




Specialising in Personality Disorder and Complex Trauma

Honouring the Past, Transforming the Future

Do we need to know the truth?

Working with dishonesty, lying and hard-to-believe truths

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Disclaimers

- **This is a big topic!**
- This presentation will explore lying, dishonesty and deception in general terms for our consideration in the clinical work.
- This presentation is designed to get us thinking together, and this is just **one** stance to this complex human phenomenon.
- This presentation **will not** cover deception and lying in the forensic context due to its complexity.

2








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On lying, deception and inaccuracy...

Who amongst us has never lied?

Failure-to-correct

Half-Truth

Silence Self-censoring

Minimisation


White-lie Denial Self-editing Omission



Exaggeration

Inaccuracy

3





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Definitions of Lying and Deception


The traditional dictionary definition:




“to make a false statement with the intention to deceive”
(OED, 1989)

Most widely accepted definition:
(as identified by Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy)

*“a statement made by one **who does not believe it** with the intention that someone else shall be led to believe it”*

4







Clinical Diagnoses to be considered

Diagnoses including deception and lying:

- Pathological Lying
- Fictitious Disorder
- Munchausen's and Munchausen's bi-proxy
- Psychopathy and Sociopathy

And yet... there is a function to the deception in all of these disorders


5









Example: Targeting Inaccurate Expression

- About three months into therapy, therapist became aware that some of the reports from Ms K. were sounding inconsistent.
- Ensured response was therapeutic:
 - delayed initial reaction
 - sought supervision
 - remained non-judgemental
 - approached with genuineness & curiosity
- Ms K. very bluntly responded “oh yeah, I lied”.
- Explored the function of lying for her, and how this was impacting her life.

6











Example: Targeting Inaccurate Expression

Principles of targeting directly in session:

- Remain non-judgemental about the behaviour (everything is caused).
- Treat the relationship as a microcosm of the person's wider social circle and use it as a way of learning about relational impact, trust and repair.
- Collaboratively work on how to identify when this is occurring in sessions and contingencies to reinforce honesty.
- Ensure the power balance is not disrupted and that the relationship remains as equals, with agency over this change remaining as much as possible with the person.

7 









Functions of Deception and Dishonesty

Social Psychologists tend to categorise deception in four ways:

1. **Prosocial:** to protect someone; or benefit / help others; or be accepted by a group.
2. **Self-Enhancement:** to save face; avoid embarrassment / disapproval / punishment; to gain advantage in a situation.
3. **Selfish:** to protect oneself at the expense of another; to conceal a misdeed.
4. **Anti-social:** to hurt someone intentionally; get revenge or out of spite.

(Source: Iñiguez G, Govezensky T, Dunbar R, Kaski K, & Barrio RA, 2014).





8 

Honesty, Trust and the Therapeutic Relationship

- Trust and reciprocity are fundamental to the therapeutic relationship.
- Dishonesty and lying can destabilise the foundation of trust between two people.
- Trust is built on (and triggered by) the knowledge that the someone has connected to and understood the crucial things about you.
- Honesty is needed to *build* trust *and at the same time* trust is needed to *create social safety* in order to be honest.

9










Example: Searching for truth...

- Presented in session distressed, either alluding to or making serious allegations. Clinician supported her to make statements and reports to police.
- Reportedly person was known to her, but at point of giving this information to police, refused to proceed or lay charges.
- This was not the first time this had happened. Some of the team started questioning the veracity of the statement.

So... let's think about this from two perspectives...

10









Example: Searching for truth...

Perspective One:
She's telling the truth but doesn't want to lay charges:

- What are some possible reasons she may not want to lay charges or changed her mind?
- What is it to us if she chooses not to pursue?

11





Example: Searching for truth...



Perspective Two:
She lied about the allegations:

- What are some possible reasons she made such a serious allegation?
- What could be the function of this deception?
- What is it to us if she did?

12





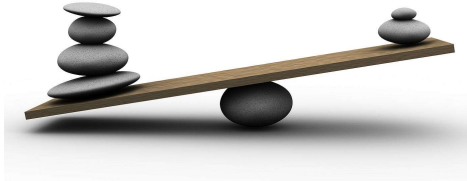




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Example: Searching for truth...



Working with polarisation in the team:

Determining the truth vs. Trusting her accounts



13




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Can we really determine truth from lie?




In research conducted to assess the accuracy of detecting deception, researchers found that:

- On average, people achieved 54% of lie-truth detection accuracy
 - 47% of lies were detected as deceptive
 - 61% of truth was detected as non-deceptive

“...individuals are at best inaccurate at deception detection...”

(Source: Bond, C.F. & DePaulo, B.M. 2006)

14


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The potential double-standard





Individuals are often pragmatic about one's own deceptions

And yet...

Individuals can become moralistic about other people's deception

(Source: Bond, C.F. & DePaulo, B.M. 2006)

15










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Example: Dropping the search...

- The more the team focused on determining the truth, or catching her out in a lie, the less the team was focused on her **formulation** and understanding that **everything is caused**.
- Refocused on developing mutual trust, honesty, and increasing self-awareness of emotions.
- The team came to a place of acceptance that:
 - Either these experiences were true and regularly occurring (which is heartbreaking).
 - Or there is a function to her using these allegations to help justify to her team the level of distress she experiences (and the distress is still valid).

16











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Example: Dropping the search...

Principles when you just don't know if it's true:

- Remain non-judgemental. Take nothing personally.
- **Show** your belief in and trust in their account, even whilst holding healthy scepticism (we ultimately do not know)
- Be aware of your body language and voice tone: all the little social signalling cues matter.
- Validate and normalise the emotional experiences.
- *If the person's account changes, reinforce honesty with validation of the valid, not punishment of past dishonesty.*


17 








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In Summary...

- All behaviour is caused and has a function.
- Remain non-judgemental at all times.
- When **inaccurate expression** is suspected approach with curiosity and non-defensive genuineness.
- When it is named, **avoid shaming** (normalise).
- You can have healthy scepticism whilst holding this with a **not-knowing stance**.
- Be mindful of the impact on the person if we focus on "catching them in a lie" or "digging for the truth".

18 



References

- Bond, C.F., & DePaulo, B.M. (2006). Accuracy of Deception Judgments. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(3), 214-234. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_2
- Iñiguez, G., Govezensky, T., Dunbar, R., Kaski, K., & Barrio R.A. (2014). Effects of deception in social networks. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Biological Sciences*; 281(1790). <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2014.1195>

19

