

Eye contact while lying during an interview

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Male and female subjects were placed into an interview situation with male and female confederates of the experimenter's. Eye contact measures were taken during the interview. Then, the subjects were instructed to continue the interview but to give untruthful answers. Eye contact measures were again taken. The difference between the eye contact measures while lying and while being truthful served as the major data. The results showed that males gazed longer into the female confederates' eyes while lying, and the females gazed longer into the male confederates' eyes while lying.

In nonverbal communication, the face is commonly regarded as the most distinctive and individual part of the body; capable of conveying much detailed information. It thus commands the most attention in a face-to-face interaction and is believed to impart personal or idiosyncratic information about the individual (Ekman & Friesen, 1969).

Among facial behaviors, eye contact in particular is personally involving and serves several social purposes. Eisenberg (1971) suggested that by looking at the eyes, an individual gathers much nonverbal information about other people, and that the act of looking at another indicates that the channels of communication are open. In general, a continued exchange of glances would seem to signal a willingness or desire to become involved with one another, or to maintain an ongoing interaction. This possibility has received support from Argyle and Dean (1965) whose research indicated that when two people like each other, they establish eye contact more often and for longer durations than when there is tension in the relationship.

One area of study related to eye contact has been the investigation of the assumption that an honest person looks one in the eye. Persons in our society interpret the willingness to engage in direct eye contact as evidence of sincerity. Furthermore, research has seemed to support the belief (Barnlund, 1968). Subjects who behaved unethically were found less likely to look an experimenter in the eye afterwards than during the pretransgression interview (Exline, Thibaut, Hickey, & Gumpert, 1970). Having manipulated the authenticity of a speaker's communication, tendencies were found in women (men were not studied) to avoid eye contact with others when repeating false as opposed to true impressions of them (Exline & Greenberg, 1971).

Based upon such prior research, the present study was designed to compare the eye contact of men and women in a lying vs. a truthful situation. Prior research has produced equivocal results with some tendency for women to interact visually more than men, but no indications have been given as to whether

this tendency would hold true in such a tension-producing situation as that involving lying.

It was hypothesized, on the basis of the foregoing analysis, that both men and women would engage in less eye contact in a lying situation than they would in a truthful situation. Further, the interaction of the gender of the listener with that of the speaker was investigated.

METHOD

Subjects

Ten male and ten female students from an introductory psychology course at Western Washington State College served as subjects in this experiment. The subjects ranged in age from 18 to 22.

Apparatus

Two small rooms separated by a one-way mirror were used for the experiment. The subject was seated in such a position that eye-contact behavior could be observed by a person seated in the other room looking through the one-way mirror. Seated opposite the subject was the confederate (or the experimenter acting the role of the confederate).

A portable tape recorder was used to record the encounter. Only the microphone was visible in the room in which the subject and the confederate interacted. A stopwatch was used to time the length of eye glances, and the length and number of glances were recorded by pencil and paper.

Procedure

The male and female subjects were divided such that one-half of them would interact with a confederate of the same sex, and the other half with a confederate of the opposite sex. This produced a 2 by 2 design with respect to the gender of both the subjects and the confederates.

The experimenter (female) and the confederate (male) were trained in both roles so as to effect the 2 by 2 design. One additional person served as observer and recorded the eye glances from behind the one-way mirror.

The subject and the confederate arrived together, by prearrangement, at the experimental room. Upon entering the room, the experimenter directed the subject and the confederate to be seated, making sure that the subject had taken the appropriate seat so that all eye contact could be observed. After introducing the two students, the experimenter explained the nature of the experiment. The explanation, however, was the beginning of a cover story designed so that the subject would not be aware that the emphasis of the experiment was on lying.

It was explained that the topic under investigation was the

interpersonal interaction taking place in an information-seeking interview. The experimenter explained that before the taping of the interview, the two people would be given a chance to decide upon some answers to some prearranged questions. The experimenter "arbitrarily" chose the subject as the interviewee and the confederate as the interviewer. Then, after explaining that they would be given a few minutes to become acquainted and to decide which answers would be used in the interview, the experimenter left the room.

At this time, the first sample of the subject's eye contact behavior was taken. While the confederate and the subject were conversing, a 5-min measure was taken of the number of times that the subject established eye contact. The duration of any eye contact longer than 1 sec was timed and recorded (these were defined as being significant glances). After the 5-min recording was finished, the experimenter explained that there would be a short trial run, as there remained a bit of space left on the recording tape. This would give them a chance to warm up before the actual interview. The experimenter answered questions, then left the room again, allowing them to practice.

After 2 or 3 min, the experimenter returned and said that an extra cassette was in the experimenter's office and asked the confederate to go get it. As previously arranged, the confederate agreed and left the room. At this time, the experimenter confided to the subject that the "forgotten tape" had been a ploy to get the other subject out of the room for a moment. The experimenter asked the subject to help in observing the behavior of the other subject when their prearranged interview answers were suddenly changed. The experimenter asked the subject to change the answers that had been previously given and to lie to the other subject. In all cases, subjects agreed to cooperate.

When the confederate returned with an extra tape, the experimenter told the two to begin the actual interview. While the interview was taking place, a second 5-min measure was taken of the eye-contact behavior of the subject. The experimenter allowed the two to complete their interview and then reentered the room.

At this time, the experimenter explained to the confederate that the subject had been instructed to change the answers in order to help study a different type of verbal interaction. The confederate, as arranged, was most gracious about the matter. The experimenter thanked the students and asked them to keep the nature of the experiment a secret for another week as the experimenter was still testing. Both the subject and the confederate then left together.

As previously mentioned, all subjects agreed to lie to the confederate, some with considerable enthusiasm. None of the subjects seemed to feel that the confederate was anything other than a fellow student, particularly after the experimenter had enlisted their help.

RESULTS

The number of glances and the total duration of significant glances (those lasting 1 sec and longer) were the two response measures taken for each subject during each of the two sessions (truthful and lying). The difference score was obtained for each subject by subtracting the initial (truthful) score from the final (lying) score. The mean difference scores are presented in Figure 1.

Although there was a tendency for the lying measures to be higher than the truthful measures, *t* tests showed that the truth vs. lying measures were not outside the chance range [$t(19) = 2.14$ for the length of glances data; and $t(19) = .80$ for the number of glances data].

Since previous research using similar interview-type situations had been equivocal concerning whether females tend to engage in more eye contact than

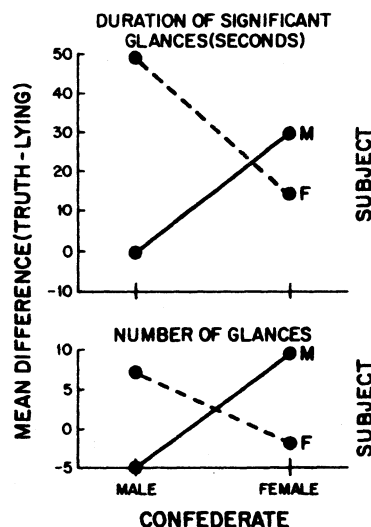


Figure 1. Mean differences between truthful and lying eye behavior as a function of the gender of the subject and confederate.

males, analyses of variance were run using both measures for both the truthful and the lying situations. Four 2 by 2 analyses of variance were thus computed. Only one *F* ratio was larger than chance expectation ($p < .05$), viz., the comparison of male vs. female subjects, while lying, using the length-of-glances measure (the females looked longer). In a word, very little evidence was found to support the belief that females tend to engage more in eye gazing than do males.

The data shown in Figure 1 were subjected to analyses of variance. The analysis of the difference data for the length of glances showed an interaction between the subjects and confederates depending upon their gender [$F(1,16) = 6.67$, $p < .025$]. The upper graph in Figure 1 shows the source of the interaction. The male subjects looked into the eyes of the female confederates longer while lying than when truthful, but the males looked into the eyes of male confederates about the same amount of time under both conditions.

The female subjects looked into the eyes of confederates of both sexes longer while lying than when telling the truth, but the amount was much larger when the confederate was male than when the confederate was female.

The lower graph in Figure 1 shows that the number of glances measure indicates the same interaction between the subjects and confederates depending upon their gender; although the *F* in this instance is not so large [$F(1,16) = 3.63$, $.05 < p < .075$].

DISCUSSION

Lying may be the most hypocritically practiced activity in our culture. Parents and teachers tell children that lying is bad.

Religious leaders insist that lying is not good. Sociologists and psychologists suggest that lying is not a good way to interact with others. Certainly, medical doctors and other therapists expect honesty from their patients, else how can diagnoses be accurate? Even businessmen and politicians state that honesty is a good policy. And, of course, professors and research scientists are living examples of the efficacy of the search for truth.

And yet, isn't there some room for modifications in the strict application of truth? Children who are punished for telling the truth, yet receive a pleasant reward for an undetected lie, aren't so impervious to reinforcement contingencies that they don't learn the lesson well.

The readiness of our students to lie, in the present study, suggested that they were not inexperienced in that area. The smooth facility with which all of them carried out the lying task, further suggests that they have done that particular thing before.

The results of other research (Barnlund, 1968; Exline et al., 1970; Exline & Greenberg, 1971) suggesting that eye contact is a form of social behavior that is related to lying was borne out in the present study.

The proclivity for females to engage in more eye contact than males was only slightly supported by the present data.

The major results were that males gazed longer into the female confederates' eyes while lying (29.52 sec longer), while females

gazed longer into the eyes of the male confederates when lying (49.54 sec longer).

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