

Let's Talk About Lying (In the U.S.)

by Steven C. Markoff at Woodbury University on Oct. 27, 2004

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Introduction: Ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

- My goal tonight is to cause us to think more about the complex topic of lying
- Mix of my but mainly 3rd party quotes; quotes mean the quotes of others.
- All underlining mine.
- Interrupting me at any time is ok.

1. Why are you here tonight?

First off, I'm curious why you are here tonight -- other than free food and drink.

Q: Any volunteers?

- Did any of you have an incident with lying in the past that stimulated your interest in tonight's topic?
- Are you here because you lie or don't and you would like to hear discussion on the topic?

2. My qualifications and interest about lying:

- Preoccupation with the topic; have worked hard not to lie in the last 40 years or so (I'm 61); as an example, our marriage vows 17 years ago were both "I'll try hard" not "I do";
- Had many discussions/arguments about my view that lying isn't necessary to accomplish what you want or to be successful - except in a few rare instances - such as under duress - or, for example, when filling out job applications that ask about past drug use.
- I'm arrogant enough to think the world is wrong - that one can be successful and not lie.

D. Telling the truth is fun - and it confuses people. Or as George Orwell said around 1940:

"At a time of universal deceit - telling the truth is a revolutionary act."

E. I have a bad memory and can't remember who I told what to, so it's safer to tell the truth - and as Mark Twain said:

"If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything."

3. Defining of a lie:

Chart #1 -- Defining A Lie	
Source:	Definition:
A. Merriam Webster Dictionary	"to make an untrue statement with <u>intent</u> to <u>deceive</u>; to create a false or misleading impression" (online 9-20-04)
B. American Heritage Dictionary	"to present false information with the <u>intention</u> of <u>deceiving</u>; to convey a false image or impression" (online 9-22-04)
C. MSN Encarta	"deliberately say something untrue: to say something that is not true in a <u>conscious effort</u> to <u>deceive</u> somebody" (online 9-20-04)
D. The Oxford English Dictionary	"false oath, oath breaking; the action of swearing to a statement which is <u>known</u> to be false, or of taking an oath which it is <u>not one's intention</u> to keep." (2nd Edition, Volume XI (ow - Poisait)

4. Spotting a lie:

A. **Q: How many of you think you can spot a lie given the relevant facts? Hands? Let's see.**

B. President Clinton

As many of you probably know, President Clinton was accused of lying under oath about the question of whether or not he had sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky. Let's look at that question:

Chart #2 -- Did President Clinton Lie?
A. Background: "During the Paula Jones deposition, President Clinton was asked if he had sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky. But before the questioning began, the Jones' lawyers produced [agreed on] the following legal definition of sexual relations: 'For the purpose of this deposition, a person engages in 'sexual relations' when the person [Clinton] knowingly engages in or causes: Contact with the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh or buttocks of any [other] person with an intent to arouse or gratify the sexual desire of any person [Lewinsky]...Contact means intentional touching, either directly or through clothing.' The Jones' lawyers then asked Clinton if he had sex with Monica Lewinsky based on the [above] definition." [Brackets added by SM] (www.huppi.com; October 2004)
B. Clinton was then asked, under oath, "Did you have an extramarital sexual affair with Monica Lewinsky?"

C. Clinton's Response: **"I have never had sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky. I've never had an affair with her."**

D. Q: Given the above, was Clinton's answer in C. the truth or a lie? Why? Why not?

C. Gift: To reward your in this topic and your effort in attending tonight, in each of your envelopes, you will find a gift of 50 dollars.

Q: Was my statement about the (Jamaican) dollars in the envelopes a lie?

Q: What's the point of these two exercises - Clinton and dollars?

Q: Any thoughts?

5. Ten types of lies:

Chart #3 -- Ten Types of Lies

A. Malicious lies:

- **"Malicious or outrageous lies are those that are willfully destructive of another's good. These lies can be lethal to a marriage or to life."** (Clinical Therapeutics/Vol. 15, No. 2; 1993)

B. ("Normal") lies: We say something we believe isn't true, to mislead, to make us look more important - or to escape embarrassment or punishment.

- **"Falsehood is invariably the child of fear in one form or another."** (Aleister Crowley)

C. "Non verbal lies:

- **"A man may act a lie, as by pointing his finger in a wrong direction when a traveler inquires of him his road."** (www.hyperdictionary.com; Paley/Webster's Dictionary 1913)

D. Authorized lies:

- **"Authorized lies are told when, for example, a parent instructs a child to lie to a teacher or neighbor, a boss tells an employee to lie to a health inspector, a cult leader instructs members to make false claims, or a physician tells other professionals to conceal a patient's diagnosis even when asked directly."** (Clinical Therapeutics/Vol. 15, No. 2; 1993)

Q: Are authorized lies, lies? Yes? No? Why?

E. "White" (or little) lies:

- **"...euphemism for such lies as one finds it convenient to tell, and excuses himself for telling."** (www.hyperdictionary.com; Webster's Dictionary 1913)

- **"White lies are made deliberately but not maliciously to avoid social embarrassment or to keep out of trouble."** (Lies and liars: Psychiatric aspects of prevarication. Am J Psychiatry; 1988)

F. Innocent (child lies):

- **The three-year-old drops a glass in the kitchen, it breaks and she then tells her dad, "I didn't do it."**

G. Patriotic lies:

- **- "Patriotic lies for king and country are expected of civil servants, military personnel, and spies for the protection of the community."** (Clinical Therapeutics/Vol. 15, No. 2; 1993)

H. "Puffing/Puffery" / "Salesman Chatter" (government accepted lies).

- **"Puffing** (telling a buyer) **has been described by most courts as involving outrageous generalized statements, not making specific claims, that are so exaggerated as to preclude reliance by consumers.**" (Cook Perkiss & Liehe, Inc. v. Northern California Collection Service, Inc., 911 F.2d 242, 246 (9th Cir. 1990))

Telling a buyer that a "building would withstand any earthquake is mere puffery because everyone knows that you can't predict how bad an earthquake would be." (Peter J. Anderson, Esq.; October 2004)

- **This car is the best car on the market.**

I. Jocular lie (jokes):

- **"[Definition] Jocular lies are told for the purpose of affording amusement. Of course what is said merely and obviously in joke cannot be a lie: in order to have any malice in it, what is said must be naturally capable of deceiving others and must be said with the intention of saying what is false."** (Catholic Encyclopedia online; 9-30-04)

J. Lies under duress/self defense (anything so promised or agreed to has no legal force or effect and the law doesn't consider such a bad thing):

- In Jacksonville, Florida **"A judge [Sharon Tanner] pretended to resign on live television...to end a standoff in which a man armed with a gun held an attorney hostage, authorities said. One of the man's demands was that Tanner resign on live television. [Mayor] Peyton said the man was not pleased with the outcome of a case he had before the judge.**

Tanner walked up to a local TV reporter...saying on camera that she was resigning immediately, without giving any explanation. Authorities didn't explain the meaning of her televised comments until after the incident ended. Tanner's office confirmed the ruse but said the judge had no further comment." (MSNBC.com; AP August 4, 2004)

- **A murderer comes to your house asking if a certain person is there - you believe that the caller will unjustly murder that person, so you say the person isn't there when you're sure he is.**

Q: Is a truthful but incomplete answer that misleads a lie?

"Half a truth is often a great lie." (Benjamin Franklin)

Q: Examples anyone?

6. Some laws on lying:

Chart #4 -- Some Laws On Lying

A. California Court Oath:

"Do you solemnly state, under penalty of perjury, that the evidence that you shall give in this issue (or matter) shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"
(Section 2094, Standard California Codes; 2004 Edition)

Q: How many people, when faced with their bad or illegal conduct - or when in court as a witness, or party, tell the "whole" truth?

Q: Who has ever been a witness in a legal proceeding?

Q: Have you told the whole truth?

Q: How about lawyers "preparing" clients and witnesses for testimony?"

Q: Who has been "prepared?"

"...to 'tell the whole truth,' is even more difficult. In fact, it verges on the outrageous. In the first place, you are not allowed to do so, at least as a witness in court. You are only permitted to answer questions put to you by the lawyers or the judge. Any persistent, personal effort to tell what you consider to be a relevant part of the whole truth can get you cited for contempt." (Marshall Pease; December 1998)

B. Perjury as defined by the state of California:

"Every person who, having taken an oath that he or she will testify, declare, depose, or certify truly before any competent tribunal, officer or person, in any of the cases in which the oath may by law of the State of California be administered, willfully and contrary to the oath, states as true any material matter which he or she knows to be false, and every person who testifies, declares, deposes, or certifies under penalty of perjury in any of the cases in which the testimony, declarations, depositions, or certification is permitted by law of the State of California under penalty of perjury and willfully states as true any material matter which he or she knows to be false, is guilty of perjury." (Deering's; 2004)

C. The 9th of the 10 Commandments:

Chart #5 -- The 9th of the 10 Commandments

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honour thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
- 9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against they neighbor. ***
10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.

(Exodus 20: 3-17)

* The 9th commandment implies that:

- **"the duty, under certain circumstances, of being true witnesses for or against our neighbor; that all men are to be regarded as our neighbors"** (Lecture XXXL, Moral Government, <http://truthinheart.com/EarlyOberlinCD/CD/Finney/Theology/hot31htm>)
- **"To be a false witness against our neighbor basically means to falsely accuse someone else of wrongdoing."** (www.elijah.com/transcripts)

Q: What does it mean, if anything, that lying, when not against a person, doesn't seem to be prohibited in the 10 Commandments?

D. Catch 22 questions and penalties:

Chart #6 -- Catch 22 Questions and Penalties

Questions	Penalty for Lying
<p>"Have you used marijuana during the last three years or more than 15 times?"</p> <p>"Have you used any illegal drug(s) or combination of illegal drugs other than marijuana more than 5 times or during the past 10 years?" (FBI Preliminary Job Application; online 9-20-04)</p>	<p>"A false answer to a question in the employment application may be grounds for not employing you, or for dismissing you after you begin work, and may be punishable by fine or imprisonment." (U.S. Code. Title 18, Section 1001)</p>

7. Pros and cons on lying:

Chart #7 -- Pros And Cons on Lying	
Pro Lying (or some)	Con Lying (none)
<p>A. "A historian who would convey the truth must lie. Often he must enlarge the truth by diameters, otherwise his reader would not be able to see it." (Mark Twain)</p> <p>B. "The [Jewish] Torah does however state that there are situations where one is permitted to lie. "Permitted", not urged..." (Moshe Ben-Chaim; www.mesora.org/lies.html)</p> <p>C. "Some adolescents discover that lying may be considered acceptable in certain situations such as not telling a boyfriend or girlfriend the real reasons for breaking up because they don't want to hurt their feelings. Other adolescents may lie to protect their privacy or to help them feel psychologically separate and independent from their parents (e.g. denying they sneaked out late at night with friends)." (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; 2004)</p>	<p>A. "St. Augustine...wrote two short treatises to prove that it is never lawful to tell a lie." (Catholic Encyclopedia online; 9-30-04)</p> <p>B. "Lying represents the antithesis of what Judaism is all about, i.e., the search for truth and knowledge of our Creator. Judaism's primary goal is one using their mind to arrive at truths and an accurate perception of reality and God. When we lie, we ignore our purpose in life; to uncover all that God has embedded in the world from which to learn." (Moshe Ben-Chaim; www.mesora.org/lies.html)</p> <p>C. "A single lie destroys a whole reputation of integrity." (Baltasar Gracian)</p> <p>D. "Holy Scripture forbids us to lie even to save a man's life. If, then, we allow the lie of necessity, there seems to be no reason from the theological point of view for not allowing occasional murder and fornication when these crimes would procure great temporal advantage; the absolute character of the moral law will be undermined, it will be reduced to a matter of mere expediency." (Innocent III)</p> <p>E. "The greatest homage we can pay to truth, is to use it." (James Russell Lowell)</p>

8. Mixed signals about lying:

Chart #8 -- Mixed Signals About Lying

- A. **"...few human behaviors are viewed as paradoxically as lying. We teach our children that it is wrong, yet we lie every day in the name of civility. We deem those who lie too often or extensively as untrustworthy, while we may call those who lie too little guileless. And though we routinely expect marketers and politicians to lie, we spare them no end of moral outrage when they do."** (Richard Freidman, MD, LA Times; July 2003)
- B. **"From the dawn of ethical speculation there have been two different opinions on the question as to whether lying is ever permissible. Aristotle, in his Ethics, seems to hold that it is never allowable to tell a lie, while Plato, in his Republic, is more accommodating; he allows doctors and statesmen to lie occasionally for the good of their patients and for the common weal. Modern philosophers are divided in the same way."** (T. Slater, Catholic Encyclopedia online; 9-30-04)
- C. **"We do it [lying] to others but resent having it done to us."**
(www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/1611/sins22lies0index.html)
- D. **"The men the American people admire most extravagantly are the most daring liars; the men they detest most violently are those who try to tell them the truth."** (H. L. Mencken)

9. Is lying pervasive?:

Chart #9 -- Is Lying Pervasive?

A. General honesty:

"[A] news organization recently did a survey here in America and asked people several questions to determine the percentage of people who lied or were dishonest about things. Some of the questions were":

- **Do you cheat on your Income Tax Return?**
- **Do you compliment people when you really don't mean it?**
- **Do you tell your spouse to tell callers you are not at home when you are there?**
- **Do you tell "little white lies" if it will keep you out of trouble"**
- **Do you tell creditors that "the check is in the mail" when you have not mailed it?**
- **Do you exaggerate in repeating things you have heard"**

"The results of this survey determined that 90% of Americans are not truthful under certain circumstance."

(www.bible.com/answers/alying.html)

- B. **"There are three lies for every ten minutes of conversation."** (Robert Feldman, a psychologist at the University of Massachusetts.)
- C. **"By the time most children are 4, they have acquired the ability to deceive others, a skill critical to survival."** (Richard Freidman, MD, LA Times; July 2003)
- D. Lies on resumes:
- **"Personnel Journal reports that more than 500,000 people are claiming a bogus college degree."** (Chronicle, 10-1-99)
 - **"The American Psychological Association recently reported that 67% of all job seekers fabricate or embellish their managerial or supervisory duties on resumes."** (Chronicle, 10-1-99)
 - **"A 1998 survey by the Society of Human Resources Management showed that 90% of respondents who checked candidates' past job titles, employment length and salary histories reported some falsification."** (Chronicle, 10-1-99)
 - **"Edward C. Andler, who runs the Certified Reference Checking Co. of St. Louis, says 36% of all resumes contain some form of untruth, an increase of 24% since he first polled corporations in 1979."** (Chronicle, 10-1-99)
- E. **"There are as many lies in business as there are people in business."** (Paul LaFontaine, after he left Bertelsmann Music Group in March 1997)
- **"Members of Congress on Thursday accused the Food and Drug Administration of suppressing information, for as long as eight years, about the increased risks of suicidal thought and behavior in children and teenagers taking antidepressants."** (LA Times, 9-24-04)
 - **"Eliot Spitzer, New York state attorney general, sued Glaxo-SmithKline, accusing the company of "repeated and persistent fraud" for allegedly hiding unfavorable data from pediatric trials of its blockbuster antidepressant drug Paxil. The company denied the charges but settled last month."** (LA Times, 9-30-04)
 - **"Tobacco companies lie about whether nicotine causes cancer, chemical companies lie about the safety of implants in breasts, pharmaceutical companies lie about suicides, jury verdicts and the effects of giving psychotropic drugs to kids."** (Phillip Tamaka; <http://members.web-o.net/rpargman/truth.html>)
- F. **"Lies in commercial speech surround us like air. If every product and service advertised to us lived up to one-half of its promise, ours would be a truly blissful commercial state."** (Phillip Tamaka; <http://members.web-o.net/rpargman/truth.html>)

10. Do we need to lie; is it good to lie or to be lied to?:

Chart #10 -- Do We Need to Lie or Need to be Lied To?

- A. ***"Lying to oneself promotes psychological well-being. Research shows that depressed people deceive themselves less than those who are mentally healthy."***

Frankly, if we did not deceive ourselves, I think we would go mad from distress. For example, the simple fact that we're all going to die, that there are various people in the world out to get us, that a good deal of the world lives in unrelenting misery and hunger - it's all enough to drive everyone bonkers." (David L. Smith, Across the Board; Sept/Oct 2004)

- B. ***"Is it advantageous to be a good liar? I'd say without a doubt, yes. People who deceive effectively get ahead in life."*** (David Livingstone Smith; Across the Board, Sept/Oct 2004)

- C. ***"Dishonesty is pervasive. And that's often a good thing, because the world would collapse under the weight of too much honesty, say David Livingstone Smith, co-founder and director of the University of New England's Institute for Cognitive Science and Evolutionary Psychology."*** (Across the Board; Sept/Oct 2004)

* **Summary: Should we lie or always tell the truth?:**

Summary -- Should We Lie or Always Tell The Truth?

Whether or not - or under what circumstance we should tell the truth, mislead, or lie is often a complex question tempered, at least, by perception, timing, circumstance, religion, and health, but regardless - it's a question we are faced with throughout our lives.

Clearly truth has value in many ways - and I believe that it is a fallacy that you can handle the truth but others can't.

I hope the discussion tonight has stirred some interest on this topic - and has added a bit of light on the questions of lying where often little light exists. And remember, whether you choose to lie, mislead or tell the truth - you make that decision.

Q & A?