLACES FOR YOUTH

Results from an independent-samples *t* test indicated that participants in the eye gaze condition ($M = \$12.15$, $SD = 11.56$, $N = 40$) did not donate significantly more money than than participants in the control condition ($M = \$11.74$, $SD = 15.43$, $N = 39$), $t(77) = .133$, $p = .895$, two-tailed.

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted that examined the influence of two independent variables (condition, conformity scale score) on the amount of money donated to the campaign. Condition included two levels (Watching Eyes, Control), and conformity scale score consisted of two levels (above the mean, below the mean). There was not a significant interaction between the conformity scale score and condition on donation amount, $F(1, 75) = .050$, $p = .824$. The main effect for condition was not

significant, $F(1, 75) = 0.000$, $p = .996$. The main effect for conformity scale score was also insignificant, $F(1, 75) = 1.176$, $p = .282$.

4.5. BETTER BEANIE

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to determine if participants in the eye gaze condition were willing to donate more than participants in the control condition. Participants who were exposed to cues of being watched ($M = \$2.25$, $SD = 4.61$, $N = 40$) did not donate significantly more money than than participants in the control condition condition ($M = \$2.97$, $SD = 5.17$, $N = 39$), $t(77) = .657$, $p = .513$, two-tailed.

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted that examined the influence of two independent variables (condition, conformity scale score) on the amount of money donated to the campaign. Condition included two levels (Watching Eyes, Control), and conformity scale score consisted of two levels (above the mean, below the mean). There was not a significant interaction between the conformity scale score and condition on donation amount, $F(1, 75) = .234$, $p = .630$. The main effect for condition was not significant, $F(1, 75) = 1.037$, $p = .312$. The main effect for conformity scale score was also insignificant, $F(1, 75) = 4.889$, $p = .030$.

5. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Results from campaign 1 show that an image of a pair of eyes significantly increases contribution to a crowdfunding campaign, but only for people who rate themselves as more conformist than average. This finding is in line with previous research, which suggests that watching eyes (1) motivate cooperative behavior, and (2) significantly increase donations among participants who are concerned about maintaining their reputations (Bateson et al. 2006; Pfattheicher & Keller 2015). As predicted, my results also show that watching eyes do not significantly increase contributions to a non-charitable crowdfunding campaign. This is a somewhat impressive result given that the non-charitable campaign contained *two* pairs of watching eyes. Prior research suggests that this is because eye gaze only promotes altruistic behavior when participants are engaging in altruistic decision-making (Haley & Fessler 2005; Mifune et al. 2010; Ekström 2012).

There was no main effect of condition for any of the campaigns, nor was there a significant interaction effect between condition and conformity score for campaigns 2–5.

It is worth calling attention to the fact that I found significant results for the campaign that used the strongest manipulation. This campaign's webpage included an extremely close-up shot of a man's eyes, and the image of eyes was featured very prominently on the page. This leads me to believe that I would have found significant

results for the other campaigns if they too used images of eyes that were prominently featured and tightly-cropped.

A study conducted by Sparks and Barclay (2013) offers a potential explanation for the lack of significant results in campaigns 2–5. He found that participants who were exposed briefly to an eye-like image gave more money in an economic game than those in a longer exposure condition and those in a control condition. However, "there was no generosity difference between the long exposure and control conditions" (Sparks & Barclay 2013). It's possible that participants in my study were simply exposed to the stimuli for too long and were thus desensitized to the watching eyes. There are several experiments in the literature that report no effect of eye gaze (Carbon & Hesslinger 2011; Fehr & Schneider 2010; Lambda & Mace 2010; Raihani & Bshary 2012). Sparks and Barclay (2013) find that nearly all of the studies with insignificant results share the same fatal flaw: participants were exposed to the eye images for a relatively long period of time. Future research on eye gaze and crowdfunding campaigns should take care to limit the amount of time that participants are exposed to the stimulus.

An unremarkable but plausible explanation for the lack of significant results in campaigns 2–5 is that the sample size was too small.

5.1. LIMITATIONS & DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Participants in this study were asked only for their hypothetical willingness to pay (WTP). At no point was real money involved (except for when participants were paid for completing the study). It is possible that participants did not report their actual willingness to pay. However, hypothetical WTP is a fairly common paradigm in the behavioral economics literature. Perhaps participants reported unrealistically high WTPs because they wanted to be seen as more charitable. This would not pose a problem for this study because it would have happened in both the Watching Eyes conditions and the Control.

That said, it would be worthwhile to re-run this experiment using real money and a dictator game paradigm. Much like Haley and Fessler's (2005) study, participants would be endowed with a certain amount of money before viewing each campaign. Then, they would be asked to allocate a percentage of the money to the campaign (and keep the rest for themselves). This is, in several ways, a cleaner design. There would be no effect of individual differences in income because each participant would be allocating the same amount of money per trial. Additionally, percentage allocated is perhaps a better dependent variable than amount donated because prior research more often uses this measure.

A second limitation is that there was only one non-charitable campaign. Future research could test more types of non-charitable campaigns in order to determine

whether my finding is in fact true (i.e. watching eyes do not significantly increase contribution to a non-charitable crowdfunding campaign). Future iterations of this study should also counter-balance the order in which campaigns are shown to participants.

A third limitation: it is possible that participants donated more to the first campaign in the Watching Eyes condition simply because the face pictured was relatively friendly. A future study could attempt to isolate the effects of facial expression from eye gaze. Participants would be placed in one of, say, four conditions: happy expression, sad expression, neutral expression, and control. The subject of the photograph would remain constant across all three conditions (except for the control condition, which would use a photograph that does not contain watching eyes). If the donation amount remained significantly greater in all three expression conditions than in the control condition, then researchers could be relatively confident that the effect is due to watching eyes rather than type of expression. Of course, it would be simpler to crop out everything besides the eyes. However, this approach is less ecologically-valid and far more suspicious-looking.

The design of my study also makes it impossible to distinguish between these two claims: (1) subtle cues of being watched (e.g. contact lenses advertisements) are less effective *per se*; (2) subtle cues of being watched *can* be effective, but happened to be placed on campaign pages that were somehow inherently less likely to produce an

effect. Future research could eliminate this problem with a between-subjects research design that tests all three types of watching eyes (i.e. contact lenses banner ad, contact lenses box ad, featured photo close-up) on the *same* campaign.

There are several minor, but interesting questions that could also make for fruitful areas of research including (but not limited to): the effect of non-human eyes, the effect of human eyes that are not looking directly at the user, and the effect of shapes that merely *resemble* human eyes.

6. CONCLUSION

These results provide preliminary evidence that watching eyes can increase donations to crowdfunding campaigns among people who tend to conform to their peers. Although many of my results were nonsignificant, it is important to note once again that the average donation amount was greater in the Watching Eyes condition than the Control condition for all four charitable campaigns. This finding has both theoretical and practical implications. It adds to the growing body of analytical literature that suggests eye gaze has profound effects on human behavior. This research also has important practical implications for people who are designing and running crowdfunding campaigns. Marketers should consider the power of eye gaze if they want to maximize the amount of money that they receive. Kickstarter and related sites

might even consider educating users about the Watching Eyes Effect within their campaign creation interfaces.

Jaden Smith, son of Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith, once famously tweeted, "How Can Mirrors Be Real If Our Eyes Aren't Real?" Though his question is nonsensical, it captures our collective fascination with eyes and the surprising ways in which they influence our behavior. Future research should continue to investigate the "watching eyes" phenomenon and explore the many ways in which eye gaze can promote altruistic and prosocial behavior.

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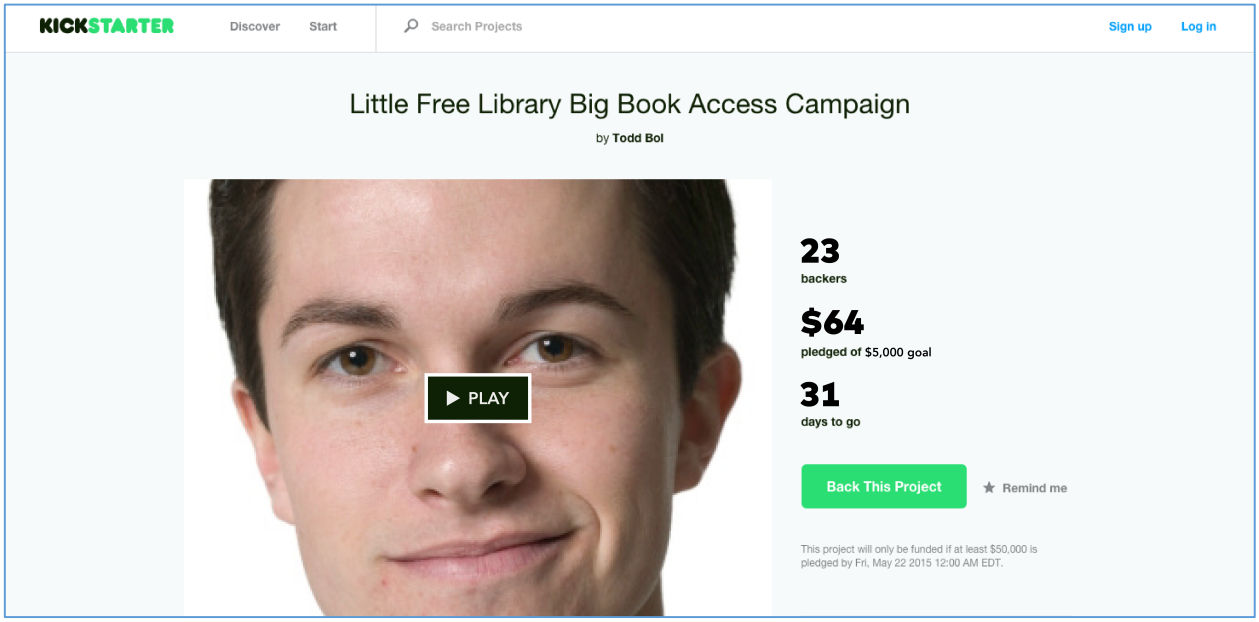
Appendix A

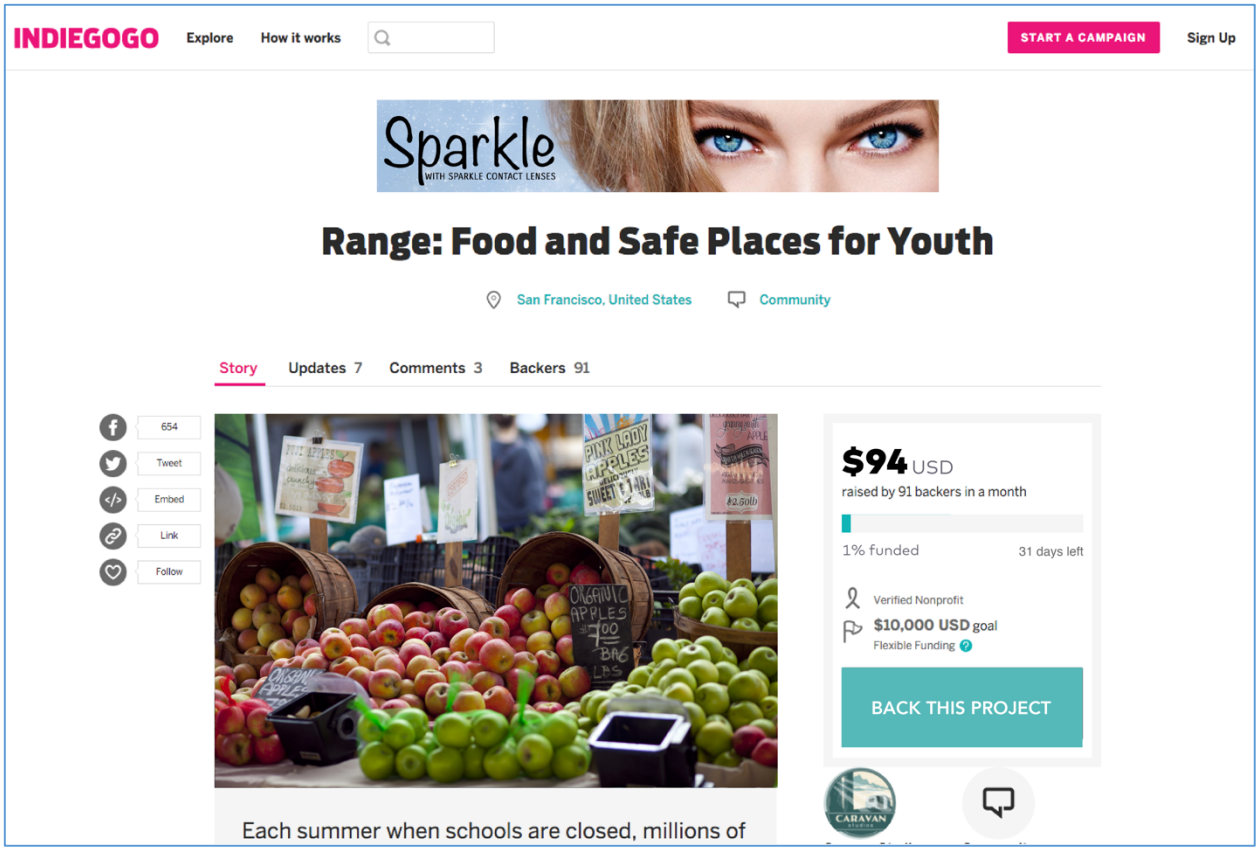
Screenshots of "Watching Eyes" Crowdfunding Campaigns



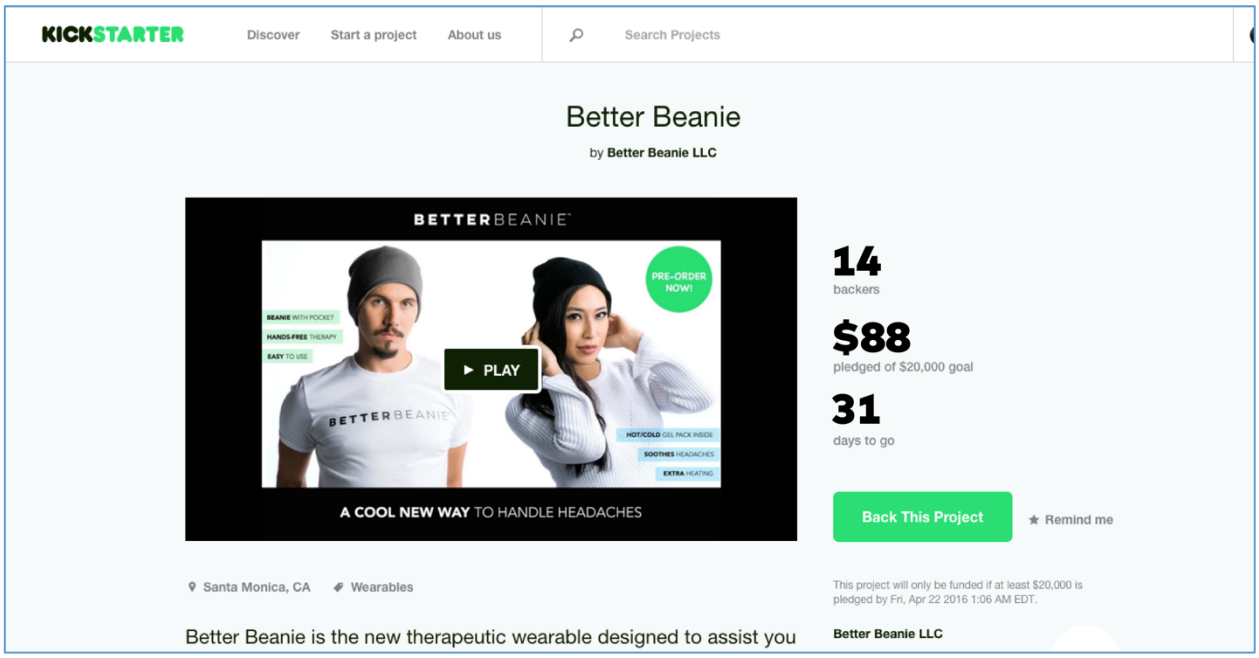
Campaign 1.

Campaign 2.

Campaign 3.



Campaign 4.



Campaign 5.