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People Lie for a Reason: Three Experiments Documenting the Principle of Veracity

Timothy R. Levine, Rachel K. Kim, & Lauren M. Hamel

*The principle of veracity specifies a moral asymmetry between honesty and deceit. Deception requires justification, whereas honesty does not. Three experiments provide evidence consistent with the principle of veracity. In Study 1, participants (*N = *66) selected honest or deceptive messages in response to situations in which motive was varied. Study 2 (*N = *66) replicated the first with written, open-ended responses coded for deceptive content. Participants in Study 3 (*N = *126) were given an opportunity to cheat for monetary gain and were subsequently interrogated about cheating. As predicted, when honesty was sufficient to meet situational demands, honest messages were selected, generated, and observed 98.5% to 100% of the time. Alternatively, deception was observed 60.0% to 64.3% of the time when variations in the same situations made the truth problematic. It is concluded that people usually deceive for a reason, that motives producing deception are usually the same that guide honesty, and that people usually do not lie when goals are attainable through honest means.*

Keywords: Deception; Honesty; Lies; Motive

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The set of premises guiding this research is simple and intuitive, but has important theoretical and methodological implications. Lying is typically defined as an intentional behavior. Therefore, it follows that people lie for a reason. However, it is not the nature of the underlying goal or motive that differentiates honest and deception communication. Honest communication is typically goal-directed, too, and the goals that guide communication transcend message veracity. Instead, people often deceive others when the truth poses some obstacle to goal obtainment. Absent psychopathology, people do not deceive when the truth works just fine. In short, most people follow the maxim, ''Do not lie if you do not have to,'' most of the time.

This maxim is consistent with what noted philosopher and ethicist, Sissela Bok (1999), labeled the ''principle of veracity.'' According to Bok, there exists a moral asymmetry between truth and deception such that ''truthful statements are preferable to lies in the absence of special considerations'' (p. 30). The telling of truth requires no justification, whereas deceit does. Honesty and trust provide a necessary foundation for human relations and symbolic exchange. Violating these requires ethical justification whereas adherence does not.

Bok (1999) made a strong argument for the ethical merits of the principle of veracity. However, does this ethical principle translate into everyday life? Do people behave accordingly? In a companion article (Levine, Kim, & Blair, 2010), evidence was generated that is consistent with a projected motive model specifying that people presume that others act in accordance with the veracity principle—that is, people suspect deceit from others when motivational pressures favor fabrication; otherwise, they uncritically presume honesty. The purpose of this article is to report a series of three experiments designed to generate more direct evidence that people actually act in accordance with the principle of veracity.

Motives for Deception

Despite widespread social and moral prohibitions against deception, it is well documented that deception is an everyday occurrence in interaction (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996; Serota, Levine, & Boster, 2010; Turner, Edgley, & Olmstead, 1975). Questions that naturally arise are when and why do people lie.

Several studies have specifically focused on classifying deception motives. For example, Turner et al. (1975) listed five motivations including (a) to save face, (b) to manage relationships, (c) to exploit, (d) to avoid tension or conflict, and (e) to control situations. Alternatively, Hample (1980) and Metts (1989) categorized motives for deception in terms of locus of primary benefit. Hample proposed that deception motives can be categorized by whether it primarily benefits the self, other, or the relationship. Metts proposed the additional category of deception motives being issue-focused. Combining these ideas, Camden, Motley, and Wilson (1984) argued that, to adequately account for motives for deception, both social motivations and beneficiaries of deception must be considered in tandem. As a result, they proposed a two-dimensional typology, with one dimension being

reward categories representing different social motivations and the other being target categories pertaining to who would benefit from the potential reward.

Examination of existing typologies of so-called deception motives suggests that none of the goals achieved through deception are at all unique to deception—that is, the various category systems delineating various motives for deception do not differ from more general social motivations guiding non-deceptive behavior. For example, consider face goals. The goal of a face-maintaining message is not to deceive *per se,* but to manage self and other's face needs; and these ends can be accomplished through both honest and deceptive means. Similarly, virtually all instrumental and relational goals can, depending on the situation, be achieved through both honest and deceptive actions. Thus, deception is typically a possible tactic, strategy, or means for goal attainment, rather than a desired end in and of itself.

The probability of using deceptive rather than honest means for goal attainment is conditional on situational features and constraints, not on the nature or type of the goal pursued. According to Bok's (1999) principle of veracity, the moral culpability associated with deception creates an initial imbalance in the assessment of deceptive and truthful alternatives, and adopting deceptive means requires justification that is not necessary for truthful means. So, although deception is in almost everyone's social repertoire, it is generally employed as a tactical or strategic option of last resort or path of least resistance (McCornack, 1997). People will not be deceptive when the truth is sufficient, efficient, and effective for goal attainment. It is only when the truth poses an obstacle to goal attainment, regardless of what that goal might be, that people entertain the possibility of being deceptive. That is, people are deceptive only when truthful alternatives are more effortful or less efficacious. Further, to the extent that the veracity principle is practiced, people may feel bad about resorting to deceptive means. Consistent with this, Hample (1980) reported that liars indicated being more satisfied with the performance and effectiveness of their lies than they were with themselves for lying.

Hypotheses

The predictions are simple and straightforward. When people are put in a situation where the truth is problematic, they are liable to lie. Of course, not everyone is expected to lie when they have a motive to do so. People in such situations must make an active or tacit decision weighing the value of honesty and dishonesty against the relative consequences. Individual differences will surely present themselves. Some combination of moral and pragmatic considerations will most likely lead some to honesty, despite negative potential consequences, whereas others will surely display blatant dishonesty when the truth proves problematic. The actual percentage of people who lie when motivated to do so is expected to vary across samples and contexts, but will usually be well above zero and well below 100%.

However, when the truth is not in conflict with desired goal states, there is no motivation for deception. Absent such motivation, veracity is highly predictable.

Absent psychopathology, honest communication should almost invariably result in such situations. Thus, the following is expected, in general:

H1: The selection, generation, or actual use of deceptive messages is significantly and substantially more likely when a motive to deceive is present than when it is not.

H1a: The percentage of deceptive messages selected, generated, or used when there is motive to deceive will be substantially greater than zero but substantially less than 100%.

H1b: The percentage of deceptive messages selected, generated, or used when a motive to deceive is absent will approximate zero.

Study 1

Method

Participants. A total of 66 (23 men and 43 women) undergraduates at a large Midwestern university participated in the first experiment. Age of participants ranged from 18 to 29 years ($M = 20.39$, $SD = 1.73$). The participants were recruited from a large lecture course that attracts students from across the university. All participants received extra credit in exchange for their participation.

Instrument and procedure. Participants completed one of two versions of a "What would you say?" questionnaire, which asked participants to indicate what they might say in six different situations (see the Appendix). The situations pertained to (a) a gift, (b) a friend's body weight, (c) a friend's cooking, (d) a date, (e) a movie opinion, and (f) a favor to go to the post office. The primary independent variable of *deception motive* was manipulated by generating two versions of each situation such that a motive to deceive was present or absent. Motive to deceive was present when the truth was made to be problematic for situational demands. For example, in the situation involving the quality of a friend's cooking, the deception motive situation read, "You're having dinner at a friend's house. You hate the food. They say, 'I hope you like the food. I spent all afternoon cooking. How do you like it?'"; whereas the situation absent deception motive said you "love" the food rather than "hate" it. In this case, being truthful about hating the food that a friend has put so much effort in preparing may pose a problem for attainment of communication goals pertaining to relationship maintenance, self-presentation, saving other's face, and so forth. In contrast, these same ends can easily be achieved with the whole truth and nothing but the truth when the food is liked.

For each situation, participants were presented with a forced-choice pair of message options that involved selecting what they would be more likely to say. The response options were identical regardless of deception motive, with one answer reflecting a truthful response and the other a deceptive one given the situational context. Thus, in the situation regarding a friend's cooking mentioned earlier, the response options included (a) "I think the dinner is fantastic. This is one of the best home-cooked meals I have ever had," and (b) "It was kind of you to invite me over and put so much effort into preparing the food, but it is not one of my favorites."

The dependent variable was whether participants selected truthful or deceptive responses.

Situations were randomly assigned to include a deception motive or not for one questionnaire version, and the inclusion–exclusion of deception motive was reversed for all situations in the second version. In both versions, the situations were randomly ordered.

Results

For each situation, a 2×2 contingency table cross-tabulating the presence or absence of deception motive with the selection of truthful or deceptive responses was created. *H1* predicted that people will generally be more likely to select deceptive messages when there is a motive to deceive than when it is absent. The data were consistent with this hypothesis in five of the six situations. With the exception of the situation involving a favor to go to the post office, chi-squares for each situation were statistically significant at $p < .001$, with effect sizes ranging from .59 to .94 (see Table 1). When the responses were aggregated across situations, deceptive responses were selected 62.5% of the time when there was motive to deceive compared to 1.6% when deception motive was absent. Hence, data were consistent with both *H1a* and *H1b*; the percentage of deceptive message selection was substantially greater than zero when there was motive to deceive and close to zero when motive to deceive was absent.

Discussion

In this study, participants considered what they would say in a number of common situations in which being truthful may or may not pose a problem for goal attainment (e.g., self-presentation or protecting other's feelings). In situations where

Table 1 Frequency of Honest and Deceptive Messages by Motive and Situation in Study 1

	No deception motive		Deception motive			
Situation	Honest	Deceptive	Honest	Deceptive	χ^2	Φ
Gift	32 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (26.5%)	25 (73.5%)	37.88*	.76
Weight	32 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	16 (47.1%)	18 (52.9%)	23.29*	.59
Cooking	34 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (12.5%)	28 (87.5%)	51.67*	.88
Date	32 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.9%)	32 (94.1%)	58.46*	.94
Movie	34 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	15 (46.9%)	17 (53.1%)	24.33*	.61
Post office	29 (90.6%)	3 (9.4%)	29 (85.3%)	5 (14.7%)	0.44	.08
Overall	189 (98.4%)	3 (1.6%)	75 (37.5%)	125 (62.5%)		

*$p < .001$.

truth posed a problem, deciding to be honest would likely involve, at minimum, some degree of social awkwardness, tension, or discomfort. In such situations, it was predicted that people are likely to entertain the possibility of being deceptive to achieve goals. On the other hand, in situations where speaking the truth did not hinder attainment of goals, there would be no reason to be deceptive because being truthful facilitates goal attainment.

The findings were generally consistent with the prediction that those with a motive to deceive are more likely to be deceptive than those who do not have such a motive. Overall, 62.5% of situations with a motive to deceive involved selection of deceptive message options, whereas only 1.6% of non-deception motive situations involved selection of deceptive messages. People lie for a reason and generally avoid lying if telling the truth is sufficient for goal attainment. However, if there is a reason to lie, people then consider deception, although they may or may not actually end up being deceptive.

The data from one situation, however, were not consistent with predictions. In the post office situation, honest messages were predominantly selected in both deception motive (85.3%) and non-deception motive (90.6%) situations. Specifically, the situation involved doing a friend a favor by going to the post office to mail time-sensitive materials because they would not able to go themselves given their schedule. In the non-deception motive situation, one mails them as promised, whereas in the deception motive situation, one forgets. The issue was whether to tell the friend, who later calls, that you are sorry but you forgot, or that you mailed the items but timely arrival was not guaranteed.

Aside from the possibility that the post office situation was somehow unclear to participants, there may be other interesting points to consider as to why participants were reluctant to be deceptive in the situation. The principle of veracity involves lying only if one must, and perhaps this situation does not necessitate deception as in the others because it arises from an initial granting of a favor. There may be less perceived need to lie to attain social goals in the situation. Drawing from notions of the norm of reciprocity, perhaps the situation is seen as involving some sort of social credit that one can afford to lose. On the other hand, perhaps people are less likely to lie in this situation because of the likelihood of one's deception being discovered. Park, Levine, McCornack, Morrison, and Ferrara (2002) observed that people largely rely on third-party information and physical evidence when detecting lies. Given the possibility of postal tracking of mailed items and dated receipts, participants may be more likely to go with honesty in this situation, regardless of deception motive. Whatever the reason, this finding may indicate that there are specific situational factors that influence deceptive messages for future exploration.

A potential limitation in Study 1 was the forced-choice message selection method. Obviously, giving participants pre-formulated messages might provide message options other than those spontaneously generated, or not provide the favored message as an option. In short, what people check-off as what they would say on a forced-choice self-report questionnaire might not correspond with the messages spontaneously generated by the participants themselves. To assess if the findings

might be an artifact of the selection method, Study 2 sought to replicate these findings with a message-generation study.

Study 2

Method

Participants. A total of 68 (28 men and 40 women, with 1 missing) undergraduates at a large Midwestern university participated in the second experiment. Age of participants ranged from 18 to 23 years ($M = 20.11$, $SD = 1.18$). The participants were recruited from a large lecture course that attracts students from across the university. All participants received extra credit in exchange for their participation.

Instrument and procedure. As in Study 1, participants completed one of two versions of a "What would you say?" questionnaire, which asked participants to indicate what they might say in six different situations (see the Appendix). The method was identical to Study 1, except that participants were asked to write out what they would say if they were in the situation described. Again, the situations included (a) a gift, (b) a friend's weight, (c) a friend's cooking, (d) a date, (e) a movie opinion, and (f) a favor to go to the post office. As in the first experiment, deception motive was manipulated by generating two forms of each situation such that it did or did not involve a motive to deceive. For example, in the situation involving the date, the deception motive situation read, "You've reached the end of a first date. You found your date to be boring. Afterwards, your date says s/he had a great time and looks at you expectantly for a response. You are not interested in going on another date." The situation absent deception motive said, "You found your date to be fun," and "You would like to see this person again." In this case, being truthful about finding the date boring is likely face-threatening to the other person and likely to hurt the other person's feelings, whereas being honest about having fun is consistent with face- and self-presentation goals. Situations were randomly assigned to include a deception motive or not for one questionnaire version, and the inclusion–exclusion of deception motive was reversed for all situations in the second version.

For each situation, participants were asked to write out exactly what they would say if they were in that situation. Each written message ($n = 408$) was independently coded by two of the authors as either honest or deceptive. Strategic omissions, equivocations, and evasive responses were also coded as deceptive, in addition to outright lies. Raw agreement was 99.7%, and Krippendorff's alpha was .986. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, and post-resolution agreement about honesty versus deception was the dependent variable.

Because neither coder was blind to the research hypotheses, a systematic coding bias was possible. To assess potential coder bias, 144 randomly selected responses were transcribed and independently coded by two individuals blind to the hypotheses and not associated with this research. One independent coder was a deception expert (with a PhD in communication and several first-authored publications on deception), whereas the other coder had no formal social scientific training. In both cases,

the independent coders were given no instruction other than to check which messages were deceptive and which were honest. The deception expert's judgments perfectly coincided with the authors' coding, and the non-expert's evaluations were 97.2% consistent with the author's coding (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .96$).

Results

As in Study 1, 2×2 contingency tables cross-tabulating the presence or absence of deception motive with selection of truthful or deceptive responses were created for each situation (see Table 2). The results closely paralleled those of Study 1. *H1* predicted that people will generally be more likely to select deceptive messages when there is a motive to deceive than when it is absent. The data were again mostly consistent with this hypothesis. Again, with the exception of the situation involving going to the post office as a favor for a friend, all chi-squares were significant at $p < .001$, with effect sizes ranging from .64 to .92. Considering responses to all situations together, deceptive responses were selected 64.3% of the time when there was motive to deceive, compared to 0.0% when deception motive was absent. Hence, data were again consistent with *H1*, *H1a,* and *H1b*. The percentage of deceptive messages generated was substantially greater than zero when there was motive to deceive, and the percentage of deceptive message selection in the absence of deception motive was zero.

Discussion

The data were again consistent with the predictions that people lie for a reason; that people sometimes, but not always; deceive when they have a motive to so; and that absent a motive, honesty prevails. In fact, the similarity in the findings across the studies is striking, with percentages in all four cells within a couple percentage points

Table 2 Frequency of Honest/Deceptive Messages by Motive and Situation in Study 2

	No deception motive		Deception motive			
Situation	Honest	Deceptive	Honest	Deceptive	χ^2	Φ
Gift	33 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (19.4%)	29 (80.6%)	45.86*	.82
Weight	33 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (30.6%)	25 (69.4%)	35.94*	.72
Cooking	36 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (9.1%)	30 (90.9%)	59.90*	.92
Date	33 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (16.7%)	30 (83.8%)	48.65*	.84
Movie[a]	35 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (42.4%)	19 (57.6%)	27.97*	.64
Post office	33 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	34 (94.4%)	2 (5.5%)	1.89	.17
Overall	100%	0.0%	35.7%	64.3%		

[a]Missing data from one participant who failed to complete last page of questionnaire.
*$p < .001$.

of each other. Given that these findings replicated across several different situations and were obtained with both message-generation and message-checklist methods adds confidence to the conclusions. Nevertheless, both studies used self-report methods, and the extent to which the findings reflect actual behavior could be debated. Thus, a third replication is provided involving a different type of situation with a different motive and direct behavioral observation.

Study 3

Method

Participants. A total of 126 (63 men and 63 women) undergraduates at a large Midwestern university participated in the third experiment. The participants were recruited from a large basic course that enrolls mostly freshman non-majors. All participants received research credit in exchange for their participation, and some participants received a cash payment.

Design and procedure. The study was introduced as the "trivia game study," and participants were told that the purpose of the study involved investigating teamwork processes. The study was conducted over two consecutive semesters, with data from 68 participants collected during the first semester, and the remaining data ($n = 58$) collected during the second semester. Experimental personnel and procedures were constant within semesters, but changed between semesters. The personnel changes were caused by the geographical relocation of an experimenter. The procedural changes included alterations to the randomization schedule, the incentives and compensation, and the interview questions. These design improvements resulted from experience during the first semester and comments by participants during debriefings. These changes were made to help equalize cell sizes and, specifically, to increase the number of lies relative to truths. The extent to which the changes impacted the results is reported later. Both versions were approved by the institutional review board.

All experimental sessions during the first semester involved four individuals: the actual participant (hereafter *P*), the confederate (hereafter *C*), the experimenter (hereafter *EX*), and the principal investigator (hereafter *PI*). The roles of *C, EX,* and *PI* were scripted, well-rehearsed, and held constant. For sessions held the following semester and subsequent to the procedural changes, the role of *EX* was split into the trivia master (*TM*), and the interviewer (*I*) was played by two different individuals. Thus, data collected during the second semester involved five individuals: four experimental personnel (*PI, C, TM,* and *I*) and one *P*.

*P*s arrived at the lab individually and were paired with *C,* who they believed to be another participant and their partner in the experiment. *C* was always a woman, although one *C* was used in the first 68 sessions and a different *C* was used in the remaining sessions after the procedural changes. None of the *P*s reported suspecting that the *C* was anything other than another participant.

*P*s were initially greeted by the *PI,* and voluntary consent was obtained. For the trivia game, *P*s were introduced to *EX* or *TM,* depending on the semester. *EX* or *TM* gave instructions and subsequently administered the trivia game. *P*s were always seated at a small table next to *C,* across from *EX* or *TM,* and with their back to the door.

All *P*s played a trivia game for a monetary prize, in addition to standard research credit. They were told that they would be working as a team with another participant. First-semester *P*s were told that the team who answered the most questions correctly would win a $20 cash prize each. Following the procedure change, the remaining *P*s were promised $5 per correct answer, for a maximum of $50 each. A stack of 50 U.S. dollars (10 five-dollar bills) were each placed in front of *P* and *C,* and one five-dollar bill was removed from both stacks following each incorrect answer. The questions were extremely difficult, and few *P*s knew answers to more than one of the ten questions.

Between the third and fourth questions, the *PI* (first semester) or *I* (second semester) burst into the room where the trivia game was in progress and told *EX* or *TM* that either there was an emergency phone call from day care, that the call was in reference to the *EX*'s son and that *EX* needed to take the call immediately, or that *TM*'s officemate was locked out of her office and that *TM* needed to go up several floors to open a door for the unfortunate officemate. *EX* or *TM* apologized, told *P* and *C* to wait in the room, and the *EX* or *TM* rushed out, loudly closing a series of three doors behind them. The answers to the trivia questions were left in a folder on the desk where the *EX* or *TM* had been sitting. At this point, the cheating induction did or did not take place.

According to a randomized, counterbalanced, and predetermined schedule, the *C* attempted to instigate cheating during more than one half of the sessions. In the cheating condition, *C* noted that she believed the answers were in the folder on the desk, that she desired the monetary reward, and proposed that she and *P* cheat to improve their scores and win the money. *C* did not excessively pressure reluctant *P*s. Approximately one half of the *P*s in the cheating condition actively participated in cheating. In the no-cheating condition, the *C* did not attempt to instigate cheating, and engaged in small talk with *P* if *P* initiated talk. Otherwise, *C* studied. Only one *P* cheated in the no-cheating condition. *EX, TM, PI,* and *I* were blind to condition.

After about 5 min, *EX* or *TM* returned, and the trivia game resumed. Following the last question, *EX* or *TM* informed *P* and *C* that they would be interviewed separately, with *EX* or *I* interviewing *P* and *PI* interviewing *C.* Post-game videotaped interviews were conducted by either *EX* or *I.* During the first semester, *EX* interviewed *P* in the same room, *P* was seated in a chair and given a lapel microphone, a video camera on a tripod was positioned across the room, and the interview was videotaped. During the second semester, *I* interviewed *P* in an adjoining room with two video cameras—one capturing a frontal view and another at a 45° angle. The interview contained seven questions asking about the strategy used and the role of teamwork. *P*s were specifically asked if they had cheated, and a follow-up question asked either why they should be believed (first semester) or how they think *C* would respond to the same question in their interview (second semester).

The primary dependent variable was whether *P* was honest or not about cheating. Non-cheaters who denied cheating and cheaters who confessed were classified as honest, and non-cheaters confessing to cheating and cheaters denying cheating were deemed deceptive. Whether *P* denied cheating or confessed was noted by *EX* or *I* after each session and recorded. The accuracy of this record was verified and found to be 100% reliable by the *PI* who reviewed all videotapes, and who checked videotaped content against research notes made immediately after each session.

Results

A 2×2 contingency table was created cross-tabulating participants who cheated or not with participants who either lied or were honest (see Table 3). *H1* predicted that cheaters would be much more likely to lie about cheating than non-cheaters. The data were consistent with this hypothesis, $\chi^2(1,\ N = 126) = 42.44,\ p < .001\ (\varphi = .58)$. Across the two versions of the experiment, 60% of the cheaters lied, whereas no non-cheaters did so. Thus, consistent with *H1a,* the percentage of cheaters who lied was substantially greater than zero; and consistent with *H1b,* the percentage of non-cheaters who lied was zero.

Table 3 also presents the data broken down by both versions of the experiment. Cheaters were less prone to deceit in the initial version than in the revised design (44% vs. 79% lying). No non-cheater in either version lied, and the chi-square was statistically significant and substantial in both versions, despite the smaller sample size. Thus, although the percentage of lying cheaters varied by situation, the data were consistent with the hypotheses in both versions.

Discussion

The people in this experiment faced a type of situation that is far from unusual. They were tempted to engage in wrongdoing. The experimental situation was such that, absent cheating, success was unlikely. Alternatively, cheating, if successful, could be lucrative.

As might be anticipated, some people yielded to this temptation, whereas others did not. Whether they cheated, all participants were subsequently interrogated and directly asked if they had cheated. It is likely that all of the participants, cheaters

Table 3 Frequency of Cheaters and Non-Cheaters Who Were Honest or Deceptive

	Non-cheaters		Cheaters			
Design version	Honest	Deceptive	Honest	Deceptive	χ^2	Φ
Initial ($n = 68$)	52 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (56.2%)	7 (43.8%)	33.71**	.70
Revised ($n = 58$)	44 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (21.4%)	11 (78.6%)	9.43*	.41
Overall ($n = 126$)	96 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (40.0%)	18 (60.0%)	42.44**	.58

*$p < .002$. **$p < .001$.

and non-cheaters alike, wanted the researchers to believe that they were honest people who had not cheated. Such a desire serves both self-presentation goals and the goal of avoiding possible sanction. After all, cheating is usually a punishable offense in a university setting, and the social label of "cheater" carries with it a stigma.

For those participants who did not cheat, the truth worked in their favor. Non-cheaters needed only sincere honesty to accomplish their self-presentation goals and, if believed, to avoid potential sanction. In contrast, cheaters faced a dilemma. They could be honest and admit wrongdoing, or they might lie and try to salvage their self-presentation and instrumental aims.

It was predicted and found that cheaters were much more likely to lie than non-cheaters.

The effect size, $\varphi = .58$, was substantial. Sixty percent of cheaters lied, whereas not a single non-cheater lied about cheating. Consistent with the findings of the first two experiments, it was again found that people lie for a reason, and they generally eschew deception when the truth is sufficient for goal attainment. On the other hand, not all people with motives that can be achieved through deception end up lying.

Procedural changes partway through the experiment impacted the results, but did not diminish or dilute the support for the hypotheses. Chief among the changes was that a greater incentive was offered for successful cheating. The greater incentive was offered to obtain a more equal balance between cheaters and non-cheaters, and liars and truth-tellers. It is interesting to note that the greater incentive did not produce more cheaters, but it did produce more liars. The percentage of participants who cheated was nearly identical (23% vs. 24%), but the percentage who lied increased from 44% to 79%. The procedural changes, however, had no impact on the honesty of non-cheaters. Those without a motive to lie were uniformly honest. These similarities and differences between the two procedures are nicely consistent with the reasoning underlying this research.

General Discussion

These findings represent empirical evidence demonstrating what most readers will likely consider just common sense. Yet, just because the findings are obvious does not mean that they lack theoretical relevance or importance. These results provide behavioral evidence consistent with Bok's (1999) principle of veracity (see Table 4 and Figure 1 for overall summary of findings). This is surely useful information, but there is an even stronger warrant.

Motive plays a crucial role in deception, and viable theory and research on deception needs to be sensitive to this. Yet, motive is often not a core construct in most deception theory. Similarly, studies of deception are typically de-contextualized in ways that make motive far from central. In many cue studies, the only motive for deception is following instructions. In most detection studies, potential liars have no apparent motive at all. If the centrality of motive were so obvious, why then has so much previous research ignored or downplayed motive? Sometimes, what is obvious is only obvious when pointed out.

Table 4 Percentage of Honest and Deceptive Messages by Motive in Each Study

	Veracity	
Deception motive	Honest (%)	Deceptive (%)
Study 1: Message selection		
Present	37.5	62.5
Absent	98.5	1.5
Study 2: Message generation		
Present	35.7	64.3
Absent	100	0.0
Study 3: Behavioral observation		
Present	40.0	60.0
Absent	100	0.0

The deception research that has considered motive has proposed a different system for categories of the motives that prompt deception. We believe that previous perspectives on deception motive tend to ignore two key points. First, the motives that prompt deception are not unique deception. Second, situational features and constraints determine whether deception is used to accomplish a goal, rather than the nature of goal or motive per se.

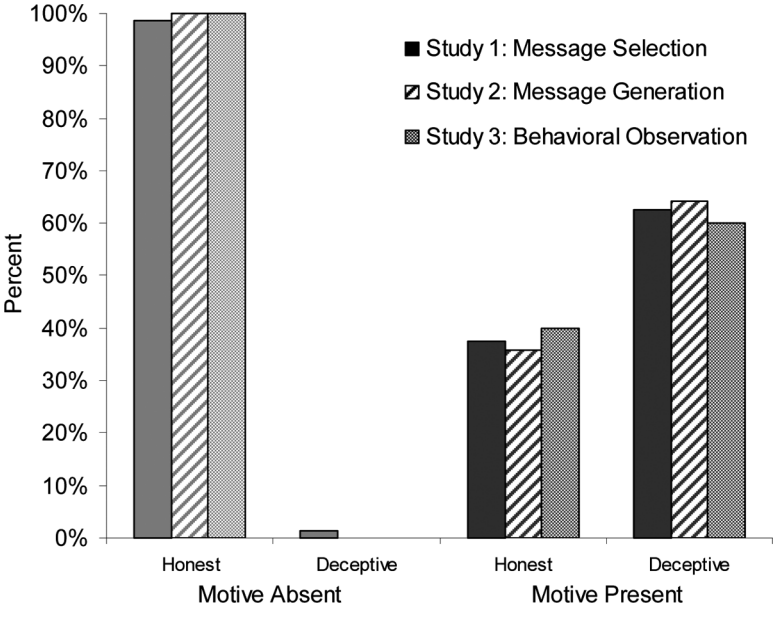

Figure 1 Percentage of Honest and Deceptive Messages in Message Selection ($n = 66$), Message Generation ($n = 68$), and Behavioral Observation ($n = 126$) Studies for Deception Motive Absent and Deception Motive Present Conditions.

It is proposed here that there exists a set of motives that guide most human behavior. People want to self-enhance and feel good about themselves. People self-present and want to be seen in a favorable light by others. People do not want to needlessly hurt others, and are disinclined to threaten others' face. People seek rewards and avoid punishments. When social, psychological, and instrumental goals such as these can be accomplished without deception, then, absent psychopathology, people are honest. People do not deceive when the truth is equally efficacious. However, situations are sometimes such that the truth thwarts goal attainment. In these situations, people tacitly or actively consider deceit, and deceit is more or less probable depending on the importance of the goal, the difficulty of goal attainment absent deceit, and the probability of avoiding detection. People lie for a reason, and others suspect deception when a motive is perceived. However, it is the interplay between motive and situation that prompts deception, rather than just the motive.

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Appendix Situations

Situation	Deception Motive	No Deception Motive
Gift	Your boy-/girlfriend gave you an expensive sweater as a birthday present. *You hate it.* They say, "I hope you like it, I spent a lot of time shopping for it, and besides, I lost the gift receipt. You like it don't you?"	Your boy-/girlfriend gave you an expensive sweater as a birthday present. *You love it.* They say, "I hope you like it, I spent a lot of time shopping for it, and besides, I lost the gift receipt. You like it don't you?"
Weight	A female friend has been gaining weight recently and it is noticeable. *She is clearly overweight.* One day, she says to you, "I feel so fat. Do you think I look fat?"	A female friend has been losing weight recently and it is noticeable. *She is clearly looking trim.* One day, she says to you, "I feel so fat. Do you think I look fat?"
Cooking	You're having dinner at a friend's house. *You hate the food.* They say, "I hope you like the food. I spent all afternoon cooking. How do you like it?"	You're having dinner at a friend's house. *You love the food.* They say, "I hope you like the food. I spent all afternoon cooking. How do you like it?"
Date	You've reached the end of a first date. *You found your date to be boring.* Afterwards, your date says s/he had a great time and looks at you expectantly for a response. *You are not interested in going on another date.*	You've reached the end of a first date. *You found your date to be fun.* Afterwards, your date says s/he had a great time and looks at you expectantly for a response. *You would like to see this person again.*
Movie	You're chatting with a group of people about movies coming out this weekend. A girl/guy you're romantically attracted to mentions wanting to watch a particular movie. *You thought the trailers were lame and had not planned on watching it.* S/he turns to you and asks, "Don't you think the movie will be good?"	You're chatting with a group of people about movies coming out this weekend. A girl/guy you're romantically attracted to mentions wanting to watch a particular movie. *You thought the trailers were good and had planned on watching it.* S/he turns to you and asks, "Don't you think the movie will be good?"
Post Office	You agreed to stop by the post office to mail important time-sensitive materials for a friend who was too busy to go him-/herself during open hours. *You forgot.* Later, your friend calls and asks if you were able to mail the items.	You agreed to stop by the post office to mail important time-sensitive materials for a friend who was too busy to go him-/herself during open hours. *You went to the post office for your friend and mailed them as you said you would.* Later, your friend calls and asks if you were able to mail the items.