

THE FACE NEVER LIES: TRANSCRIPT

Friday, January 23, 2009

Dr. Paul Ekman, a psychologist who's been in the business of lie detection for about 30 years, has long known that the polygraph can't reliably detect a lie.

DR. PAUL EKMAN: We do not have a machine that can do the job as well as a human being.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: The human beings trained by Ekman can unmask a liar – 95 percent of the time. He's worked with private companies and law enforcement for years, helping to figure out who's prevaricating and why. His work sounds kind of like a TV show, and now it is. In FOX's new program *Lie to Me*, Tim Roth plays Dr. Cal Leightman, based on Dr. Ekman. Ekman also is the series' scientific advisor, a position he uses to dispel long-held myths about lie detection. He'll also blog about the accuracy of each episode after it airs. In the series debut this past Wednesday, we are introduced to the concept of micro-expressions, which, Ekman says, are minute variations in breathing or the position of an eyebrow or the set of a shoulder. They're just ordinary expressions, except they last only about a 25th of a second.

DR. PAUL EKMAN: Most people just don't see 'em, they're too fast. We have on our website a tool that teaches anyone how to recognize micro-expressions, and tens of thousands of people have, in about an hour's time, learned to do that.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Are you saying it's that easy?

DR. PAUL EKMAN: It's that easy to learn to see it. It takes an hour.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Now, the show, at least the episode I saw, exposed a myth, apparently.

[CLIP]:

TIM ROTH AS CAL LEIGHTMAN: He was lying.

JOSH STAMBERG AS A.U.S.A. HUTCHINSON: Well, I thought most people avoid eye contact when they're lying.

TIM ROTH AS CAL LEIGHTMAN: No, that's a myth. And quite often they make more eye contact.

[END CLIP]

BROOKE GLADSTONE: The character who plays you in the show, Cal Leightman, says that liars are more likely to look at you while they're telling the lie because they want to see if you're buying it.

DR. PAUL EKMAN: Well, it's more than that. They also believe this false idea that if you look away, it means you're lying, so they don't want to be caught, so they look at you more than anybody else ever looks at you. [LAUGHS] And so, in fact, maintaining unbroken eye contact very often suggests that you're dealing with a liar.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Can you give me examples of some other commonly-held myths about liars and lying that you hope the show may dispel?

DR. PAUL EKMAN: Crossing your arms – that has nothing to do with whether you're lying or not. Most often it is a somewhat defensive gesture or that you're cold. Scratching your ear or pulling your ear, that's another myth - nothing to do with lying. Looking up to the left or to the right doesn't tell us that you're lying. Hesitations in speech - some people always hesitate when they talk, and it means absolutely nothing.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Now, getting back to the first episode, there's a scene in which the character who plays you recruits a Transportation and Security Administration official, a TSA official, at the airport because you see that she has a natural ability to spot liars. And the partner that works with your character says that this is incredibly rare.

[CLIP]:

ACTRESS: You're one of the naturals. There's an infinitesimal percentage of the population, less than .001, that tests nearly perfect without any advance training.

[END CLIP]

BROOKE GLADSTONE: How rare is it really?

DR. PAUL EKMAN: We've talked to 15,000 people in every walk of life and we have found 50 who have this really nearly perfect ability to spot liars, and that's without any specialized training. We're still trying to find out how in the world did they learn this skill? Are they the sort of Mozarts of lie detection; they just had it?

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Now, in another scene, a law enforcement official tells Dr. Leightman that his expertise is bogus, which, of course, leads Dr. Leightman to prove that it isn't.

[CLIP]:

TIM ROTH AS CAL LEIGHTMAN: You know, a moment ago I saw you smile at your colleague, flash her a glance, then shift your gaze. She responded by raising her chin, boss, revealing deep embarrassment.

ACTRESS: Cal.

TIM ROTH AS CAL LEIGHTMAN: I'll take another wild guess. You two had a fling.

[END CLIP]

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Are people generally skeptical in real life that this technique works?

DR. PAUL EKMAN: There must be skeptics, but they don't talk to me. [BROOKE LAUGHS] I'm continually having to emphasize that it isn't perfect. We get 95 percent accuracy. That means 5 percent errors. We don't have Pinocchio's nose. You can't catch everyone.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Can you turn this thing off or are you constantly watching people -- friends and family -- for signs that they're lying?

DR. PAUL EKMAN: I am constantly -- I can't turn it off, nor can anyone I've trained.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: One last question. What was it like to see your life and your life's work turned into a TV series?

DR. PAUL EKMAN: I have mixed feelings 'cause I'm continuously worried that they're going to get things wrong, and so I work very hard the moment I get a script to go over it and try to take out of it any of the mistakes. But my agreement with FOX was that Tim Roth could have none of my personal characteristics. [BROOKE LAUGHS] My friends don't think I am as grouchy or difficult to get along with as Tim Roth's character.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Maybe that's just what they're telling you, Dr. Ekman. [LAUGHS]

DR. PAUL EKMAN: That could be. But I would know if they were lying.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: [LAUGHS] Dr. Paul Ekman is a psychologist. He's been in the business of lie detection for decades. He's also the science advisor for the new program Lie to Me, and he blogs about every episode at Paulekman.com.