Body Language "Says" More about Whether a Person Is Lying

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Does Body Language "Say" More About Whether a Person is Lying?

Emily Scheiwiller & Shelbie Weightman
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The wording of a question can bias someone's perception of another person (Questionnaire design; Ulatwski, 2013).

- Direct Questions
- Indirect Questions

Social Awareness

- Social Awareness Inventory (SAI) assesses individual differences in social awareness of emotion demonstrated by others (Sheldon, 1996)
Hypothesis

- **Hypothesis 1:** Indirect questioning as compared to direct questioning when evaluating an interviewee's dishonest responses will produce more accurate determinations of dishonesty that correspond with research-supported correlates of dishonesty.

- **Hypothesis 2:** Questions designed to detect observer bias related to dishonest behaviors, compared to those related to interviewee verbal and nonverbal characteristics, as well as the observer’s expectations of interviewee behaviors will be more accurately associated with dishonesty of the interviewee in the video.
Method

- **Participants**
  - 105 female college students; 102 male college students
  - 105 participants in direct condition; 102 participants in indirect condition

- **Materials**
  - 4 short videos from several studies conducted by (Levine; University of Alabama-Birmingham)
  - Indirect or direct questionnaire
  - Social Awareness Inventory (SAI)
Example Questions

• Direct:
  • “Do you believe that this person’s statements are honest?”

• Indirect:
  • Expected Behavior - “Based on this video, do you think this person would donate to a charity?”
  • Body Language - “Based on this video, does this person appear to be nervous?”
  • Perceived Biases - “Based on this video, would the person being interviewed more likely be employed as a teacher or a salesperson?”

• SAI:
  • “I usually know how others feel, even if they don’t know themselves”
Procedure

- Participants given informed consent and a basic demographic questionnaire asking age, gender, and school year
- Participants randomly assigned to direct or indirect question conditions in small groups of 5 or less, view 4 short videos projected onto a screen, and answer a series of questions for each video.
  - **Direct Questions**: 12 direct questions about the actor in each video.
  - **Indirect Questions**: 19 indirect questions about the actor in each video.
- All participants completed the Social Awareness Inventory
Results

- More accurate deception detection for indirect than direct questions

Of the indirect questions, actor’s expected behaviors produced more accurate deception detection than actor’s body language or viewer’s perceived biases.

There were no differences between the data of male and female participants in any analysis.
Discussion & Future Directions

- Further analysis will focus on potential interactions between gender of actor and type of indirect questions asked of the participants to detect any differences between (a) body language of the actor (b) responses of the actor to questions from the interviewer, and (c) expectations and biases of the participant about variables indicating the honesty of the actor. Further analysis will also examine the extent of social awareness of the participant as related to accurate detection of deception.

- Experiment 2: Focus Interviews
References


