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Interpersonal Communication
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Interpersonal Deception: A Cross-Section

In the popular television program, "House M.D.", the protagonist Gregory House is

portrayed as cynical and sarcastic in his view of the world and other people. In fact, his view of

humanity can be summarized in his most well-known statement, "Everybody lies." Throughout

the years and seasons of syndication, he has repeated this statement concerning his patients, and

often he is mocked by his coworkers for taking this stance, seeing him as unrealistically negative

or lacking trust in humanity. Unfortunately for them, each episode invariably ends with House

being proven correct in his beliefs as patient after patient choose to withhold important

information from their physicians.

Just like the fictional hospital and stories of Princeton Plainsboro Teaching Hospital, the

rest of the world is a breeding ground for deception and such acts can occur numerous times each

day, often without the knowledge of others, or even the deceiver themselves. Noted deception

expert and researcher, Paul Ekman defined deception in his book *Telling Lies*: "In my definition

of deceit, then, one person intends to mislead another, doing so deliberately, without prior

notification of his purpose, and without having been explicitly asked to do so by the target,"

(2009, p.28). This definition will serve as a starting point for viewing deception in the rest of this

review. There are a few qualifications that Ekman places on this definition that are worth noting,

delineating true deception from other forms of communicational patterns that are often lumped

together. First, Ekman puts the primary emphasis on the deliberate nature of deception. Simply

put, the speaker must want to deceive his partner, and conversely, if the speaker does not intend

deception and believes his message to be true, then it is not deception. Second, an act of deception must not have forewarning to the target of deception. In order to deceive, the target must not know she is going to be deceived. Third and related to the second, deception cannot be requested by a target. This is because the foreknowledge and intent are no longer there and all parties involved are aware of the misinformation.

However, even with all these qualifications for deception, the act of deception can still take numerous shapes and sizes in everyday interaction. Later research has broken this trend down into four ways of responding when and individual is asked a question and does not want to answer, "…they can answer it truthfully and risk the negative consequences associated with the discovery of that information about themselves…they can lie blatantly and risk being seen as dishonest if the truth is later revealed…they can choose to keep that information secret and thus violate the questioner's expectation for an answer…they can equivocate and respond with a technically true answer that is intended to deceive, possibly angering the questioner by 'getting off' on a technicality," (Rycuna, Champion & Kelly 2009, p.40). According to these results, deception is re-characterized as a choice that each person is faced with in personal interactions every day. How those dilemmas are resolved decides if deception is used and what form it will take. This choice should not be misrepresented as a bad incident or a sign of some moral deficit in the individual. Deception itself is a tool that is used for a plethora of purposes in communication both acceptable and unacceptable, from stealing someone's identity to keeping a secret to protect a friend in need.

This literature review will be by no means comprehensive, as deception is too large of a topic to discuss comprehensively in such brevity. Rather, this investigation should be used to inspire further research and interesting in understanding deception. First, self-deception will be

discussed because it is an issue everyone wrestles with in their personal lives. Second, equivocation is often misunderstood in its uses and purposes, but it can be separated from deception and serve important purposes. After looking into these two exceptions, the third topic will be social views of deception. Fourth, research will be reviewed showing that the body and mind are often inexorably linked together, and this is being seen as an important tool in detecting deception. Finally, a deeper look will be taken at deception detection methods and confounds to those methods, all to gain a better understanding of deception and its role in everyday life.

Self-Deception

Self-deception is a protective function of the human mind that is used to protect from dangerous or threatening ideologies or emotions. In this way, self-deception is a defense mechanism in the most Freudian sense, though he called it rationalization. However, while the process of self-deception involves the use of misinformation, its name would be misleading to consider it a form of deception. Back in Ekman's definition, it was noted that deception cannot happen with permission or cooperation of the person being deceived. However, since self-deception involves deceiving the self, there is inarguably foreknowledge of the action, and it has been posited that, even in self-deception, the individual knows and fears that his beliefs may be false, because that would unravel all or part of his self-concept (Noordhof 2009).

Self-deception is utilized as a way of protecting the human psyche from beliefs or ideas that could be damaging to mental sufficiency or competency. However, there is still a lingering fear or anxiety inherent in this process, and the deceiver, while avoiding acceptance of certain ideas, is not entirely confident in her new beliefs (Noordhof 2009). Therefore, while the process can protect from trauma in the short-term, it becomes apparent that long-term self-deception is inherently unstable in its logic, and this instability makes it more likely to fail if challenged to

often.

Self-deception is the rote acceptance of an idea of one's own creation, and reinforcing it with related ideas. This behavior can be characterized as abnormal or a dysfunctional pattern of thought, but it can be identified in every person's life. According to research, "Mele notes that if information is vivid---engaging the imagination---then it has a greater influence on what we believe," (Noordhof 2009, p.50). What's more, Noordhof goes on to say that the vivid nature of images is heightened by one person's fear that such is actually the case, and suddenly information becomes all the more readily available. Through fear or other emotionally charged images, ideas are implanted or accepted quickly, and those emotions remain linked to that image.

Because of their emotionally charged nature, when confronted with challenges to these ideas, the individual is more likely to find supporting evidence than opposing evidence. Noordhof stated, "…the self-deceived often seem to try to void believing that not-p [challenge of their belief] by looking for and assessing evidence in a biased way," (Noordhof 2009, p.49). In the field of theology, this process is called the Hermeneutical Circle, and once an individual or group accepts and ideology, they will view the world and other evidence in such a way that it supports their ideology. This type of staunch beliefs can be seen in the eating disorder anorexia nervosa. No matter what others say or do to prove, the individual afflicted with this disorder will continue believing she is overweight and unattractive, interpreting only those facts that support her beliefs. This justification process perpetuates self-deception, but is not limited to just self-deception, which is why it is such an important topic of theological studies.

Each person engages in such self- justification at some point in their life, and that includes different instances of self-deception. While it should not be classified as actual deception, the process of self-deception bears more awareness because of the inherent instability

it brings and the possibility for psychological damage if such deception fails.

Deception &Equivocation

Much like self-deception, equivocation and its partner, ambiguity, are both parts of conversations and communication everyday, often without speaker or listener being aware. Especially in the current social climate that has developed over the last couple decades, favoring statements and communication that is deemed "politically correct", equivocation is needed in order to avoid offending another person unintentionally. Yet, despite the politically correct undercurrents of society, there still exist stigmas of language and communicators who are ambiguous or equivocal, characterizing the speakers as deceptive, under-handed, or possessing ulterior motives. Richard Bello attempted to debunk this conception in his research when he said, "Equivocation is the use of vague, ambiguous, or non-straightforward communication and is a routine and pervasive component of everyday life," (Bello 2005, p.285).

Rather than immediately presuming that ambiguous speech is dysfunctional or poor, Bello posits an alternative interpretation that equivocation is rather a tool that is, and must be, used regularly in order to adapt to unexpected communicational difficulties (2009). It is definitely not a perfect world, and a logical extension of this fact is that communication is inherently flawed as well. There are always going to be communicational situations that are undesirable or dangerous, and the ability to use equivocation to resolve those situations with minimal damage can be seen as a useful skill to be honed rather than defective verbosity to be avoided. One example of such difficult situations is what is known as the Avoidance-Avoidance Conflict, which Bello characterizes as, "…the necessary and sufficient condition for eliciting equivocation… involving any situation in which a communicator is faced with two seemingly direct but unattractive communicative choices," (Bello 2005, p.286). Such situations equate to

the proverbial trick question, in which the individual is faced with equally dangerous or unattractive choices 'A' or 'B', and in these situations, equivocation becomes the be solution, essentially taking option 'C' and avoiding the problems of the first two.

However, even for those who still view equivocation negatively and would seek to eliminate it, viewing equivocation as a response to environmental difficulties offers a means of minimizing equivocation by minimizing the context for it and, by extension, the need. Social situations can be characterized as more formal or informal. Compared to the latter, formal social situations are marked by greater social distance or rank and a greater focus on a central situation, removing much ambiguity from the situation (Bello 2009). Therefore, by simply formalizing the situation and its communication, equivocation will be less necessary and won't fit as well as more direct communication, thereby reducing the use of it. However, despite the beliefs of noted behaviorists such as Thorndike or Skinner who hold that environment causes behavior, the situation is not that cut and dry. Bello himself also admitted that, while forma situations create less call for ambiguity, those situations also carry heavier consequences for failing to neutralize Avoidance-Avoidance consequences, making equivocation still a necessary evil.

Thus, any social situations have elements that can both necessitate and prevent equivocation. However, regardless of each individual's personal views of equivocation, it can serve a purpose for solving communicational difficulties.

Social Conceptions of Deception

Often characterized by religious leaders as evidence of some underlying moral compass that transcends cultures, research has shown that there is an underlying social convention that people are expected to be honest, "Honesty is expected from partners in ongoing relationships (continuing romantic, social, or professional relationships), as well as from

acquaintances…relationship partners evaluate current behavior against a baseline determined from information gathered over the course of a relationship. Miller et al. found that partners use verbal or nonverbal discrepancies from this baseline as evidence of deception, assuming (perhaps falsely) that the baseline to this point was formulated under the conditions of truth," (Rycuna, Champion & Kelly 2009, p.41). People expect their friends, partners, and family members to be truthful in all their communications, and any deception is a violation of those expectations. What's more, these expectations transcend personal relationships, "Other theorists suggest that people also expect honesty from strangers. That is, when people have no baseline of shared experiences, they create a baseline derived from what they assume to be common values," (Rycuna et al. 2009, p.41). Therefore, the long and the short of this phenomenon seems to be that people assume others they meet will be honest with them due to some shared relationship or common values.

When these expectancies are violated through deception, conflict arises and negative judgments are made about the character of the deceiver, "If people's expectations for a truthful response to their questions are violated, they likely will experience negative emotions, which, in turn, can have a negative impact on their perceptions of the sender…negative reactions are formed because of the violation of expectations of honesty and truth, and because of the additional cognitive processing that is required of the receiver to react appropriately to the interruption," (Rycuna et al. 2009, p.41) In any conversation or communicational interaction, question or statement, the speaker has certain expectations about what the other person will say in response, and when those norms are violated, the speaker tends to look less favorably on the violator.

An extreme example of this personal assumption is the group of individuals clinically diagnosed as psychopathic. These individuals are known for their proud natures and ability to lie without concern, so much so that this is part of their official diagnostic criteria in the psychological Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – IV, the primary manual for diagnosticians (Klaver, Lee, Spidel & Hart 2009). Therefore, people who are viewed as psychopathic, diagnostically or not, are then stigmatized as liars. Incidentally, Klaver studied this group in regards to deception and found that, "…psychopathic offenders were less successful at deception compared to non-psychopathic offenders," (Klaver et al. 2009, p.178). While people diagnosed as psychopathic are marked by their ability to lie and deceive without remorse or much show, they can be stigmatized such, and then everything they say, true or false, becomes scrutinized as lies.

Thus despite its regularity, deception is still seen as unusual and is qualified as negative, but this trend, too, is not uniform. Some forms of violations are shown to be more acceptable. Equivocation or silence, for example, are often preferred to outright lying because they are seen as passive actions, allowing the listener to make assumptions, rather than actively misleading another (Rycuna et al.2009). What's more, as with equivocation, sometimes a situation can call for acts of deception, and while these acts might not ever be totally acceptable, their offense is mitigated by the perceived positive intentions. According to some findings, "…characters who lied or exaggerated to help a friend were liked more than those who told the truth, perhaps because lying to help a friend is in line with normative expectations," (Rycuna et al. 2009, p.47). This action is seen as normal, and one could even be seen negatively for refusing to deceive in such situations.

While honesty is seen s normal, however, people still recognize that lying and deception exist. Many people not only recognize that deception is all around them, but they also believe themselves to be good judges of honesty. However, with few exceptions, research has shown that most people, even professionals who deal with deception regularly, aren't particularly skilled. "Ekman and O'Sullivan (1991) found that most criminal justice and mental health professionals perform no better than chance in detecting deceit. Few groups, including secret service agents, federal law enforcement agents, and clinical psychologists, have been found to perform at superior levels in deception detection tasks," (Klaver et al. 2009, p.172). In a troubling example of universal irony, despite the true accuracy levels, most people still believe that they are talented at finding out lies. This deficit may be attributed to attending to the wrong details about the deception, the message rather than other possible clues. In fact, research has shown that the most effective ways of detecting deception is to look for peripheral cues showing ambivalence or added cognitive load required to maintain deception

Deception is a constant in communication, and everyone can understand that to be a truism. However, the expectation of people, familiar and strange, is that they will be honest, and violations of this expectation can result in personal character judgments. However, deception is best seen, not through direct evaluation of content but in the peripheral cues that the body produces in response to deception.

Body & Mind

One important reason that deception can be seen in the body of deceivers by those who pay attention is that the body and mind are intertwined. The actions of one invariably affect the other, and vice-versa. Intensive cognitive processes and strong emotions will influence body language, and therefore body language can be show a view of the emotional states underneath

(Pease & Pease 2004). It is easy to see how emotions change body language, like smiling when you're happy, but few people are aware that body language, in turn, can cause emotional responses, "…intentionally producing smiles and laughter moves brain activity toward spontaneous happiness," (Pease & Pease 2004, p.80). Furthermore, research has shown that people not only react to their own emotions, but to the reactions of others, mirroring the expressions of other people they see. Often this mirroring happens unconsciously and cannot be stopped (Pease & Pease 2004).

Because of this strong connection, emotions are a strong indicator of a person's true thoughts and feelings and cannot easily be disguised, and this connection applies to deception as well. One study by Webb found that the act of performing and sustaining deception requires a much larger cognitive load on the speaker, and as a result, this cognitive load can be evidenced by increases in pupil diameter, with the promise of showing some deception (Webb, Honts, Kircher, Bernhardt & Cook 2009). Even when an individual pays close attention to their body language, some factors like pupil diameter cannot be controlled, and because the attention is focused on what answer to give next in a deception, other bodily clues are likely to present themselves. To make this bodily stress load more intense, deception also adds emotions into the mix of bodily cues. According to Ekman, "Any emotion may be the culprit, but three emotions are so often intertwined with deceit as to merit separate explanation: fear of being caught, guilt about lying, and delight in having duped someone," (Ekman 2009, p.49).

As a result for all of these stressors on the human body, there is plenty of logical credence to this connection between what a person says or thinks and what he shows with his body. As a result, experts in the field of deception have reason to maintain that the most accurate readings will come from watching these non-verbal messages. There are a number of

physiological responses to the cognitive and emotional stress of deception that have shown

promise in deception detection: skin conduction, relative blood pressure, and vasomotor activity

(Web et al. 2009). Webb found that pupil dilation is related inexorably to cognitive stress as well

as emotional arousal, and therefore attention to this cue alone was able to raise detection

accuracy to 80% (2009).

Reading Deception Clues

The common phrase that the preponderance of evidence in this review has shown is

that the detection of deception can profit exponentially by incorporating added attention to

physiological responses and non-verbal behaviors. With the development of society and cultures,

it is safe to say that most developed societies are heavily reliant on words and their meaning for

communication. Some cultures, such as Eastern Asian cultures are considered to be higher

context and rely more on non-verbal cues to provide context for their words. However, even in

those societies, attention is often given only to a handful of common gestures and rituals for their

communication. Regardless of intent, though, everybody communicates messages through their

body language. Despite the lack of conscious attention to these details, there has been evidence

that people can unconsciously notice some bodily cues and get a "feeling" about a person's true

feelings, even if they don't know the reason for such feelings. To Quote Pease and Pease,

"Research shows that nonverbal signals carry about five times as much impact as the verbal

channel and that, when the two are incongruent, people - especially women - rely on nonverbal

content," (2004, p.23). When these messages are seen or translated, they can increase accurate

readings considerable. While the average person's ability to detect deception is around 53%,

giving them little more than chance to get their answer correct, some professionals who

incorporate these techniques have improved their numbers to 64% in secret service agents and as

much as 73% in other groups interested in detection (Warren, Schertler & Bull 2008). These groups succeed where others fail largely because they are able to see more of the behavioral cues, indicative of the emotional distress and cognitive stress that accompanies the process of deception. However, before enumerating different types of cues for deception, experts in reading body language and facial cues make one important caveat, that all gestures must be put into context, "It's only when you put a word into a sentence with other words that you can fully understand its meaning. Gestures come in 'sentences' called 'clusters' and invariably reveal the truth about a person's feelings or attitudes," (Pease & Pease 2004, p.21).

Once an individual understands the reality and significance of this hidden "language" of nonverbal gestures, he can then work to pay more attention to such gestures. This will lead to the discovery that different gestures provide different sorts of messages, depending upon the message's context. Ekman frames it best from his research when he wrote, "There are two kinds of clues to deceit...When a liar mistakenly reveals the truth, I call it leakage. When the liar's behavior suggests he or she is lying without revealing the truth, I call it a deception clue....Deception clues or leakage may be shown in a change in the expression on the face, a movement of the body, and inflection of the voice, a swallowing in the throat, a very deep shallow breath, long pauses between words, a slip of the tongue, a micro facial expression, a gestural slip," (Ekman 2009, p.39,43). These messages exist as part of every bodily action, and each can tell a different and uniquely useful story about a speaker's inner thoughts.

Just as the functions of the body are numerous and near-infinite, so too are the number of nonverbal gestures and slips that can betray hidden thoughts. Because there is neither time nor room to list and discuss each of these gestures, special attention will be given to a more obvious and educational areas of nonverbal communication, facial expressions. Breaking most of

the new ground in facial expression recognition, Ekman determined two types of facial cues for seeing deception. First, subtle facial expressions are parts of a masked emotional expression that slip through, and the second cues of micro-expressions are complete facial expressions that are shown and then concealed in a suppressed emotional response (Warren et al. 2008). As shown in the previous section on the body and mind, the average person often does not have control over his or her emotions and resulting facial expressions. In micro-expressions, the individual is unable to prevent the expression, trying rather to stop it as quickly as possible, and as a result, micro-expressions are easily missed as they appear for the briefest of times, only around 1/25th of a second (Warren et al. 2008). It is important to note that some expressions are far more likely to be used in deception than others, for one reason or another. The most commonly falsified facial expression is a smile, possibly because it seeks to exude happiness and trust from the person being deceived or possibly because a smile is the easiest facial expression to accurately recreate voluntarily.

It is especially important to remember the point about context. No single gesture can be read as a sign of deception without accounting for context. Individual gestures can have ulterior reasons for showing up, and the process of deception can also be colored by other outside factors. One such factor is the perceived ability of the listener to detect deception. One of the reasons that tests such as polygraph deception tests are so effective is that people believe they are infallible. This belief makes liars more distressed and their emotions are more easily registered on the test. Additionally, the way in which liars are approached can alter their responses as well. When Granhag and his colleagues studied counter-interrogation techniques, they found that, "The results showed that an accusatory style of interviewing (indicating a higher degree of suspicion) resulted in innocent, as well as guilty, suspects making short denials, and

consequently these statements contained the fewest verbal cues to deception," (2009, p.131). The level and type of resistance that a deceiver faces will have profound impact on his or her ability to maintain the deception. Third and finally, the personal experience and ability with deception and professionals of the liar himself will impact his success in deceptive endeavors. For instance, research found that people with criminal records behaved differently when interrogated than did inexperienced individuals, probably because their experience has taught them there is nothing to gain by talking to authorities (Granhag et al. 2009).

The body and the mind are connected to each other and strong efforts of cognition or strongly felt emotions can get reflected in an individual's body language. Facial expressions and bodily gestures, when taken together can be used by trained observers to detect when a person's words to not fit with their thoughts and emotions. However, the context of the situation, the abilities of the detector and the deceiver as well as the means of uncovering truths can all change the effectiveness of such efforts and even produce false readings of deception.

Conclusion

Throughout this literature review, deception has been discussed in a number of its facets. Self-deception is not so much deception as it is a defense mechanism for the mind to protect itself from trauma. Equivocation is often discouraged, but it is simply a communicational tool to over come difficult situations, such as Avoidance-Avoidance-Conflicts. Overall, the thought processes and emotional rigors of the mind are evidenced in the body, and the observer who is willing to take the time and know the significance of each gesture, can use these emblems to see the truth of matters. However, in all of this the observer must always be cautious and be aware of context so that they do not jump to false conclusions.

If it was not known before, the wealth of current research on the topic makes it apparent that deception, and truth for that matter, is not a cut and dry, black and white, issue. "When considering these responses, it is important to note that deception is not merely the opposite of the truth, but rather exists on a continuum. Whereas lying is deception by commission, secrecy has been described as deception by omission," (Rycuna, Champion & Kelly 2009, p.40). There are a plethora of gradations of truth and falsehood in between these extremes and each of these grades come with their own value judgments and moral assignments.

Once any individual or society decides and clearly delineates what is truth to them, they must invariably turn their attention to what is considered lies and deception, and this task is necessary in knowing how to deal with such offenses. According to Turner, Edgely, and Olmstead, "…approximately 62% of conversational statements made by subjects could be classified as deceptive. This translates to only 38% of communication acts as being completely truthful," (Cupach & Spitzberg 1994, p.183). Deception is all around, in the words, actions and sentences of friends and family members. Not all of these acts are malicious or would be considered immoral. Nonetheless, the prevalence of communicational trend, combined with the significance this trends holds for the veracity of human communication, make this subject fundamental to the study of communication. This review represents a small survey of some major topics in deception, and scholars and communicators alike would benefit greatly from a better understanding of deception as well as its effects on the self and others.

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