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Can intuition improve deception detection performance?

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ABSTRACT

Two studies examined the role of processing style (intuitive vs. deliberative processing) in a deception detection task. In the first experiment, a thin slicing manipulation was used to demonstrate that intuitive processing can lead to more accurate judgments of deception when compared with traditional deliberative forms of processing. In the second experiment, participants who engaged in a secondary (concurrent) task performed more accurately in a deception detection task than participants who were asked to provide a verbal rationale for each decision and those in a control condition. Overall, the results converge to suggest that intuitive processing can significantly improve deception detection performance.

Improving human deception detection performance is a difficult undertaking. The popular story of Pinocchio tells of a little boy whose nose grew magically whenever he lied. Unfortunately, in real life there is no growing nose or specific cues that make lying immediately apparent to all (DePaulo et al., 2003), and performance in deception detection tasks is only slightly above chance levels (see Bond & DePaulo, 2006; Vrij, 2000). One promising line of inquiry has involved the assessment of indirect judgments of deception.

In their meta-analysis assessing the utility of various cues to deception, DePaulo et al. (2003) found that while direct cues (e.g., various verbal and non-verbal indicators) tend to yield small effects, cues that are assessed more "subjectively" (e.g., vocal immediacy, facial pleasantness, or level of narrative detail) showed significantly greater discrimination. Indeed, studies suggest that asking participants to render more holistic or "indirect" judgments regarding a sender can better discriminate truths vs. lies when compared with direct assessments of veracity (see DePaulo & Morris, 2004). In addition, studies show that participants appear to intuitively distinguish between liars and truth tellers via appropriate cues to deception (Anderson, DePaulo, & Ansfield, 1999), and through initial perceptions of veracity that are later "over thought" (Hurd & Noller, 1988). While the examination of indirect cues to deception has yielded some promising results, the current study examined related social psychological theory on intuitive judgments and more directly assessed its potential contribution to improving deception detection performance.

Information used to make decisions is generally believed to be processed using two different modes, namely via *intuitive processing* and *deliberative processing* (Gigerenzer, 2007; Wilson & Schooler, 1991). Intuitive processing has been referred to as an affective or experiential mode that is effortless, spontaneous, and holistic in nature. In contrast, deliberative processing requires conscious effort and is generally a slower, more analytic process. Although both processing modes are essential to good decision making, the vast majority of research has focused primarily on deliberative processing and regarded intuitive processing as the source of negative, problematic outcomes (Bargh & Williams, 2006; Gigerenzer, 2007). Recent research, however, has largely supported the importance of intuitive processing to everyday decision-making (Dijksterhuis, 2004; Gigerenzer, 2007).

One method used to assess intuitive judgments in the social psychological literature involves asking participants to view thin slices of behavior (i.e., brief clips of expressive behaviors) and to render judgments based upon incomplete information (cf. Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson, 2000; Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992, 1993). In one of the more well-cited examples of thin slicing, Ambady and Rosenthal (1993) demonstrated that participants could accurately predict an instructor's ratings of teaching effectiveness in as little as 6 s. Thin slicing has been investigated in a variety of contexts over the years, including teacher expectations of students (Babad, Bernieri, & Rosenthal, 1991), parental expectations of children (Bugental & Love, 1975), performance ratings for management consultants (Ambady, Hogan, Spencer, & Rosenthal, 1993), judgments of sexual orientation (Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999), supervisor ratings of camp counselors (Blanck & Rosenthal, 1984), and judgments of testosterone levels (Dabbs, Bernieri, Strong, Campo, & Milun, 2001). Research suggests that thin slicing may have its impact by encouraging participants to evaluate information in a more *intuitive* manner (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992).

The goal of the current study was to assess whether deception detection performance might be influenced by intuitive vs. deliberative processing styles. In Experiment 1 we assessed whether

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