Patterns of Perceived Cues in Detecting Deception

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Abstract

This study identifies specific combinations of verbal and nonverbal cues in the perception of deception judgments. Using the Q-methodology, this study describes, classifies, and assesses individuals’ subjective perceptions of deception cues. For the P-sample, 32 graduate students majoring in communication, psychology, politics, and sociology were recruited. In addition, 36 Q-statements were constructed based on a review of previous research on detecting deception and interviews with deception professionals. The participants were classified into four groups according to their perceptions of deception judgments based on their emphasis on verbal or nonverbal cues and focus on macro or micro cues: face-focused observers, verbal-oriented detectives, micro-cue amplifiers, and nonverbal-sensitive lie catchers. Despite the discrepancies between these four groups, they all considered facial expressions and eye directions to be important in detecting deception. Noteworthy is that they perceived no close relationship between sentimental traces such as pleasantness and disgust and the detection of deception. The results suggest that diverse criteria for deception cues reflect the complexity of perceiving detection judgments and that deception judgments tend to be difficult.

Keywords: Detecting Deception, Q-Methodology, Face-Focused Observers, Verbal-Oriented Detectives, Micro-Cue Amplifiers, Nonverbal-Sensitive Lie Catchers

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I. Introduction

To what extent do individuals recognize deception cues? Previous studies of deception have examined deception cues and detection skills and investigated the relationship between individual differences in deception judgments. However, they have consistently demonstrated that most individuals have only limited success in detecting deception, finding an accuracy rate of 45-60%, which is like flipping a coin (Bond & DePaulo, 2006, 2008; Ekman & O’Sullivan, 1991; Malone & DePaulo, 2001; Miller & Stiff, 1993). It is clearly not sufficient to simply conclude that detecting deception is not an easy task or individuals are not able to distinguish liars from honest individuals.

DePaulo et al. (2003) conduct a meta-analysis and provide an explanation. First, acts of deception evoke a variety of cognitive, emotional, and physiological responses in the communicator. Second, these cognitive and emotional responses are associated with changes in the frequency or intensity of various nonverbal and verbal behaviors. Third, all behaviors are not equally amenable to conscious control by the communicator, and consequently, some behaviors are more likely to betray deception than others. The number and type of deception cues may vary, and perceptions of those cues may also vary across individuals.

A meta-analysis of 120 deception studies showed that over 80% used student subjects (Bond & DePaulo, 2006). While most studies used undergraduate students as lie detectors, several scholars including Bond (2008) examined graduate student samples. He concerned whether there were experts in deception detection. The current study explored graduate students as the Q-methodology basis of deception detection research of experts such as police, crime investigators, judges, and psychologists.

Previous studies have generally focused on whether a single sign like Pinocchio’s nose or a universal set of deception cues exists and whether individuals can detect it. The present study contributes to the literature by identifying more specific combinations of verbal and nonverbal cues in perceptions of deception judgments. Using the Q-methodology, this study describes, classifies, and assesses individuals’ subjective perceptions of deception cues.