

Detecting deception



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Detecting Deception Erik Skrudland Columbia Southern University Abstract

Since the day you first learned to lie as a child, your parents have probably demonstrated extraordinary talent at knowing when you are telling the truth..... and when you are lying. Did you ever wonder how they knew? Chances are it was collection of things called “ tells” that you were unaware of that gave you away. When most people lie, their body goes through a series of physiological reactions that are subconscious and therefore uncontrollable.

While most people cannot make even a better than chance guess at telling when a person is lying, by analyzing things like “ micro-expressions”, body language, speech patterns and writing techniques, experts can increase the probability of determining deception to levels as high as 90%. The recent inclusion of software speech and facial recognition software has greatly increased the success of these efforts and every day, technological and psychological advances increase the chances of success for law enforcement personnel worldwide. But can anyone do this?

Detecting Deception Wouldn't it be great if you could tell when someone was lying to you just by observing them? And the harder they tried to conceal the truth, the easier it was for you to tell they were lying. Some people say they can do just that. It's not a super-power they claim to have; but simply the ability to read the “ tells” that almost everyone displays when they are not saying what they believe is the truth. From “ micro-expressions” to body language to verbal slips; your body is almost always giving away all your secrets.

But is it possible for anyone to tell if a person is lying just by watching them and if so, how? When a person is suspected of a crime, the first thing the police usually do is bring them in for questioning, which is really just a polite way of saying “interrogation”. Interrogations are a lot better now than they used to be; sharp knives, electric prods and whipping used to be the norm (Navarro, Schaffer, 9), but now we only allow verbal questioning which means that interrogators must be very good at detecting deception.

The first step someone would want to do to conduct a successful interrogation is to create the optimal environment starting with clearing the area of any distractions or obstacles between the interviewee and the interviewer. Anything that presents a barrier for the subject to hide behind must be eliminated. It can be as small as a soda can or the corner of a table, but by eliminating these obstacles, a deceptive subject will feel more vulnerable and therefore telegraph their discomfort more clearly resulting in greater changes in body language and a better chance for you to determine their deception. (Navarro, Schaffer, 10) Telling a little white lie is pretty easy to conceal, but when the stakes are high, your body has a hard time hiding its emotions in ways that you would never consider. Unknown to most, a large portion of nonverbal behavior emanates from the lower body; feet that fidget or point to the door communicate discomfort. (Navarro, Schaffer, 10) And have you ever noticed someone leaning toward you or spreading out when you are talking to them?

These are the signs of comfort and truthfulness that are present in everyday conversation but when pressed, liars tend to lean away and increase the space between themselves and other while drawing into a small space as if

hiding or frozen. (Navarro, Schaffer, 11) Another thing that gives liars away is head movement; specifically head movement that doesn't match the verbal response. Sometimes people say yes, but nod no instead. Navarro, Schafer, 10) Elmhurst, IL Police Chief John Millner, a recognized expert on forensic body language, states that one of the best signs of dishonesty is the innocuous nose rub; especially when combined with a break in eye contact. (Office Tics, Davidson, 3) Since we are obviously not as in control of our bodies as we believe we are, studying and cataloging these signs can be used to determine truthfulness in everyday situations. They say that the eyes are the windows to the soul, and when trying to determine the truth, the eyes may be the key to really being able to tell when someone is lying.

Most people believe that liars avoid eye contact, but in reality, they often increase their eye contact because they have learned that investigators look to it as a sign of truthfulness (Navarro, Schaffer, 10). Another to determine deception is through the length of someone's eye blinks. A slightly longer than normal eye blink can be a sign that a person doesn't fully believe or support something they have said. By cataloging a person's normal eye blink length, you can compare the responses during questioning and determine the validity of a subject's statement. Navarro, Schaffer, 10) Millner explains "To get at a lie, you have to compare someone to him or herself, not to arbitrary criteria. " (Davidson, 4) In other words, you must have a baseline to compare everything else to. But blinking and eye contact are not the only way the eyes deceive; people also tend to look in certain directions when remembering things or creating new thoughts. By analyzing the direction of gaze during questioning, a reasonable guess at validity can be made.

Additionally, Millner states that the real key to analyzing someone's expressions is not to look for large gestures, but to look for subtle, out of place micro-expressions; expressions that last for just a fraction of a second and are then gone. (Davidson, 4) These expressions are impossible to control and may be the key to determining truthfulness. To make matters even more complicated, despite what you may think, honest people and liars don't speak even the same language.

When people tell the truth, they make an effort to ensure that others understand them, whereas, when people are lying, they more often attempt to manage other people's perceptions through their wording (Navarro, Schaffer, 10). They will rarely include negative details in their stories and silence makes them uncomfortable so they tend to keep talking until they are sure their version of the truth is accepted. By listening intently throughout the silence, you can often detect when a liar slips up and reveals the truth. Navarro, Schafer, 12) In addition to listening for a liar to slip up, you can actually influence someone to tell the truth using certain key phrases. By allowing offering someone a dignified way to admit to a lie, you can oftentimes influence the truth out of them. The use of Rationalization, Projection and Minimization techniques through phrases like " accidents happen", " everybody makes mistakes" and " you had no choice" can be used to influence a liar to " spill the beans". (Napier, Adams, 11) All the techniques that were presented here sound pretty easy to practice, but will they work in real life?

Many have wondered this same thing, so there have been numerous studies conducted on detecting deceit and in nearly every one unfortunately, the

conclusion is the same; people are rarely able to tell the difference between a lie and the truth. In fact, the average score has rarely gone above 60%; hardly better than chance and in many cases, the average score was worse than chance. Of course, most of these studies were with untrained college students, but a few focused on professional lie catchers with hardly better results (Ekman, O'Sullivan, 913). There has been one exception, however.

In a recent study, mainly to combat the problems with the previous ones, Ekman and O'Sullivan (913) used known video clips that had been tested to show differences between lies and truth and expanded their subject group to include professional deception detectors such as Secret Service Agents, Judges and Psychiatrists. They also decided to not only analyze group percentages, but to look at individual data as well which led to some interesting results. Contrary to previous studies, Secret Service Agents scored much better as a group than any previously.

In fact, no Secret Service agent scored lower than chance (30%) and more than half scored higher than 70% accurate. (Ekman, O'Sullivan, 913-918). Maybe there is hope for the common man after all. Although most previous studies have proven that as a whole, people cannot tell the difference between a truthful and a deceptive person, there have been some studies that have shown with proper training and by cataloging not one, but many tells, some people can make a good, educated decision that will lead to the determination of truth and potential conviction.

With enough study and practice, you too can detect a liar. References
Adams, S. , Napier, M. (1998, October), Magic Words to Obtain Confessions,
FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, Davidson, J. , (1998, July), Office Tics -

Understanding Body Language, Men's Fitness, Ekman, P. , O'Sullivan, M. , (1991, September), Who Can Catch A Liar, American Psychologist, Navarro, J. , Schaffer, J. , (2001, July), Detecting Deception, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin,