Addressing Unhealthy Patterns in Relationships:
Recognizing Deception and Control

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Lying in Love

Deception is Common
Have You Ever . . .?

- Reassured a partner: “You look great.”

- Avoided conflict: “I am fine!” [Not]

- Over promised: "I will do those dishes later," or, "I will be home in 10 minutes"

- Bought something without telling.

- Made excuses

- Exaggerated your innocence during conflict.
A study on Lies

• Participants interact for 10 minutes.

• Review their interactions.

• About 60% lie at least once, and the average number was three.
Marital Deception

• People expect honesty from their partners.

• But 10% of communication between spouses is deceptive (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998).
Why?
Lots of Reasons to Lie

• To appear a certain way
• To avoid conflict
• To schmooze and impress
Effects of Deception

• Deception is associated with poorer relationships. (Cole, 2001).

• People feel less committed to partner.

• Can be used to manipulate

• Partners are more likely to use deception in return
The Sunglasses Study

And the Counterfeit Self
“most forms of private vice and public evil are kindled and sustained by lies. Acts of adultery and other personal betrayals, financial fraud, government corruption – even murder and genocide – generally require an additional moral defect: a willingness to lie.”

Sam Harris
Types of Deception

1. Lies
2. Rationalization
3. Smugness
4. Self-Pity
5. Anger
6. Defensiveness / Denial
7. Bias / Blindness
1 - Lies

- Is a misrepresenting of a situation through willful deception or omission or distortion of reality.
Exaggeration

• “I’ve exaggerated things, like ‘I do so much and you don’t.’”

• “I’ve exaggerated about him being angry . . . and maybe he’s not really that angry”
2 - Rationalization
Excuses, Excuses

• “You didn't do the dishes so why should I vacuum?”

• “I picked a fight I shouldn’t have picked and I justified that [by thinking] ‘I have legitimate reason to be hurt by what you did, my fight is just secondary to what you did.’”

• “There’s no way else to release my anger so . . . I’ll go talk to some woman or go out to some bar.”
Blame

“I didn’t say it was your fault,
I only said I was blaming you”
Excuses are Easy

- Kids do it.
- Certain things make it easy to do (e.g., being online)
- If it is a handy excuse, we use it.
• When are you most likely to use excuses?

• What are your favorite excuses?

My Favorite Excuse

Ponder
3 - Smugness and Self-Pity

Moralizing and Playing the Victim
Luke: “You think I am always mad at something. And every time I say something you always snap back at me . . . and that makes me upset. Sometimes I might snap back, but I don’t mean anything by it.”

Iris: “Well you’ve been coming across real irritable and real snippy, so I snip back.”

Luke: “See, I don’t see how. I guess I am not seeing it. All I ever do is I try to help you and say, ‘let me help you with this and that.’ And all you ever say is nothing, or, ‘I’ll do this, fine.’ . . . I don’t feel like I deserve that because I am just trying to be helpful.”
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“Self-righteousness can also be heady, seductive, and even . . . addictive. Any truly honest person will admit that the state feels good.”

David Brin
• Claiming a noble reason for our hurtful behavior.
Two Studies by Baumiester

• First – “Describe a time you made someone else angry, as well as a time you were angered.”
  o These narratives differed substantially.
  o The perpetrator story (when they made someone angry):
    • “I did it because I had a good reason, and it was only fair. Plus, it wasn’t that bad, it was easily fixed, and it is time to them to get over it!”
  o The victim story:
    • “This was another hurtful thing out of many. It was intentional, senseless, mean, and unjustified. I have been badly harmed and I won’t forget this. It has caused long-term harm.”

• Second – “Take the side of one of these roommates.”
  o Same result, even when there is no stake in the outcome.
“I would selectively recall the few times that I [helped with housework] to make it sound like I was doing more than I was.”

“I have purposefully cried . . . [and sometimes] cry a little bit louder so he hears me even if I’m in the other room.”

Evidence Building
Be a Scientist not a Lawyer

- If partners are willing to step back and look at the situation from both perspectives, the tone becomes curiosity instead of animosity.
“The brain is a decent scientist but an absolutely outstanding lawyer.”

“Although many lawyers won’t tell a direct lie, most will do what they can to hide inconvenient facts while weaving a plausible alternative story for the judge. . . . Our inner lawyer works in the same way, but, somehow, we actually believe the stories he makes up.”
Stepping Back

• One study found that having partners write about their most significant disagreement from a neutral perspective changed the way they thought and felt about what happened.

• A little effort went a long way.
4 - Victimization and Self-Pity

Playing up our victimized role will serve as a justification for bad behavior.
Types of Victimization

Genuine Victims

- Are mistreated.

Willing Victims

- Exaggerate mistreatment for gain.
5 - Anger
Anger and Irrationality

- Anger traps couples in combat.
- Anger is contagious.
- Take a break!
6 - Defensiveness and Denial
Lowering Defenses

- Accepting influence.
- Healing raw spots.
- Creating new habits.
- “The mind can rewire the brain.”
7 - Bias and Blindness
• Good moods bring rose colored glasses.
• Bad moods are the reverse.
‘I have done that’ says my memory. ‘I cannot have done that,’ says my pride, and remains inexorable. Eventually – memory yields.
– Nietzsche (trans. 1973)
• Our memories are fluid and changing.
  o Each recall is a recreation.

• The 9/11 Memory Study:
  o Survey of subjects about the event after it happened.
  o At one year 37% of details had changed.
  o At three years 50%.

• People don’t see that their memories have changed.
Honesty and Trust

Takes some work, but it worth it!
Helping Trust Grow

• Emotional reappraisals
• Availability and responsiveness
• Loving kindness meditations
Control and Coercion

... Dominating Another
Control Can Be Subtle

- Trying to influence another to get what you want
- Using guilt, bribes, blame
- Can become coercive
Abuse and Dominance

- Coercive Control

- Can Include:
  - Anger or threats of violence
  - A willingness to punish - intimidation
  - Surveillance
  - Wearing down resistance
  - Undermining means to resist
Emotional Abuse

- Isolation
- Monopolization
- Economic abuse
- Degradation
- Rigid sex-role expectations
- Psychological destabilization (Gaslighting)
- Withholding emotional responses
- Contempt
- Shaming
- Name calling
- Mocking
Assessing Controlling Behaviors

1. My partner monitored my time and made me account for my whereabouts.
2. My partner used our money or made important financial decisions without talking to me about it.
3. My partner was jealous or suspicious of my friends.
4. My partner accused me of having an affair with another person.
5. My partner interfered in my relationships with other family members.
6. My partner tried to keep me from doing things to help myself.
7. My partner restricted my use of the phone.
Effects of Control

• “When he’d get real stressed out, he’d freak out and then do the apologizing thing and then he’d turn around and say ‘well it’s your fault anyway’ - make it make a whole lot of sense - to make it really look like it was my fault. That just kept on and on until I started believing that.”
Finding Freedom
Allowing Interdependence in Relationships
Comments and Questions

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