



THE ART OF LYING

Words: Jamie Christian Desplaces

There is a case, some would argue, for the 'great temptation' being history's first ever mistruth, the mighty fall of Adam and Eve forever branding our souls with the burden of sin. But for those who favour evolution over creation, the art of deception may well hold even more ancient roots.

A study at Trinity College Dublin discovered deceptive behaviour rife amongst species that regularly engaged in co-operation, with primates being the most notable example. "Ultimately, our ability to convincingly lie to each other may have evolved as a direct result of our cooperative nature," Luke McNally told ABC, having studied 24 different primate species with his research team. "Of course, deception may have benefits in many spheres of animal behaviour. For instance, mating and aggressive encounters." It is a trait not limited to primates, with even spiders and bacteria dabbling in deception's dark art. "It has even been shown to evolve in robots," continues McNally. "Our theory suggests that co-operation evolves before deception, but deception will follow hot on its heels."

While men (politicians, especially), are often portrayed as serial misleaders (though admittedly, politicians usually are), studies have shown that women are the more capable fibbers. The reason is that ladies' language and communication skills are far more adept. An average woman on an average day will utter a staggering three times the number of words than that of an average bloke. They also develop more advanced communication skills at a younger age than their (cave!)man counterparts. "Men and women lie in equal measures," says Steve van Aperen. "What is often interesting is their reason for doing so. A woman is likely to lie to protect or make someone feel better about themselves, whereas men often do it to make themselves look good. Women have more evaluation centres in their brains. Men's lies are often simplistic – *Why are you late?* 'I was caught in traffic' – whereas women's more fluent language allows for greater elaboration."

Australian Steve van Aperen has been labelled by media across the globe as the 'Human Lie Detector', and with good reason. The former police officer now advises government agencies and corporate bodies on a worldwide scale and is a CNN and *60 Minutes* regular. He has trained with the FBI, the CIA and has just been invited to front one of the USA's longest-running shows, *America's Most Wanted*; one of only a handful of foreigners ever bestowed the honour.

"In reality, it is very hard for the average person to lie," van Aperen tells me. "Research also shows human beings are not very good at spotting liars either." Steve asks me to name my first job but cuts me off before I can answer. While trying to remember, he tells me, my eyes rolled up and to the left; a sign



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of neurological recall. It is a myth that breaking eye contact betrays a mistruth. And besides, I couldn't have lied as he'd cut me short. Looking up and to the right – the creative side of our brain – is a more likely sign of deceit. Though, even this is no guarantee. Instead, van Aperen studies his subjects holistically.

"There is no one tell-tale sign that is indicative of deception," he says. "I teach people to baseline a person's behaviour, then to look for deviations from their normal state. If you haven't benchmarked a person's behaviour from the start, you won't see any changes when they're fabricating or embellishing a story later on." Steve tells of how unaware we are of our own body's betrayal of our innermost thoughts: "We know that across all cultures human beings use the same expressions of emotion – from shock to anger, happiness to sorrow – and usually within a hundredth of a second. They're called micro-expressions, and feigning them is very, very difficult."

Our use of language is also telling. "Truthful people will often take ownership," continues Steve. "Or they simply deny something outright: 'I did not do that'. Whereas a guilty party would more likely say, 'I'm not the kind of person to do that'." The use of tenses, too are important. Rarely, says van Aperen, will innocent parents talk about a lost child in the past tense because they live in hope that their kids will be found unharmed. He gives the example of an American woman who told a journalist that she 'loved' (as opposed to 'loves') her missing children. Days later, the children were found murdered, their mother guilty of the crime. Other indications of lying include sidestepping questions, answering with other questions, contradictory behaviour (nodding during a denial, or shaking the head with an agreement) and subconscious concealing of the face.

"For every lie a person tells, they must invent a further two or three to protect themselves," Steve says. "They must avoid contradiction. A truthful person relies on memory to recall details such as smells, times and emotions, but a deceptive person must fabricate these and that takes longer to process. They feel a greater need to convince us of their honesty which is where we'll often see the changes in tense, pronoun use, micro-expressions and body language. Behaviours all associated with fear of being caught in a lie. Often we don't look for these changes, let alone pay any attention to them."

The phrasing of questions is vital. Asking a murder suspect if they know for certain where the victim's body is offers them an opportunity to mislead. Though they may have committed the crime, the body may have been dumped at sea, or they may have had an accomplice dispose of it, so they would not be lying by denying knowledge of the body's whereabouts.

Questions must be direct: "There is no such thing as a bad interviewee, just a bad interviewer." What is also important is for suspects to like Steve. He tells of a time interrogating a man suspected of abusing a child, with van Aperen's colleague verbally tearing the man to shreds; threatening him that his life, as he knows it, is over, that his wife will leave, his family will disown him. "My colleague simply gave the man a thousand reasons why he shouldn't own up," says Steve. "Later, I calmly said to the suspect, 'the only thing I want to know is, did you mean to hurt her [the victim]?' He looked to the floor, slowly shaking his head and whispered 'no'. I had a partial confession."

We chat some more and Steve conducts a couple of rather disconcerting psychological observations on yours truly. I ask him if he's ever able to switch off and he says that he's learned to in social situations, though he sometimes still can't resist. He jokes (I hope), that he has few friends left. But those who remain certainly know better than to try to cheat him out on the golf course.

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