

## Chapter Seven: Interpersonal Deception Theory

(David Buller and Judee Burgoon)

***“Human beings are poor lie detectors in interactive situations. Although strategic deception often results in cognitive overload that leaks out through a deceiver’s communication, respondents usually miss these telltale signs due to a strong truth bias. When respondents appear doubtful, deceivers can adjust their presentation to allay suspicion”*** (Griffin (pp. A-13-14).

Strategies of deception –

*falsification* creates a fiction

*concealment* hides a secret

*equivocation* dodges the issue

### ***An Emergent Theory of Thoughtful Interaction***

Interpersonal communication is interactive

Can’t just examine one side of the interaction

Important to examine adjustments made in the interaction

See chart 7.1 (pp. 97-98) of the eighteen axioms in the original description

Strategic deception demands mental effort

Deceiver must deal with multiple complex tasks –

Cognitive overload may lead deceiver to exhibit nonstrategic, nonverbal cues

Leakage

### ***Manipulation Information: The language and look of liars***

Deceiver must deal with multiple complex tasks –

Accomplish specific task/goal

Establish or maintain a relationship with the respondent

‘Save face’ or sustain the image of one or both persons

Interpersonal and identity motivations – ‘text’ marks communication as less than honest

Four message characteristics reflecting strategic intent:

*Uncertainty and vagueness*

*Nonimmediacy, reticence, and withdrawal*

*Disassociation*

Levelers

Group references

Modifiers

*Image- and relationship-protecting behavior*

Suppressing cues that might signal deception

Outcome depends on quality of message and nonstrategic cues (can’t be controlled)

### ***Leakage – The truth will come out (maybe)***

Four-factor model of deception (Zuckerman)

Attempt to control can lead to too-slick performance (signalling deception)

Lying causes psychological arousal

Emotions of guilt and anxiety are predominant felt emotions

Complex cognitive factors overload brain and lead to unintended behaviors

Important to focus on deceiver’s overall performance to see if deceiver can ‘pull off’ deceit,

but also depends on suspicion of the receiver

### ***The Respondents' Dilemma: Truth bias or suspicion?***

Cognitive heuristic – expectation of honesty

Suspicion is a mid-range mindset, located somewhere between truth and falsity

Truth-----Suspicion-----Lie

Verbal tactics (vagueness, nonimmediacy, & disassociation) make respondents wary

Nonverbal signs of emotional stress and mental meltdown put listeners on guard

Difficult to induce deep-seated skepticism

If doubt a deceiver's honest, important to try indirect means of getting more information

### ***Putting Doubts to Rest: Deceiver adjustment to respondent suspicion***

Deceivers' usually better at sensing suspicion that respondents are at spotting deception

Deceivers usually reciprocate the mod and manner of the person as they try to mislead

'Othello error'—recursive spiral of sender and receiver cognitions influencing behaviors

and subsequent cognitions during interaction.

Deception-detection is hit-and-miss matter and depends on the interaction

### ***Critique: Why does it have to be so complicated?***

Zuckerman's explanation was relatively simple

McCornack's explanation also quite simple:

Relational closeness-->Detection confidence-->Truth bias-->less detection accuracy

Buller & Burgoon emphasize that since deception is a communication activity, we must

take into account the mutual influence of many different factors which is obviously

complex

### **Key terms**

*falsification*

*concealment*

*equivocation*

*leakage*

*truth bias*

## Study Questions

1. Based on what you've read about this theory, do you consider it to be a **scientific** or a **humanistic theory**? **Why** do you think so?

2. Based on what you know about this theory, identify the 'slider' point for each of the theory's metatheoretical assumptions. Then, briefly indicate **why** you think that position is appropriate

**Epistemology:**            **One Truth -----Multiple truths**

**Ontology:**                **Determinism-----Free Will**

**Axiology:**                **Value-neutral-----Value-laden**

3. From what theoretical tradition(s) does this theory develop? **Why** do you think so?

4. Based on the appropriate evaluative criteria (for a scientific or interpretive theory), indicate whether you think this theory is useful. Then, briefly indicate **why** you think so.