

Introduction

There is something darkly fascinating about those skilled in verbal legerdemain. And at least one team of scientists, led by Dutch psychologist Aldert Vrij, believes that it has identified the precise ingredients of "good liars." These researchers outline the following 18 traits (pdf) that, if ever they were to coalesce in a perfect storm of a single perpetrator, would strain even seasoned interrogators' lie-detection abilities:

Source: <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/bering-in-mind/18-attributes-of-highly-effective-liars/>

1) Manipulativeness

"Machiavellians" are pragmatic liars who aren't fearful or anxious. They are "scheming but not stupid," explain the authors. "In conversations, they tend to dominate, but they also seem relaxed, talented and confident."

2) Acting

Good actors make good liars; receptive audiences encourage confidence.

3) Expressiveness

Animated people create favorable first impressions, making liars seductive and their expressions distracting.

4) Physical Attractiveness

Fair or unfair, pretty people are judged as being more honest than unattractive people

5) Natural performers

These people can adapt to abrupt changes in the discourse with a convincing spontaneity.

6) Experience

Prior lying helps people manage familiar emotions, such as guilt and fear, which can "leak" behaviorally and tip off observers.

7) Confidence

Like anything else, believing in yourself is half the battle; you've got to believe in your ability to deceive others.

8) Emotional camouflage.

Liars "mask their stark inclination to show the emotional expressions they truly feel" by feigning the opposite affect.

9) Eloquence

Eloquent speakers confound listeners with word play and buy extra time to ponder a plausible answer by giving long-winded responses.

10) Well-preparedness

This minimizes fabrication on the spot, which is vulnerable to detection.

11) Unverifiable responding

Concealing information ("I honestly don't remember") is preferable to a constructed lie because it cannot be disconfirmed.

12) Information frugality

Saying as little as possible in response to pointed questions makes it all the more difficult to confirm or disconfirm details.

13) Original thinking

Even meticulous liars can be thrown by the unexpected, so the ability to give original, convincing, non-scripted responses comes in handy.

14) Rapid thinking

Delays and verbal fillers ("ums" and "ahs") signal deception, so good liars are quick-witted, thinking fast on their feet.

15) Intelligence

Intelligence enables an efficient shouldering of the "cognitive load" imposed by lying, since there are many complex, simultaneously occurring demands associated with monitoring one's own deceptiveness.

16) Good memory

Interrogators' ears will prick at inconsistencies. A good memory allows a liar to remember details without tripping in their own fibs.

17) Truth adherence

Lies that "bend the truth" are generally more convincing, and require less cognitive effort, than those that involve fabricating an entire story.

18) Decoding

The ability to detect suspicion in the listener allows the liar to make the necessary adjustments, borrowing from strategies in the preceding skill set.