

The Psychology of Lying

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Lying emerges from the self-indulgent nature of humans, to avoid pain and to increase pleasure. We as human beings not only lie for our personal gains but also for the gains of others as well. It is a known fact how telling lies is emotionally, psychologically, and physiologically draining. Systematic detailed information was depicted about types of lying along with providing an overview of convergence and divergence.

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Introduction

Have you ever come across a person who got away by telling a lie? Or an authority figure, trying to manipulate people under him? Have you yourself lied to protect the person you love? The answer to all-1 of these questions suggest that, yes- we do indulge in some kind of lying on a daily basis. It is common among humans to lie to each other, it is a feature that we all share, not proudly, but conveniently. Lying refers to making a false statement to deceive others intentionally, often for some form of personal gain. It has been a part of our everyday life and we have casually normalized this behavioral response in communicating with others. Researchers also say that it is a consistent feature of human social behavior. Deceiving is generally viewed as emotionally taxing and morally wrong. We lie for various reasons, often to avoid the situations and escape from reality. We are afraid to face what's coming for us and deceive ourselves to get away with it. An interesting question is do we even know what is a lie and truth? Do we deceive ourselves in order to convince our own ego? Are some people more affected by lying than others? Can lying be categorized as a disorder? Let's explore the answers to all of these questions.

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Categories of liars

There are mainly four broad categories of liars. **Occasional liars** are those people who tend lie rarely, only when it is needed. But whenever they lie, they are distressed by their actions and feel guilty and tend to seek forgiveness. They aren't perfect but are often respected at being humble to at least admit their fallacy. The **Frequent liars** are people who lie in every way they can and would not even care to cover up for their lies. Everyone is aware of the fact that they are liars. Therefore they tend to have very few friends.

Another type, called as **smooth liars** are extremely skilled people. Even when they have a bad reputation of being liars, they are cunning that they would make other people believe them.

Fourth type are the **compulsive liars**, they tend to lie even when it is not required for them to lie. They tend to lie even in the situations where truth would be more appropriate than the lies. They spend an obstructive amount of time covering up for their lies that would also allow them to be shielded against all the subsequent lies. It is said that they have some kind of dependency to lying. On the other hand, pathological liars also tend to lie compulsively and they do not have a clear motive. Non-pathological lying is beneficial in some way.

What is the science behind compulsive lying?

Some lies in our lives also play a positive role especially in our emotional development. A child's first lie is seen as a positive breakthrough by psychologists in terms of mental growth. When lying becomes a habit and results in destructive behavior, then that's when it is seen to be pathological. So-, are we raising our children in the right way? It has been stated that the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Compulsive lying is a condition in which a person lies out of habit and sometimes for no reason at all. The most extreme form of lying is called 'pseudologia fantastica,' in which a person constructs stories from their past which may not be even true, all self-fabricated. Research suggests that some neurological patterns can be traced. Impairment in frontal lobes along with deficits in memory have resulted in evaluating the difference between lying and telling the truth falsely. They suffer from the inability to assess the accuracy of what they say and therefore cannot see the difference between lying and telling the truth.

The DSM-5 states that deception is a manifestation of antisocial personality disorder. Furthermore, this behavior involves telling lies without a specific reason, and lies grow from an initial lie. These subsequent lies, are more distressing in nature. A study conducted by The University of Southern California has found the first evidence of the structural brain abnormalities in people who repeatedly lie. They found a high degree of activity in the prefrontal cortex, which is the area associated to feel remorseful and learn moral behavior.

Electrical stimulation performed on the prefrontal cortex has resulted in improving our propensity to deceive. This region of the brain is responsible for the decision to lie or tell the truth. It is not only humans who practice deception, trickery and deceit-, has also been found in various kinds of mammals. A part of the brain which has recently been evolved called as Neo cortex is critical to this ability. Small children love to play pretend and generate stories which aren't real. They- tend to tell their first lies at about the age of four or five.

Children must first acquire two important cognitive skills. One is deontic reasoning, the ability to identify and understand social rules and what happens when the rules are transgressed. For instance, if you admit the lie, you may be punished and if you lie you might escape the punishment.

The other is known as theory of mind, which is the propensity to presume what the other person is thinking. For instance, I need to realize that my father will not believe that my dog ate my cookie if he saw me eating it. As a result of the theory, it is said that children must understand the fact that they might know something that their parents do not, and vice versa. This kind of awareness is usually acquired by the ages of four or five.

Categories of lying that may overlap with each other:

Pathological lying emerges from different personality disorders, finding its roots in narcissistic personality disorder, and borderline personality disorder. According to a recent study it has been revealed that 13% of people believe themselves to be pathological liars or are deemed so by people in their social circle. Minimum of 10 lies were reported each day. People from NPD are prone to indulge in activities where they receive immense importance and they have a certain need for validation. They are great at lying because of a complete lack of empathy for others. People suffering from BPD or NPD tend to lie to get away from reality into something that fits well with their emotions and not the facts.

American psychologist, Martha Stout stated in an interview that Pathological liars lie just to see if they can trick people.

Malingering is deliberate lying where the person grossly exaggerates or totally lies about physical and/or psychological symptoms. Malingerers are motivated to tell lies for a specific purpose such as to obtain financial compensation, or to avoid working etc., unlike the pathological liars.

Gansers syndrome is one of the rarest disorders found in people. It has only 101 recorded cases all over the world. They construct their lies on some nonsense stories from the past. It is also called nonsense syndrome. However it is different from pathological lying. The lies told by these people are very simplistic and approximate in nature, unlike from the pathological liars, who construct their stories based on some fantasies.

Self-deception

Del Paulhus says that Self Deception smells deeper than just lying and faking it. It involves psychological forces that hinder us from acknowledging truth about ourselves. We try to deceive ourselves to avoid making difficult changes. It gradually becomes a habit for some people, they get out of control. It's called as "fooling their inner eye" because people want to believe that they are more successful or attractive than they really are. In a study, when people were asked to choose the most attractive picture of themselves from an array of photos, that are either accurate, or altered to make them look up to 50% more or less attractive, most choose the photo that looks 20% better than reality. In research co-written by Dr. Norton and published last year in Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, college students were given an answer key to an intelligence test and allowed them to cheat which resulted in them scoring higher than the control group. Researchers predicted that they would score higher on the second test without allowing them to cheat. As a result, they were deceiving themselves into believing their strong performance was a reflection of their ability. In order to boost their self-esteem or to feel better, people tend to deceive themselves in an unconscious way. Evolutionary psychologist says different parts of the brain play a role in setting conflicting beliefs at the same time, say self-deception is a way of fooling others to our own advantage

What are the cues of deception?

Verbal cues of deception are most noticeable and researched. Verbal cues such as voice pitch, pauses, interruptions, hesitations and response length are used to detect deception. The contents of the speech also vary with veracity of the statements. Research suggests that lying requires more cognitive and mental effort which in turn distracts the liar from behaving normally.

Political lies

"A lie gets halfway around the world, before the truth has a chance to get its pants on" says Winston Churchill. Why is it easy to trust a person in power? Why do lies have a tendency to spread like a wildfire, and truth is always doubted?

Researchers have been trying to find the reason behind this human behavior.

One reason is that people find it hard to accept the truth. Lying and deception are two perennials of politics

In recent decades, western democracies have been hit by cynicism that is instigated by increased widespread poorly challenged political lies and scandals. Politicians lie and deceive for many reasons, whether it is in the public interest or their personal interest.

However, people still tend to believe whatever politicians have to say even when they know they are lying, what could be the reason behind this ?

In other words, in the current post-truth era that is engaged by public skepticism and still maintains some political sophistication. A famous example of this is Boris Johnson, who is said to have a history of lying and he still managed to win the 2019 elections. He ended up becoming the UK prime minister and introducing Brexit.

Lying proved to be a very successful strategy for political causes in the U.K. and U.S. elections in 2016, allowing Oxford Dictionaries to introduce the new term called Post-Truth.

Picciotto (2019) argues that this phenomenon is a big example of post-truth era and we are currently living it in. It is an era where denial of facts are tolerated and politicians' deception and lies are not questioned.

In a representative democracy, politicians and voters enter into a principal- agent relationship; in which the voters' rationale to select candidates is based on their perceived trustworthiness. Swire et al. (2017) approached the phenomenon from a cognitive perspective. Their focus was on source credibility, where individuals do not have enough time and cognitive resources to comprehend the complexity of politics. One of the reasons why they use politician's trustworthiness as a heuristic to drive their assessment of what is a truth and what is a lie.

Researchers carried out surveys post US presidential elections of 2016 only to find out how voters find a candidate authentic and appealing even though they are con artists. Interestingly they found out that lying politicians are viewed as more authentic and veritable as compared to any other politician who neither lies nor blatantly violates publicly endorsed norms.

They found out that a political candidate can gain a perception of authenticity in two ways; via sincerity or via authentic champion hood. When "trustworthiness" becomes the most dominant explanation for why people vote for a particular candidate and participate in the political game, lies and deception become irrelevant and widely forgiven and ignored. Famous political lies in the history include:

Six-Day War between Israel, Jordan, Syria and Egypt on June 8th, 1967 was one to remember. Israeli Air Force ended up attacking an American spy ship, the USS Liberty. However, when later on

Israel found out that they had mistaken it for an Egyptian ship and apologized. Analysts figured out that the attack was in fact planned to deceive US in joining the war by condemning Egyptians and later the entire thing was concealed by Israel and US governments. The investigation found evidence about his involvement and spying on the Democrats' campaign. He was then forced to resign the US president Office, and he was the first one to do it.

Casual lies

We all are a part of telling lies in our everyday lives. We do it to make ourselves feel better or to protect ourselves from any kind of embarrassment and try to gain our self-esteem and affection of other people. We also tend to lie about our achievements, failures, and our whereabouts. In other words, in everyday life, people lie about what they really like and how they feel about things.

When gas lighters/narcissists are caught, they go on the attack. They will mostly blame it on their surroundings. They may also choose to continue lying without compunction, and run away from apologizing, as they see apology as the sign of weakness

Researchers predicted that people tend to lie more Often in close relationships than in casual ones. They also feel more distressed after lying to their loved ones than lying to people in casual relationships. They also tend to communicate their love and concern by telling altruistic lies. In simple communications they would pretend to agree with them and would claim to understand them. However, these lies are supportive rather than breathing instruments.

How to know if someone is lying?

Someone telling a lie often leaves clues behind. It's easy to trace a lie, you just have to focus on the person's body language, their pitch and facial expressions. They would be usually nervous and jittery while telling a fib. The saying "eyes says it all" stands true. Lack of eye contact or wandering eyes can tell if someone is lying. It is quite important for a person to use intuition or experience when they see something suspect.

If someone is blinking a lot (sign of pressure) when you are asking them a hard hitting question, they should be able to determine where the pressure is coming from. Is the conversation/context making them anxious or are they actually hiding information?

Some Gestures become quite pronounced while people tell lies, such as licking the lips often, rubbing their hands together or their forehead, scratching their head etc. If they are lying there tends to be much more of these than necessary because people tend to be very good at coming up with detailed lies.

Conclusion

We focused on how lying is a part of our social as well as our day to day life. We all indulge in some kind of lying quite often. We also covered the reasons behind some people develop a habit of lying. Predominantly, the theory of lying suggest that lying is innate in nature as we move towards achieving our needs. In order to achieve these levels and to prevent the obstacles from coming way to our need satisfaction we make statements which may be not true. Lying becomes pathological when it adopts a destructive side to it, either it harms the person who's lying or to whom they are lying to. We lie in close as well casual relationships, and sometimes to our own selves. Even our politicians lie to us in some or the other form.

Either in their political agendas or their policy making strategies. Why do we still choose to vote for them? It is a rhetorical question and researchers are still looking to find answers for it. Could this be a form of self-deception? It is a phenomenon that is worth thinking about --- are we really trusting our own instincts? Is this a larger game played by our politicians to have control over us? It's interesting how we are surrounded by deception, and the real question is do we know the truth of anything? But always remember

“A lie has speed, but truth has endurance”

-Edgar J. Mohn.

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