Mistakes When Deceiving

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN A PERSON purposefully withholds certain information and presents false information in a credible fashion, two types of mistake may occur. An expression or gesture may suggest that the person is engaged in deception without revealing just what is being concealed. Wallace Friesen and I have used the phrase *deception clue* to distinguish this from those instances in which the mistake provides what we called *leakage* of the concealed information.[1] Consider the dinner party guest who leaves much earlier than the rest of the guests, telling the host how much he regrets that a very early business meeting the next morning requires that he depart this most enjoyable gathering. Suppose that as the guest says this, he engages in a prolonged hand-to-hand manipulation, using one hand to scratch and pick the other. If noticed this could be a deception clue, tipping off the host that the guest is at least quite uncomfortable, and perhaps therefore his excuse should be regarded as false and his enjoyment but a mask. Unless there was leakage, the host would not, however, know the information concealed — why the guest actually was leaving. Was he bored, irritated by the partner the host had assigned to sit next to him, off for a rendevous, or did he not want to miss the next installment of *Masterpiece Theater?*

Confession is not the same as leakage, although confession often follows or is compelled by a very noticeable leakage incident. In confession the betrayal of the concealed information is not unintended or unwitting. Instead, the confessor deliberately gives up the deceptive pretense, volunteering the true information.

Much of the current research on facial expression and body movement has been motivated by the possibility that these behaviors, more

than the words, provide leakage and deception clues. Freud expressed this hope in an often cited quote, ". . . if his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips, betrayal oozes out of him at every pore."[2] This seductive possibility has fascinated the popular press,[3] and been attested to by clinicians.[4-7] Yet there has been little research directly examining this matter and a paucity of theory explaining why nonverbal behavior† might be more reliable than words. Even those investigators who have studied nonverbal behavior in a deceptive interaction have failed to provide much explanation of why nonverbal behaviors would be a source of leakage.

Obviously leakage and deception clues do not always occur. Some deceits succeed. Even when leakage and deception clues occur, they need not always be detected. Deceits that could have failed may succeed. When deceit fails it may be betrayed in words, rather than, or in addition to, face, body, and voice. The very line taken by the deceiver may, as it is elaborated, become so circuitous or improbable to suggest a lie. Or, a slip of the tongue may provide leakage of concealed information. Yet, there are times, particular types of social interaction, and particular moments within those interactions, when nonverbal behavior may be a particularly rich source of leakage and deception clues. This report will attempt to explain why and when mistakes may be most prevalent in nonverbal behavior.

While Wallace Friesen and I have been conducting experimental research on deception for the past 11 years,[1,11,12] this report is almost totally theoretical. There is a point of contact between these speculations and our quantitative research. Much of our research has been directed towards testing bits of our theory, in particular the notion that face and body differ in leakage and predictions about how deception clues are revealed in hand movements and facial expressions. The theory has developed in part to explain problems we encountered in thinking about how to study deception, and what to make of unanticipated findings.

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† We have agreed in a previous paper (Reference 9) with Sebeok's assertion (Reference 8) that nonverbal behavior is a terrible term, but we know of no better phrase to designate facial behavior, body movement, and posture. *Motor behavior*, while technically correct, seems more appropriate to skills and abilities. *Visual behavior* refers to the sensory apparatus involved in perceiving all but the tactile events. *Kinesics* implies a particular theoretical view, first promulgated by Birdwhistell (Reference 10), that body movement can be best understood by applying methods and concepts from linguistics. *Expressive behavior* is also problematic, seeming to imply that these actions only express inner emotions or personality. By nonverbal behavior, we exclude relative distance, which is currently termed proxemics. We also exclude changes in voice tone, loudness, pitch, rate of speaking, pauses, and so on, which we consider to be *vocal behavior*. *Verbal behavior*, as we will use it here, refers to the content of spoken behavior, the words, their arrangement, but not the manner in which they are spoken, which is vocal.

Emotion Arousal as a Source of Leakage and Deception Clues

When emotion is aroused certain changes occur in face, body and voice that can be considered *automatic*,‡ and in this way different from the changes in the content of speech. By automatic I mean that the changes occur quickly, without deliberate choice, and at least initially go unnoticed by the person showing them.

The term automatic does not mean the behavior changes are necessarily involuntary. Nor does it mean that they cannot be interrupted or inhibited. The changes in face, body, and voice during emotional arousal are *not* reflexes or fixed action patterns, which run their course until completion. Quite the contrary, the changes due to emotional arousal are susceptible to deliberate or habitually imposed control. They may be attenuated, masked, interrupted, or inhibited. The term automatic is meant to suggest that these behavior changes seem to occur without deliberate choice, very quickly. The person does not experience the changes in his behavior as something he intended to do. He may often not notice the changes in his behavior, at least at the outset. When he becomes aware of what is happening, his subjective experience is likely to be one of struggle if he tries to inhibit these changes in his own behavior.

Two separate but interrelated arguments can be made about why changes in face, body, or voice occur in any automatic fashion when emotion is aroused. One argument is based upon the proposition that certain changes in behavior are biologically programmed to occur when emotion is aroused. The other line of argument emphasizes the early development of habits linking certain behavior changes to emotion. For our purposes here it does not matter whether both or only one of these arguments is correct, although specific predictions about how leakage and deception clues may be revealed would vary with the basis that is postulated for automatic changes during emotional arousal. (Elsewhere each argument is elucidated, the evidence reviewed, and the implications for leakage detailed.[16]) All that must be granted is that on the basis of biological programming and/or learning, when emotion is aroused it is likely that certain changes may automatically occur in face, body, or voice.

Verbal behavior is not unaffected by emotion, but it is different.

‡ Mandler's use (Reference 13) of the term *automatic* is similar to what we mean. He described automatic processes as operating without requiring attentional conscious work, originating through preprogramming (innate) or habits that through some process such as overlearning become unconscious. Also see Zajonc (Reference 14). Elsewhere (Reference 15) I have described more specifically my use of the term automatic in relation to emotion.

When fear is aroused, for example, there is no pressure that impels a set of words to pop out of the mouth, tantamount to the backwards jerk of the torso, or a facial muscular contraction. What is said is deliberate, at least for that moment. The person speaks intending to transmit a message. He is aware of what he says.

Emotional arousal may cause the person to speak intemperately, saying more, or saying it more strongly than he might otherwise. Emotional arousal may interfere with the ability to speak, it may produce various speech disruptions, but we consider those phenomena as vocal behaviors. The scream that may occur when fear is aroused, or the sound "Ooaah" or something like it, may be impelled or automatic like the facial and body changes, but we consider that also as vocal not verbal behavior. And, further, the person would be aware of his scream at the moment he makes it.

The differential impact of emotional arousal on face, body, voice, or words suggests that when a person conceals an emotion he is experiencing, there should be more leakage in the face, body, or voice than in the words. Words that are more deliberate would be less likely to unintentionally leak the emotion experienced. The more automatic changes in face, body, and voice would, if not managed, leak the true feeling. Now, let us consider a second basis for leakage and deception clues — habits for monitoring and disguising behavior, which are focused more on the face and words than on the body.

Controlling Behavior and Signs of Deception

Friesen and I suggested that people learn to monitor and disguise those aspects of their own behavior for which they have been held most accountable.[1] Most people grow up receiving the greatest commentary and criticism for what they say, next most for what they show in their facial expressions, with less specific attention to most of their body movement.§ As a result of this experience, people develop the habit of monitoring carefully their own words and voice, and, to a lesser extent their facial expressions, much more than they monitor most of their body movements. They also develop skills in the management of their

§ It is probably no accident that people receive the most feedback and criticism about those aspects of their behavior that can provide the most information. Certainly words are a far more elaborated information transmission system than the nonverbal or vocal behaviors. And, within the nonverbal behavior, facial movement is the best sender — the quickest, most visible, most precise, and capable of assuming an enormous number of distinguishable appearances. The relationship between sending capacity and feedback from others was elaborated in our earlier theoretical article on deception (Reference 1).

behavior, learning how to withhold, simulate, and mask. These management skills are best developed for words; and management is easy for a system that does not automatically change when emotion occurs. Management skills are also developed for facial expressions. Although not as facile as word management, the skills for withholding, simulating, and masking are usually far better for the face than for the body. Many aspects of the voice are attended to, noticed by the person who speaks and by the other. The voice, therefore, should be a prime target for inhibition and simulation. But, these are very difficult skills to acquire, and few do so. It is very difficult for most people to manage their voice so that anger, fear, or distress, when experienced, is not revealed. One can of course not talk, but that tactic is not always allowable. Also, few people can convincingly simulate the sound of these emotions.

When a person explicitly sets about the business of deceiving another person it is most likely that he will attend to those aspects of his own behavior that he has learned are most scrutinized by others — his words, face, and voice. He would have the requisite awareness and skills in performance to conceal his felt emotions and simulate unfelt emotions best through his words. There should be some success, but errors as well, in facial expressions. Those changes in facial expression that occur automatically with emotional arousal will be hard to totally suppress. Yet people do learn, we believe, to quickly abort such facial expressions, interrupting, blanking, or covering them. Simulating unfelt expressions is not done with great finesse, but our evidence suggests that it is done well enough to fool most other people. Attempts will also be made to inhibit automatically occurring voice changes, and to simulate emotions with the voice, but these efforts will often not succeed. Finally, the deceiver will tend not to think of the need to manage most of his body movements. If he did decide to simulate emotions through body movements, he would not be likely to do a good job of it, not having had the practice to develop the skills for convincing body movement performances.

The discussion so far suggests that when emotion is *not* involved in the deceit, there is no reason to expect that face, body, or voice will be especially good sources of leakage and deception clues. Of course emotion can become involved even if the deceit was not undertaken for the purpose of concealing emotion.

Five Ways Emotion Can Become Involved in Deception

First and most simply, the concealment of affect or the substitution of an unfelt emotion for a felt emotion may be all that the deception is about. For example, a wife may wish to conceal her anger from her hus-

band and instead have him think she is pleased. Often the deception involves the easier task of concealing how the person felt in the past or might expect to feel in the future.

The second way in which emotion can become involved in deception is when there is a feeling about what is being withheld. Suppose someone is concealing a piece of nonaffective information such as their true age. The deceiver could have strong feelings regarding his age, such as embarrassment, shame, or anxiety. The successful perpetration of his deceit involves not only concealing his true age, but also concealing his feeling about the item being concealed. In this example the central purpose of the deception was to conceal nonaffective information (age), yet there was affect about the nonaffective information. When the central purpose of the deception is to conceal emotion, there also may be affect about the affect being concealed. This secondary emotion may also need to be concealed adding to the burden of perpetrating deceit. Return to the example of the wife who is concealing her anger from her husband, trying to instead appear pleased. The wife may be ashamed of her anger, or disgusted with herself for feeling anger. These feelings about the emotion being concealed must also be concealed. If she was to look ashamed or disgusted, her husband would certainly not believe she was pleased. He would want to know why she felt that way. The emotion about the withheld emotion compounds the types and amount of affect that must be concealed.

A third way emotion becomes involved in deception is when the person fears being caught. *Detection apprehension* can be considered as a gradient, ranging from neglible to so overwhelming that it leaks, or the deceiver confesses at least in part to obtain relief from the suffering of detection apprehension. Many factors could determine the intensity of detection apprehension; the list to follow is an example of some of the possibilities. Some people may be more vulnerable to detection apprehension. Practice in deception and reported past success in perpetrating deception may attenuate detection apprehension. If the person who is being deceived has a reputation as someone who is tough to fool, detection apprehension may be greater. The greater the anticipated punishment for being caught, the greater would be the detection apprehension. The greater the reward for succeeding in deception, the greater would be the detection apprehension.

A fourth way emotion becomes involved in deception is when the person feels guilty about engaging in the process of deceit. *Deception guilt* can be distinguished from the guilt that may or may not be experienced about the item of information being withheld. Consider a student who has cheated on an exam and is concealing that fact from a suspicious teacher. The student may or may not feel guilty about

cheating. If she does, that would be an affective reaction about the concealed item (cheating) and it also must be withheld. The student may or may not feel guilty about lying to the teacher. If she does, that would be deception guilt. Deception guilt also can be considered a gradient, ranging from the negligible to instances when it can become so overwhelming it leaks. Relief from its pressure may motivate a confession.

The extent of deception guilt may be due to a variety of factors, some of which may be the same as the determinants of detection apprehension. Some people may be especially vulnerable to deception guilt. These may or may not be the same personal characteristics that predispose towards detection apprehension. Practice in deception and the experience of succeeding may attenuate deception guilt, the person may become "hardened," just as practice and success attenuate detection apprehension. We also suspect that the deceiver's perception of differences in social values between himself and the person he deceives may determine his deception guilt. People may not feel very guilty about misleading those who they perceive as holding different or antagonistic social values. For example, the revolutionary may feel less deception guilt about lying to the police than would a solid non-alienated member of the middle class. Yet the revolutionary might well feel deception guilt about misleading someone with whom he shared social values. There are situations where social conventions of one kind or another encourage, sanction, or even require deception. In these instances there should be little deception guilt. The nurse concealing her feelings of disgust when cleaning up the incontinent patient, or the family member withholding the true state of affairs from the dying loved one may feel no deception guilt.

The fifth way in which emotion becomes involved in deception is in *duping delight,* which refers to the exhilaration, pleasure, glee, or satisfaction a person may experience during the process of deception. Deception can be a challenge. Like mountain climbing or chess, it may be enjoyable only if there is some risk of loss. An innocent example of duping delight occurs when "kidding" takes the form of misleading a gullible friend. The kidder has to conceal his duping delight about his achievement even though his performance may in large part be directed to others who are collusively appreciating how well the gullible person is taken in. Duping delight can also be considered a gradient, ranging from the nonexistent to the point where it becomes so great that the excitement or pleasure leaks. The person may reveal his deception in order to share his excitement in his accomplishment in having put one over.

There may be personal characteristics that distinguish those who are most likely to experience duping delight. Probably those are not the same personal characteristics that distinguish persons who are suscepti-

ble to detection apprehension and deception guilt. The gains involved for succeeding and/or the losses anticipated for being caught can enhance duping delight, making the deception more risky or challenging. If the person being deceived has a reputation as someone who is difficult to fool, this may add spice, facilitating duping delight. The presence of an audience collusively involved in the deceit also should increase the likelihood of duping delight.

Our discussion so far has emphasized the role of emotion as the source of leakage and deception clues. Let me note, before closing, another basis for deception clues, albeit one that I think is less important.

Cognitive Clues to Deception in Nonverbal Behavior

Ekman and Friesen defined *illustrators* as movements that are intimately tied to speech rhythms, serving to illustrate what is said.[17,18] Illustrator movements can emphasize a word, trace the flow of a thought, depict the rhythm, form or action of an event or object or point to an event. Illustrators serve a number of functions including word searches, self-priming, and help in explaining certain concepts difficult to put into words. Illustrators have been found to increase when a person is involved in what they are saying, and decrease with distinterest, apathy, tiredness, or lack of concern about what is being said.

What concerns us here, however, is another observation about the conditions that influence illustrator activity. Illustrators usually will decrease, often almost entirely, when a person is focusing their efforts on exactly what it is they are in the process of saying. Careful weighing of each word and close monitoring of what is said as it is said may occur when a person is especially cautious about exact statement, is confronted with competing alternatives, has conflicting messages, only one of which is allowable, or is inventing as he proceeds and is having a tough time doing so. The drop in illustrators that will occur may also be accompanied by changes in gaze direction.¶

Care in talk, even the presence of conflicting messages, is not itself a sign of deception. In certain social interactions, when certain lines have been taken, evidence that the speaker is being careful in his talk, cautious about what he is saying or inventing with difficulty, could be a clue that deception is in progress. Such dependence upon the social context and in particular fit with the words is relevant also to the interpretation of leakage or deception clues based on emotional arousal. I do not believe there is any body movement, facial expression, or voice

¶ We have not measured gaze until very recently and have no evidence on this yet.

change that *ipso facto* is a sign of deceit. An item of behavior betrays deceit because it does not fit with the rest of the behavior.

CONCLUSION

This discussion of the sources of nonverbal leakage and deception clues may help to explain why some investigators have found no evidence of leakage or deception clues, while still others have obtained quite contradictory findings. They were not studying the same types of deceits. The amount and type of emotions generated in their experimental deception interactions appear to have been quite different. Before new studies are undertaken, the investigator should ask what basis there is for expecting signs of deceit in face, body, or voice.

My discussion of the sources of leakage and deception clues has implications for how such betrayals will be manifest in nonverbal and vocal behavior. The signs of deceit, the particular facial expressions and body movements that give away deception, may not be the same if there is detection apprehension but no deception guilt, or the reverse, or both, or just duping delight, and so on. Elsewhere I have described in detail the specific signs of deceit that might be expected in different types of deceit.

As I mentioned in my introduction, not all deceits fail. There may not be leakage or deception clues. The explanation that I have given of the emotional and cognitive bases of leakage and deception clues suggests when deception should be the easiest. Leakage and deception clues will be least probable when:

The central purpose of the deceit is not to withhold emotion experienced at the moment, but some nonaffective item of information is being concealed.

The person feels little affect about the nonaffective item being withheld.

There is little detection apprehension (because the person is not vulnerable to that feeling, or the deceiver is practiced and has succeeded in the past, or the object of deception has a reputation for being easy to fool, or there is little punishment or reward for either failure or success).

There is little deception guilt (because the person is not vulnerable to that feeling, or the deceiver is skilled, or the deceived and the deceiver have antagonistic social values, or there is institutional sanction for deception).

There is little duping delight (because the person is not prone to such feeling, there is little risk or challenge in perpetrating deceit, or there is no audience collusively involved in the deceit).

The deceiver has a well worked out, practiced line, and need not carefully select what he says as he says it.

Deception should be the hardest, the leakage and deception clues

most probable, when the exact reverse pertains to what was just listed. These ideas form the basis for a typology of interpersonal deceits, which time does not allow me to describe. From what I have said it should be obvious, however, that leakage and deception clues will be more likely in a spousal deception about an infidelity than in conversation between Carter and Brezhnev about how many missiles each has in place.

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