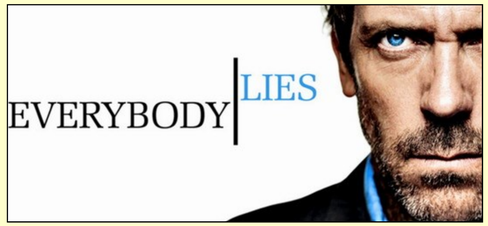
Deception in Therapy: Forensic Therapists Attitudes and Beliefs

Chelsea Dickens

Thesis Chair: Drew A. Curtis

Thesis Committee: Allyn Byars, Jose Contreras, & Ellen Melton

Angelo State University



INTRODUCTION

People see deception every day by means of politics, the media, advertising, and daily interactions. One study suggests that people tell, on average, two lies a day (DePaulo & Colleagues, 1996) and "most people are often successful with their deceit" (Curtis, 2013, p.1). Therapists in a forensic setting offer a unique perspective on attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of deception because of the clientele they work with. Criminals operate in a culture that is generally much more deceptive than non-criminals (Vrij & Semin, 1996). The purpose of this study was to determine if forensic therapists hold accurate beliefs about indicators of deception as well as explore attitudes held toward deception. Results for this study showed forensic therapists hold inaccurate beliefs about deception as well as negative attitudes toward clients who lie. These inaccuracies could cause a therapist to misinterpret behaviors as an indication of deception when a statement may in fact be the truth. These inaccurate beliefs can be detrimental to the therapeutic process due to forensic therapists indicating they hold negative attitudes toward those who lie.

METHODS

The current study recruited 48 participants 10 of whom did not complete the survey after the demographics questionnaire and were excluded from analysis. An email containing a brief summary of the study and a link was sent to each forensic therapist contact. After selecting the link participants were directed to an informed consent form on PsychData. Forensic therapists were then asked to complete the Demographic Questionnaire followed by the Detection of Deception Questionnaire (DDQ), Therapists' Attitudes Toward Deception (TATDS), and finally the Beliefs about Client Deception Questionnaire (BCDQ).

Forensic Therapists' Beliefs about Indicators of Deception

Variable	Mean (SD)	t	Belief	Prior Research
Nonverbal Indicators				
Eye Contact	3.13 (1.359)	-3.939*	Decrease	No change
Eye Blinks	4.55 (1.108)	3.076	No change	No change
Head Movements	4.76 (.943)	4.991*	Increase	No change
Hand and finger	4.89 (.953)	5.790*	Increase	Decrease
Arm movements	4.51 (.870)	3.591*	Increase	Decrease
Leg and foot move-	5.14 (1.032)	6.692*	Increase	Decrease
Smiles	4.58 (.967)	3.618*	Increase	No change
Postural shifts	5.05 (.880)	7.284*	Increase	No change
Shrugs	4.65 (.824)	4.789*	Increase	No change
Gestures	4.76 (.820)	5.738*	Increase	No change
Paraverbal Indicators				
Speech interrup-	4.89 (1.110)	4.969*	Increase	No change
Pauses or hesita-	4.97 (1.013)	5.840*	Increase	No change
Latency to respond	4.70 (1.331)	3.213	No change	Increase
Hectic speech pat-	4.65 (1.006)	3.922*	Increase	No change
Pitch of voice	4.82 (.865)	5.811*	Increase	Increase
Length of answers	4.66 (1.300)	3.119	No change	No change
Verbal Indicators				
Short simple sen-	4.00 (1.434)	0	No change	Increase
Plausible descrip-	4.29 (1.450)	1.23	No change	Decrease
Logical consistency	3.26 (1.408)	-3.226	No change	Decrease
Detailed description	4.00 (1.560)	0	No change	Decrease
Unusual detail	4.89 (1.290)	4.275*	Increase	No change
Unnecessary detail	5.24 (.971)	7.854*	Increase	No change
Description of feel-	3.74 (1.519)	-1.068	No change	No change
Describe what	3.89 (1.607)	-0.404	No change	Decrease
Description of inter-	4.00 (1.577)	0	No change	No change
Spontaneous correc-	4.89 (1.350)	4.020*	Increase	Decrease
Claim lack of	5.45 (1.032)	8.647*	Increase	Decrease
Story contradictions	5.63 (1.051)	9.573*	Increase	No change

Note: *p<.002

RESULTS

One sample t-tests were conducted on each of the specific attitudes related to attitudes toward discovering client deception (items 1-12 on TATDS) to determine if there was a statistically significant difference from a 5 anchor score. A one sample t-test was also conducted on each of the items related toward global attitudes of clients who lie in therapy (items 13-24 on TATDS) to determine if there was a statistically significant difference from a 4 anchor score (Bonferroni correction = .004). A statistically significant difference was found among 9 of the 24 attitude items in which 7 were negative. The attitudes that showed a statistically significant increase on the global scale were weak and lazy, indicating forensic therapists hold a moderate belief of clients who lie as being not very weak or lazy. The researcher then used a one-sample t-test for each of the non-verbal, paraverbal, and verbal indicators in the DDQ to determine statistically significant difference from an anchor score of 4 (Bonferroni correction = .002). Results revealed forensic therapists hold inaccurate beliefs about 23 out of 28 indicators of deception.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study revealed forensic therapists do not hold accurate beliefs about indicators of deception. These inaccuracies could cause a therapist to misinterpret behaviors as an indication of deception when a statement may in fact be the truth. These inaccurate beliefs can be detrimental to the therapeutic process due to forensic therapists indicating they hold some negative attitudes toward those who lie. This demonstrates a need for therapists to explore client deception and motivation for deception further. Recently an educational workshop aimed at increasing correct beliefs about indicators of deception and reducing negative attitudes toward clients who lie has been shown to be effective (Curtis et al. 2015).