

Behavior Dynamics Journal

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Why behavior cues may occur and attempts to control behavior

In most cases there may be an ample amount of behavior cues displayed when an individual attempts to deceive. There may be cases, especially with psychopaths and sociopaths, that no behavior cues are present because of the lack of emotion, feelings of guilt, or wrongdoing. Some reasons for displays of behavior during attempted deception are as follows:

- Attempt to control behavior—deceivers need to control their behavior to appear more credible.
- Emotion—attempting to deceive can result in feelings of guilt, fear, or as Dr. Paul Ekman coined, “duping delight” or the kick someone gets from fooling another.
- Cognitive load—deceiving requires substantial mental effort.
- Deceivers tend not to take their credibility for granted as truth tellers might. Interpersonal deception theory. Deceivers will feel the need to control their behavior to appear more believable. For example, the common belief is that a liar will not make consistent eye contact and may over compensate eye contact in order to appear believable.
- An individual attempting to deceive can experience strong emotions such as guilt or fear. These emotions may cause a decrease in gross body movements due to the attempted deception, but they can also be due to thinking or cognitive overload. Generally speaking, the research shows that liars tend to show less arm and hand movements than truth tellers. There have been studies that report either increases or decreases in these cues.

Are they telling the truth?

Furthermore, individuals telling the truth may experience heightened emotional arousal due to fear of not being believed, or increased cognitive load trying to remember critical facts. As a result, they can display the same type of behavior as liars, such as frequent speech hesitations and lack of gross body movements. Due to the stress caused by this situation, truth tellers can lead others to commit what is known as the “Othello error” (Shakespeare’s Othello suspected his wife, Desdemona, of adultery and when he questioned her, she was so anxious to prove her innocence that her nervousness was interpreted as a sign of guilt). Conversely, liars may attempt to suppress cues such as hand and arm movements and eye blinks which they consider will make interviewers suspicious (attempted behavioral control). As such, the presence or absence of these cues shown by an individual is dependent on which physiological response (emotional, cognitive load or attempted behavior control) is most dominant at the time.