

PARENTAL DECEPTION: INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTS OF DECEPTION ON
PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

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JOSCELYN RENEE CARGILL

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JOSCELYN RENEE CARGILL

APPROVED:

Dr. Drew A. Curtis, Chair
Assistant Professor of Psychology

Dr. Kristi Cordell-McNulty
Assistant Professor of Psychology

May 6, 2015
Date Successfully Defended and
Approved by Advisory Committee

APPROVED:

Dr. Shirley M. Eoff
Director of the Honors Program

May 15, 2015

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ABSTRACT

Psychologists have completed much research in the broad field of deception, but an emerging topic is the deception within parent/child relationships. Previous studies have shown that parents lie to their children in order to control their actions and emotions (e.g., Heyman, Luu, & Lee, 2009; Heyman, Hsu, Fu, & Lee, 2013). There appears to be a gap in the area of research pertaining to the implications of parents lying to their children. The goal of the current study was to examine the effects of parental lies on the parent/child relationship. A survey was conducted that determined what kinds of lies parents have told to their children, how serious the lies were (as determined by the child), and how the lies effected the parent/child relationship. The current study found that parental deception is related to satisfaction within the parent/child relationship. Results also showed that perceived seriousness of the lie does not impact relational satisfaction and parents are more likely to use white lies than any other types. These results have implications for not only the parent/child relationship, but also education and communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Lies are a familiar part of our lives; we tell them and are told them. Scholars have long wondered the reason people deceive others, what benefits and consequences this deception entails, and even what constitutes deception. Researchers have examined different kinds of lies, lying within intimate relationships, repercussions of lies, motivations, learning to lie, children lying and other aspects (e.g., Peterson, 1996; Bryant 2008; Argo & Shiv, 2012; Lee, 2013).

Lies can serve a variety of functions in different situations and in various relational contexts (Peterson, 1996; Vrij, 2008). In some situations, white lies can be seen as necessary for successful social interactions (Bryant, 2008). On the other hand, blatant lies can cause damage to relationships (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996; Schweitzer, Hershey, & Bradlow, 2006). Lying can also cause people to lose trust in others (Sagarin, Rhoads, & Cialdini, 1998). Research and literature has extensively discussed the different types of deception, its consequences, and dynamics within relational contexts (Peterson, 1996; Sagarin et al., 1998; Vrij, 2008).

Deception Defined

It is important to define deception as the author of this study uses it because many definitions have been written. Deception can be defined in many ways. One description is that of a false message being communicated with the intent to benefit the communicator. This definition is not very clear. It can be interpreted to mean that unconscious beings, such

as plants, lie. It could also imply that the unintentional use of false information is deception. This could mean that if someone shares information that they believe to be true but is actually false, they would be considered to be deceptive (Vrij, 2008).

Deception can also be defined as an act or communication that intends to create a belief in another that the correspondent knows to be false (Vrij, 2008). This definition is clearer than the previous and is left open to less interpretation. It does not imply that an individual who unknowingly gives false information is lying. To be considered a lie, the communicator must have the intent to deceive someone.

Still another definition of deception is a conscious act or communication to produce a differing belief in someone that puts them at a disadvantage. This suggests that such deception as white lies are not considered lying because they are intended to benefit the receiver. White lies can be used to protect an individual's feelings or enhance confidence. An example could be telling a friend or colleague that their presentation was great when it could have been better. This could put their mind at ease and help them to stop worrying about mistakes they may have made.

The author of this study chose to use the definition of a deliberate attempt, whether successful or unsuccessful, to create a false belief within another person (Vrij, 2000). This definition makes it clear that the deception does not have to be successful to be labeled as lying. It is also implied that the communication does not have to benefit or harm either the communicator or receiver of the information. If the speaker intends to deceive someone whether or not it is successful, he or she is a liar. This definition has been used widely in other research (e.g., Curtis, 2013; Hart, Curtis, Williams, Hathaway, & Griffith, 2014).

Types of Lies

There are varying forms of deception that can be used depending on the situation at hand. A few forms of lying include omission, distortion, half-truths, blatant lies, white lies and failed lies.

Omission. Omission is used by removing pieces of the whole truth. This tactic could be used when a person is asked about something they did, but may not want the person asking to know certain aspects of the event. For example, a student may be asked by a teacher if they have finished an upcoming project, but instead of saying that they had not finished some of the work the student may just put emphasis on the work they have done and not mention what they have not completed (Peterson, 1996).

Failed deception. Failed lies are meant to deceive an individual, but end up becoming true after the deception has taken place. For example, a student is invited to lunch by someone they are not particularly fond of and to avoid the encounter they say that they will have to work on homework at that time. When the individual said this, it was an outright lie, but it becomes a failed lie when a professor later emails an assignment that they expect to be done for the next class meeting. The student then ends up actually needing to work on homework during the time they were invited out to lunch (Peterson, 1996).

Half-truths. Half-truths are technically true statements but are used to mislead the dupe to believe something else. For example, a married couple have some work that needs to be done on the house, so the husband volunteers to do it rather than calling in a repairman. While the wife is out running errands she calls to see how the work is going and the husband tells her that he started the project but it seems like it will take longer to do than anticipated.

He had in fact begun the work, but decided to watch a football game rather than finish what was started. Therefore, the wife believes that he began and worked hard to finish, but just would not have the time to do it in one day (Peterson, 1996).

White lies. The more readily accepted form of deception is the white lie. A white lie is a falsification that is used to benefit the dupe rather than the liar. White lies, as mentioned before, can be used to protect the feelings of an individual or promote confidence. There are a plethora of examples of white lies during everyday interactions. White lies can be as simple as telling someone that you like their new haircut when in reality you do not. This kind of lie can be seen as being polite, but it is also considered deception. The use of white lies can bring about a dilemma between upholding politeness and being completely honest (Peterson, 1996).

Distortion. Distortion can be referred to as “bending the truth.” This is not a direct lie, but is misleading. For example, an individual asks their friend to help them make decorations for a party that will happen in a month. The friend agrees, but waits until the night before the party to put everything together. On the day of the party the friend says that it took her the longest time to get the decorations done and that she even had to work on them the previous night. This would imply that she had been working on them, but the project took longer than anticipated rather than admitting that she had put it off until the last minute. In this instance, the individual throwing the party believes that his or her friend worked diligently to complete the decorations, but does not know that they were actually all put together the night before the party (Peterson, 1996).

Blatant. Blatant lying is a complete falsification of a story to where no truth is left. This kind of lie could be used to instill an absolutely fabricated belief in another individual. A person may blatantly lie to make someone believe that they did something that they in fact did not do or that they did not do something they did. An example could be an employee telling their boss that they have finished all of the paperwork that needed to be done when they had not even started it. An employee could also tell their employer that they did the paperwork to receive praise and recognition when a coworker was actually the one who did the work (Peterson, 1996).

Why Do People Lie?

There are many reasons for lying. Lies can be used to benefit the person telling lies, help or encourage someone else, or uphold social status (Vrij, 2008; Bryant, 2008). People may not always be aware of the lies they tell throughout the day. If someone asks how you are doing on a particularly bad day and you respond that you are doing well, when you are not actually doing well, then you engaged in telling a social lie. Social lies can encompass different types of lies discussed and are generally used to uphold social status. Individuals may not have the intent to lie when they use this kind of deception. Instead, they could be trying to uphold social status or the response may be automatic rather than an actual representation of how their day is going. Lies can be used to benefit the deceiver. An example of this would be an individual saying that he or she does not have money for lunch in the hopes that a friend will offer to pay for the food. Another example could be telling a friend that there was a family emergency after missing a scheduled meeting.

Self-oriented lies are those in which the communicator is focused on the effect the truth may have on their image (Vrij, 2008). One use for this kind of lie is to gain an upper hand. An example of this would be an individual failing to express mistakes that may have been made while baking cupcakes to a potential buyer at a bake sale. This could result in the buyer purchasing cupcakes that will not be very tasty, but the deceiver makes money. Self-oriented lies can also be used to secure psychological advantage (Vrij, 2008). For instance, while a group of friends are discussing a particular video game that they all play, a new member of the group might say that they also play this game when they actually do not. The deceiver in this situation is attempting to impress the other group members to gain a higher status. Another reason people use self-oriented lies is to escape loss or penalty (Vrij, 2008). This could be applied to many situations, but one example would be when a student is directly asked if they were passing notes in class, he or she denies it even though they had passed a note to a friend. With this lie, the student is trying to avoid getting in trouble with his or her teacher. Finally, self-oriented lies can also be used to steer clear of psychological shortcomings (Vrij, 2008). An individual who thoroughly enjoys the *Twilight* book series may say that he or she has never liked the books to prevent embarrassment from peers who constantly make jokes about the story. In addition to self-oriented lies, individuals also use other-oriented lies. These lies focus on the receiver of the information. Lies of this nature can be used to protect someone's feelings, improve a friend's public image or help a person to gain or avoid something (Vrij, 2008). Other-oriented lies can be similar to white lies in that they benefit the other person, but are not limited to slight severity typically associated with a white lie. Other-oriented lies can also be blatant lies as long as it is used to benefit someone

other than the one lying (Vrij, 2008). An example could be telling someone who is looking at the last copy of a book on the shelf that the book is complete trash, when it is not, so that they will set it back down and the liar's friend can come buy the book (Vrij, 2008).

Deception in Relationships

Lies can come up in any aspect of everyday life. It has been found that individuals tell lies most often to people who are not close to them personally (Vrij, 2008). This can be seen during short interactions with acquaintances or strangers when using social lies. These lies are used to uphold social status and can also be automatic. Individuals may also lie to strangers or acquaintances to appear impressive. Because the stranger or even acquaintance does not know personal details about an individual's life, it would be easy to paint a different picture of reality (Vrij, 2008).

It has also been discovered that individuals tell fewer lies within close relationships, such as with a spouse, but these lies tend to be more serious. Many of these lies told are other-oriented and intended to preserve the other's feelings. However, lies within romantic partnerships can also be used to hide something from the partner that may lead to ending the relationship (Vrij, 2008). Partners may use lies of omission to keep certain details hidden. This kind of deception could be used for different intents such as to hide transgressions or to protect the partner from upsetting news.

Lying to a significant other is something that is generally looked down upon. Taking this into consideration a study was conducted to examine the use of deceptive communication within intimate relationships. It was found that each form of lying significantly affected each partners' satisfaction within the relationship. This was shown to

be true both when a partner lied as well as when their significant other lied to them (Peterson, 1996).

Deceptive individuals typically have a negative connotation in society, because they are perceived to use lies for self-protection or to hurt someone. Most people do not think about the consequences of their lie being undiscovered. Instead they think about what will happen if they are caught. However, the effects of undiscovered deception have been investigated by looking at the way liars perceived others after deceiving them without the recipient of the lie finding out (Sagarin et al., 1998). The study's main objective was to show that liars would more readily think that they were being lied to after not having been caught in their own lie. This enticed the participant to lie to his or her partner. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that assessed her or his partner's personality characteristics, including honesty. Overall, the results showed that the participants who had lied to their partners thought their partners were less honest compared to those participants who did not lie to their partners (Sagarin et al., 1998). These findings show that not only can lies harm an interpersonal relationship, but undetected lies can elicit harmful consequences as well. Undetected lies can cause suspicion to arise within the relationship from the liar as distrust forms, perhaps from a guilty conscience.

Lying can also happen in close relationships that are not romantic. It has been discovered that older children, those in college, lie to their mothers. It was hypothesized that this may occur because the child is financially dependent and wants to maintain a good image. They may believe that if their mother knew about the classes they had skipped or the parties they had been to, their mother would no longer provide money. It may also be that

they care what their mother thinks of them and they do not want to tarnish their reputation (Vrij, 2008).

Little Liars

As early as age three, children tend to grasp the concept that lying to hide a wrongdoing is immoral and that telling the truth is a better action to take (Lee, 2013). Children do usually consider lying to be wrong and they will be even more likely to tell the truth if they have promised to do so. To study deception in children, researchers use a temptation resistance paradigm in which they leave a child in a room after telling them not to do something, like get out of the chair or play with a toy. The researcher will then observe the child to see whether or not they do what they were told. Afterwards, the child is asked whether or not they got up from the chair or played with a toy when they were told not to. Young children, those who are 2-3 years old, tend to confess their disobedience, but as they get older they will attempt to lie. Adults tend to be incapable of detecting a child's lie if they do not already know the truth. When children lie, they act as if they are telling the truth. They will make direct eye-contact and use body language that supports their beliefs of how individuals should act while being honest. Children also get better at lying as they age. When younger children in temptation resistance research attempt to lie, there will typically be inconsistencies in their statements such as "I did not play with the toy. I looked at it and it moved across the room" (Lee, 2013). This research parallels that of Sodian (1991), in which results showed that children younger than three and a half had a difficult time using deceptive communication to win a game. Sodian also found that the successful use of deception increased with age from 3 to 5 year olds.

A similar temptation resistance paradigm was used to analyze children's use of prosocial and antisocial lies (Williams, Kirmayer, Simon, & Talwar, 2013). In this study, antisocial lies were used to hide the child's transgression while the prosocial lies were used to protect another person's feelings. To analyze antisocial lies, researchers in this study assigned children either to their parent or to a research assistant. The parent or research assistant had the child close their eyes while a toy was placed in the room and then instructed them not to peek. The parent or research assistant left the room for a few minutes and upon their return asked the child if they had peeked. Being paired with the parent or research assistant had no effect on whether or not the child looked at the toy. It did have an effect, however, on whether or not the child lied about having done so. More children lied to the research assistant, an unfamiliar adult, than to their parent (Williams, et al., 2013).

In a second experiment, the authors analyzed prosocial lies. In this experiment the children were again assigned to either their parent or a different research assistant than was involved in the first experiment. The children were given a gift from the adult they were assigned. Before receiving the gift, the original research assistant had the children rate a set of prizes to determine which ones would be unsatisfactory. After receiving a disappointing gift, the children were asked by either the parent or the research assistant whether or not they liked it, what they liked about it, and what they were going to do with it. Children were then rated on whether or not they could control and conceal their disappointment. The majority of the children told a prosocial lie, such as "I like it" or "I will play with it when I get home." More of the children told prosocial lies to the unfamiliar adult, the research assistant, than they did to their parents. It appears that they were more concerned with protecting the

feelings of the research assistant than their parent. This could be due to the familiarity of the parent compared to the research assistant and that they felt more comfortable being honest with the parent (Williams et al., 2013).

As children age, they begin to understand that lying to appear polite is accepted. Preschoolers view white lies negatively, but less so than other lies and their views become more positive as they grow older. In an experiment, children were asked to take a picture of the researcher who had a large red mark on his or her face. When the researcher asked if he or she looked good for the picture, most of the children, age three to seven, said that they did. It seemed that the children were trying to be polite and spare the researcher's feelings, but when asked about why they lied, many of the children stated that they did not know (Lee, 2013).

Parent/Child Relationship

The relationship between parents and their children is extremely important. It has been shown that the relationship between a parent and their adolescent child may predict the kind of parenting the child will later use with their own children (Friesen & Woodward, 2013). This study found that adolescents who reported having a close relationship with their parents also reported more positive parenting styles fifteen years later with their children. This could be interpreted as meaning children are likely to use a similar parenting style with their children as was used with them if they felt like it was successful.

Parenting styles may affect the parent/child relationship by having an effect on children's behavior. A study found that different maternal and paternal parenting styles combined have negative effects on a child's behavior (Braza et al., 2015). An authoritarian

maternal parenting style was correlated with externalizing and internalizing problems. This may be a result of harsh discipline, strict expectations and intrusive behaviors. When this style is combined with an authoritarian paternal parenting style there is a negative correlation with externalizing problems and indirect aggressive behavior. Combining an authoritarian maternal parenting style and a permissive paternal parenting style results in less internalizing problems in boys, but remains positively correlated with aggression in girls. Finally, the use of a permissive style by both parents resulted in physically aggressive behavior in children. This may be because permissive parents do not monitor behavior and the children do not develop self-regulation (Braza et al., 2015).

Self-determination theory suggests that growth and development is sustained by the fulfillment of needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. To examine this, researchers conducted two studies in which they used the Perceptions of Parents Scale (POPS; Robbins, 1994) with junior and senior high school students to assess their perception of their parent's involvement, autonomy support, and warmth. Depressive symptoms and life satisfaction of the participants were also measured. The first study examined mothers and fathers separately, while the second assessed parents together. Results showed that the need for support from both mothers and fathers had a relationship with the participant's well-being. The second study paralleled this finding when looking at parents as a whole rather than individually. Need of support was also related to the participant's autonomous self-regulation which also related to their well-being and psychological health (Niemic, Lynch, Vansteenkiste, Bernstein, Deci, & Ryan, 2006).

Parental Deception

Recently, increased attention has been given to deception within the context of parent-child relationships, specifically focusing on child deception (Williams et al., 2013). However, parental deception appears to be an under-examined variable of relational deception.

Some of what has been found in the scant literature is that parents do lie to their children, even though they promote honesty (Heyman et al., 2009). Heyman and colleagues (2009) examined the phenomenon of parental deception through conducting an experiment which asked college students to refer to their childhood and report whether or not their parents had used different kinds of deception, promoted honesty, and how severely they were disciplined for lying. It was found that parents strongly encouraged honesty (Heyman et al., 2009). Of the lies that were reported as used by parents, many of them were intended to promote positive feelings while others were used to control behavior. It was not indicated by the evidence that parents who promoted honesty were less likely to lie to their children (Heyman et al., 2009).

Further, these findings indicate that parents deem lying to be acceptable in particular situations. In fact, lies are commonly used to control behavior and emotion (Heyman et al., 2013). Parental deception appears to be a cross-cultural phenomenon, in which parents lie to their children to influence behavior. Heyman and colleagues (2013) examined the differences between parents in the United States and China in lying to their children. It was found that the majority of parents in both countries used lies to control their child's behavior. The study also showed that parents in China used this practice more so than those in the United States.

However, parents in both countries stated that promoting honesty with children was an important aspect of childrearing in their respective culture. It could be questioned that if a parent deems teaching their child the importance of honesty to be important then why would they lie to their children? It has been proposed that parents use this tactic as a last resort to get their children to comply (Heyman et al., 2013).

The way adults lie, whether it be a blatant lie or a white lie, may have an effect on children. Adults verbally instruct children not to lie, but because white lies are so common children are still exposed to deception. Also, parents may teach their children that lying is wrong, but tell them to lie to uphold social status. Most adult children say that they were encouraged by their parents to be honest as they were growing up, but how many of these would also say that their parents have lied to them? One study found that even though parents encouraged honesty, they were no less likely to lie to their children. An argument could be made that parents lie to their kids to be polite and increase levels of self-esteem, but lies are commonly used to control behavior and emotion (Heyman et al., 2009).

Scholars have conducted research into the repercussions of different kinds of lies (Sagarin et al., 1998), but little has been done on the consequences of parents lying to their children. This area lacks empirical investigation. Thus, the current study examined parental deception and its effects on the parent-child relationship.

OVERVIEW

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Question 1: Do parents lie to their children?

Hypothesis 1: It was predicted that the majority of participants would indicate that their parents have lied to them.

Question 2: What types of deception do parents use with their children?

Hypothesis 2: It was predicted that white lies and lies of omission would be reported as being told more frequently than other types of lies by parents.

Question 3: Is there a relationship between parental deception and parent/child relationship satisfaction?

Hypothesis 3: It was predicted that there would be a negative correlation between the frequency of reported parental lies and parent/child relationship satisfaction.

Question 4: Are children taught that lying is wrong and are they punished for it?

Hypothesis 4: It was predicted that participants would report that, as growing up, deception was morally unacceptable and punishment was the consequence of its use.

METHODS

Participants

The current study recruited 197 participants ranging in age from 17 to 57 years ($M=20.09$, $SD = 4.19$). Most participants were women (76%) and largely identified as Caucasian (See Table 1).

Table 1

Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
African American	14	7.1%
Caucasian/European American	95	48.2%
Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander	8	4.1%
Native American/Alaskan Native	1	0.5%
Hispanic/Latina/Latino	61	31.0%
Bi Racial	9	4.6%
Multi Racial	4	2.0%
Other	3	1.5%
No Answer	2	1.0%
Total	195	100.0%

The majority of participants indicated that their highest level of education was “some college” (80%). This is due to the participants coming from a college sample. Most participants were classified as freshman (44%). More participants were psychology students rather than other disciplines (28%), but academic majors varied. This is possibly due to participants being enrolled in general psychology courses that are required for all students.

Within the demographics questionnaire, participants were asked to report who their guardian was that they lived with while growing up. This provided information regarding who the participants considered their parents to be (See Table 2).

Table 2

Family Member(s) that Participants Lived with Growing Up

Who did you grow up living with (until 18 years of age)?	Frequency	Percent
Biological Mother	188	95.40%
Biological Father	147	74.60%
Step Father	32	16.20%
Grandparents	18	9.10%
Aunt/Uncle	10	5.10%
Step Mother	8	4.10%
Siblings	8	4.00%
Adoptive Parents	4	2.00%
Adoptive Father	1	0.50%
Foster Care, Family Friend, Friend's Family	1	0.50%
Godparents	1	0.50%

The majority of participants indicated that they continue to have a relationship with their biological mother (90%) and biological father (74%). A smaller percentage of participants reported to continue to have a relationship with their step-mother (4%) and step-father (16%).

The majority of participants indicated that the highest level of their mother's education was some college (33%), directly followed by high school (32%), and a four year

college degree (25%). A small percentage of participants reported their mother having a Master's degree (8%) or Doctoral degree (0.5%).

Reports of the father's education were similar to that of mothers. Most participants reported their father's highest level of education to be high school (36%), followed by some college (32%), and a four year college degree (22%). Again, a small percentage of participants reported their father having a Master's degree (10%) or a Doctoral degree (2%). Of those who did not grow up with their mother or father, there was an even divide between high school (43%) and a four year college degree (43%) for the highest level of the guardian's education followed by some college (14%).

Materials

The current study used four instruments: Demographics Questionnaire, Perceptions of Parents Scales, Types of Parental Communications Questionnaire, and Frequencies and Perceptions of Deception Questionnaire.

Demographics Questionnaire. The questionnaire asked participants to provide information about age, sex, gender, ethnicity and race, education, parents, and parental education. Subsequently, the questionnaire asked participants to indicate their satisfaction with their relationship to their parent(s) on a Likert-type rating scale (1 = Extremely unsatisfied, 5 = Extremely satisfied).

Perceptions of Parents Scales-The College Student Scale. The Perceptions of Parents Scales-The College Student Scale was developed by Robbins (1994) to investigate parental involvement, autonomy support, and warmth. The measure consists of 42 items: 21 for mothers and 21 for fathers. The measure contains six subscales which include: (a) Mother

Autonomy Support, (b) Mother Involvement, (c) Mother Warmth, (d) Father Autonomy Support, (e) Father Involvement, and (f) Father Warmth. Table 3 shows the internal consistency of each of these scales and total scale scores for mother and father..

Table 3

Internal Consistencies of Perceptions of Parents Scales-The College Student Scale

Scale	Mean (SD)	Range	α
Mother Total	117.5 (24.9)	21-147	0.95
Mother Involvement	34.2 (7.6)	6-42	0.87
Mother Autonomy Support	47.5 (11.6)	9-63	0.90
Mother Warmth	35.8 (7.8)	6-42	0.91
Father Total	110.3 (27.2)	21-147	0.95
Father Involvement	30.2 (9.1)	6-42	0.90
Father Autonomy Support	46.3 (11.9)	9-63	0.88
Father Warmth	33.8 (8.2)	6-42	0.87

Types of Parental Communications Questionnaire. The Types of Parental Communications Questionnaire was adapted from Peterson (1996) and consisted of participants being asked to read a series of scenarios and respond to questions regarding how often their parents have used or would use that type of communication and how they perceive the type of communication. The scenarios and questions were similar to those used in another study that explored deception in intimate relationships (Peterson, 1996). The scenarios retain the type of deception used but have been changed to reflect content of parental deceptions. Each vignette corresponds to a specific type of lie. The types of lies include omissions, failed deception, half-truths, white lies, distortions and blatant lies (See Appendix A).

Frequencies and Perceptions of Deception Questionnaire. The Frequencies and Perceptions of Deception Questionnaire is a nine item questionnaire developed to assess participants' perceptions of the frequencies of parental deceptions. The questionnaire begins with a statement indicating that the investigators do not condone or condemn deception. Then, participants are asked questions about whether their parents have ever lied to them and the frequency of use on a Likert-type rating scale (1 = Never, 5 Often). Next, participants were asked to indicate their opinions on five items that asked about how morally acceptable lying was and the consequences that resulted from lying on a Likert-type rating scale with a no difference anchor point (1 = Significantly agree, 3 = No difference, 5 = Significantly agree; see Appendix B).

Procedure

The study was initially approved by the Institutional Review Board. It was conducted completely online through a secure research host site, Psychdata. The study's link was posted in Angelo State University's Sona-Systems. Participants were able to select the study, if they chose to participate, from Sona, as a research component of a course or for extra credit.

Once participants selected the link to the study they were presented with an informed consent. After giving consent, participants were asked to complete the Demographic Questionnaire. Next, participants were provided with the Perceptions of Parents Scales-College Student Scale (Robbins, 1994). Then, participants were asked to complete the Parental Communications Questionnaire followed by the Frequencies and Perceptions of Deception Questionnaire. Lastly, participants were provided with a debriefing form.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics revealed that most participants indicated that their parents have lied to them (90%); however, only a small percentage (5%) reported that their parents lied often. In support of the hypothesis, a strong negative correlation was found between reported parental satisfaction and perceived parental deception ($r(188) = -.48, p < .001$). This finding was present when analyzing parental deception individually, for perceived mother deception ($r(189) = -.45, p < .001$) and father deception ($r(185) = -.32, p < .001$). Further, a moderately strong negative correlation was found between amount of deception perceived from the mother and the mother's involvement, autonomy support and warmth ($r(195) = -.43, r(195) = -.48, r(195) = -.49, p < .001$). Also, a moderately strong negative correlation was found between amount of deception perceived from the father and the father's involvement, autonomy support and warmth ($r(191) = -.46, r(191) = -.39, r(191) = -.47, p < .001$).

These results demonstrate that most participants perceived their parents to have lied to them, but only a small portion believed that their parents lied to them often. The first hypothesis was supported in that a negative correlation was found between the participant's satisfaction with their parents and how much they perceived their parents to have lied to them. This means that as the participants perceived more lies from their parents, the level of relationship satisfaction went down. This was true for parents in general as well as mothers and fathers separately. Results also showed that as there was more perceived deception from

parents, the level of involvement, autonomy support and warmth decreased for mothers and fathers.

A repeated measures MANOVA was conducted to test types of lies, as a repeated measures variable, across the measures of parental use and the likelihood to use. The results showed a statistically significant difference between the types of lies across all measures, $F(20, 159) = 23.44, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .75$. Univariate tests also indicated statistically significant differences among the type of lies used by mothers ($F(5, 178) = 106.74, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .38$) and fathers ($F(5, 178) = 85.33, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$). Also, the likelihood to use particular types of lies differed for mothers ($F(5, 178) = 104.86, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .37$) and fathers ($F(5, 178) = 80.36, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$). Pairwise comparisons revealed that mothers ($M = 4.03, SD = 1.13$) and fathers ($M = 3.83, SD = 1.20$) used white lies more often than all other types ($p < .001$) and omissions were reported as least used by both mothers ($M = 1.65, SD = 1.09$) and fathers ($M = 1.74, SD = 1.11; p < .001$).

Results from these tests reveal that white lies are the most common type of deception used by both mothers and fathers. This is not surprising given that white lies are commonly used in society. These results also showed that omissions were the least used type of deception by both mothers and fathers. This could be because the participants never discovered that their parents deceived them by using omissions.

A repeated measures MANOVA was conducted to test types of lies, as a repeated measures variable, across the measures of how affective, serious, and honest they are. The results showed a statistically significant difference between the types of lies across all

measures, $F(35, 138) = 29.90, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .88$. Univariate tests also indicated statistically significant differences among the type of lies used and their seriousness, ($F(5,172) = 31.93, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$), how affective ($F(5,172) = 160.57, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .48$), blameworthy, ($F(5,172) = 141.72, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .45$) destructive, ($F(5,172) = 138.71, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .45$), and honesty ($F(5,172) = 72.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .30$). Also, the type of lies differed by preferred use ($F(5,172) = 165.38, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .49$) and use instead of an argument ($F(5,172) = 88.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .34$). Pairwise comparisons revealed white lies were least serious ($M = 2.17, SD = 1.33$), more positive ($M = 4.28, SD = .85$), more praiseworthy ($M = 1.92, SD = 1.03$), more helpful ($M = 1.86, SD = .89$), more honest ($M = 3.05, SD = .92$), more likely to be used ($M = 4.24, SD = .89$), and preferred to an argument ($M = 4.23, SD = .95$). It was found that perceived seriousness of the lie did not correlate with relationship satisfaction.

One-sample *t*-tests were conducted on the acceptableness, morality, truthfulness, parent values, and parental consequences of deception in the participants household (Bonferroni correction = .01) compared to a no difference anchor of three. Results revealed statistically significant differences for all items from the no difference anchor. Lying was deemed unacceptable ($M = 4.05, SD = 1.07$), $t(193) = 13.63, p < .001$ and morally wrong ($M = 4.21, SD = .99$), $t(193) = 17.08, p < .001$. Participants were told to always be honest and truthful ($M = 4.66, SD = .64$), $t(192) = 36.00, p < .001$, were punished for lying ($M = 4.40, SD = .94$), $t(191) = 20.64, p < .001$, and were not rewarded for lying ($M = 1.17, SD = .50$), $t(192) = -51.44, p < .001$. Participants indicated that they were taught to be honest, lying was wrong and that they were punished for it.

DISCUSSION

The current study found that many people report that their parents have lied to them. This is not surprising given that individuals typically lie two times a day. The average of two lies a day typically consists of social lies. Emotionally close deceptions are far less frequently used (DePaulo, 1996). This is supported by the findings in this study due to participants reporting that white lies were the most frequently used by their parents. Also, because we know that individuals lie an average of twice per day, it can be speculated that the small percentage of participants who reported that their parents never lied to them were unaware of the deception used.

There was a negative correlation between the amount of perceived lies told and satisfaction with the parent-child relationship. Participants indicated that as perceived deception from parents increased, their satisfaction with the relationship between them and their parents decreased. This could be due to participants believing that lies are harmful, providing a negative view of their parents. This finding parallels other research that examined deception within intimate relationships (Peterson, 1996). Previous research found that when individuals perceive their partners to be deceptive the relationship is altered and they may be less satisfied with their relationship (Peterson, 1996). The findings of the current study add to the literature of relational deception and extend beyond intimate relationships leading into familial relations.

A correlation was not found between the perceived severity of the lies told and relationship satisfaction. Therefore, it seems that regardless of the perceived threat deception

is related to less relational satisfaction. It is possible that this occurred because participants may have placed all types of lies on an even playing field. It may not matter how serious a lie is, but knowing that they have been lied to may be enough to alter perceptions of the parents.

Types of lies told differed for parents, mother and father, as they told more white lies than any other type. This finding was not surprising given that we know parents lie to their children to influence their emotions (Heyman et al., 2009). The majority of participants also felt like this kind of deception had a positive effect on them and stated that they would be more likely to use this kind of deception with children than the other types. This was an interesting finding because even though there was a negative correlation with parental deception and relationship satisfaction, the participants rated white lies as the type of lie perceived as most told and that it had a positive effect. Perhaps white lies are positive and helpful when first told, but result in negative feelings once discovered that it was a lie. It may be possible that the realization that a mother or father lied outweighs the initial positive feelings of the statement. It is also possible that when participants were asked to report the frequency of parental deception, they were not thinking of or counting white lies. Participants may have only been considering blatant lies, or distortion.

Another possibility is that people may be unaware of the effects of white lies. This explanation may be more plausible based on the findings from Kaplar (2006), revealing that white lies were negatively correlated with romantic relationship satisfaction. Also, in romantic relationships, people who are willing to tell their significant others white lies prefer not to be told white lies (Hart et al., 2014). In relation to this study, perhaps children are willing to use white lies with their parents and therefore do not wish for their parents to use

them. This could provide an answer as to why participants would report white lies as having a positive effect but still resulting in a negative correlation with relationship satisfaction.

Lastly, telling little white lies has been shown to lead to more negative experiences such as leading a deceiver to lose something in order to benefit someone else (Argo & Shiv, 2012).

For example, a previous study showed that those who lied to their server at a restaurant were more likely to leave a larger tip to compensate for lying to the server (Argo & Shiv, 2012).

Thus, parents who tell white lies to their children may subsequently feel obligated to change their behaviors or interactions with their children in order to offset the lie.

In the current study, it was reported that parents encouraged honesty and punished lying behaviors. These findings parallel with other research in which it was discovered that parents promoted honesty with their children, but used lies to control their behavior and influence their emotions (Heyman et al., 2009). The dynamics between the parent/child relationship may elicit what is deemed as moral hypocrisy (Batson, Thompson, Seufferling, & Strongman, 1999; Batson & Thompson, 2001). It has been suggested that moral hypocrisy can be found in telling white lies within romantic relationships (Hart et al., 2014). Parents may send mixed messages by telling their children to not lie and then encourage them to lie to uphold social status. This may cause an internal dilemma within children when trying to decide whether or not to lie. They may want to protect someone's feelings, but feel guilt from lying. On the other hand, if they tell the truth, they may hurt someone's feelings and still acquire the feeling of guilt.

Implications

The current study has implications for areas of parenting and education. Prior research has indicated that parental autonomy support is pivotal in the development of autonomous self-regulation in high school students and in making the decision to pursue higher education (Niemic et al., 2006). Parent's involvement and autonomy support have also been found to be related to children's well-being and psychological health (Niemic et al., 2006). The results of the current study showed negative correlations between perceived deception from mother and mother's involvement, autonomy support and warmth as well as between perceived deception from father and father's involvement, autonomy support and warmth. Therefore, participants reported that as they perceived more deception from each parent they also perceived less involvement, autonomy support, and warmth from each parent. Therefore, parental deception appears to affect development of children's autonomous behaviors, well-being, and psychological health.

Parental deception may also be related to children's education as Niemic and colleagues discovered that parental support is related to high school students' decision to continue their education (Niemic et al., 2006). Prior research using the POPS (Robbins, 1994) showed that parental involvement and autonomy support has a relationship with children's school performance (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). Given the current findings, parents' use of deception may alter their child's performance in school.

In addition to parenting and education, there may also be implications in the area of communication. Lying can be used as a means of persuasion while communicating with others (Miller & Stiff, 1993). An example of this can be seen through Heyman et al.'s

research (2009; 2013) in which it was found parents do use deceptive communication to control, or influence, behavior and emotions of children. Findings from the current study suggest that this kind of communication results in less satisfaction within parent/child relationships.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to this study including the fact that participants were largely a university sample. Students from Angelo State University may not be representative of the general population. Most participants in this study reported that their mothers and fathers both had at least some college education. Those whose parents did not further their education may not have been aware of the effects of using deception and may have used deceptive communication more often than parents who attended a university or college. Researchers may be able to acquire a more representative sample if recruiting from university and non-university populations. College-aged individuals who are not attending a university or college may also have different views of deception due to a lack of education on its effects on relationships.

Another limitation is that participants of this study were not young children. By the time children reach college, they may have forgotten or begun to put less emphasis on lies their parents may have told them when they were younger. Perhaps younger children who still have the lies fresh on their mind would provide different results.

Future Research

Continuing this research is encouraged. Possible future studies could replicate this study with younger children to examine the differences or similarities compared to the

college students in this study. A similar study could also be done with parents to examine their perceptions of lying to their children and if it has any effect on the relationship from their perspective.

It may also be productive to conduct a similar study to look at possible benefits of parents lying to children. Then, researchers could examine the possible advantages and the disadvantages of lying to children to determine whether or not parents should use deception with their children or not.

Conclusions

This study promotes research within the area of parental deception. It remains an underdeveloped area at this time, but researchers are encouraged to continue expanding the field. This could be done by replicating this study with younger children and from the position of parents. In conclusion, parents are perceived to lie by college-aged children, often through white lies, and deception has a negative correlation with the satisfaction of parent/child relationships. Parents may want to consider the negative impact on the parent/child relationship found in this study before using deception with their children. Being aware that there may be negative implications to lying to a child may be helpful in building a satisfying relationship. Parents should also be aware that parental deception is negatively related to autonomy support which has been shown to be related to overall well-being of children and the likelihood of continuing higher education.

This study shows that there may be negative outcomes of parents deceiving their children, but more research should be done to discover any potential benefits of lying to children before a researcher determines whether or not parents should ever lie to their

children. It may be possible that parents use deception to protect children from difficult situations that they would not be able to understand at a young age. Using deception as protection may have more positive repercussions rather than negative. Research into this area may show that there are benefits that outweigh the negative effects of the discovery of the lie.

As stated above, more research is encouraged in this area. As of now, studies have shown that parents do lie to their children, how and why they lie, as well as the repercussions of the deception (Heyman et al., 2009; Heyman et al., 2013). Until more research has been conducted, parents should be more aware of repercussions of their deception and alter their communications appropriately.

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How would being told this kind of statement affect you?

1	2	3	4	5
Extremely Negative				Extremely Positive

How would you rate the honesty of this statement?

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Dishonest				Completely Honest

How likely would you be to use this type of communication with a child?

1	2	3	4	5
Not likely				Very Likely

If you were faced with a choice between your parents using this type of communication versus having a quarrel or an argument with you, which would you choose?

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely Argument				Definitely this Type of Communication

Scenario 2: One morning a child asks his mother if they can go to the park that afternoon. His mother tells him that they cannot go today because she has to fill out some paper work her job. The child is disappointed, but decides to play in his room. The mother did not have any paper work, but later got an email from her boss saying that he needed her to do some work for him.

Has your mother ever made this kind of statement to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

Has your father ever made this kind of statement to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

How often would your mother make this kind of statement?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

If you were faced with a choice between your parents using this type of communication versus having a quarrel or an argument with you, which would you choose?

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely	Argument			Definitely this
				Type of Communication

Scenario 5: A mother decides to leave her child with a babysitter while she buys them school supplies. Her child specifically asks for a certain kind of folder. The mother tells her child that she will find one and that she will be back soon. It takes her a while to find the folder, but she finally does and goes to check out. On her way out of the store, she runs into an old friend and decides to go get coffee with them. When she gets back home, her child is upset at how long the shopping trip took. The mother tells her child that she should be happy that she got the special folder because it took a long time to find.

Has your mother ever made this kind of statement to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

Has your father ever made this kind of statement to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

How often would your mother make this kind of statement?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

How often would your father make this kind of statement?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

In your opinion, how serious is this kind of statement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Extremely
Serious				Serious

How would being told this kind of statement affect you?

1	2	3	4	5
Extremely				Extremely
Negative				Positive

How would you rate the honesty of this statement?

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Dishonest				Completely Honest

How likely would you be to use this type of communication with a child?

1	2	3	4	5
Not likely				Very Likely

If you were faced with a choice between your parents using this type of communication versus having a quarrel or an argument with you, which would you choose?

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely Argument				Definitely this Type of Communication

Scenario 6: A child's favorite blanket is dirty and torn beyond repair. So, when the child is out with a friend, their mother throws the blanket out. Later, when the child returns, they are distraught because their blanket is missing. Their mother tells them that they must have taken it out with them and lost it.

Has your mother ever made this kind of statement to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

Has your father ever made this kind of statement to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

How often would your mother make this kind of statement?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

How often would your father make this kind of statement?

1	2	3	4	5
Never				Often

In your opinion, how serious is this kind of statement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Serious				Extremely Serious

How would being told this kind of statement affect you?

1	2	3	4	5
Extremely Negative				Extremely Positive

How would you rate the honesty of this statement?

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Dishonest				Completely Honest

How likely would you be to use this type of communication with a child?

1	2	3	4	5
Not likely				Very Likely

If you were faced with a choice between your parents using this type of communication versus having a quarrel or an argument with you, which would you choose?

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely Argument				Definitely this Type of Communication

Your parents told you to always be truthful and honest.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

You were punished for lying.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

You were rewarded for lying.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

VITA

Joscelyn Renee Cargill was born on January 1, 1994 in Hale Center, Texas. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with Highest University Honors from Angelo State University in 2015. She was inducted into Psi Chi in the spring of 2015 and also received the Outstanding Research award. She was listed in *Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges* in the spring of 2014. She was an active member of the Angelo State University Honors Program and served as an Emissary during the 2014-2015 school year. She also worked as a student assistant at the West Texas Collection in the Porter Henderson Library. Joscelyn served the community as an ambassador for the non-profit organization Give More HUGS. She headed a book drive held on campus that provided books to children in need from the region. Joscelyn will attend the Texas Tech University Graduate School in Lubbock, TX, to study clinical counseling. She plans to become a licensed professional counselor.

Joscelyn can be contacted via email at jcargill12@gmail.com