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Female deception detection as a function of commitment and self-awareness

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Abstract

It was been hypothesized that evolutionary factors including self-awareness and commitment are related to deception detection. In this study, 34 female undergraduates were tested for their ability to detect deception via a video paradigm. Females that were not in a committed relationship were significantly better at detecting males “faking good” as compared to committed females. Further, self-awareness was correlated with the ability to detect deception. These data are consistent with the hypothesis that deception may be related to self-awareness and that such a relationship is related to reproductive advantages secured by the ability to deceive.

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1. Introduction

The ability to deceive is a valuable strategy, and humans can be considered expert deceivers (DePaulo et al., 2003). Fiedler and Walka (1993) concluded that most people have become so experienced at deception that they have mastered the skill. Even when people are not confident in their lies, they still manage to deceive others (Vrij, Edward, & Bull, 2001).

It is not known why some people excel at deception detection and others do not. Most people are not above chance in detecting deception (see DePaulo et al., 2003). Poor deception detection

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ability is not surprising, however, given that there are few cues to indicate that a person is lying. It has been speculated that non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, can aid in deception detection; however, these cues are not always present and vary from person to person (Ekman, Friesen, & O'Sullivan, 1988). When asked to identify liars using only non-verbal cues, most people are not successful (Bond et al., 1992).

Deception may be related to an individual's ability to "mind read," or possess a Theory of Mind (TOM; Keenan, Gallup, & Falk, 2003). In order to mind read, one must possess self-awareness (Gallup, 1998). Gallup (1982) and Keenan et al. (2003) have speculated that self-awareness is related to TOM and that these abilities should be tied to deception. Deficits of these abilities appear to correlate with each other in patients following brain trauma (Keenan, Wheeler, Gallup, & Pascual-Leone, 2001; Stuss, Gallup, & Alexander, 2001).

The present research also examines the role of relationship status in deception detection. Drawing from an evolutionary psychological perspective (see, e.g., Buss, 2004; Trivers, 1972), we predict that females will excel at detection of male deception when there are reproductive consequences to the female (Dimoulas, Wender, Keenan, Gallup, & Goulet, 1998). We predict that females who are not in a committed romantic relationship will be superior at deception detection than females in a committed relationship. Because non-mated women might suffer greater reproductive consequences for failing to detect male deception, it would follow that these women should be superior at deception detection. While deception plays a significant role in evolutionary theory (Byrne & Whiten, 2002), few have examined the role of deception (and detection) in these terms (e.g. Buss, 1994). We have found that lies typically are told along gender specific lines to enhance one's own characteristics. By dividing lies into those that are told in this manner (Faking Good) and those that would not normally be told (Faking bad; e.g. telling a person that you make less money than you do), one can examine the evolutionary consequences of deception.

Finally, the present study examines the relationship between self-awareness and deception detection. Because self-awareness gives us insight into our own mind (Wheeler, Stuss, & Tulving, 1997), self-awareness should provide a better idea of what is going on in someone else's mind. Self-awareness, an inherently difficult construct to measure, can be divided into a number of components including 'private' (similar to Jung's introversion) and 'public' (related to Mead's concept of self-consciousness) self-awareness.

We predict, therefore, that a heightened sense of self-awareness will lead to greater accuracy at detecting deception. Thus, self-awareness and deception detection should correlate with each other such that greater self-awareness should predict increased accuracy in deception detection. Further, females that are not in a committed relationship should be superior at deception detection than females in a committed relationship, for the reasons outlined above.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 34 Montclair State University undergraduate female students. They were recruited from psychology courses, and were given extra credit for their participation. Participants

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