

A real attention grabber

December 2 2007

The person you're speaking with may be looking at you, but are they really paying attention? Or has the person covertly shifted their attention, without moving their eyes? Dr. Brian Corneil, of the Centre for Brain and Mind at The University of Western Ontario in London, Canada has found a way of actually measuring covert attention.

His research "Neuromuscular consequences of reflexive covert orienting" is posted on the Advance Online Publication of *Nature Neuroscience*.

"Our results demonstrate for the first time that covert attention can be measured in real-time via recordings of muscle activity in the neck," says Corneil, an assistant professor of physiology & pharmacology and psychology.

"This finding may fundamentally change how attention is measured, grounding it in an objective and straightforward technique."

Until now, measuring attention was based on indirect measures of changes in reaction time, or stimulus detection. In furthering our understanding of how the brain works, Corneil has discovered that neck muscles are recruited during covert orienting, even in the absence of eye movements. This finding could help in assessing the effectiveness of therapies for stroke or other neurodegenerative disorders such as Parkinson's disease.

Source: University of Western Ontario

Citation: A real attention grabber (2007, December 2) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2007-12-real-attention-grabber.html>

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