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Lie Spotting Through Thin Slicing

Abstract

Human beings are hard-wired to lie, purposeless and purposeful, in everyday life. However, they are equally capable of spotting lies through adaptive unconscious of their brains they have the capability of rapid cognition i.e. the capacity to think without thinking to make out thin-slicing and detect deception in everyday life. The investigator, keen on exploring such skills in humans, decided to measure the effect of thin slicing on lie-spotting abilities, especially after imparting training and instruction in snap judgements. It was found that due to appropriate training in think slicing, the first impressions of the subjects under study improved to be more sound and they were better skilled to spot lies in everyday life. Control group and experimental Group Design was used for the study.

Keywords: Lie-Spotting, Thin Slicing, Adaptive Unconscious, Snap Judgements, Rapid Cognition.

Introduction

Everyone's mind is capable of amazing and unbelievable things. We just need to understand a little about the way the mind works to harness and focus its energy and use its power. One can learn how to use mind's power to communicate and persuade; to make connections; to create and harness positive energy; to use the mind creatively to bring about change; to develop intuition in such a way that you can call on it to take decisive action. Human mind is key to what a human does. If we start watching people trying to figure them out just like objects and study their faces and body movements to try and work out what was going in their minds, we can get to understand language of their eyes, lips, face and body. Researchers have shown that when watching a body's movement reduced to points of light on a screen, observers can read grief, anger, joy, disgust, fear and surprise. Dr Winand Ditrach, quoted in Lior Suchard (2012) worked with trained dancers to investigate just how easy it is to interpret emotion by reading body language only and found that all of us are primed to read emotion and meaning into body movements. Our minds are at work all the time without our knowing it from the moment we wake up in the morning and start multitasking in our world. Mind is also habitual of all kinds of shortcuts and automatic responses for dealing with the things we do not need to think about. Our conscious mind is always busy. We may also account for the subconscious of which we are most of the time not even aware of. But the subconscious makes up a great percentage of our mental processes. It remains active even if we do not know what it was doing. Sometimes, while seeing something or somebody, we have a hunch i.e. an instinctive sense that something was amiss or we first feel a wave of intuitive repulsion i.e. our mind, below the surface of consciousness, reaches conclusions without immediately telling us that it was reaching conclusions. This kind of action or reaction of the mind is fast, though frugal. The part of our brain that leaps to conclusions like this is called the adaptive unconscious. The adaptive unconscious is different from the unconscious described by Sigmund Freud (which was a dark and murky place filled with desires and memories and fantasies that were too disturbing for us to think about consciously. Malcolm Glandwell (2005) defines "adaptive unconscious as a kind of giant computer that quickly and quietly processes a lot of the data we need in order to keep functioning as human being." It helps us to determine fact from fiction.

The adaptive unconscious helps us to deal with the deception epidemic spread in the present day world. The investigator does not claim to be a deception detector, but has simply attempted to discuss lie-spotting skills that can work as tools to help us protect ourselves in situations where we may encounter falsehood. To some extent all humans act dishonestly at least once in a lifespan and tell lies abundantly. This does not mean that dishonesty is running rampant in the world. But none can deny its heavily felt existence. Pamela Meyer (2011) holds, "Deception is intrinsic in nature" She further opined that if lying and fraud are innate in the animal kingdom,



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humans must also be hardwired for deception. Many researchers have firmly established that lying is, in fact, one of the major building blocks of human social life. Although our adaptive unconscious is a powerful force, yet it is fallible. The internal computer may not succeed every time in everything. It may not be able to instantly decode the truth of a situation. It can be distracted. However, when our powers of rapid cognition are distracted, there may be specific and consistent set of reasons- which can be identified and understood. So, our snap judgements and first impression could be improved and made reliable through education and control. Malcolm Gladwell holds, "Just as we can teach ourselves to think logically and deliberately, we can also teach ourselves to make better snap judgements.... The power of knowing, in that first two seconds, is not a gift given magically to a fortunate few. It is an ability that we can all cultivate for ourselves ." Sometimes, the instinctual compulsion or the first impression or a snap judgement can be as valuable as months of rational analysis. By educating ourselves in the very smallest components of our everyday lives i.e. the content and origin of those instantaneous impressions and conclusions that spontaneously arise whenever we meet a new person or confront a complex situation or have to make a decision under conditions of stress, we can make a different and better world.

Malcolm Gladwell describes 'Thin Slicing' as "the ability of our unconscious to find patterns in situations and behaviour based on very narrow slices of experience." Thin slicing refers to the thoughts and decisions that bubble up from our unconscious purely instinctively. It amounts to pattern recognition and intuitive judgement processes. Gladwell further explains that thin-slicing is not an exotic gift. It is a control part of what it means to be human. It is the power of the glance i.e. the ability to immediately see and make sense in the blink of an eye.

Snap judgements and rapid cognition take place secretly i.e. in our unconscious. This is an automatic way of thinking, just like an auto-pilot aeroplane. Also, the bag of our unconscious thinking is hidden. We go on thinking without thinking. Our snap judgements have a mysterious nature and are also susceptible to outside influences. The automaticity of social behaviour has also been explained by John A Bargh, Mark Chen, and Lara Burrows (1996). They devised a test, called the Priming Experiment, to show just how much goes on behind that locked door of our unconscious. Thin-slicing is most of the time inexplicable. If we ask people to explain their first impressions or snap judgements or the hunch they get when they first confront people or objects, the most transparent and pure of thin-slicing turns into something quite confusing. The human need to explain the inexplicable has been described in detail by Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson (1977). They concluded: "It is naturally preferable, from the standpoint of prediction and subjective feelings of control, to believe that we have such access. It is frightening to believe that no one has no more certain knowledge of the workings of ones own mind than

would an outsider with intimate knowledge of one's history and of the stimuli present at the time the cognitive process occurred." Psychologist Norman R.F. Maier (1931) stated that we learn by example and by direct experience because there are real limits to the adequacy of verbal instruction. His research shows that people are ignorant of the things that affect their actions, yet they rarely feel ignorant whereas we need to accept our ignorance.

Thin slicing is possible due to our ability to very quickly see behind the curtain. But if we reach a snap judgement without seeing behind the curtains, dark side of thin slicing appears. Every human being has mental associations. Peoples appearances i.e. their size, height, shape, colour, sex, can trigger automatic first impressions due to pre-existing mental associations. Harry M. Daugherty (1960) has described the story of Warren Harding as first choice of Americans for Presidency due to his sturdy outlook and mental associations Daugherty even called Harding "a great President" whereas, as opined by Malcolm Gladwell, Harding was, most historians agree, one of the worst Presidents in American history. Such a first impression is the dark side of think-slicing. Anthony G. Greenwold, Debbie E. McGhee, and Jordan L.K. Schwartz (1998) concluded, "When there is a strong prior association, people answer in between four hundred and six hundred milliseconds. When there is not, they might take two hundred to three hundred milliseconds longer than that." But such unconscious biases can be tutored. We are not helpless in the face of our first impressions because we can even control something which is outside of awareness. First impressions are generated by our experience and our environment, and by educating our experience and environment, we can change them. Malcolm Gladwell holds, "Taking rapid cognition seriously acknowledging the incredible powers of for good and ill, that first impressions play in our lives- requires that we take active steps to manage and control those impressions. " And for the steps, Gladwell describes that the spontaneity of our blinks need to be structured through lengthy rehearsals in daily life to avoid randomness and chaos. He likens the spontaneous blink to the game of Basketball which is an intricate, high-speed game requiring split-second spontaneous decisions. But such spontaneous snap judgements are a result of highly repetitive and structured practice, when the players are too in complete agreement. The effect of structured spontaneous blinks has been illustrated in the movie "Chak De India" where the Indian Hockey Team, despite having very good players, can be seen in disagreement mode and seems to lose to the Australian Team in the first half of the match. But in the second half, when Indian players come in complete agreement, they improve and equalize with Australian Team. This is the result of structured spontaneity. Further in the midst of extra direct hits, the coach, Mr. Kabir takes a snap judgement where the Australian goalkeeper would run to defend and indicates the same to the Indian Shooter who ended with the last winning hit. It was the result of studied

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blink through long experience and expertise of the coach.

Intuiting the intentions, needs, and emotions of people confronting us also helps us make correct snap judgements. In fact, successful decision making relies on a balance between deliberate and instinctive thinking. Further, fragility too plays a part in decision making. John Gottman (1999) showed that even the most complicated of relationships and problems have an identifiable underlying pattern. If we pick up such patterns through the process of editing information unconsciously, we could make better snap judgements. So, excess of information confuses decision making. Also too much of choices or options blur snap decisions. Overload of information spoils the environment for rapid cognition. If we have to decide between analytic and intuitive decision making, neither is good or bad. The wise thing is that we should use one or the other in appropriate circumstances. Too much of introspection reduces quality of our snap judgements. Thin-slicing has, therefore, to be done in context and appropriate environment without too much introspection.

The most common forms of rapid cognition are the judgements we make and the impressions we form of other people. We keep on drawing inferences about what the other persons in attendance or just passers by were thinking. We go reading the mind through eyes and facial expression. The explicit understanding of mind reading was brought forth by Silvan Tomkins and his student, Paul Ekman mentioned in Malcolm Gladwell. Gladwell says, "Tomkins believed that faces-even the faces of horses- held valuable clues to inner emotions and motivations." Silvan Tomkins held that face is a complete guide to the adaptive unconscious and according to him, there was a common set of rules. However, most psychologists disagreed with Tomkins and believed that expressions were culturally determined. Gladwell describes that Paul Ekman, to make sure which view was right, traveled to many countries, carrying photographs of men and women making a variety of distinctive faces, and astonishingly found that Tomkins was right. Ekman found a universal structure of facial expression that suggests uniform covariance among traits in humans despite vastly different culture, history, economics, social life, ideology and every other from of cultural and behavioral expression. Then, Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen (1978) created a taxonomy of facial expression and catalogued the essential repertoire of human facial displays of emotions. They prepared a Facial Action Coding System (FACS). Ekman accepted that many facial expressions can be made voluntarily, but our faces are also governed by a separate involuntary system that makes expressions that we cannot control consciously. If we try to consciously suppress the involuntary responses, the suppressed emotion leaks out and it is there on the face for atleast a fraction of a second. However eyes and faces reveal information to us when we know the art of mind-reading i.e. when we become able to put ourselves in the mind of the subject we are

trying to read. Nancy L. Etcoff and Paul Ekman (2000) explained at length the ways to learn mind reading. The hold that mind reading allows us to adjust and update our perceptions of the intentions of others. The mind reading skill can be developed with continuous repeated practice.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of this study

- (i) To study the effect of appropriate training and repetitive practice on improvement of the quality of snap judgments and first impressions
- (ii) To study the effect of thin-slicing on lie-spotting in everyday life.

Hypotheses

- (i) The students would be able to improve their snap judgements and first impressions after receiving appropriate training in thin slicing or rapid cognition.
- (ii) The students would be able to spot lies in everyday life after they are trained in thin slicing.

Methodology

- (i) Sample : 100 B.Ed students, 50 boys and 50 girls, of the academic session 2013-14 were randomly selected from various Education College situated in the District of Gurgaon in the State of Haryana.

Limitations of the study

Due to paucity of time and resources the study was limited as under

- (a) The study was limited to two schools only
- (b) The study was limited to experimentation on five components of lie spotting viz Spontaneous Structure; Pattern Recognition; Training and expertise; Context and Environment; Mind Reading.

Experimental Design

- (a) The sample students were evenly divided into two groups, Control Group and Experimental Group, to study the impact of instruction and training on thin-slicing as well as to know the role of thin-slicing to spot lies in everyday life.
- (b) The Experimental group was imparted one week training and instruction in the following areas based on the instruction material developed by Malcolm Gladwell with the intention to make appropriate thin-slicing by the group subjects to get correct first impression and thereby spot lies in everyday life most accurately

1. Spontaneous Structure
2. Pattern Recognition
3. Training and Expertise
4. Context and Environment
5. Mind Reading

1. Spontaneous Structure : For the purpose of this study spontaneous structure here means creating a structure in the adaptive unconscious to create a spontaneous picture of persons or situations by considering all aspects involved.
2. Pattern Recognition : It means instantly recounting how a particular person behaved in a particular situation in the past or how a similar situation was tackled in the past to arrive at better and dependable first impression.

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3. Training and Expertise : For the purpose of this study, it means to receive adequate training and practice to gain expertise in instantly recognizing facial expression, body postures and eye movements etc to hand out correct first impression which could help one to distinguish lie and truth.
 4. Context and Environment : it means to develop the habit of accounting for the context and surrounding environment prior to thin-slicing so as to make sound first impressions.
 5. Mind Reading : This means to enter into the confronting person's mind to assess what was running in his or her unconscious mind so as to arrive at explicit first impressions. It amounts to deciding advantageously before knowing the advantageous strategy.
- (c) A self-constructed questionnaire was prepared taking cues from the research conducted by John Gottman and Sybil Carrere; Timothy Wilson and Jonathan Schooler; Paul Ekman; Dasgupta, N. and Greenwald, A. G. (2001) and Malcolm Gladwell. The purpose of this questionnaire was to obtain first impressions of the sample students, before and after training, regarding the objects, persons, and situations added before all the questions. The questionnaire contained 10 questions each on the five training instruments explained in (b).

Results and Discussion

The results of the study have been tabulated below in Table 1 and Table -2

Table 1

Pre-Training Scores of thin-slicing of Control and Experimental Groups

Sr.No	Component s	Control Group N=50		Experimenta l Group N=50	
		%	%	%	%
1	Spontaneous Structure	22 %	78 %	24%	76%
2	Pattern Recognition	26 %	74 %	28%	72%
3	Training and Expertise	22 %	78 %	23%	77%
4	Context and Environment	28 %	72 %	29%	71%
5	Mind Reading	21 %	79 %	22%	78%

The above table reveals that there is no significant difference in thin-slicing levels of the control and Experimental groups on all the five components of making first impression. Only 22% of the control group and 24% of the experimental group could succeed in creating spontaneous structures as a basis for handing out first impressions about objects, persons, and situations explained in the questionnaire. Similarly 26% of the control group students and 28% of experimental group could recognize patterns before making first impressions. Only 22% of control group and 23% experimental group could give first impressions on the basis of informal training received at home and classroom

interactions. 28% of control group and 29% of experimental group could be able to take into account the context and environment before making first impressions. Very few in both groups i.e. 21% in the control group and 22% in the experimental group could use the mind reading skills due to inherent abilities. It is derived from these results that the sample students had negligible knowledge is recognizing spontaneous structures and patterns; had no formal training and expertise; less ability to take contest and environment into consideration; had almost no skills of mind reading. The results revealed that it was all due to absence of intuition; less knowledge of the rules of improvisation to size up a person or situation; less mental situation; over confidence; and lack of ability to combat their prejudices.

Table 2

Post- Training Scores of thin-slicing of control and Experimental groups

Sr.No	Component s	Control Group N=50		Experimenta l Group N=50	
		%	%	%	%
1	Spontaneous Structure	24 %	76 %	54%	46%
2	Pattern Recognition	26 %	74 %	54%	46%
3	Training and Expertise	23 %	77 %	58%	42%
4	Context and Environment	28 %	72 %	5%	41%
5	Mind Reading	22 %	78 %	52%	48%

Table 2 reveals that instruction and training on all the five components of thin-slicing yields a significant difference in arriving at sound first impression by the experimental group subjects. 54% of the experimental group students improved their ability to create spontaneity in existing structures as compared to 24% of this group prior to training. Similarly, 54% as compared to 28% before receiving training, of the experimental group showed ability to recognize patterns in objects, persons and situations. After formal training, 58% of the experimental group positively impacted their first impression as compared to 23% before training. 59% of the experimental group were found able to base their first impressions on context and environment. 52% could properly read the minds of confronting persons before making first impressions. Mind reading, in fact, requires continuous long practice and rehearsals to reach a higher level of understanding of the minds of others. The investigator, due to paucity of time and resources, could only impart training in mind reading skills. The results of control group, who were not assigned any formal training on the stated five components, are almost the same at both stages of assessment.

It is further evident from the results of this investigation that the experimental group students, after receiving training and instruction in thin-slicing, were able to hand out more correct first impression which enabled them to distinguish between truth and

deception. Thus, a person trained in taking better snap judgements was wound more skilled in spotting lies of the respondents. Hence, both the hypotheses stand proved.

Conclusion

If a person is imparted sufficient training and instruction for finding spontaneity in the respondents mental structures; for recognizing patterns in the cognitive and non-cognitive thinking of the respondents; for taking into account context and environment while arriving at snap judgements; and for reading the road map of adaptive unconscious of the respondents, that person would be able to make out sound first impressions which could help him or her to spot lies in everyday life.

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