

Evaluating Truthfulness and Detecting Deception

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VERBAL AND NONVERBAL LEAKAGE

Lies can be betrayed in verbal and nonverbal leakage independently. However, the authors have chosen to further examine this area, analyzing the combined contribution of verbal and nonverbal leakage to the prediction of deception or truthfulness. In their latest study, the authors examined videos of dedicated members of ideologically motivated groups. Separate studies analyzed two types of lies. One involved participants in a situation in which they chose whether to steal \$50 in cash from a briefcase and later were interviewed about their guilt (the crime scenario). In another analysis, participants decided to lie or tell the truth about their beliefs concerning their political cause (the opinion scenario). Each instance involved stakes—if researchers judged them as lying, the subjects lost their participation fee and faced 1 hour of white-noise blasts while sitting on a cold, steel chair in a small, cramped room.

The authors selected videos of 10 individuals from each scenario and knew beforehand that half told the truth and half lied. After coding their nonverbal behaviors—facial expressions and gestures—the authors judged their consistency with the speech content according to time and context. The authors also transcribed what the participants said and annotated their statements using the concepts and linguistic features of statement analysis, such as examining minimizing and intensifying adverbs, editing adverbs, alterations in verb tense, equivocation, unique sensory details, and changes in nouns.

Analyses by the authors indicated that the liars produced significantly more nonverbal behaviors inconsistent with the context or content of their words than truth tellers. For example, a participant in the crime scenario may have denied stealing the check, but showed fear or distress while making that claim. Conversely, the nonverbal behaviors (e.g., nodding their heads up and down while saying “yes”) of truth tellers remained much more consistent with their verbal statements. Interestingly, the nonverbal behaviors by themselves were not as indicative of truth telling or lying; instead, it was their level of consistency with the verbal statements or context that determined truthfulness at a high degree.

Also, the various statement analysis categories that were coded could differentiate liars from truth tellers at statistically significant levels. Greater use

of minimizing and editing adverbs and changes in nouns and verbs all were associated with lying, while equivocation and spatial details indicated truth telling. These findings confirmed previous research on statement analysis.

While these findings remained consistent with previous research, the authors also combined the nonverbal leakage and statement analysis cues in attempting to differentiate truth tellers from liars. The authors found that inconsistent facial expressions combined with statement analysis annotations could correctly classify 90 percent of the participants in the videos as to whether they lied or told the truth. This seems to indicate that behavioral cues in both verbal statements and nonverbal behaviors collectively provide a much better source for gauging truthfulness. This potentially provides investigators with powerful aids in conducting investigations and interrogations.

DETECTION OF LIES

Nonverbal Examination

Investigators can improve their ability to detect lies by becoming more aware of and skillful in reading the nonverbal cues to lying. In examining such important nonverbal behaviors as gestures, voice, and verbal style, officers first must focus on the facial expressions of emotion, especially those known as micro- and subtle expressions, because these both are involuntary and have demonstrated association with deception.

Microexpressions are fleeting expressions of concealed emotion, sometimes so fast that they happen in the blink of an eye—as fast as one-fifteenth of a second. This results from the individual's attempt to hide them. They generally go unnoticed in daily social interactions; the most reliable evaluations are done by the review of slow- and stop-motion videotape of the speaker.

However, people can learn to see them in real time. For instance, trainees at the FBI National Academy typically can increase their recognition of microexpressions to above 70 percent, in some cases over 90 percent; studies on other populations, including U.S. Coast Guard senior investigating officers, have shown average posttraining accuracy of better than 80 percent. These same officers almost doubled their ability to accurately read individuals who displayed these microexpressions in real-world, real-time settings. This ability is retained weeks after initial training.

Facial expressions of emotion, including macro-, micro-, and subtle expressions, are universal and independent of race, culture, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, religion, or any other demographic variable. All people express emotions on their faces in exactly the same ways. Moreover, they are immediate, automatic, and unconscious reactions. These are incredible characteristics of facial expressions because learning to read them means that someone can have a bigger window into the soul of almost anyone. It is a powerful tool for investigators because facial expressions of emotion are the closest thing humans have to a universal language.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Training and practice can help individuals and groups leverage facial expressions of emotion, other nonverbal behaviors, and statement analysis to better evaluate truthfulness, detect deception, and assess credibility. Improving these skills makes for a better interviewer and investigator. Although difficult, mastering such methods can make the officer faster, more efficient, and more accurate in conducting interviews. Investigators can follow some pointers to apply these skills in their police work.

If, while interviewing suspects, witnesses, or informants, investigators see a microexpression inconsistent with the words spoken or the emotions described, they should follow up until they can achieve reconciliation or get a more complete answer. For example, if suspects flash fear, distress, or contempt when saying they were nowhere near the scene of the crime, they may be omitting some of the story. Interviewers should probe that particular statement.

Similarly, if suspects show disgust when talking about another person, what does that mean? It depends on the context. Saying, for instance, they are “not a fan” of someone suggests that they truly dislike the individual. A statement like “He’s a great guy” suggests the suspect is lying.

Informants who show contempt when investigators request of them a particular action show a level of distrust. This suggests a need for better rapport before officers make the request.

When witnesses leak expressions inconsistent with their statements, their emotions show investigators how to dig deeper to unearth the hidden story. For instance, flashing fear when talking about the suspect may indicate that a witness feels threatened by the individual and, thus, apprehensive about sharing all details. Or, witnesses may fear getting caught lying about their relationship to the suspect. Regardless, something about the suspect has produced an involuntary reaction in the witness. If investigators identify the emotion, they can leverage it to obtain the real story.

After taking a written statement from a suspect, investigators should apply statement analysis techniques to identify key areas to pursue in the interview. For example, if a suspect’s statement jumps in sequence from the early evening to the next morning, ignoring the time that the crime occurred, it likely would be noted by editing adverbs (e.g., then, later). Additionally, noting changes in noun and pronoun usage and verbs of communication can prove critically important as they can signify areas for further exploration. Once officers complete their analysis, they can begin the interview by jumping straight to such areas in the statement, thereby catching suspects off guard because of the immediate attention on the part of their statement where they feel vulnerable.

When questioning the suspect, investigators should watch their emotions and other nonverbal behaviors. Signs will arise that something meaningful was glossed over. For instance, suspects showing fear or distress when officers jump straight to a particular point in time may indicate that there was something to hide. Conversely, displaying surprise or, perhaps, nothing, may show that the skipping was incidental.

When an interview turns into an interrogation, officers can use the signs of emotion to know when to push further or retreat. For example, if suspects show anger, contempt, or disgust, it may, but not always, be best to stop and try another approach. However, if they show fear, it might be time to drill deeper. If they show distress, they may be about to call it off. In this instance, investigators should use logical reasons as to why the suspect may have committed the crime and continue to press for the confession. Understanding facial expressions also can let investigators know when someone fakes an emotion. Sometimes, a person may express anger at being accused. Is it real? A liar more likely will fake anger. Officers who know all of the signs of anger more accurately can determine the authenticity of anger. The same rules apply to happiness. There is a reliable signal within a smile for a genuine feeling of happiness, and, if investigators know that, they can tell whether a person who says they feel very happy at that moment actually {is} experiencing happiness.