

Eye contact

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Most of us would not readily think that eye contact had anything to do with language, or a person's culture. While researching a topic for this paper I came across an article on cultural differences that contained a section about eye contact. I found it to be very telling, as to the reasons for either the lack of, or the reasons for eye contact. The article of reference is " Cultural Differences? Or, Are we really that different? " (Gregorio Billikoph). This article discusses the differences in cultures, or the different ways in which these cultures relate to others, and how some words or expressions may not make sense to another culture. One example of this is using the phrase " thank you". In the U. S., we thank everyone for just about everything we do, but in the Chinese culture, for example, will only thank someone if the task being preformed is something very important. Although this article touches on a variety of cultural differences, I found the idea of eye contact very interesting. In this article the writer, who is of Hispanic origin, talks about his own strong need for eye contact. He explains that his wife has come to realize that when he is talking to her, she needs to stop what she is doing and make eye contact with him, or he will stop talking until she does. He goes on to say that poor eye contact is " partially due to shyness or how sake a person feels around others" (pg 5). As I stated in the beginning, eye contact may not seem to be part of our language. On this I would have to disagree, because I think without eye contact, communication is very difficult. Consider this; you are having a conversation with someone who speaks English only as a second language, and has some difficulty with some phrases. While talking to this person, he or she is looking anywhere but at you, do you think this person fully understands what you are saying, or are they feeling embarrassed because they are having difficulty understanding

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you? If you and this person were talking and maintaining eye contact, you would be able to see by your companion's expressions whether or not you were being understood. There are of course other reasons for lack of eye contact. Some may feel that they are inferior to you, or they may be shy or withdrawn. I have been in situations where eye contact made me very uncomfortable. For me, there are those whose eye contact is so intense, I am forced to look away for a bit because it makes me feel violated, like they are looking too deep into me. Then there are those times when talking to a man, where I feel they are trying to attract my attention to them for different reasons I am not interested in. I believe that eye contact is important, but it seems to me that times have changed in that area to some extent. Why? Again it comes down to how your eye contact is perceived. I have been in situations when talking to someone of the opposite sex, and their wife or girlfriend gets the idea that I am interested in their man because of eye contact. I also had the issue with my ex-husband. He did not like me talking to other men period, because he felt that my eye contact with them meant that I was interested in them. It is very difficult to avoid all eye contact when talking to others, so I was always uncomfortable talking to men when in the presence of my ex- husband. I think that when it comes to eye contact in any culture. Or when dealing with anyone in general, we need to be aware of how that eye contact will be perceived by others. We all need to educate ourselves as much as possible, regarding cultural differences in order to help avoid some of the negative effects our actions could cause. References Gregorio Billikoph. Cultural Differences? Or, are we really that Different, <http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7article/article01.htm>

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