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Verbal and Nonverbal Dynamics of Privacy, Secrecy, and Deceit

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We discuss the ways in which deception can be used to protect privacy, as well as the ways in which claims to privacy can provide the latitude to lie. In their attempts to maintain their own privacy and their secrets, people can be assisted by others who overlook their lies. Habits of honoring other people's verbal and nonverbal claims about themselves, even when they are not totally convincing, and expectations of similar indulgences from others can keep interactions from getting derailed by small interpersonal bumps. But they also enable exploitation in the form of frauds and scams.

Our interest is in the practice of privacy, secrecy, and deceit in the ways that have been available to humans throughout history: in what they say (or do not say) and how they say it. The focus of our analysis is the ways in which privacy can be protected by verbal and nonverbal expressions rather than fences or firewalls. Our original aim was to explore the role of deception in regulating privacy and invading it. But we soon discovered that privacy and deceit could not speak clearly

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to each other without including secrecy in the conversation. We begin, then, by briefly defining privacy, secrecy, and deception, and the distinctions among them.

In the two subsequent sections of our analysis, we consider privacy first from the point of view of those who are trying to maintain and protect it (i.e., from the inside looking out) and then from the point of view of those who are trying to penetrate it (i.e., from the outside looking in). Our review of the insider's perspective begins with a discussion of what it is that people most often try to hide. We also consider the breadth of people's claims to privacy, and argue that more expansive claims afford the claimants greater latitude to lie. In our analysis, privacy is not just personal but also interpersonal, and it is the interpersonal aspect of privacy regulation that is most likely to open the door to deceit.

Our consideration of the outsider's perspective begins with the argument that people often behave in ways that help others maintain their privacy. We discuss the ways in which men and women differ in their verbal and nonverbal habits of respecting privacy. We comment also on the important role of privacy regulation in close personal relationships.

In the final sections, our analysis builds to a more ominous set of conclusions. We demonstrate how our habits of maintaining our own privacy and respecting the privacy of others, which so often serve us well in everyday life, can be our undoing when others set out to scam, con, or defraud us.

Disentangling Privacy, Secrecy, and Deceit

We agree with Bok (1984) that "claims to privacy are claims to control access to what one takes . . . to be one's personal domain" (p. 11). However, in her view, privacy only protects *unwanted* access. We favor Altman's (1975) broader construal of privacy as bidirectional: We do not solely keep others away from our private spaces; sometimes we invite them in. Privacy is a dynamic, changing process of regulating access to ourselves.

Bok's (1984) definition of secrecy as "intentional concealment" (p. 5) is simple and elegant, and we take it as our starting point. So, too, do we accept her statement that "privacy need not hide; and secrecy hides far more than what is private" (p. 11). For example, private property is not necessarily hidden or secret. The contents of gifts, in contrast, often are concealed, but not because they are private. (See also the discussion of the distinction in Margulis, this issue.)

We see deception as a deliberate attempt to mislead. Secrecy can be a component of deceit, as when a truth is secreted away, and an imposter unleashed in its place. An ex-con, for example, can hide his criminal background and describe himself instead as "a self-educated ranch hand who read Plato under the stars" (Samuels, 2001, p. 74), as a successful applicant to Princeton once did. If another applicant with nothing in particular to hide made the same false claim, that

applicant, too, would be practicing deceit. That applicant's "secret," if it were to be considered as such, would simply be that he was not in fact a Plato-reading ranch hand.

In our attempts to practice privacy, secrecy, and deceit, others sometimes assist by deliberately overlooking what we do not want them to see. In fact, if we could count on others to respect our privacy, as well as our prerogative to decide what counts as private, we would not need to use secrecy or deceit to guard the physical and emotional spaces we want to claim as our own. When we do not expect such respect, or when the value of the private spaces is so high that we dare not risk it, then we use secrecy, or even deceit, to protect them.

Privacy From the Inside Looking Out

What Are We Hiding?

What is it about ourselves that we most want to protect from "unwanted access"? If we could peek behind each other's cloaks of privacy, what would we see? Years ago, in one of our labs (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996), we set out to address some of the most fundamental questions about lying: How often do people lie? To whom do they tell their lies? What reasons do they give for their lies? And, what do they lie about? The answer to the last question begins to tell us what it is about ourselves that we prefer to keep to ourselves.

For this research, we recruited 77 undergraduates and 70 people from the community to keep a diary, every day for a week, of all of their social interactions that lasted at least 10 minutes, and all of their lies. They described, in their own words, all of their lies and their reasons for telling them. By the end of the week, we had collected a pack of more than 1500 lies.

The college and community samples differed from each other in many ways. But in the data they provided, the groups were not so different. The participants from both samples lied about their feelings more than they lied about anything else. They feigned invulnerability when they were really feeling hurt. They professed affection for people who left them cold. They claimed enthusiasm when they had none, and they claimed not to mind when they did.

We had a lengthy introductory session to explain to our participants what counted as a lie (any attempt to mislead). We assured them of complete anonymity, we kept in touch with them during the week, and did everything else we could think of to elicit complete and accurate reporting. Still, we think there were ways in which people protected their privacy that they could not have reported to us, no matter how well-intentioned they may have been to be exhaustive in their record keeping. We think that by early adulthood, or long before, many people have developed habits of hiding.

Nonverbal Habits of Hiding

Habits of nonverbal hiding, or its converse, nonverbal expressiveness, may have roots in temperament. There are discernible differences in overt expressiveness even in newborns (e.g., Field, 1982). These differences can then be shaped by socialization, as, for example, when girls' expressiveness is prized and boys' is discouraged (e.g., Buck, 1984). Children and adults also act as agents of their own socialization and shapers of their own identity, as when they deliberately attempt not to show what they are feeling (DePaulo, 1991), or, even more pro-actively, try to dodge the feeling (e.g., Harris, 1993).

To the extent that a characteristic style of nonverbal showing or hiding is temperamentally based, there may be little or no deliberateness involved (e.g., Buck, 1984). The constructs of emotional privacy (controlling access to your feelings), secrecy (deliberate concealment of your feelings), and deception (deliberately misleading others) may, therefore, seem misplaced in this context. But from a self-presentational perspective, perceptions of privacy, secrecy, and deceptiveness can be at least as consequential as the realities (e.g., Schlenker, in press). The men (and women) who rarely show any facial expressions of emotion, and who chronically speak in an affectless tone of voice, may be seen and treated as very private or even secretive or deceitful people. In fact, in a meta-analysis of cues that are linked to people's perceptions of deceptiveness, expressiveness was important (Malone, DePaulo, Adams, & Cooper, 2002). Facially expressive people were seen as less deceptive than facially unexpressive people, and people who were involved and animated were seen as a bit more truthful than those who were less engaged in their presentations. In that others can see expressiveness directly but need to infer any intentionality behind it, it may be the overt expressiveness that is of greater self-presentational significance.

But what of the attempts at nonverbal hiding that truly are deliberate? If we stand by Bok's (1984) definition of secrecy as intentional concealment, then people who are purposefully hiding their feelings surely are acting secretively, and if they are trying to mislead others (for example, by conveying the impression that they are emotionally unfazed), then they are also deceiving. And yet, we have some reservations about these seemingly simple truths. Suppose the concern of the concealer is not whether others know what he is feeling (although, at times, it may be), but rather that they may want to act on that knowledge, and draw him into the show. For example, the man who was just passed over for promotion may not mind if you realize he feels despondent, but he may mind a great deal if you try to express your sympathy for his troubles or draw him into a discussion of his feelings. We think the goal of this man is privacy. He wants the control over the use of his feelings to be his alone. Blocking others' knowledge of his feelings by secrecy and deceit is the way he insures that control.

People who first attempt to deliberately hide their feelings from others will find that it takes work (DePaulo et al., in press; Lane & Wegner, 1995). The concealment is effortful; it *feels* deliberate. But after years of practice, the task may seem effortless. Concealers simply shut down their nonverbal expressive channels at any hint of a threatening emotional trigger, whether internal or external. They may not experience any sense of deliberateness, but the purposefulness is tipped off by the goal-driven instigation of the emotional shut down. The concealers' blank slate appears primarily in response to emotion cues. It is what Bargh (1989) calls goal-dependent automaticity. We think this process is an example of deception in the service of privacy or secrecy goals, but it is not the sort of deception that people would be able to report. (See Larson & Chastain, 1990, for the assessment of attempts at self-concealment that people can report.) Habitual liars of the nonverbal sort have become effortlessly private people.

Hidden in Plain View: Verbal Hiding

As Altman (1975) pointed out in his early writings on the topic, people can also regulate their privacy verbally. Altman (1975, p. 33) described clear instances of this (e.g., "keep out," "come in," "I'd like to be alone"). Also, he noted that the amount of verbal output (as well as the intimacy of it) typically increases as relationships progress (Altman & Taylor, 1973) and he interpreted that as a privacy regulation mechanism as well. In his work, the increasing verbal output was a way of letting others into one's private psychological space. We think that talk, and lots of it, can also be used as a way of keeping people out. This occurs when what people talk about is not their feelings, or their relationship as it is experienced at the moment, but instead external topics such as movies and sports. Retzinger and Scheff (2001) described this as "topic talk." Such talk distances and even shames relationship partners by its implication that movies and sports are more important than they are.

As technological wizards race to create the ever shinier bells and whistles designed to protect our privacy in cyberspace, we should keep in mind the ingenious ways people can find to protect their own privacy with no special gadgets or training (cf. Marx, this issue). In a clever program of research on multiple audience communication, Fleming and his colleagues demonstrated that people can create messages that will have different meanings to different people, all of whom are hearing the same message at the same time (Fleming, 1994; Fleming, Darley, Hilton, & Kojetin, 1990). Teenagers, for example, can talk simultaneously to other teen friends, their parents, and adults unknown to them, and deliberately convey a message to their friends that will fly over the heads of all of the adults. It is not just that the adults do not recognize the true identity of the UFO; they do not even realize that there was one. This is privacy regulation in an ingenious and brazen form. The teens say the words that link them meaningfully with their friends while

excluding the adults; they say those words right in front of the adults—in fact, to them—and yet the adults never realize that they have been duped (still again?) by the teens.

We have called this privacy regulation when it may seem instead to be an example of secrecy. If it was the content of their communications that the teens were trying to hide from the adults, then the discussion would indeed be an example of secrecy. But if the point was not so much to conceal what it was they had to say, but instead to say it in private, then we think it would be an example of privacy regulation. Secrecy was the means of achieving privacy, and not the goal.

Privacy Is Not (Just) Personal

In this issue, Margulis describes an important distinction he gleaned from the literatures on privacy and secrecy, and their relationship: "[S]ecrets, unlike private information, have the potential to affect (e.g., undermine) the excluded other's well-being, relationships, decisions, and his or her ability to correctly interpret the reality. . ." (p. 417). We agree with this reading of the literature. But we do not agree with the literature.

Private matters, like secrets, can be shared. It is this selective sharing, we believe, that is hurtful to those who are not selected. The matters kept private can be of little consequence, but that is small comfort to those stung by exclusion. For example, a boss can maintain some privacy by refraining from discussing anything other than work with her employees. If she then mentions the name of the town where she grew up to one, but not another, of her employees, she has, perhaps ever so slightly, and perhaps even unwittingly, made one employee special, and the other, by comparison, not (cf. Brock, 1968; Posner, 1978).

When the door to the private is opened, even by just a crack, deceit can sneak in. If the person who is now "in the know" is friends with the person who is not, she may, out of kindness, lie about her new knowledge. Or if she mentions it, thinking that surely the boss has told her friend as well, her friend may engage in a bit of deceit himself, pretending to have known all along. This emotional tug-of-war is over a piece of information which either employee probably could have obtained quite readily in some other manner. With such inconsequential information, it is not the possession of it that matters but how it came to be obtained or not obtained.

We believe that there are rules for the disclosure of both private and secret information that are spelled out nowhere, and yet are widely understood. Often, these rules pertain to the nature of the information that can be disclosed. For example, personal information about others is rarely disclosed by the well-intended when it could render the exposed person vulnerable to stigma or danger.

Disclosure rules also indicate the order in which personal information is to be revealed to different categories of people. To be passed over in the line of disclosure can be hurtful and humiliating. This theme appeared repeatedly in our research in which we asked people to tell us about the most serious lie anyone ever told to them (DePaulo, Ansfield, Kirkendol, & Boden, 2003; for related discussions, see Bellman, 1981; Kelly & McKillop, 1996; and Yovetich & Drigotas, 1999). For example, a college student described a time when the news of his mother's cancer was hidden from him for several weeks. He recounted feeling devastated by the discovery that his younger sisters had been told the news before he had.

We have one more point to make about the implications of privacy for the persons who are claiming it. Then we will go on to consider the view of people who are outside of other people's zone of privacy, looking in.

Privacy Provides Latitude to Lie

Privacy has been heralded for its healing qualities. In our physical and psychological space into which we allow only those we welcome, or perhaps no one at all, we can take time out to reflect. Privacy is Goffman's (1959) backstage, where we can exchange the costumes we donned to draw an admiring crowd for our shabby old jammies. Away from the heat of the bright lights and the evaluative eyes of the crowd, we can bask in the warmth of our own special place.

However, privacy can allow for harm as well as healing. In our private places, we can afford ourselves the latitude to lie. The more places we claim as private, the more we can lie without fear of discovery. Control of access to places in our homes and in our hearts is control of information that could betray our lies.

In our diary studies, we found a link between emotional closeness and the telling of the little lies of everyday life (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998). People told fewer of those lies to the people in their lives to whom they felt closest. We think that lying is a violation of the openness and authenticity that people so value in their close relationships. But emotionally close people are also the ones we let into our private places. Perhaps we avoid lying to them not only because of our commitment to an honest and trusting relationship, but also because we know we are likely to get caught. We asked the participants to tell us whether they thought their lies were believed at the time they were telling them. The college students thought that their closer relationship partners were less taken by their lies. Also, we asked participants to review all of their lies a week after recording them and tell us which ones had (to their knowledge) been discovered. Across both the college students and the community members, more of the lies they told to their closer relationship partners had indeed been discovered.

Privacy From the Outside Looking In

How Others Routinely Help Us Maintain Our Privacy

It may be reasonable to feel a bit alarmed by the proliferation of ever more sophisticated ways in which others can intrude on our privacy. Still, we think there will always be one very important way in which other people routinely grant us a measure of privacy: They tend to believe us more readily than they disbelieve us.

In studies of people's skill at detecting deception, participants are often shown videotapes of people who are lying half the time and telling the truth the other half. Sometimes the participants are even told explicitly that half of the communications they hear will be lies. Still, when they record their judgments as to whether each of the communications was a truth or a lie, they typically report that more of the messages were truths (Bond & DePaulo, 2003).

There are a number of perspectives on this finding, which is sometimes called a "truth bias." In place of our language of truths and lies, belief and disbelief, Goffman (1959) suggests a dramaturgical metaphor. As social actors, we typically accept the "faces" that other people present to us. We do not challenge the identities that others wish to claim. In turn, we expect them to honor our own presentations of self. We all assume our proper places in the theater of social life and do not try to sneak backstage to see what deeper truths may be hidden there. (We will return to this metaphor in our discussion of the ways in which scams succeed.)

From a cognitive perspective (Gilbert, 1991), the truth bias is a consequence of the design of our mental machinery. Belief is our default setting. When we comprehend something, we initially believe it. This happens effortlessly. To disbelieve requires an extra step; it takes cognitive work. Whenever we do not get to that second step, because we are too tired or too lazy or simply have no reason to proceed beyond the point of belief, we will see others as truthful.

Still another explanation of the truth bias maintains that people are simply importing the wisdom of their social worlds into a laboratory setting that is rigged to be different from their everyday experiences. From this perspective, it is appropriate to assume that others are telling the truth more often than they are lying, because typically they are (e.g., Anderson, Ansfield, & DePaulo, 1999). The truth bias, then, is really not a bias at all. Nor is it a way of respecting privacy or letting others get away with their lies. It is simply a way of making judgments that is in accord with the realities of social life.

We do not yet have a complete understanding of the effect, nor do we have any evidence that it is motivated by a desire to grant others some privacy. But we do think that a consequence of the effect, whether intended or not, is to afford others a modicum of privacy that they would not have if social actors had no such inclination to believe most of what they hear.

The truth bias, if it can be called that, is not an absolute. It can be undone by virtually any cue that arouses suspiciousness (e.g., McCornack & Levine, 1990). For example, in their judgments of salespersons who are hawking their wares, social perceivers evidence a definite lie bias (P. J. DePaulo & DePaulo, 1989). The truth bias changes over the course of relationships as well, declining when relationships hit rough spots or as the initial glow subsides (e.g., Anderson, DePaulo, & Ansfield, 2002) and gaining strength as relationships deepen and confidence in relationship partners grows (DePaulo, Charlton, Cooper, Lindsay, & Muhlenbruck, 1997; Levine & McCornack, 1992; McCornack & Parks, 1986).

Sex Differences in Honoring Privacy and Secrecy?

Different kinds of communications can be classified in terms of covertness and controllability (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1969). For example, the facial expressions of people who are communicating truthfully are overt and controllable communications. People can purposefully convey an impressive array of meanings with their faces. Privacy is not an issue to people who are using their facial expressions to try to tell you how they really do feel. Body cues are not quite as controllable. People do not get as much feedback about their body movements and postures, and they cannot convey meanings that are as fine grained and differentiated as they can with their faces. At the other end of the continuum are discrepant communications, in which the meaning conveyed one way (e.g., facially) seems inconsistent with a meaning conveyed a different way (e.g., via tone of voice) at the same time. The discrepancies people produce are nearly always inadvertent. When social actors are trying to hide their true feelings and simulate false ones, their goal is to convey a consistent (though false) impression, and inconsistencies are indicative of their failure to do so. Other times, people may want to keep certain feelings to themselves and expect those feelings to be indiscernible as long as they are making no special efforts to try to show them. If they are wrong in that assumption, inadvertent inconsistencies could again be the result. Discrepancies can result also from the leakage of feelings that people do not try to control because they are not fully aware of them. Regardless of the specific origins, discrepancies are relatively covert and uncontrollable communications. People who recognize them may be seeing something the actor did not intend to show. The discrepancy detector is in that sense a violator of secrecy (if the people producing the discrepancies were deliberately trying to hide their true feelings) or of privacy (if they expected and wanted their feelings to remain undetected even if they were not deliberately trying to conceal them).

Intuition, the conventional wisdom of the culture, and the results of scientific research all converge in indicating that women are more interpersonally sensitive than are men (e.g., Hall, 1984). For example, their interpretation of the facial expressions of people who have nothing to hide is more accurate than is men's.

However, there is an intriguing pattern that emerges when women's accuracy is compared to men's for communications arranged by covertness. As communications become more covert, women's advantage over men shrinks. For example, women are better than men at reading facial expressions, and they are also better at reading body cues, but not by as much. In contrast, in their attempts to identify discrepant communications, women typically show no superiority over men at all (Rosenthal & DePaulo, 1979a, 1979b).

Because the data are descriptive and come mostly from college student populations, they support multiple interpretations. The authors favored an interpersonal accommodation explanation (Rosenthal & DePaulo, 1979a). Because women outperformed men only in reading those cues that others were not trying to hide, Rosenthal and DePaulo suggested that women were politely reading what others wanted them to read and overlooking the cues that others preferred to keep to themselves. We might say that they were honoring other people's nonverbal claims to privacy.

In the early studies reviewed by Rosenthal and DePaulo, the cues that the men and women tried to read were from the communications of strangers. It may be easy to avoid eavesdropping on other people's unintended nonverbal cues when those people are unknowns and their private lives are of no interest. But the allure of a secret can stir interest even in the life of a stranger. In our lab, we are testing the hypothesis that women's success at detecting deception and reading hidden feelings (and perhaps men's, too) will improve when the strangers they are reading are described as having a secret (LaFleur, Bell, DePaulo, & Tornqvist, 2001).

The private lives of strangers can be intriguing even when no secrecy is involved. The fans of rock stars, movie stars, and fallen celebrities crave access to the most insignificant details of their private lives. We grant that celebrities' failures, rejections, and undisclosed illnesses may interest their fans the most; these calamities are, after all, the secrets. But even word of their favorite colors, or the first names of their childhood friends, can sell magazines. Privacy is about control of access. Fans who slip through those controls, even in the most innocuous ways, may feel that they have gained a touch of intimacy with the people they never will meet.

When privacy issues pertain not to strangers, but to relationship partners, a new set of considerations becomes significant. The politeness norm may be appropriate when the other person is an anonymous stranger, and the search for pseudo intimacy may drive interest in the private lives of public figures. But when the people who are expressing or hiding their feelings are people for whom we have kind and caring sentiments, then recognizing how they really do feel, in our quest for genuine intimacy, may well trump the social niceties of politeness. When reading the cues of their close relationship partners, perhaps women will show the special sensitivity to which they typically lay claim. A number of studies support this. Women can tell when their boyfriends (but not men who are strangers) just

received disappointing feedback about the success of their efforts; men cannot tell when their girlfriends (or anyone else) have just been disappointed (Tornqvist, DePaulo, Hodges, & Smart, 1998). Women in platonic friendship pairs learn to detect each other's deception more accurately as the relationship progresses; men who have been platonic friends for six months are no more insightful about each other's deceptiveness than they had been in the first month of their friendship (Anderson et al., 1999).

In reading the disappointment that close others are not voicing, and seeing through the lies they are trying to tell, friends and lovers are piercing the privacy of their relationship partners. It is a risk, but one that could ultimately deepen intimacy (Kelvin, 1977; Margulis, 1979). Maybe these friends and lovers can discuss the disappointment and come to terms with it, or recognize that the truth concealed by the lie was not so shameful after all.

Sometimes, though, the threat of learning the truth is just too scary. For example, people who are romantically involved but insecure about their relationship may be motivated *not* to recognize the sexual interest their partner is developing for someone else (Simpson, Ickes, & Blackstone, 1995). Close platonic friends may be similarly oblivious to signs of each other's hidden anger (Sternglanz & DePaulo, 2002). A related dynamic seems to characterize family gatherings in which sensitive topics are studiously avoided. In these instances, relationship partners are not respecting each other's privacy, they are running away from it.

Malevolent Deception: The Art and Science of Scams

Lies can be used to protect privacy, but privacy and secrecy can be used also in the service of lies, including malevolent and exploitative ones. Malingerers can feign illness and injury to avoid work or imprisonment or to defraud insurance companies. Con artists and perpetrators of scams have posed as surgeons, attorneys, astronauts, FBI agents, and long lost children (e.g. "Surgeon," 2000). Victor "The Count" Lustig, for example, posed as a French minister and sold the Eiffel Tower to a scrap metal dealer, then fled the country. Weeks later, when the expected outcry never materialized, Lustig returned to Paris and sold the Tower again (Mason, 1978).

Lustig, like so many other masters of outrageous deceptions, was aided and abetted by privacy and secrecy. He met with each dealer in private and described the sale of the Tower as part of a secret government mission. Claiming to each dealer that he alone was deemed sufficiently trustworthy to be recruited into such a sensitive undertaking, Lustig thereby ingratiated himself to his victims, making them feel special. Lustig understood that privacy and secrecy are not just personal, but can be used to establish an interpersonal bond, which can then be exploited in the most nefarious ways. The privacy and secrecy of the transaction also provided Lustig a wide latitude to lie because each dealer was isolated from information

from others that could have exposed the con. Finally, and importantly, once the swindled dealer realized he had been taken, he kept his victimization to himself in order to save face.

How do people with no legitimate credentials whatsoever get away with their cons? We think that the skills of impostors and confidence artists are akin to those of the best experimental social psychologists. Working in a private lab, they need to stage a compelling reality, draw people into it, and then keep them so involved in the show that they have no time to question the authenticity of the performance.

The show begins with the setting, the costumes, and the props. None of these need resemble the real thing—they need only to match the targets' expectations about them. Impersonating an FBI agent, then, may take little more than a short haircut, dark glasses, an equally dark suit, and a good measure of confidence.

Impostors who assume roles such as FBI agents or physicians, complete with the concocted credentials of badges and stethoscopes, have cloaked themselves in their own special but invisible costume: the aura of authority. A man who opens his door to a teen in jeans asking for contributions to an obscure charity may not feel reluctant to ask a few skeptical questions. That would be a bit more difficult to do to the person with the badge. For authority figures, their aura is their border patrol. Few would-be invaders of their privacy or secrecy even try to get by. Discretion stops them in their tracks.

With the costumes, props, and scripts in order, the curtain now rises. The opening scenes are often riveting and fast moving, and they can tap into motives as different as altruism and greed. In the theater of an altruism scam, an unsuspecting customer in a bank could be approached by a "bank examiner" and asked to help catch a dishonest bank teller who is passing counterfeit $100 bills to customers. "Helping" involves withdrawing ten such bills from the customer's own account and turning them over to the examiner. The examiner, in turn, certifies the bills as counterfeit, carefully places them in an evidence bag, has the victim sign an evidence receipt, and then walks off with the money (AARP, 2002).

When the play (scam) is about greed, the purported payoff is huge amounts of money, as in a lottery scam (Latin Lotto Scam, 2002). In this scam, the con artist poses as an illegal immigrant with a winning lottery ticket. Claiming fear of being discovered and deported, the immigrant offers to sell the mark (victim) the ticket for a fraction of what it is worth. Typically, a decision to get in on the take must be made immediately and in private. There is no time to ponder the wisdom of the decision or the credibility of the spectacular opportunity.

Time to ponder, to tune in to that queasy feeling in the stomach, or to notice in any other way that something is not quite right, is just what the con artists are trying to deny the marks. Instead, they disarm them with their charm and con them with their confidence. It can be difficult to express or even entertain skepticism about someone who seems so engaging or so authoritative (Goffman, 1952). We believe that perpetrators of frauds isolate their marks by labeling the transactions

as secret or conducting them in private places. Such safeguards ensure that the marks remain unenlightened by other people and their suspicions.

Without a twinge of suspiciousness, discerning the scam may be impossible. Suspicion can put an end to the mindless way in which you are going along with the gig and nudge you to look harder and think more deeply (Langer, 1989). But suspiciousness alone may not be enough. In studies of deception detection, suspiciousness has not proven to be the magic bullet that finds its way right to the heart of the lies. Suspiciousness can, though, be consequential (e.g., Toris & DePaulo, 1984). The suspicious person becomes more distrusting, seeing more and more people, even truth tellers, as liars. Suspiciousness also annoys its targets, who come to feel that they are being manipulated. It also undermines the confidence of both the suspicious person and the target of the suspicions. It disrupts the tenor of the interaction: Liking is no longer reciprocated the way it often is between pairs of people who trust each other. Attempts to wrestle the truth out of an unwilling target, then, can wreak all manner of havoc, while leaving the hidden truth intact.

Our arguments so far suggest that targets can be drawn into scams by a compelling opening act, complete with costumes and props, that disables suspicion. But as impersonators play out their roles, shouldn't the superficiality of their performance become evident? People impersonating history professors, for instance, do not have the deep knowledge of history of a true historian. Nevertheless, our same argument about costumes and props applies to scripts: People impersonating a professor do not need to know the lines a professor really would use, only those the targets assume a professor might use. And even if impostors do seem a bit inept at their roles, that can be easily overlooked or dismissed. Many legitimate professionals reveal a level of knowledge and competence that is far from impressive. Most humans, regardless of role, speak imperfectly. People contradict themselves, speak in ambiguous ways, and violate virtually every rule of good grammar and good sense with no intent to defraud or mislead. As conversational partners, humans realize this and allow for it (e.g., Grice, 1975, 1989). People guess at the best resolution of the ambiguity and effortlessly discern the likely meaning despite the misstatements. And people do so without stating any suspicions or even harboring any. We believe that, like social actors, social perceivers may also have their own habits of hiding. What they conceal is their puzzlement over what the social actors really are trying to convey. Also like social actors, if social perceivers practice this form of hiding long enough (and most of them do), they will come to conceal without any apparent strain or awareness. Behind these seamless conversational rituals, impostors hide the telling reality: They actually do not know what they are talking about. But, in our analysis, we think they know that they can count on the rules of social decorum to help them remain unchallenged. The impostor and the victims have colluded to build a house of cards.

Purveyors of successful scams are also good personality psychologists. Lore has it that they deftly choose their targets and craft a winning appeal. Perhaps they also know who is or is not going to squeal.

In relationship cons, in which the con artist develops a romantic relationship with a mark in order steal her financial assets, many victims naively accept the inflated and flashy identities of the con artist. Not only are victims swept off their feet by the con's charm, but they seem to run away from delving too deeply into their partner's past. The con expects that and therefore can hide in plain sight.

In relationship scams and virtually all other cons, the aftermath is of great significance (Goffman, 1952). "Count" Lustig was pleasantly surprised when his first victim did not complain publicly upon realizing that he had been had. Most other perpetrators of outrageous fraud count on this. They anticipate that their victims would prefer to lose their life savings than to admit publicly that they paid cash for the Eiffel Tower.

Detecting Impostors: The Evidence

We know of only one systematic program of research on the detection of impostors. Wetzel (1999) wondered whether college students, with all of their experiences in the classroom, could distinguish a competent lecturer from an inept faker. In a series of his studies, an actor presented a coherent lecture on the biochemistry of learning and memory, or an incoherent one. Students watched the lecturer on videotape, then evaluated him, indicated their agreement with his main points, and rated the comprehensibility of his lecture. They were also tested on the content of the lecture.

Wetzel's studies modeled some of the ways that impostors are believed to get away with their impersonations. For example, lecturers sometimes sported a charismatic style instead of a boring one; sometimes the lecturers were introduced as high status professors, other times as low. In other studies, the students were helped along in their impostor detection task in some way. For example, some were forewarned that the lecturer could be an impostor, whereas others were not. To encourage some of the students to process the information deeply, they were offered a cash prize if they earned the best score on a test of the material presented in the lecture; the other students were offered no such prize.

Impostors were well served by status and charisma. The students could not distinguish the coherent lecturer from the incoherent one when both were charismatic or when both were high status and boring (see also Shaw & Margulis, 1974). They could distinguish the competent, charismatic lecturer from the incompetent one significantly better when they were offered a reward for outstanding performance on the test. (The reward did not aid detection of the high status, boring impostor, however.) Forewarning students that the lecturer could be an impostor helped only the male students distinguish the competent from the incompetent professor.

Across all of the studies, students' success at recognizing that an actor was not a genuine professor was underwhelming (see also Ware & Williams, 1975). In fact, in some conditions, the students agreed more with the incompetent, incoherent lecturer than with the coherent one, and their teacher ratings suggested that they were also more impressed with the rambler. Wetzel suggested that the students interpreted their own confusion (which they no doubt wished to keep private) as a cue to the lecturer's brilliance. Perhaps impostors can use obfuscation as a route to success because no one wishes to admit he or she does not understand. Media reports and case histories already suggest as much (e.g., Borgatta, 1954; Editors of *Lingua Franca*, 2000; "Surgeon," 2000). As scientists, we are intrigued and would like to see more data.

Can We Avoid Being Deceived, Conned, and Defrauded?

In our quest to trip up those who would exploit us with their deceit, we develop ever more sophisticated technology. Self-report integrity tests, though still in use (e.g., Sackett, 1994; Saxe, 1994), seem quaint when set alongside our modern marvels. A flood of information pertinent to suspected liars and their lies can be accessed in a flash. The race is not just to find the information but also to outpace the technologically assisted fabrication of false information, such as diplomas, certificates, and digitally altered pictures. Some executives still have voice stress analyzers hooked up to their phones in hopes that the color of the blinking light will tell them whether to believe the person on the other end (green means yes and red means no; e.g., Hollien, Geison, & Hicks, 1987; Nachshon, Elaad, & Amsel, 1985; O'Hair & Cody, 1987; Waln & Downey, 1987). But the wave of the future is more likely to be the wave of the brain (Farwell, 1992; Farwell & Donchin, 1991).

Our concern, however, is with none of those options. Instead, our interest continues to lie in the methods of detection people can attempt in their ordinary interactions with others, unaided by any technological tricks. For example, people eager to avoid being duped could try to look more closely at the behavior of other people, listen more intently, ask more probing questions, or simply try harder to determine the truth. Uneasiness about violating the privacy of others is just one of the problems with these strategies. Another is that they do not work. Sometimes they even backfire. For example, people who are more highly motivated to discern when others are lying to them may be less successful at doing so than those who are less highly motivated (Forrest & Feldman, 2000). It appears that the motivated lie detectors simply rely on their favorite cues to an even greater degree than they do ordinarily (Malone et al., 2002). The problem is that some of those favorites have no valid link to deceit (DePaulo et al., in press). Probing, too, can be to no avail. In one study (Walker Wilson, 2001), perceivers listened to social actors who were describing their experiences truthfully or deceptively. At first, the perceivers

simply recorded their judgments as to the true nature of the actors' experiences. Next, they were allowed to ask the actors any questions they wished. Then, they guessed again about the true nature of the actors' experiences. When the social actors were lying, the perceivers were no more accurate at discerning the actors' true feelings after asking questions than they had been before. In other studies, actors' responses were always the same but, in some conditions, probes were edited into the videotapes that perceivers watched. Social actors who seemed to have been probed were more likely to be judged as truthful than those who were not probed, regardless of whether they really were lying or telling the truth (Levine & McCornack, 1996, 2001).

There are, of course, individual differences in people's talents and appetites for puncturing other people's privacy, unearthing their secrets, and ferreting out their lies (DePaulo & Friedman, 1998; Scheibe, 1979). Still, the most skillful human lie detectors are far from infallible (almost never scoring above 70%, when a score of 50% would be earned by chance), and even years of on-the-job experience at trying to detect lies, or specific training at the task, results (at best) in modest successes (e.g., DePaulo & Pfeifer, 1986; Ekman & O'Sullivan, 1991; Vrij, 2000).

Conclusion

If we all agreed to value privacy less, then we could pursue bold interpersonal options with impunity. For example, we could pose invasive and impertinent questions and expect to receive honest responses. We could shamelessly train our eyes on parts of other people's bodies that we typically avoid scrutinizing (or at least avoid the appearance of scrutinizing). Although there may be a glimmer of appeal to these new norms when applied to the pursuit of access to other people's privacy, that glow would fade quickly when turned on ourselves. We may be left with the conclusion that, in the service of the privacy that we so value, the risks of being deceived, conned, and defrauded are necessary evils.

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