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WHY PEOPLE LIE

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Do you think it is right or wrong to lie? Some declare they are dead against lying. Others think that you have to lie to protect yourself or others or to get what you want. Still others think they are not lying, but merely omitting the truth or being diplomatic. And of course, there is a small minority who lie without conscience whatsoever. Interestingly, a vast majority fall in the middle and have lied – many times. If the neighbour asks what you thought of her home-baked, non-fat, no-salt cookies, you might kindly tell her they were very good – a lie of kindness. If your hair-dresser creates a Marge Simpson look, some will bite their quivering lip, say ‘thank you’, pay and leave in a blur of tears – a lie of omission. If you were going by the strictest sense of deception, those of you who are bleaching your teeth, stuffing your bra, living in a big house but dining on Ichiban Noodles are misleading others – a lie to gain acceptance and approval. If you are feeling completely miserable but masking it with indifference or pleasantness – you’re lying to protect yourself or others.

People who come from chaotic and dysfunctional families have a greater tendency to lie than those who grew up in a caring household. Children from such families lie to change or modify reality so as to make life more tolerable. Lying becomes a strategy of coping with a hostile environment. Discipline

can play a role in encouraging or discouraging lying. Severe punishment for misdemeanours paradoxically encourages deception, as the child realizes a need to get out of punishment by any means possible. Inconsistent punishments for lying or the total absence of punishment will also encourage the child to lie. Punishing a child for lying all while the parent lies will do nothing to help the situation.

Normal teenagers may lie to gain their autonomy in an adult-controlled world. Adolescents are just beginning to discover abstract principles and values and to begin to formulate their own ideas about right and wrong. There are many moral levels – some people advance beyond adolescence and some do not.

For some, it’s more desirable to be lied to. They would rather know that Mr. Whiskers passed on peacefully in his sleep with his favourite toy tucked under one paw. The wife of the philandering man may not want to know of his infidelities. The woman with a lump in her breast may forego a medical appointment. Sometimes, we don’t want to know the truth because the truth can force us to take action. It can thrust very painful facts into our lives causing us to face assorted unpleasant, inconvenient, and even humiliating change. Better to tuck that all in the closet sometimes - otherwise known as the ever-popular ego-defense: denial - how

we lie to ourselves. This is the ego’s way of protecting us from harsh realities by refusing to see them.

People lie because they don’t think anyone will be hurt or maybe the liar will be the only one hurt.

For some, it depends on their value system as to *when* lying is okay. For example, a man may confess to a crime he didn’t commit in order to protect his daughter from a life in prison – a lie in the name of altruism. Someone who upholds family values might applaud his actions but someone who thinks that too many people escape justice might think it appalling. If you have made a mistake at work, do you blame a computer malfunction or confess and risk losing your job? Looking through history – people hid persons of certain ethnic or religious groups to escape persecution, poor treatment or death – lying to authorities for philanthropy. The Trojan Horse was a very famous deception in the guise of a gift and in modern day it has been adapted to describe a computer program in which malicious or harmful code is contained inside apparently harmless programming or data. It was deemed necessary to lie and deceive on a monumental scale to Adolf Hitler and his troupes and yet we are quick to condemn the very same government for its lies and deceptions. Are there times it is okay to lie and times it isn’t?

People lie to be accepted and to feel

“By and large, language is a tool for concealing the truth.”

—George Carlin

they are a part of the group – something that often starts in adolescence and carries on into adulthood.

Sometimes people lie to protect personal and private information they don't want to share. Others lie to hide things about themselves that make them feel embarrassed or weak. They spend their precious life-energy covering up their perceived shortcomings rather than invest in short-term discomfort for long-term change and overall personal satisfaction.

People lie to avoid persecution, career damage, relationship harm, reputation blemishes, being cut out of the will, paying fines, paying bills, or admitting defeat. Some people lie to bypass certain rules and laws that seem arbitrary, discriminatory or unjust. When people are faced with a dilemma in which the personal consequences are great, they are likely to demonstrate lower-level moral thinking. The greater the consequence, the greater the likelihood of lying.

The unfaithful spouse may be lying because he or she is so angry and hurt they feel justified in their extramarital pursuits – one might say a type of revenge. Or they don't want to be in that relationship to begin with so they lie rather than deal with the difficult, painful and sticky aspects of breaking up. Or they don't want to be monogamous but to get their beloved and have all their desires met – they lie. If they have no functional coping mechanisms for major stressors in their lives they may flee into the exciting and temporary escape of a new affair.

Some people lie to their partners because they desire certain ac-

tivities that their beloved disapproves of – *staunchly*. The activities can be completely innocent but where a suspicious, rigid, inflexible and demanding partner is the counter balance – lying behaviour can actually be manifested by those who don't wish to be lied to in the first place. The lying behaviour becomes a survival tactic used to avoid unfair persecution and maintain self-rule. Then the demanding partner is angry and hurt at the lying behaviour. Behaviour they both manifested. Lose-lose. Self-government is necessary to a healthy relationship.

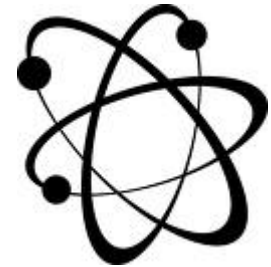
Blooming liars can be rooted in the foundation of a relationship with very thin-skinned people – the ultra-sensitive crowd. These individuals have fragile inner boundaries and very little can be done or said by another without them taking it to heart and feeling incredibly hurt, offended, or rejected. Consequently, those around them find themselves needing to couch the truth, be falsely agreeable, and refrain from honest disclosure in order to avoid hurting this delicate creature. Ironically, the sensitive one may take even greater offense at the withheld truths once discovered. It is difficult or seemingly impossible to 'win'. In either case, we want to offer empathy to the very sensitive person but not sacrifice our own wants and desires – calm, empathic assertiveness is good with these people. A path built on lies only leads to mutual degradation.

Some folks have trouble dealing with hurt and criticisms and they presume it is the same for others so they withhold, or deny their true feelings. It's hard to know where you stand with

these individuals. They may believe that people (or themselves) should not be subjected to hurt and pain (perhaps because they feel it is intolerable or unfair) and should be avoided at all costs. Ironically, it is their very attachments to these ideals that are making them miserable. If they learn a more accepting attitude, they will respect the fact that a little rain falls into everyone's lives. Life *can* be unfair but that's reality, *no one* is exempt, and lying doesn't build genuine relationships.

Most often there is a motivational factor compelling people to lie. Many passive people have a greater propensity for lying. You may be surprised to know that such people lie *not* to hurt you but to *save you* or *save themselves*. In reality, they risk hurting others but they deny this to themselves believing they had no choice. Why? Well, for some, confrontation is terrifying and they want to avoid it at any cost. A very strong programming may be deep in their psyche saying they should *never, ever*, hurt, disappoint, anger, inconvenience or otherwise bother others. To go against this deep belief results in their conscience gnawing at them relentlessly.

The 'nice nice' person will offer false promises. Have you met the individual who says yes to your invitation but never shows up? No word of explanation? They tell you they will do something when really they have no intention of doing it. They, too, have an overdeveloped conscience that subscribes to the ideas of never saying no or letting anyone down ever – which of course, is impossible to achieve and have any personal wants required – so they lie –



"Marge, it takes two to lie—one to lie, and one to listen. (Homer Simpson)"

—Matt Groening

leaving them to live a life of cowardice with frustrated acquaintances in their wake.

In the face of an angry or aggressive person, many people feel compelled to lie out of self-preservation – to get to necessary safety. Confrontations leave them feeling defenseless and vulnerable. So, the safest route is to avoid, hide and lie. They hope, against all hope, that no one will be hurt. They cannot see beyond this insurmountable wall of fear and they deny the tangled web they eventually find themselves in.

Some people lie to gain sympathy. They may be perpetuating their 'victim' mode and avoiding personal accountability.

A sense of entitlement can be behind many lies. People feel that they are entitled to what they want so they feel their lies are justified. Sometimes this stems from perceived injustices in their life – they feel they have been wronged and are entitled to take what they need by whatever means necessary. It's a 'dog eat dog' world.

Those with strong ego defenses may lie more often. The ego defenses often involve the need to uphold their belief that they are a good, successful and decent person. They will desperately do whatever it takes to protect their ego – their self-image of the 'good person'. To let their ego down is incredibly painful from a psyche standpoint. They may thrust the burden of blame on a scapegoat; bad luck; or you. They may also maintain the cognitive distortion of black and white thinking. They believe that something is either all or nothing – there are no grays. So they are either a good or a bad

person and there are no alternatives they can see. They use the common ego-defense of *rationalization* proving to themselves that their behaviour is reasonable and justifiable and thus worthy of the approval of themselves and others.

People lie to get what they want. You may be familiar with the manipulator. We see this commonly in advertising, politics and the legal professions – where it seems almost necessary to confound, bedazzle and distort to get what they want: money; power; or 'wins'.

Exaggeration is a form of lying – usually to impress the listener. Often times people who don't feel heard, valued or interesting may be inclined towards this method. Sometimes a little 'locker-room' bragging is intended for a specific audience but gets out and causes damage. Gossiping also falls into this arena and can involve fabrication – perhaps to give the listener the impression we have some inside information and therefore have value.

More and more these days, the best of students feel there is no possible way for them to achieve the grades necessary to attain their goals so they buy ready-made reports or plagiarize. Even certain career professionals may feel uninspired and desperate and take from others.

People lie to appear more likeable or competent and often times to feel better about themselves.

We all need to be accepted and loved and yet many of us have acquired a sense of inadequacy. It is better to address those inadequacies and either adapt a

more positive self-perception or change the inadequacies themselves.

One of the dangers of frequent lying is people will begin to believe their own lies – leaving them to disembark from reality. It maintains a sense of inferiority sometimes projected onto others in the form of blame, resentment, and bitterness.

When a person lies, especially about important matters, they have broken a bond – an unspoken agreement to treat others as we would like to be treated. Serious deception often makes it impossible for us to trust another person again. Because the issue of trust is on the line, coming clean about the lie as soon as possible is the best way to mend fences. Personal culpability is essential to the success of a relationship. If the truth only comes out once it is forced, repair of trust is far less likely.

Normally, telling white lies doesn't escalate to habitual lying. It rarely happens where a person becomes entirely untrustworthy. We have all exaggerated and told lies before.

If you know your friend is lying or exaggerating about something should you confront them? Depending on how the lie or exaggeration impacts on you. If the impact is serious, consider confronting. Don't confront them in front of others but later when you're alone. Tell them you're their friend, you care about them and would like them no matter what so they don't have to lie. If we take away the prospect of feeling rejected for truth-telling more people would not lie or feel they had to.

Remember Hansel and Gretel?

"I have to admit that I lie on my Weight Watchers' food list. I'll put down that I had 3 eggs...but I won't put down that they were Cadbury Chocolate Eggs."

—Caroline Rhea



"I'm not upset that you lied to me, I'm upset that from now on I can't believe you."

—Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

A children's fable talking about the horrible realities of poverty that lead a family to trick their children into becoming lost in the forest only to encounter a wicked witch with cannibalistic intentions who tricks the children with her candy house. The witch tries to mislead Gretel into checking the fire by putting her head in the oven. Gretel outwits her and pretends she doesn't know so the witch eventually falls for it, puts her own head in the oven where Gretel pushes her to her death. A children's story full of deception for many and various reasons: for the good of the many, for selfish gain and for survival. Interesting – no?

As you can see, lying is often not done out of malice, but out of self defense or self interest. At worst – it is a sign of deep vulnerabilities and at its best, a kind heart.

Is there an upside to lying? Is it possible that lying is integral to the fabric of society? I, for one, am grateful for storytellers, songwriters and actors. Make-believe challenges us and expands our minds. Sometimes, a good fish-tale can be very entertaining.

There are times we know a person is *not* seeking our genuine opinion, but validation or reassurance. Do these pants make me look fat? Do you like my singing? Do you love me? Incredibly, lying does play a valuable role. Virginia Woolf held that telling the truth without considering others feelings is “an outrage of human decency”. We lie to maintain our friendships with people, keep our jobs, and to cultivate some semblance of kindness in our world. We weigh the impact of our words against the value or necessity of telling the truth. Sometimes, we under-

stand that telling the “truth” will cause more harm than good. Imagine what would happen if we spoke every unedited opinion, thought, or feeling? What would happen to society? Think of all the uncensored, bizarre, outrageous thoughts that cross our collective brains on a daily basis and what would happen if we spoke it all? Maybe we can also pat ourselves on the back for our discriminating wisdom and tactful diplomacy.

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