

## **Good Liars: Our invited article in Review of Policy Research that never got published**

In September 2004 the Journal *Review of Policy Research (RPR)* invited me to write an article. The paper *Good Liars*, co-authored with Granhag and Mann, was accepted for publication in May 2005. I inquired about this paper in September 2008 and was told that there was no record of my submission. The Editor, who took over in 2007, referred to Professor Paul Rich, the President of the Policy Studies Organization that owns the Journal. Paul Rich informed me that he had checked his records from 1 January 2005 onwards, despite the fact that I had told him that the correspondence regarding this article took place in October 2004. After sending him the evidence that *RPR* had invited me to write a paper and had accepted that paper, he emailed me that *RPR* will not publish this paper. The article is too old, it needs to be updated and offered as a new submission. The Editor would then decide whether or not the article would fit in the current agenda of the Journal before sending it for peer review. I told him that due to the time elapsed, we are willing to update the paper, but because little research has been carried out regarding good liars since we wrote the article, the updates would be minor. I also wrote that *RPR* should fulfill its commitments and that the “acceptance” status should remain, as the Journal rather than me is responsible for the delay in publication. Paul Rich replied that “Editors are not committed to publishing old papers, regardless of the circumstances.” If this approach of running a Journal were to become standard practice, an academic outcry would be the result. I thus contacted the Publisher of the Journal, Wiley-Blackwell. They agreed that I have followed the correct procedure at all times; that it was bad that the article was not published; and worse that the reaction from the Journal seemed to be one of evasion rather than apology. They also informed me that a complaint has been made. I have not heard from Paul Rich or from the Journal since then.

Let’s finish with some positive news. The Journal is not easy to trace, it is not on the Web of Science.

The article appears below.

## **Good Liars**

Aldert Vrij<sup>1</sup>

University of Portsmouth

Par Anders Granhag

University of Gothenburg

Samantha Mann

University of Portsmouth

Running head: Good liars

---

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Aldert Vrij, University of Portsmouth, Psychology Department, King Henry Building, King Henry 1 Street, Portsmouth, PO1 2DY, United Kingdom or via email: [aldert.vrij@port.ac.uk](mailto:aldert.vrij@port.ac.uk).

Abstract

A neglected area in deception research is what constitutes a good liar. On the basis of deception theory, people's views about how liars respond, impression formation theory and persuasion theory, we describe eighteen attributes which in our view are all present in a good liar. Insight into these characteristics will help law enforcement personnel in two ways: It provides insight into who would be suitable for undercover operations, and it may help lie detectors, because one reason why people make errors in lie detection is that they do not take the full complexity of deception into account and seem to have limited knowledge about what is actually going on in a liar's mind.

## Good Liars

Deception research has focused on a wide range of issues, including why people lie, the topics they lie about, how often they lie, whether liars differentiate from truth tellers in terms of speech content, nonverbal behaviour and physiological cues, and how good people are at detecting liars (Vrij, 2000). Widely ignored is the straightforward and relevant question: What constitutes a good liar? Insight into this question benefits law enforcement personnel in two ways. First, it provides insight into who would be suitable for undercover operations. Second, it may help lie detectors. One reason why people make errors in lie detection is that they do not take the full complexity of deception into account and seem to have limited knowledge about what is actually going on in a liar's mind (Vrij, 2004a, b).

This article addresses the issue of what characterises a good liar. Due to the paucity of research in this area, we will not present many empirical findings. Instead, we will discuss criteria that we think will suit a good liar, and we base these criteria on four sources of information. The first of these is theories of deception, giving insight into what may hinder liars and what they need to overcome in order to be successful. The second is people's views on how liars respond, explaining what reactions liars need to avoid. Third, impression formation theory provides insight into what type of people naturally come across as likeable, trustworthy, and honest. Finally, fourth is persuasion theory which describes what liars could do in order to convince others. Taking these four areas into account, we will then discuss eighteen characteristics that we think constitute a good liar. The limited amount of research addressing what strategies liars actually use will be discussed in the final section of this article.

## Deception Theory

There are several theoretical perspectives, each suggesting reasons why liars may show signs of deceit, and they all have one important feature in common: The mere fact that people lie will not affect their behaviour, speech content or physiological responses. However, sometimes liars may show different responses to truth tellers.

Zuckerman, DePaulo, & Rosenthal's (1981) multiple factor model. According to Zuckerman et al. (1981) the differences in responses are the result of liars experiencing an increase in emotions or cognitive load, or attempting to control their behaviour. Each of these aspects may influence a liar's response.

Telling a lie is most commonly associated with two different emotions: Guilt and fear (Ekman, 1985/2001). Liars might feel guilty because they are lying or might be afraid of not being believed. Liars do not always experience these emotions. In fact, research has indicated that they do not feel any of these emotions in the majority of lies they tell in daily life (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996). However, emotions are likely to be felt in situations where the stakes (i.e., positive consequences of getting away with the lie and negative consequences of getting caught) are high. In such circumstances, the strength of the emotions depends on the personality of the liar and on the circumstances under which the lie takes place (Ekman, 1985/2001; Ekman & Frank, 1993). Some people will experience less guilt than others while lying. For example, for manipulators, people high in Machiavellianism or social adroitness, lying is a normal and acceptable way of achieving their goals. Manipulators frequently tell lies, tend to persist in lying when challenged to tell the truth, don't feel uncomfortable when lying, and don't feel guilty when lying. In addition, they don't find lying cognitively too complicated, view others cynically, show little concern for conventional morality, and openly admit that they will lie, cheat, and manipulate others to get what they want (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996; Gozna, Vrij, & Bull, 2001). The term Machiavellianism is derived from the Italian statesman and writer Machiavelli (1469-1527). In 1513 he published his book 'Il Principe' (The Prince) where he made a plea for a united Italy with a powerful ruler to protect the national interest. This can be done by all necessary means, including those that are not morally justifiable. In his book *l'Arte Della Guerra* (Art of War), published in 1520, he outlined several possibly effective means.

Interpersonally, manipulators are scheming but not stupid. They do not exploit others

when their victims might retaliate, and do not cheat when they are likely to get caught. In conversations, they tend to dominate, but they also seem relaxed, talented and confident. They are usually liked more than people low in manipulative skills and are preferred as partners (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996).

The amount of guilt someone experiences also depends on the circumstances. A liar will not feel guilty when he or she believes that the lie is morally justified. Spies, for instance, try to protect the national interests of their country and therefore find it acceptable to lie, and few people experienced moral objections when lying to German soldiers when their countries were occupied in the Second World War.

Neither will a liar feel guilty when he believes that it is legitimate to lie: A salesman considers it to be part of his job to emphasise the favourable aspects of the product he is trying to sell and will therefore not experience guilt when doing so. A liar will also feel less guilty when he thinks that the negative consequences are not serious for the person he dupes. The amount of fear liars experience also depends on several circumstances. Liars are more likely to experience fear when the stakes are high. Fear also depends on the person to whom the lie is told. When a liar thinks that this person is a good lie detector, the liar will experience more fear than when he thinks it is easy to dupe that person. Finally, it depends on how good the liar thinks he or she is at lying. Some people have learned by experience that it is easy for them to fool others and that they hardly ever get caught. This will increase their self confidence and will decrease their fear while lying.

Sometimes liars might find it difficult to lie, as they have to think of plausible answers whilst avoiding contradicting themselves, and tell a lie that is consistent with everything the observer knows or might find out, whilst avoiding making slips of the tongue. Liars also need to remember what they have said, so that they can say the same things again when asked to repeat their story. They may also feel an urge to control their demeanour so that they will appear honest (as emphasised in the attempted control process, below) which may also be cognitively

demanding. Lies are not always cognitively difficult. In fact, most lies in daily life make little cognitive demand (DePaulo et al., 1996). The extent to which lying is demanding probably depends on a person's intelligence: Less intelligent people find it harder to lie (Ekman & Frank, 1993; Vrij & Mann, 2001). It also depends on people's personality. Verbally skilled people, such as manipulators, might find it easier to lie (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996; Vrij, Akehurst, Bull, & Soukara, 2002; 2004), as do people who find themselves good at acting (Gozna et al., 2001; Vrij, Edward, & Bull, 2001). Cognitive load also depends on the type of lie. Telling an outright lie (a total falsehood) might be more cognitively demanding than concealing information, and telling an elaborate lie might well be more demanding than providing short yes or no answers. Lying is perhaps also more demanding when the lie is not well prepared or rehearsed.

Liars may well realise that observers will look at their responses in order to judge whether they are lying. Liars may therefore attempt to control their behaviour so that they will appear credible. To be successful, the liar should suppress his or her nervousness effectively, whilst masking evidence of having to think hard. They should also be able to show the responses they want to show. This all requires acting skills and therefore people who are good at acting might be particularly good at this.

DePaulo's Self-Presentational Perspective. Zuckerman et al.'s (1981) perspective predicts that the more liars experience one or more of the three factors (emotions, content complexity, behavioural control), the more likely it is that cues to deception will occur. A key element in DePaulo's self-presentational perspective (DePaulo, 1992; DePaulo et al., 2003) is that truth tellers and liars have much in common, as truth tellers might also experience these factors. Thus, being accused of wrongdoing might make liars feel uncomfortable, but probably also truth tellers; liars might be afraid of not being believed in high stakes situations, but so might truth tellers, since not being believed might harm them also; producing lengthy statements might be more cognitively demanding for liars, but probably also for truth tellers, and so on. According to DePaulo et al. (2003) differences between liars and truth tellers occur for two reasons. First,

deceptive self-presentations might be less convincingly embraced as truthful self-presentations, for example, because liars have moral scruples, lack the emotional investment in their false claims, or lack the knowledge and experience to convincingly back up their deceptive statements. Second, liars typically experience a greater sense of awareness and deliberateness in their performances than truth tellers, because they typically take their credibility less for granted than truth tellers. They therefore feel perhaps a stronger need to act, which might not be very successful if someone is poor at acting.

Buller and Burgoon's Interpersonal Deception Theory (IDT). The third perspective, Interpersonal Deception Theory (Buller & Burgoon, 1996; Burgoon, Buller, & Guerrero, 1995) postulates that lying in face-to-face encounters is not a unidirectional activity, rather, both liar and receiver actively participate in constructing the deceptive conversation (Burgoon, Buller, Floyd, & Grandpre, 1996). When liars are exposed to negative feedback from the receiver, expressed verbally or nonverbally (the latter for example through a lack of conversational involvement), the liar might realise that his or her performance is lacking credulity and might therefore attempt to make behavioural adjustments over time to diminish suspicions. Being good at nonverbal decoding, that is, spotting and correctly interpreting subtle nonverbal cues in a conversation partner, is a particularly beneficial skill in this respect.

#### People's Views about How Liars Respond

A substantial number of studies have been carried out examining how observers think that liars respond. Strömwall, Granhag, and Hartwig (2004) and Vrij, Akehurst and Knight (2004) provide reviews of these studies. Those studies have been carried out in countries all over the world such as Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States, albeit mostly with Caucasian participants. Moreover, the participants were sometimes laypersons, but also police officers, prison guards, customs officers, prosecutors, and judges took part. A striking and consistent finding is that, with the exception of prisoners, people across different occupational groups and different countries do not differ in their beliefs about

deception. People typically believe that liars will react nervously with 'looking away' and 'making grooming gestures' being the most popular answers. People also believe that liars experience cognitive load when telling convincing lies. Finally, people find 'odd responses', that is responses which violate normative expectations, suspicious (Bond, Omar, Pitre, Lashley, Skaggs, & Kirk, 1992). For example, people have expectations about how often someone looks a conversation partner into the eyes during face to face interactions. Deviations from this pattern, either looking away from another or staring into the eyes of another, are suspicious. However, what the norms of gaze behaviour are depends on factors such as the social power of the people who interact (DePaulo & Friedman, 1998), and their cultural background (Vrij, 2000).

#### Impression Formation Theory

Many impressions and judgements about others are made rapidly, unwittingly and intuitively, and just a mere glance of another person can trigger such impressions and judgements (Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson, 2000). Once made, they form the anchor from which subsequent impressions and judgements are made (Ambady et al., 2000). For example, O'Sullivan (2003) found that when an observer believes a person to be generally a trustworthy person, s/he will have the tendency to judge that person as truthful in any given situation. Similarly, when the observer believes a person is untrustworthy, s/he will be inclined to judge that person as dishonest in any given situation. In other words, it benefits one to make a positive and/or trustworthy first impression. In that respect, physical appearance could be important, as good looking people are typically thought of as more honest (Aune, Levine, Ching, & Yoshimoto, 1993; Bull, in press; Bull & Rumsey, 1988).

Some individuals' nonverbal behaviour gives the impression that they are telling the truth (honest demeanour bias), whereas others' natural behaviour leaves the impression that they are lying (dishonest demeanour bias) (Riggio, Tucker, & Throckmorton, 1988; Riggio, Tucker, & Widaman, 1987). This is related to personality traits, such as expressiveness. Expressiveness, or 'spontaneous sending' (DePaulo & Friedman, 1998) could be defined as 'the ease with which

people's feelings can be read from their nonverbal expressive behaviours when they are not trying deliberately to communicate their feelings to others' (DePaulo & Friedman, 1998, p. 13). Expressiveness is related to charisma (Friedman, Riggio, & Casella, 1988). The first impressions expressive people make are typically positive; they are generally well liked and often regarded as attractive (DePaulo & Friedman, 1998). Expressive people exude credibility, regardless of the truth of their assertions. Their spontaneity tends to disarm suspicion, which makes it easier for them to get away with their lies (Riggio, 1986). Expressive people are also good at feigning convincing expressions of feelings that they are not actually experiencing, which makes them good actors (DePaulo & Friedman, 1998).

#### Persuasion Theory

DePaulo and Friedman (1998, p.12) pointed out that 'an effective door-to-door salesperson succeeds not because of knowledge of written persuasion techniques, but because of something in the dynamics of the face to face interaction'. Indeed, persuasion theory (see Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 1999, for an overview) has suggested that effective communicators are perceived as likeable. A behaviour style that includes directed gaze to the conversation partner, smiling, head nodding, leaning forward, direct body orientation, posture mirroring and uncrossed arms are typically perceived positively (Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990), so are moderately fast speaking rates, lack of ums and ers, vocal variety (Buller & Aune, 1988), behaviour matching (that is, when two people behave similarly) (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999) and articulate gesturing (Ekman, 1985/2001). Being physically attractive and being perceived as similar to the perceiver also contributes to likeability (Brehm et al., 1999).

Apart from likeability, being perceived as credible is the second attribute of a persuasive communicator (Brehm et al., 1999). Being judged as credible requires being seen as competent (i.e., knowledgeable or an expert on a topic) and trustworthy. Being perceived as trustworthy partly depends on first impressions (see above), but also on stereotypes (some occupational groups, such as estate agents, lawyers, and car salesmen, are seen as less trustworthy than others,

such as medical doctors and college teachers), and the content of the message. Messages are least persuasive if the observer believes that the sender has something to gain from successful persuasion. Thus, balanced, two-sided messages are more persuasive than one-sided messages (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994), as are messages that take unpopular stands or messages that are seen as being against the sender's own interest (Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978).

### Characteristics of Good Liars

Based on the literature discussed above, we believe that the following characteristics constitute a good liar.

Personality. *Manipulators, good actors* and *expressive people* probably make better liars than their counterparts for different reasons. Manipulators lie often, have no moral scruples when they lie (which reduces feelings of guilt), feel confident when they lie (which reduces fear of not being believed), and don't find it cognitively difficult to lie (which reduces signs of cognitive complexity). Actors are probably good liars because they feel confident when they lie and don't find lying difficult. Expressive people are often liked. They make an honest impression because their demeanour disarms suspicion. Good looking people also tend to be liked and perceived as honest, therefore, being *physically attractive* may also benefit liars.

Behaviour. Since some behavioural patterns make a suspicious impression on others, whereas other behavioural patterns are associated with honesty and likeability, it will benefit liars when they show these positive behaviours. Those who show such behaviours naturally, *natural performers* (Ekman, 1997), are therefore in a beneficial position. Those who don't show such behaviours naturally can't react spontaneously but need to act when they would like to produce such behaviours. They hereby run the risk of their behaviour lacking spontaneity and looking artificial (DePaulo & Kirkendol, 1989; Vrij, Semin, & Bull, 1996). An issue that complicates showing positive behaviour is that what is seen as positive may well be culturally defined. Whether this is the case is unclear due to lack of cross-cultural research in this area, but it is known that people from different cultures sometimes show different behaviours (Vrij, 2000).

Emotions. Good liars probably don't experience strong feelings of guilt and fear. As already mentioned, experiencing such feelings is related to personality, with manipulators and actors experiencing such emotions to a lesser extent than their counterparts. It is also related to *being experienced in lying*, and *feeling confident when lying*. However, it is likely that in some circumstances, for example high-stakes situations, people will experience emotions such as fear of not being believed when they lie. On such occasions a liar will not be fundamentally different from a truth teller, as truth tellers probably will experience the same emotions in such circumstances. However, it sounds reasonable that good liars are those who are able to *mask or camouflage such emotions*. Expressive people are relatively good at feigning convincing expressions of feelings that they are not actually experiencing (Friedman et al., 1988). However, these are also the people who tend to express their true feelings spontaneously. When lying, they therefore may have to mask their relatively stark inclination to show the emotional expressions they truly feel. Therefore, their skill in feigning emotions might well be counteracted in part by this glaring inclination to show real feelings. Indeed, there is evidence that expressive people have problems with suppressing their emotional expressions in the heat of passion (Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991).

There are several emotions that the vast majority of people cannot feign as they cannot deliberately produce the emotional expressions that accompany such emotions (Ekman, 1985/2001). For example, raising and pulling together the eyebrows, an expression that occurs when people experience great levels of fear, is impossible for most people to simulate, as is narrowing the lips, an expression that occurs when people experience real anger. Ekman (1985/2001) believes that people most often mask their true emotions by using a smile. However, people have difficulty feigning true happiness. Smiles as the result of real enjoyment are accompanied by the action of two muscles, the Zygomatic Major which pulls the lip corners upwards towards the cheekbone, and the Orbicularis Oculi which raises the cheek and gathers skin inwards from around the eye socket, producing bagged skin below the eyes and crow's-feet

wrinkles beyond the eye corners. When people simulate enjoyment, they often produce a smile with upturned lips but the accompanying effects around the eye (actions of the Orbicularis Oculi muscle) are often missing (Frank, Ekman, & Friesen, 1993). Other differences between felt and false smiles are that false smiles are more asymmetrical, appear too early or too late, and often last longer (Ekman, Davidson, & Friesen, 1990; Ekman & Friesen, 1982). Liars, however, often get away with these errors as observers often fail to notice them or do not know how to interpret them (Ekman, 1985/2001). Another way of lying about emotions is by acknowledging the feeling, but lying about its cause (Ekman, 1985/2001).

Cognitive load. Good liars don't experience much cognitive load when they lie. As mentioned above, there are individual differences which are in part related to personality: Manipulators and actors find lying less demanding than their counterparts. People who are good actors probably experience less cognitive load, as do people who are *eloquent*. Several other factors are related to cognitive load, such as adequate preparation. Good liars are probably *well prepared* and have worked out in advance what they are going to say and do. Good lie detectors will check the person's statement and will search for evidence that confirms or contradicts these statements. Liars should therefore be careful about what they say. Ideally, *they should only say things which are impossible for others to verify*. Concealing information is therefore better than telling an outright lie: Telling somebody that you 'honestly can't remember' what you have done a couple of days ago is preferable to making up a story, as the latter option gives the observer the opportunity to check the story. The more difficult it is to verify that statement, the better the statement is from a liar's point of view. Concealments, however, are not always possible, sometimes a statement needs to be provided. In which case, it may help *to say as little as possible*. The less information is given, the less opportunity it provides for the lie detector to check.

Even a well prepared liar can be faced with unexpected situations which require an immediate response. To be successful in these situations, the liar needs to give a convincing

answer, which requires *original thinking*. The ability to come up quickly with answers is also advantageous. It is essential that liars do not wait too long before giving an answer, because a delay may make the observer suspicious. *Rapid thinking* is therefore required. It will benefit the liar to be an eloquent speaker, as eloquence can help in getting out of awkward situations. People who usually use many words to express themselves are in an advantageous position. They can commence with giving a long-winded response, which in fact doesn't immediately answer the question, but does buy time to think about the appropriate answer. Or they can use their eloquence to fool the observer, by giving a response which sounds convincing but which, in fact, doesn't provide an answer to the question. Being original, eloquent and a quick thinker might be related to *intelligence*.

Liars always run the risk that lie detectors will ask them to repeat or clarify what they have just said. They should then be able to repeat the same story or to add some information without contradiction. A *good memory* is thus required. In that respect, it might again help the liar to say as little as possible. The less someone says, the less that person has to remember. In this respect, it also helps to *stay with the truth as much as possible*. In other words, rather than fabricating a whole story, a liar could tell a story which is mostly true but differs from the truth in a few crucial details. Thus, if someone wants to lie about his activities last Saturday, he could claim that he was at the gym at a particular (i.e., the relevant) time. If he has been to that particular gym before he now can truthfully describe an experience at the gym. The only fabricated part in this story is *when* he was there.

Decoding skills. As was emphasised in IDT, liars could perhaps increase their chances of not getting caught by adapting their response once their reply raises suspicions in the receiver. Again according to IDT, receivers' suspicions might become clear through nonverbal cues. In that respect, those who have good *decoding skills* and therefore quickly notice such suspicions may be more successful liars.

#### Strategies that Liars Use

Good liars use effective strategies to conduct their behaviour. But which strategies do they use, and how do these differ from the strategies used by truth-tellers? To date there is very little research on truth-tellers' and liars' strategies (DePaulo et al., 2003). In this section we will sum up what science can tell us, and offer a few speculations on the issue. At the most basic level, a distinction can be made between strategies pertaining to (a) the statement (e.g., the theme and the level of details) and (b) the acting in terms of nonverbal behaviour (e.g., eye contact, body language). Below we will discuss both types of strategies. Specifically, first we will examine the extent to which truth-tellers and liars differ in terms of employing strategies. Then we will close in on the different types of strategies used, and discuss verbal and nonverbal strategies separately. The so-called self-presentational perspective, advocated by, for example, DePaulo et al. (2003), suggests that both liars and truth-tellers edit their behaviour in order to appear truthful. Hence, in order to learn about liars' strategies, and separate effective from less effective strategies, we need to study also truth-tellers' strategies.

In a study by Strömwall, Granhag and Hartwig (in press), thirty students were interrogated by experienced police officers about a mock crime (half lied and half told the truth). After the interrogations, the suspects were asked about their strategies. Interestingly, only 10% of the liars reported that they had lacked a strategy, whereas the corresponding figure for truth-tellers was 30%. A similar trend was found in a recent study by Granhag, Hartwig, Strömwall, & Kronkvist (2005), who also found that liars and truth-tellers did not differ in the extent to which they had planned the verbal content of their statement, but liars reported having planned their nonverbal behaviour to a larger extent than truth-tellers. Why is it that truth-tellers are less prone to plan their behaviour and use strategies during an interrogation? A tentative answer is suggested by Kassin and Norwick (2004), who in a recent study showed that many truth-telling suspects seem to have strong faith in the power of their own innocence; they have "done nothing wrong" and expect that the truth will come out. Such reasoning may turn out to be very naive, and may cause a truth-teller much suffering.

We have argued that liars are more prone to use strategies than truth-tellers, and we will now close in on the truth-tellers that do use strategies. Do these strategies differ from the ones used by liars? In the study by Strömwall and colleagues (in press), students were asked what nonverbal and verbal strategies they had used to appear credible during the interrogation. Truth-tellers and liars did not differ in terms of their nonverbal strategies. The most common nonverbal strategy for both truth-tellers and liars was to avoid making any excess movements (about 50% of the liars and truth tellers reported having used this strategy). The second most common nonverbal strategy was to try to maintain eye contact (approximately 25% of the liars and the truth tellers reported having used this strategy). In short, both liars and truth tellers decided on a plan of attempted control (see above).

However, the results showed that truth-tellers and liars differed in terms of verbal strategies. The most common verbal strategy reported by truth-tellers was to 'keep it real' (about 50% of the truth-tellers reported having used this strategy), whereas the most common verbal strategy for liars was to 'keep it simple' (about 40% of the liars reported having used this strategy). The finding that the liars decided to keep their story simple, and to not add details, finds support in previous research (Granhag & Strömwall, 2002). Noteworthy, many of the truth-tellers who 'kept their story real' were assessed as liars. Counter-intuitive as it may seem, it may be that the 'tell it like it was'- modus operandi used by truth-tellers is very risky. Good liars seem to know this and use strategies that help them tell plausible stories. In short, good stories have a clear-cut central action to which all other elements are connected, and a context that explains the actors' behaviour. In addition, a good story is free from ambiguities, such as contradictions and missing elements (see Bennet & Feldman, 1981). In a study on liars' strategies, Malone et al. (1997, cited in DePaulo et al., 2003) asked liars about how they came up with their lies, and as many as half of them said that they based their lies on experiences from their own life, but altered critical details. In line with this finding, Granhag, Strömwall and Jonsson (2003) speculated that placing oneself in a familiar environment and performing highly

scripted activities, is probably a wise route to choose when, for example, fabricating an alibi. It seems that truth-tellers' main objective is to try to remember what they actually experienced, whereas good liars are focused on editing reality so that it conforms with the story grammar characterising a plausible story. In short, truth-tellers use their memory to try to reconstruct reality, whereas good liars use their memory to remember the ingredients of a good story.

In the same vein, Granhag and Strömwall (1999) suggested a so-called 'repeat vs reconstruct' hypothesis in order to explain the processes at play during repeated interrogations. The hypothesis rests on two premises. First, good liars know that in order to avoid detection they have to remember what they have said in previous interrogations. Secondly, it is well established finding that human memory is malleable (Baddeley, 1990). In brief, good liars will try to repeat what they have said in previous interrogations, whereas many truth-tellers will try to reconstruct what they have experienced, and be less concerned with what they have said in previous interrogations. Liars who manage to follow their strategy will produce statements with a high degree of consistency (and thereby stand a good chance to avoid detection), whereas the truth-tellers' more recollective memory work might undermine the degree of consistency (which, in turn, may put them in a doubtful light).

To sum up, it may be tempting to conclude that the most successful liars are those who manage to imitate the behaviour of truth-tellers. But considering that research shows that people hold misconceptions about not only liars', but also truth-tellers' behaviour (Strömwall, Granhag, & Hartwig, 2004), a liar should think twice about trying to imitate truth-tellers. Instead, good liars make sure they behave in accordance with people's beliefs about how truth-tellers behave, and make sure they avoid behaving in ways which fit with people's beliefs about how liars behave.

### Conclusion

On the basis of theory, we came up with eighteen characteristics that are likely to be present in a good liar. Since research about good liars is almost lacking, we hope that this article

will stimulate scholars and practitioners to conduct research in this area. As mentioned above, we believe that this article will benefit lie detectors as it gives more insight into liars, but will it make people better liars? We don't think it will. Undoubtedly, this article provides some tips that liars could use in order to make their performance more convincing, but most characteristics we mentioned are inherent, and related to personality and being a natural performer. In that respect, this article is more useful to identify people who might be naturally good at lying.

## References

Ambady, N., Bernieri, F. J., & Richeson, J. A. (2000). Toward a histology of social behaviour: Judgmental accuracy from thin slices of the behavioral stream. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *21*, 201-271.

Aune, R. K., Levine, T., Ching, P., & Yoshimoto, J. (1993). The influence of perceived source reward value and attributions of deception. *Communication Research Reports*, *10*, 15-27.

Baddeley, A. (1990). *Human memory: Theory and practice*. Hove, UK: Erlbaum.

Bennett, W.L., & Feldman, M.S. (1981). *Reconstructing reality in the courtroom*. London: Tavistock.

Bond, C. F., Omar, A., Pitre, U., Lashley, B. R., Skaggs, L. M. & Kirk, C. T. (1992). Fishy-looking liars: Deception judgment from expectancy violation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *63*, 969-977.

Brehm, S. S., Kassin, S. M., & Fein, S. (1999). *Social Psychology, fourth edition*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Bull, R. (in press). Training to detect deception from behavioural cues: Attempts and problems. In P. A. Granhag & L. A. Strömwall (Eds.), *Deception detection in forensic contexts*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Bull, R., & Rumsey, N. (1988). *The social psychology of facial appearance*. New York, NJ: Springer-Verlag.

Buller, D. B., & Aune, R. K. (1988). The effects of vocalics and nonverbal sensitivity on compliance: A speech accommodation theory explanation. *Human Communication Research*, *14*, 301-332.

Buller, D. B., & Burgoon, J. K. (1996). Interpersonal deception theory. *Communication Theory*, *6*, 203-242.

Burgoon, J. K., Buller, D. B., Floyd, K., & Grandpre, J. (1996). Deceptive realities: Sender, receiver, and observer perspectives in deceptive conversations. *Communication*

*Research*, 23, 724-748.

Burgoon, J. K., Buller, D. B., & Guerrero, L. K. (1995). Interpersonal deception IX: Effects of social skill and nonverbal communication on deception success and detection accuracy. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 14, 289-311.

Chartrand, T. L., & Bargh, J. A. (1999). The chameleon effect: The perception - behaviour link and social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76, 893-910.

Crowley, A. E., Hoyer, W. D. (1994). An integrative framework for understanding two-sided persuasion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20, 561-574.

DePaulo, B. M. (1992). Nonverbal behaviour and self-presentation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111, 203-243.

DePaulo, B. M., & Friedman, H. S. (1998). Nonverbal communication. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (pp. 3-40). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

DePaulo, B. M., & Kashy, D. A. (1998). Everyday lies in close and casual relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 63-79.

DePaulo, B. M., Kashy, D. A., Kirkendol, S. E., Wyer, M. M., & Epstein, J. A. (1996). Lying in everyday life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 979-995.

DePaulo, B. M., & Kirkendol, S. E. (1989). The motivational impairment effect in the communication of deception. In J. C. Yuille (Ed.), *Credibility assessment* (pp. 51-70). Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer.

Eagly, A. H., Wood, W., & Chaiken, S. (1978). Causal inferences about communicators and their effect on opinion change. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, 424-435.

Ekman, P. (1985/2001). *Telling lies*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Ekman, P. (1997). Deception, lying, and demeanour. In D. F. Halpern & A. E. Voiskounsky (Eds.), *States of mind: American and post-soviet perspectives on contemporary*

*issues in psychology* (pp. 93-105). New York, NJ: Oxford University Press.

Ekman, P., Davidson, R. J., & Friesen, W. V. (1990). The Duchenne smile: Emotional expression and brain physiology II. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 342-353.

Ekman, P., & Frank, M. G. (1993). Lies that fail. In M. Lewis & C. Saarni (Eds.), *Lying and deception in everyday life* (pp. 184-201). New York, NJ: Guildford Press.

Ekman, P., & Friesen, W. V. (1982). Felt, false, and miserable smiles. *Journal of Nonverbal Behaviour*, 6, 238-253.

Frank, M. G., & Ekman, P., & Friesen, W. V. (1993). Behavioral markers and recognizability of the smile of enjoyment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64, 83-93.

Friedman, H. S., Riggio, R. E., & Casella, D. F. (1988). Nonverbal skill, personal charisma, and initial attraction. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 14, 203-211.

Friedman, H. S., & Miller-Herringer, T. (1991). Nonverbal display of emotion in public and private: Self-monitoring, personality, and expressive cues. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 766-775.

Gozna, L., Vrij, A., & Bull, R. (2001). The impact of individual differences on perceptions of lying in everyday life and in high stakes situation. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 31, 1203-1216.

Granhag, P.A., Hartwig, M., Strömwall, L.A., & Kronkvist, O. (2005). *Suspects' strategies during police interrogation: What works and what backfires?* Manuscript in preparation.

Granhag, P.A., & Strömwall, L.A. (1999). Repeated interrogations - Stretching the deception detection paradigm. *Expert Evidence - The International Journal of Behavioural Sciences in Legal Context*, 7, 163-174.

Granhag, P.A., & Strömwall, L.A. (2002). Repeated interrogations: Verbal and nonverbal cues to deception. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 16, 243-257.

Granhag, P.A., Strömwall, L.A., & Jonsson, A.C. (2003). Partners in crime: How liars in collusion betray themselves. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 4*, 848-867.

Kashy, D. A., & DePaulo, B. M. (1996). Who lies? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*, 1037-1051.

Kassin, S.M. & Norwick, R.J. (2004). Why people waive their Miranda rights: The power of innocence. *Law and Human Behavior, 28*, 211-221.

O'Sullivan, M. (2003). The fundamental attribution error in detecting deception: The body-who-cried-wolf-effect. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 29*, 1316-1327.

Riggio, R. E. (1986). Assessment of basic social skills. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*, 649-660.

Riggio, R.E., Tucker, J., & Throckmorton, B. (1988). Social skills and deception ability. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 13*, 568-577.

Riggio, R. E., Tucker, J., & Widaman, K. F. (1987). Verbal and nonverbal cues as mediators of deception ability. *Journal of Nonverbal Behaviour, 11*, 126-145.

Strömwall, L. A., Granhag, P. A., & Hartwig, M. (2004). Practitioners' beliefs about deception. In P. A. Granhag & L. A. Strömwall (Eds.), *Deception detection in forensic contexts* (pp. 229-250). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Strömwall, L.A., Granhag, P.A. & Hartwig, M. (2004). Professionals' beliefs about deception. In P.A. Granhag & L.A. Strömwall (Eds.), *The detection of deception in forensic contexts* (pp.229-250). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tickle-Degnen, L., & Rosenthal, R. (1990). The nature of rapport and its nonverbal correlates. *Psychological Inquiry, 1*, 285-293.

Vrij, A. (2000). *Detecting lies and deceit: The psychology of lying and its implications for professional practice*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

Vrij, A. (2004a). Guidelines to catch a liar. In P. A. Granhag & L. A. Strömwall (Eds.), *Deception detection in forensic contexts* (pp. 287-314). Cambridge, England: Cambridge

University Press.

Vrij, A. (2004b). Invited article: Why professionals fail to catch liars and how they can improve. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 9, 159-181.

Vrij, A., Akehurst, L., & Knight, S. (2004). *Police officers', social workers', teachers' and general public's beliefs about deception in children, adolescents and adults*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Vrij, A., Akehurst, L., Soukara, S., & Bull, R. (2002). Will the truth come out? The effect of deception, age, status, coaching, and social skills on CBCA scores. *Law and Human Behaviour*, 26, 261-283.

Vrij, A., Akehurst, L., Soukara, S., & Bull, R. (2004). Let me inform you how to tell a convincing story: CBCA and Reality Monitoring scores as a function of age, coaching and deception. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 36, 2, 113-126.

Vrij, A., Edward, K., & Bull, R. (2001). Stereotypical verbal and nonverbal responses while deceiving others. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 899-909.

Vrij, A., & Mann, S. (2001). Telling and detecting lies in a high-stake situation: The case of a convicted murderer. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 15, 187-203.

Vrij, A., Semin, G. R., & Bull, R. (1996). Insight in behavior displayed during deception. *Human Communication Research*, 22, 544-562.

Zuckerman, M., DePaulo, B. M., & Rosenthal, R. (1981). Verbal and nonverbal communication of deception. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology, volume 14* (1-57). New York, NJ: Academic Press.