

## Chapter 42

# Using Technology to Examine Cultural Learning of African–Americans: Verbal and Nonverbal Messages of Deception

**Michael L. Whitley**  
Park University, USA

### ABSTRACT

*Police officers frequently work with people of different cultures and those who speak different languages, thus needing to learn cultures (Navarro, 2001). The purpose of this case is to examine the self-perceptions of African-Americans regarding their ability to distinguish deception in interpersonal communication. RQ1: How do African-Americans self-report their ability to detect interpersonal communication deception? RQ2: What behaviors do African-Americans believe are indicators of interpersonal communication deception? The method of study is survey research conducted through SurveyMonkey.com. Participants (n=57) discuss their perceptions of deception in their lives. The results suggest that respondents (80%) believe they are better than others at detecting deception. The literature findings also suggest that African-Americans believe themselves to be more effective at detecting deception within their own ethnic group compared to other ethnic groups. Commensurate with previous deception studies, the current study finds that an array of communication behaviors, believed to be indicative of deceit by other ethnic groups, are also used by African-American respondents.*

### BACKGROUND

The African-American culture possesses a storied history. Brought to America against their will and forced into servitude, African slaves were stripped of culture and compelled to adopt the culture and ways of the American slave owner. As such, the

African-American culture is a miscellany of both the dominant American culture and the post-Civil War struggle that defined the freedmen of late 19<sup>th</sup> century America.

Acculturation into the dominant culture was not the choice of the African-American. But because of acculturation, African-Americans may

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very well understand the dominant culture better than their culture is understood by anyone outside of their own culture. This presumption may also extend to perceptions of deception in the dominant culture. Although this idea has been discussed, there seems to be little research about whether the idea is true (Bailey, Nowicki, & Cole, 1998). Until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, African-Americans were the dominant minority culture in the United States. One cannot help but wonder why this co-culture has been all but omitted from many areas of research (Bailey et al., 1998). Communication research is no exception.

As there appears to be little research that includes African-Americans as research participants, the author of this thesis explored the African-American culture's perception of deceptive communication. This research examined attitudes toward deception from an intra-cultural perspective and an intercultural perspective.

This case used technology to examine the self-perceptions of African-Americans regarding deception in interpersonal communication. The current study also proposes to examine the nature of self-report of African-Americans regarding deception. How do African-Americans self-report their ability to detect interpersonal communication deception? What behaviors do African-Americans believe are indicators of interpersonal communication deception?

## **SETTING THE STAGE**

Police officers frequently work with people of different cultures and those who speak different languages, thus needing to learn cultures. In this case, a police officer used technology to seek information from African Americans about their perceptions of verbal and nonverbal communication related to deception. Deception has been the subject of a vast amount of communication research (Levine, Shaw, & Shulman, 2010a). This research has been rather broad in scope, exam-

ining many facets of deceptive communication behaviors. Researchers have examined the effect of stakes on deceivers' behaviors, the effect of probing questions, the reliability of perceived nonverbal indicators of deception, and a plethora of related data.

Perhaps most interesting to the current researcher has been the impact of cultural research on the study of deception in interpersonal communication (Bailey, Nowicki, & Cole, 1998; Park & Ahn, 2007; Seiter & Wiseman, 1995). Researchers have compared the abilities of various cultures to detect deceptive communication, e.g., Korean versus American; Latino-American versus Asian-American versus Caucasian-American. Research has even examined a number of gender-based studies, comparing the accuracy rates of females and males in detecting deception. Scant attention, however, has been paid to how African-Americans fit and compare in similar studies. It is for this reason the current researcher has endeavored to examine African-American attitudes toward deceptive communication.

## **Unresolved Issues, Theoretical Questions, and Social Concerns**

Deception research is sometimes called "the dark side of communication." While there is extensive research about communication deception, there seems to be little research in the area of ethnicity and deception (Seiter & Wiseman, 1995). The limited scholarship that discusses African-Americans and deception is not focused on everyday communication (e.g., Hagood, 2005; Hochhauser, 2004; Smith, 2004). The exclusion of African-American focus from most research on cultural differences in deception detection may have presented an inaccurate depiction of the human ability to decode nonverbal messages. Current research seems incomplete regarding an analysis of deception detection from a cultural standpoint.

African-Americans are included in current research as participants, but it seems logical that

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