

English Conversation Club – Saratoga Library

April 3, 2025

Lying and Deception

The past few weeks we have discussed factual statements, opinions and bias. We also touched on the topic of lying and deception, but today we will discuss it in more depth. Lying is part of human nature and is a topic that can lead to intense debates about ethics.

Ethics are the principles we live by. Every society has a code of behavior that distinguishes right from wrong and how to lead a life that is virtuous and benefits society. Before reading today's article, review the following questions and the vocabulary.

Warm-up Questions

1. Why do people lie?
2. Are there sometimes when you think it is okay to lie or tell a half truth?
3. Do we ever lie to ourselves?

Vocabulary: Review the following vocabulary words. Match the words to their meanings.

1. acquisition (ak'-wuh-zish-uhn)	A. regularly or repeatedly doing or practicing something or acting in some manner
2. cohesion (koh-hee-zhuhn)	B. an act of lying, misleading, hiding or distorting the truth from oneself because one does not want to face the truth
3. compulsive (kuhm-puhl-siv)	C. a false statement about a seemingly small or unimportant matter, often told to avoid hurting another person
4. disorder (dis-or-der)	D. doing something over and over and not being able to stop
5. frustration (fruh-strey-shuhn)	E. the forming of a united whole; bonding; unity
6. habitual (huh-bich-oo-uhl)	F. feeling or showing open dislike for someone or something; regarding something as undeserving of respect or concern
7. predator (pred-uh-ter)	G. a state of confusion
8. scornful (skorn-fuhl)	H. the feeling of being upset or annoyed, especially because of an inability to change or achieve something
9. self-deception (self dih-sep-shuhn)	I. the act of buying, taking over or being given something such as land, property, knowledge
10. white lie (whyt ly)	J. a person or group that harms, bothers, steals, destroys, or robs
11. virtuous (vur-choo-uhs)	K. having or showing high moral standards; morally excellent

ANSWERS: 1 – I; 2 - E; 3 -D; 4 -G; 5 -H; 6 – A; 7 – J; 8 – F, 9- B; 10 – C; 11 - K

Dialogue

Cal: Kyle **habitually** asks me if I am interested in a business **acquisition**. He says he can make me a lot of money.

Kim: I know, he's **compulsive** about it. When I question him about it, he treats me **scornfully**.

Cal: He treats me **scornfully** too! So **frustrating**.

Kim: We're not the only ones he treats like that. He does it to everyone. He's like a **predator**.

Cal: It's too bad. He used to be a nice guy. Maybe he has some kind of **disorder**.

Kim: He should see a doctor. His behavior started by telling us a bunch of **white lies**.

Cal: Now his **self-deception** is getting worse.

Kim: Yes, let's try to get him some help.

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The psychology of lying is complex and sometimes it can be significant for our survival. Why do people lie? People lie for a variety of reasons, such as to avoid punishment, gain an advantage, protect their self-image or spare someone's feelings.

Some common types of lies include white lies, which are small lies told to be polite or to avoid hurting someone's feelings. Serious lies, which are compulsive and habitual may stem from a mental disorder.

Types of Lying

Many types of 'lying' can involve **self-deception**. Sometimes we try to convince ourselves that the choices we made are justified. Our views of ourselves play an important role in how we perceive and interact with the world.

An example from Aesop's fable "The Fox and the Grapes" illustrates a common form of **self-deception**. The story goes that the fox tries to reach some grapes, but after trying again and again, the fox gives up and walks away.

As he walks away, he **scornfully** says the grapes are probably sour and not that good anyway. This is a feeling we can all probably relate to. This mental trick of downplaying something we can't have is a common form of **self-deception**.

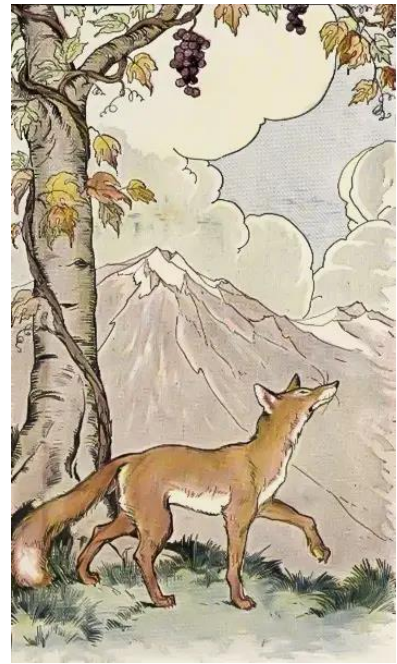
It helps to eliminate the **frustration** of not getting what we want. The fact that the clever fox is the main character demonstrates how **self-deception** can be useful for avoiding the discomfort of unmet desires. Logically, it's about deciding to believe a comforting lie instead of a painful truth.

This process is also essential for survival and social interaction. After all, who wants to tell their partner or best friend (who is thrilled with themselves having spent hours cooking a meal for you) that the meal was not to your taste and barely edible? Do we all prefer to hear a good lie, rather than accept a painful truth at times?

In prehistoric eras, where physical survival was the primary objective, the ability to deceive a **predator** or a rival could mean the difference between life and death. This aspect of lying as a survival tool is widely recognized in evolutionary biology and is essential in the process of finding a mate and in competition for resources, even to this day.

Social Change

As humans moved to more complex social structures, the role of lying became more complicated as it began to serve as a tool for resource **acquisition**. An individual proficient in the art of deception might



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secure a larger share of resources like food, enhancing their chances of survival, promotion and reproduction.

Self-deception is commonly found in groups as well as in individuals. Groups frequently tend to influence their individual members in ways that reinforce group goals, even when such goals are based on all sorts of deceptions.

Indeed, group goals based on individual and total group deception may often, at least for a time, reinforce the cohesion and stability of the group even more than those that are deception-free. Such attempts to achieve overall **cohesion** and stability through self-deception may continue for a while.

However, at a certain point these self or group deceptions may become self-destructive and have serious consequences, damaging trust and relationships. Understanding the motivations behind lying and the different types of lies can help us navigate these complex social situations with greater clarity and compassion. But can we do it soon enough to avoid disastrous consequences?

Discussion Questions

1. How can these deceptions be exposed before serious consequences occur?
2. Why do you think people lie?
3. Is it okay to tell white lies or half truths? Have you ever lied to avoid hurting someone's feelings?
4. Do you have to say something in order to lie or deceive? Or can you deceive by not offering information?
5. How do children learn to lie?
6. Children who are good liars sometimes grow up to be very intelligent. Were you a good liar when you were a child?
7. Have you ever told someone the truth and they became angry to hear it?
8. Has a lie someone told you ever hurt you? Was it worth it?
9. What do you think of compulsive liars?

References

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On Self-Deception in the Individual, in Groups, and in Society as a Whole - David Bohm Society