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Human Lie Detectors
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Is detecting deception primarily limited to technology such as polygraph and voice analysis computers? Or, are there some “human lie detectors” operating within the law enforcement community? Recent studies conducted by the National Institute of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation and a host of non-governmental organizations suggest some officers can detect deception with accuracy levels that rival technology.

During 2006 the author conducted exploratory research to identify areas of common perceptions and practices of detecting deception by law enforcement officers. Approximately 350 peace officers in the State of Alabama were surveyed concerning their methods of detection deception. This article will briefly review some behavioral signs that over half of the surveyed officers identified as indicative of deception.

Behavioral Cue #1 - deceptive persons avoid eye contact unless they are practiced liars or from cultures that shun eye contact.

Behavioral Cue #2 - deceptive persons appear to be tense and assume an uncomfortable posture which seems exaggerated.

Behavioral Cue #3 - deceptive persons display closed palms, erratic movements and keep their hands close to their side.

Behavioral Cue #4 - deceptive persons ask for repetitions as a delaying tactic to buy time while they make up a plausible response without lying.

Behavioral Cue #5 - deceptive persons take longer to start answering questions unless they had prepared for the questions in advance.

Behavioral Cue #6 - deceptive persons use fewer hand movements to illustrate their actions but repeat words and phrases to emphasize their response.

Behavioral Cue #7 - deceptive persons avoid using first person pronouns such as “I,” “me” and “my” as a means of avoiding responsibility-taking.

Behavioral Cue #8 - deceptive persons fake emotions.

Behavioral Cue #9 - deceptive persons tend to offer too much detail to questions which they have anticipated and formed a response.

Behavioral Cue #10 - deceptive persons qualify their responses such as “at this point in time,” “to the best of my knowledge,” and “if I recall correctly.”

While most of these behavioral cues have been published in a variety of interview training material for law enforcement officers for numerous years, none of the surveyed officers reported their acquisition of these cues from sources other than experience. These preliminary results suggest that an experienced officer who is adept at detecting deception may favorably compete with detection technology.

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