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Social stimuli have a tendency to both attract and direct attention. The literature on social attention has however, emerged largely from laboratory-based paradigms lacking in social context. This examined the role of social context in modulating gaze behaviour of participants when they viewed people participating in a social interaction. A video of two actors in a waiting room was played to three groups of participants. In two social conditions, participants were told that the video was a live webcam feed from another room. The “socially-engaged” group believed they would subsequently be completing a task with the actors. The “non-engaged” group believed the actors would complete the task without them. In the final non-social, “free-viewing” condition, participants were told that the video was pre-recorded. Results demonstrated that social context significantly influenced viewing behaviour. Participants in the social conditions followed the gaze direction of the actors significantly less than those in the free-viewing condition. Furthermore, attention to the heads of the actors was significantly greater in the free-viewing condition relative to the social conditions. These results suggest that by underestimating the impact of ecological validity in social attention studies, researchers may risk drawing inaccurate conclusions about social behaviour in the “real-world”.