

Attention Bias to Social Stimuli During Social Interaction Tasks

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Background

Attention Bias:

- Attention bias (AB) to threat is a phenomenon in which anxious individuals attend to threatening stimuli more frequently than when compared to neutral stimuli (1).
- Individuals with trait level anxiety tend to have an exaggerated and dysfunctional response to socially threatening stimuli.
- To our knowledge, prior research investigating AB in social situations have not conducted experiments in true real-world situations, making results difficult to generalize to the real world.
 - Virtual Reality, Dot-probe task

Trier Social Stress Test (TSST):

- Standard protocol designed to consistently elicit a moderate level of psychosocial stress and physiological stress response in participants (2)
- Two main components: Speech Task and Math Task (2)

Hypothesis

We hypothesize that in such a realistic social setting, individuals with trait anxiety will attend to negative stimuli more frequently than positive stimuli.

References

- (1) Bar-Haim et al., (2007).
- (2) Kirschbaum et al (1993)
- (3) Allen et al., (2017).

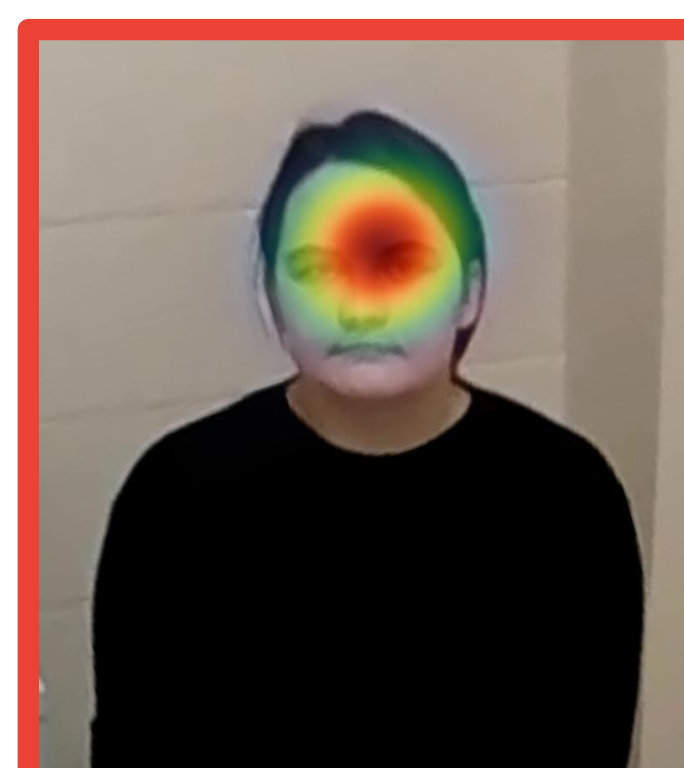
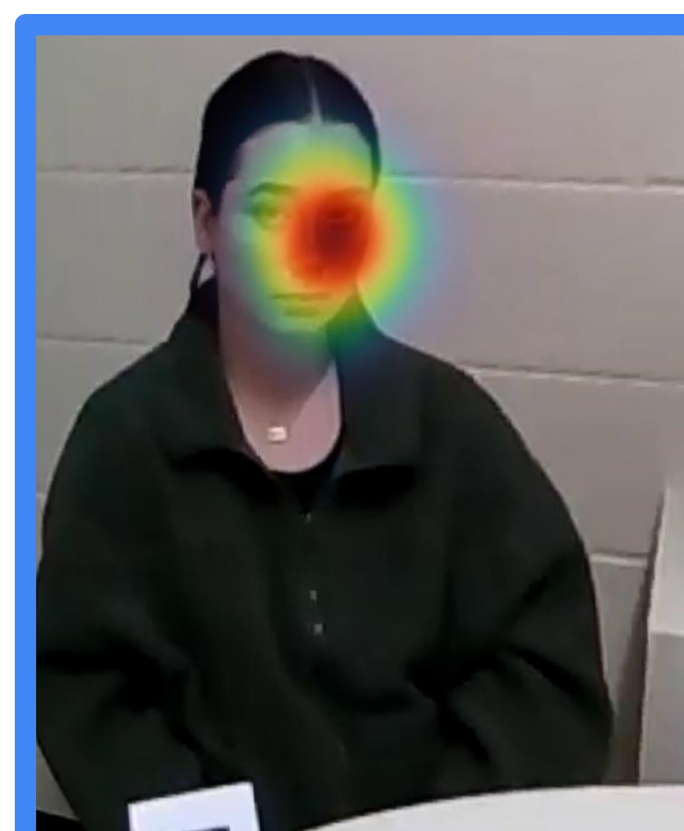
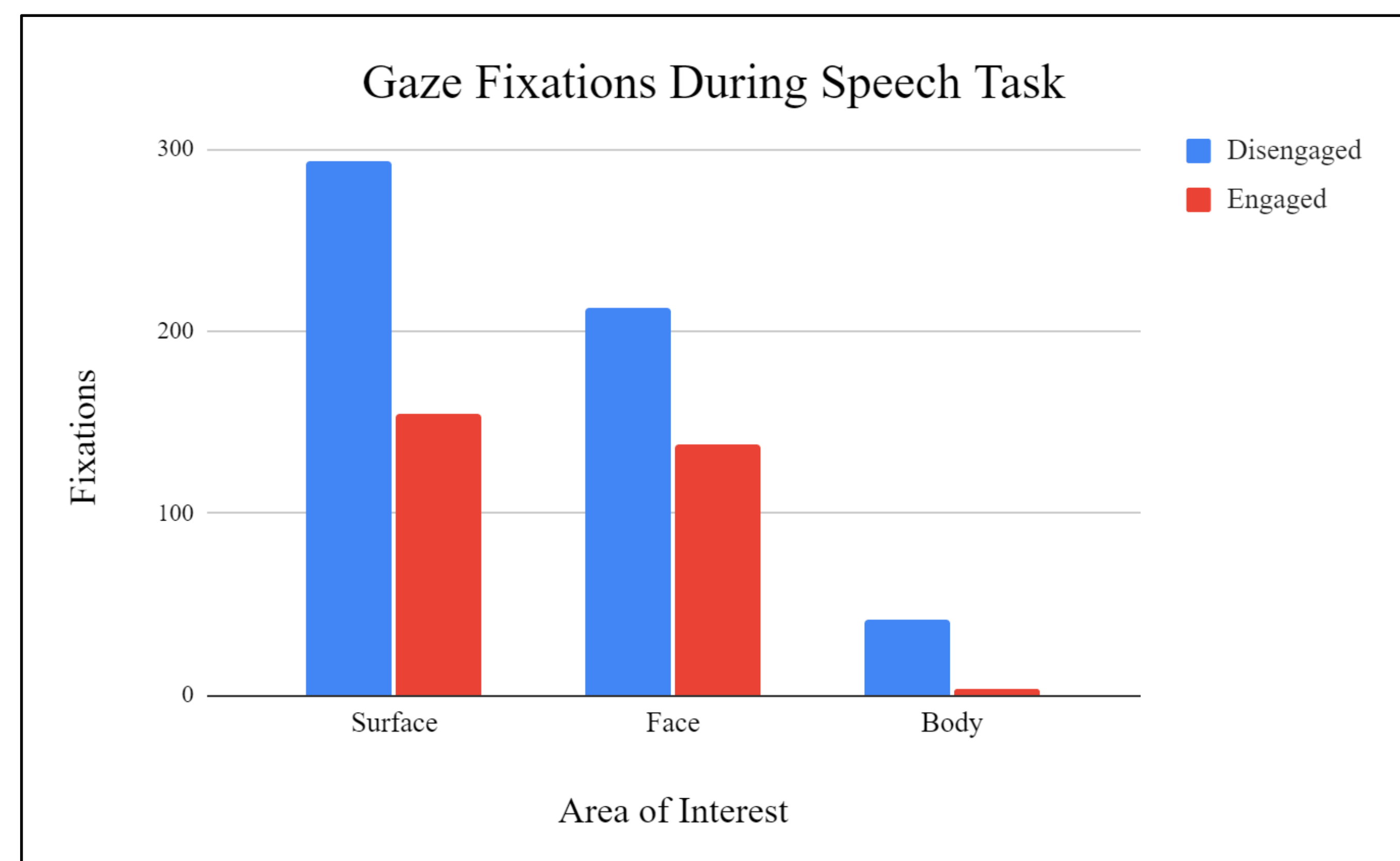
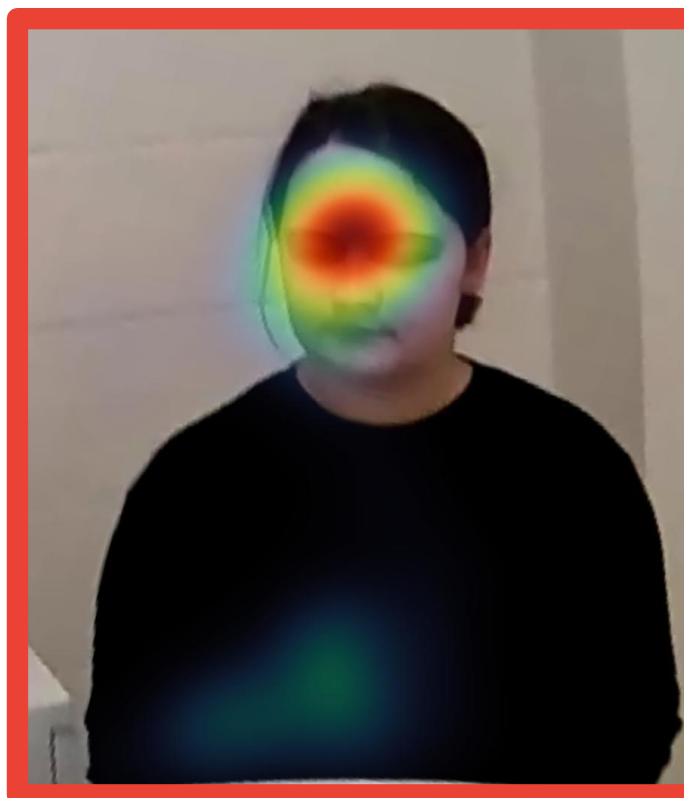
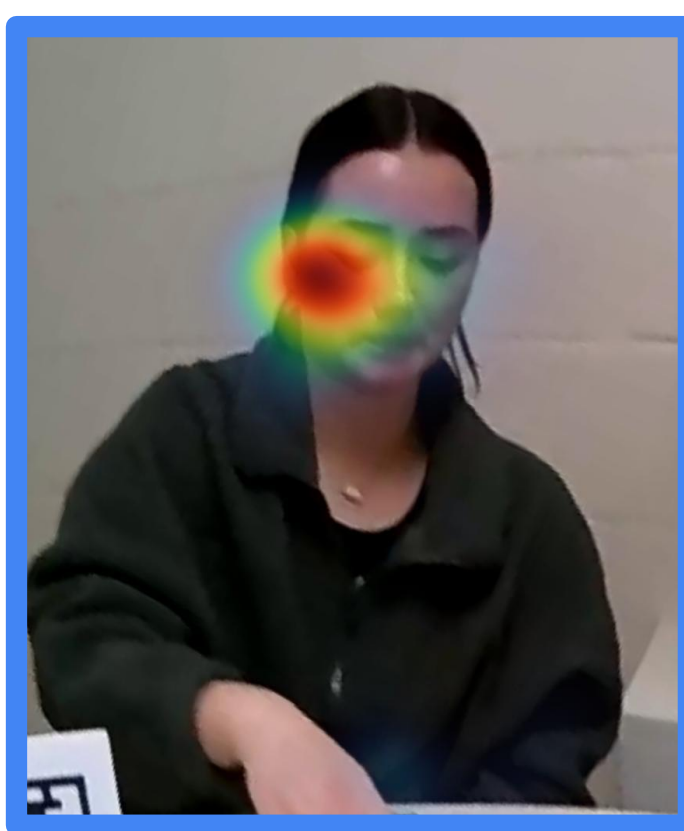
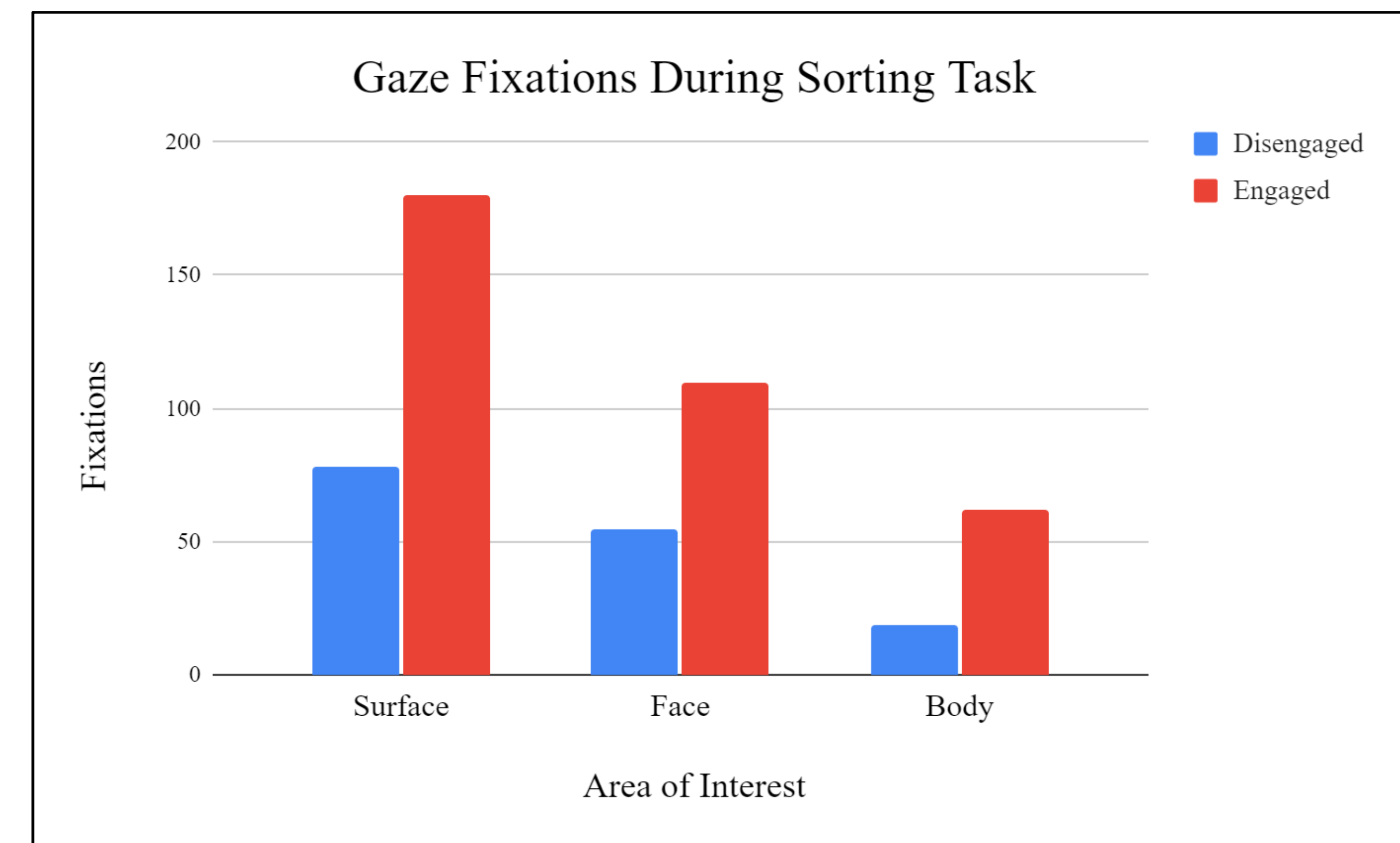


Figure 1 (above). Sorting Task and Panel set up.

Figure 2 (left). Pupil Neon mobile eye-trackers (Pupil Labs GmbH, Berlin, Germany).

Conclusion

Results:

- Increased number of fixations to negative verses positive stimuli in stressed task vs sorting task.
- Consistent with hypothesis, but no conclusions can be made.

Limitations:

- Small sample size
- High stress tasks
- Uncontrollable differences between confederate presentation

Future Directions:

- Assessing AB in individuals with other mental health disorders.
- Assessing AB in other social interaction tasks.