

Self-Deception to Deceive Others

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In the struggle to accrue resources, a strategy that has emerged over evolutionary time is deception. For example, people frequently lie to those on whom they are dependent to receive resources that might not otherwise be provided (Steinel & De Dreu 2004). Indeed, approximately half of people's daily deceptions are intended to gain a resource for the self (DePaulo & Kashy 1998). Such deceptive practices instigate a co-evolutionary struggle, because selection favors the deceived evolving new means of detection and the deceiver evolving new means of deception. Self-deception may be an important tool in this co-evolutionary struggle, by allowing deceivers to circumvent detection efforts (Trivers 1976; 1985; 2000; 2009).

In the case of deception among humans, there are at least four general categories of cues (beyond fact-finding itself) that people can use to detect deception in others: signs of nervousness, suppression, cognitive load, and idiosyncratic sources. Despite the availability of these cues, research on lie detection suggests that people perform poorly in detecting deception (e.g., Bond & DePaulo, 2006). Nevertheless, the literature on deception may have grossly underestimated people's ability to detect deception through reliance on studies where (a) the deception is of little or no consequence, (b) the deceived has no opportunity to cross-examine the deceiver, (c) deceiver and deceived are strangers to each other, and (d) there are no repeated interactions between deceiver and deceived. Thus, rates of deception detection may be substantially higher outside the laboratory than in it.

Because successful deception can lead to substantial benefits for deceivers while imposing costs on the deceived (DePaulo 2004), and because unsuccessful deception can lead to substantial costs imposed on deceivers by people they had endeavored to deceive (Boles et al. 2000; Schweitzer et al. 2006), those who would deceive are in a perennial

struggle against those who would not be deceived. We propose that self-deception offers an important tool in this co-evolutionary struggle by allowing the deceiver the opportunity to deceive without cognitive load, conscious suppression, increased nervousness, or idiosyncratic indicators that a deception is being perpetrated. That is, to the degree that people can convince themselves that a deception is true or that their motives are beyond reproach, they are no longer in a position in which they must knowingly deceive others. Thus, by deceiving themselves people can better deceive others because they no longer emit the cues of consciously mediated deception that could reveal their deceptive intent.

Self-deception in service of social advancement

Self-deception can also facilitate the deception of others in a more general sense, in that it can help us convince others that we are better (e.g., more moral, stronger, smarter) than we really are. Thus, the benefits of self-deception go beyond convincing others of specific lies, as self-deception can also help us accrue the more general social advantages of self-inflation or self-enhancement. To the degree that people can bolster their image of themselves to themselves and enhance their self-confidence, they increase the chances that they will be able to influence others and will be chosen for socially important roles. For this reason, self-enhancement should be ubiquitous and people should believe their own self-enhancing stories. Evidence supports both of these possibilities.

With regard to ubiquity, self-enhancing biases are evident in a wide variety of domains and strategies among a wide variety of peoples (for a review, see Alicke & Sedikides 2009). Even East Asians, who value humility and harmony over individualistic self-aggrandizement, show self-enhancement in their claims of the superiority of their collectivist qualities (Sedikides et al. 2003; 2005). Furthermore, like Westerners, East Asians

who are lower in depression and stress show this self-enhancement to a greater degree than those who have more psychological problems (Gaertner et al. 2008).

People not only self-enhance the world over, but the average person appears to be convinced that he or she is better than average (Alicke & Sedikides 2009). Most of the research on self-enhancement does not allow one to assess whether these aggrandizing tales are self-deceptive or only intended to be other-deceptive, but some of the variables used in this research support the idea that people believe their own self-enhancing stories. For example, in a pair of clever experiments Epley and Whitchurch (2008) photographed participants and then morphed these photographs to varying degrees with highly attractive or highly unattractive photos of same-sex individuals. Epley and Whitchurch then presented participants with these morphed or unaltered photos of themselves under different circumstances. In one experiment participants were asked to identify their actual photo in an array of actual and morphed photographs of themselves. Participants were more likely to choose their photo morphed 10% with the more attractive image than either their actual photo or their photo morphed with the unattractive image. This effect emerged to a similar degree with a photo of a close friend, but it did not emerge with a photo of a relative stranger. Because people often perceive their close friends in an overly positive light (Kenny & Kashy 1994), these findings suggest that people do not have a general bias to perceive people as more attractive than they really are, but rather a specific bias with regard to themselves and close others.

In a second study, participants were presented with an array of photos of other individuals, among which was a single photo of themselves (either their actual photo or a photo morphed 20% with the attractive or unattractive image). Epley and Whitchurch

(2008) found that people were able to locate photographs of themselves most rapidly if they were morphed with an attractive photo, at an intermediate speed if they were not morphed, and most slowly if they were morphed with an unattractive photo. These findings suggest that the enhanced photo most closely matches how people see themselves in their mind's eye, suggesting that they are deceiving themselves about their own attractiveness. Were they aware of this inaccuracy, they would be unlikely to claim the attractive photo to an experimenter who has the truth at her disposal, and they would be unlikely to locate their more attractive self more rapidly than their actual self.

Along with their self-enhancing stories, people also derogate others. Indeed, self-enhancement and other-derogation are opposite sides of the same coin, as people arrive at their self-image via social comparison (Festinger 1954). For this reason all self-evaluations are relative, and the self can be elevated above others either via self-enhancement or other-derogation. Like self-enhancement, derogation of others can also be an offensive tool used in the service of social advancement, as people often derogate their rivals when they are trying to impress (Buss & Dedden 1990; Schmitt & Buss 2001).

As with self-enhancement, derogation of others appears to be both ubiquitous and believed by the self. Some of the best examples of self-deceptive derogation of others can be found in the research of Fein and Spencer. In one of their studies (Fein & Spencer 1997), participants were told either that they did well or poorly on an IQ test. They were then given a chance to watch a videotape of a female student being interviewed for a job, and this individual was portrayed as either Jewish or Christian via her ostensible surname and a photo showing her wearing a Jewish star or a cross. When participants watched the

individual they believed was Christian, their ratings of her were not influenced by whether they had ostensibly failed the IQ test. In contrast, when participants thought they were watching a Jewish woman, their ratings were influenced by how well they had done on the IQ test. Those who thought they had done well showed no sign of prejudice. Those who thought they had done poorly, however, rated the Jewish woman negatively. Furthermore, these individuals also showed a rebound in self-esteem compared to people who thought they had failed but watched the Christian woman. These findings suggest that people responded to failing an IQ test by denigrating Jews. This denigration appears to have been believed by these individuals, because the more they derogated her, the better they felt about themselves. Furthermore, people appeared to have objective information about this woman at their disposal, given that they did not rate her negatively when she was portrayed as Christian or when they had not ostensibly failed the test.

The research of Fein and Spencer (1997) suggests that people do not derogate others only to look better in other people's eyes. Rather, they appear to be self-deceptively making themselves look better in their own eyes as well. This interpretation is corroborated by the findings of their second experiment, in which participants who had reflected on their important values (a process that affirms a sense of self-worth) evaluated the Jewish woman the same as they rated the Christian woman even after failure. This sort of threat-induced derogation of others documented by Fein and Spencer (1997) can also take place outside of awareness (Spencer et al. 1998), a finding that further suggests that people truly believe their negative impressions of others when they are led to feel bad about themselves. Because downward social comparison is self-enhancing (Wills 1981), these findings can be considered the flip-side of the bias documented by Epley and Whitchurch

(2008). Thus, it appears that by deceiving themselves about their own positive qualities and the negative qualities of others, people are able to display greater confidence than they might otherwise feel, thereby enabling them to advance socially and materially.

If deceiving others can be facilitated by self-deception, the question then arises about how people are able to deceive the self. The answer to this question can be found in a variety of information processing biases that favor welcome over unwelcome information.

Varieties of self-deception

Amount of searching. There are many situations in daily life in which people avoid further information search because they may encounter information that is incompatible with their goals or desires. For example, on the trivial end of the continuum, some people avoid checking alternative products after they have made a purchase that cannot be undone (Olson & Zanna 1979). On the more important end of the continuum, some people avoid AIDS testing out of concern that they might get a result that they do not want to hear, particularly if they believe the disease is untreatable (Dawson et al. 2006; Lerman et al. 2002). This sort of self-deceptive information avoidance can be seen in the aphorism, “What I don’t know can’t hurt me.” Although a moment’s reflection reveals the fallacy of this statement, it is nonetheless psychologically compelling.

Similar sorts of biased information search can be seen in laboratory studies. Perhaps the clearest examples can be found in research by Ditto and colleagues (e.g., Ditto & Lopez 1992; Ditto et al. 2003), in which people are confronted with the possibility that they might have a proclivity for a pancreatic disorder. In these studies people expose a test strip to their saliva and are then led to believe that color change is an indicator of either a positive or negative health prognosis. Ditto and Lopez (1992) found that when people are

led to believe that color change is a good thing, they wait more than 60% longer for the test strip to change color than when they believe color change is a bad thing. Studies such as these suggest that information search can be biased in the amount of information gathered even when people are unsure what they will encounter next. Thus, it appears that people sometimes do not tell themselves the whole truth if a partial truth appears likely to be preferable.

Selective searching. Information search can also be biased in the type of information gathered. Although one never knows for sure what lies around the next corner, some corners are more likely to yield welcome information than others. Thus, politically liberal people might choose the *New York Times* as their information source, whereas politically conservative individuals might choose Fox News (Frey 1986). In such a manner, people can be relatively confident that the brunt of the information they gather will be consistent with their worldview, even if they do not know what tomorrow's headlines will bring.

Laboratory studies have examined this sort of biased information search, in part by assessing the conditions under which people are interested in learning negative information about themselves. One conclusion from this research is that the better people feel about themselves, the more willing they are to face criticism. For example, Trope and Neter (1994) told participants that they were going to take a social sensitivity test and asked whether they would like feedback on their assets or liabilities. When participants had just ostensibly failed an unrelated spatial abilities test, or had not taken the test, they showed a slight preference for feedback on their assets. In contrast, when bolstered by the experience of ostensibly having performed very well on the spatial abilities test, participants were more interested in learning about their liabilities, presumably in service of self-

improvement. In a related vein, Armitage et al. (2008) demonstrated that smokers were more likely to take an antismoking leaflet if they had been self-affirmed by reflecting on their prior acts of kindness. These data suggest that people tend to search for welcome information but are capable of searching for unwelcome information when their self-enhancement goals have been met. Thus, it appears that people are often able to avoid telling themselves the whole truth by searching out those bits of truth that they want to hear, but they are also willing to face uncomfortable truths when feeling secure (Albaracín & Mitchell 2004; Kumashiro & Sedikides 2005).

Selective attention. When information is perceptually available and need not be actively discovered, people can still bias their encoding by selectively attending to aspects of the available information that they would prefer to be true. For example, if a person is at a dinner party where one conversation concerns the dangers of smoking and the other concerns the dangers of alcohol, she can choose to attend to one conversation or the other and may do so selectively if she is a smoker or a drinker. In such a case she would likely be aware of the general tone of the information she is choosing not to gather, but by not attending to one of the conversations, she could avoid learning details that she may not want to know.

This sort of effect has been documented in a variety of different types of experiments. For example, in a study of proactive coping, Wilson et al. (2004) convinced participants that they might be chosen or were highly unlikely to be chosen for a hypothetical date. When participants believed they might be chosen, they spent slightly more time looking at positive than negative information about their potential partner. In contrast, when they believed that they were highly unlikely to be chosen, they spent more time looking at

negative information about their potential partner. Thus, when people faced almost certain disappointment, they directed their attention to information that will make their upcoming rejection more palatable.

Although measures such as reading time provide a good indicator of the amount of information processing, attention can be assessed more directly. Eye-tracking studies provide some of the clearest evidence of where people direct their attention, and such studies have also shown that people are often strategic in their attentional decisions (Isaacowitz 2006). For example, older adults look toward positive stimuli and away from negative stimuli when in a bad mood (Isaacowitz et al. 2008). This attentional bias clearly implicates partial awareness, as some encoding of the negative must take place for preferential attention to be directed toward the positive. This effect did not emerge among younger adults, suggesting that older adults are more likely than younger adults to rely on selective attention for mood repair. In a case such as this, it appears that older adults sacrifice informational content in service of emotional goals. This strategy might be sensible for older adults who have greater immune challenges than their younger counterparts and thus reap greater benefits from maintaining happiness. As with the strategy of ending information search early, selective attention can allow people to avoid telling themselves the whole truth.

Biased interpretation: Despite the strategies just described for avoiding unwelcome information, there remain a variety of circumstances in which such information is nevertheless faithfully encoded. Under such circumstances, unwelcome information can still be dismissed through biased interpretation of attitude-consistent and attitude-inconsistent information. In the classic study of this phenomenon (Lord et al. 1979), people who were

preselected for their strong attitudes on both sides of the capital punishment debate were exposed to a mixed bag of information about the efficacy of capital punishment. Some of the data with which they were presented suggested that capital punishment was an effective crime deterrent, whereas other data suggested that it was not. Given that the findings were new to participants, logic would suggest that they would coalesce at least to some degree in their attitudes. In contrast, people ended the experiment more polarized than they began it.

Lord et al. (1979) discovered that this attitude polarization was a product of biased interpretation of the data. People who were in favor of capital punishment tended to accept the data as sound that supported capital punishment but reject the data as flawed that opposed capital punishment. Those who were against capital punishment showed the opposite pattern. This selective skepticism appears to be self-deceptive, as it is attenuated or eliminated by self-affirmation (Cohen et al. 2000; Reed & Aspinwall 1998) and cognitive load (Ditto et al. 1998). These findings suggest that people rely on their motivational and mental resources to be differentially skeptical. Thus, selective skepticism appears to be a form of self-deception rather than simply an objective devaluation of new information to the degree that it is inconsistent with a large body of prior experience (see also, Westen et al. 2006).

As a consequence of this selective skepticism, people are able to encounter a mixed bag of evidence but nevertheless walk away with their original beliefs intact and potentially even strengthened. Because they are unaware that a person with a contrary position would show the opposite pattern of acceptance and rejection, they are able to convince themselves that the data support their viewpoint. Thus, it seems that by relying on their

considerable powers of skepticism only when information is uncongenial, people are able to prevent themselves from learning the whole truth.

Misremembering: Even if people attend to unwanted information, and even if they accept it at the time of encoding, this does not guarantee that they will be able to retrieve it later. Rather, information that is inconsistent with their preferences may simply be forgotten or misremembered later as preference-consistent or neutral. Thus, a person might have great memory for the details of his victory in the championship tennis match but very poor memory for the time he lost badly. Indeed, this latter memory might also be distorted to implicate his doubles partner or the unusual talents of his opponent. There is evidence to support such a possibility.

First, when people put effort into self-improvement but the improvement does not materialize, they can manufacture the gains they wish they had made by misremembering how they used to be. For example, Conway and Ross (1984) demonstrated that after taking a study skills class, people misremembered their prior study skills as lower than they rated them originally, thereby supporting their belief that their skills have improved. They then later misremembered their subsequent course performance as better than it was to maintain the fiction of improvement. Through processes such as these, people are able to purge their memories of inconvenient truths, thereby preventing themselves from knowing the whole truth, even if they accurately encoded it in the first instance.

Health information can be similarly distorted in memory (Croyle et al. 2006). In Croyle et al.'s research, participants were given cholesterol screening, and 1, 3, or 6 months later tested for their memory of their results. Respondents showed highly accurate memory of their risk category (89% correctly recalled this information), and this accura-

cy did not decay over 6 months. Nevertheless, even in the context of this apparently easy memory task, respondents were more than twice as likely to recall their cholesterol as being lower rather than higher than it really was.

This sort of memory bias can also be seen in recollection of daily experiences, whereby people have better recall of their own good than bad behavior but do not show this bias in their recall of the behaviors of others (D'Argembeau & Van der Linden 2008). This self-enhancing recall bias is also eliminated by information that bolsters people's self-image (in this case, doing well on a test; Green, Sedikides & Gregg 2008). Thus, people's memories appear to be self-enhancing, sometimes containing information that is biased to be consistent with preferences and sometimes just failing to contain the whole truth.

Rationalization: Even if one's prior misdeeds are accurately recalled by self and others, it is still possible to avoid telling oneself the whole truth by reconstructing or rationalizing the motives behind the original behavior to make it more socially acceptable. For example, after eating a second helping of cake that leaves none for those who have not yet had dessert, a person could explain that he had not noticed that there was no other cake, or that he thought more cakes were available elsewhere. Here it is not memory of the misdeed that is critical, but interpretation of the motive that underlies that deed.

Again, laboratory evidence supports this sort of rationalization process. For example, von Hippel et al. (2005) demonstrated that when cheating could be cast as unintentional, people who showed a self-serving bias in another domain were more likely to cheat, but when cheating was clearly intentional, self-serving individuals were no more likely to cheat than others. These data suggest that some types of self-serving biases involve rationalization processes that are also common to some types of cheating. Indeed, people also

cheat more when they are told that free will is just an illusion (Vohs & Schooler 2007), suggesting that they rationalize their cheating in these circumstances as caused by life situations rather than their own internal qualities.

More direct evidence for this sort of rationalization can be found in the hypocrisy research of Valdesolo and DeSteno (2008). In their study participants were given the opportunity to (a) choose whether to give themselves or another individual an onerous task or (b) randomly assign the onerous task to self versus other. When given this opportunity, nearly all participants chose to give the onerous task to the other participant rather than rely on random assignment. Observers were not asked to make the choice themselves but rather watched a confederate make this same self-serving choice. When asked how fair the choice was, observers rated the act of choosing rather than relying on random assignment as less fair than it was rated by those who had actually made this choice. This hypocrisy in self-ratings shown by those who chose to assign the onerous task to another was eliminated by cognitive load, suggesting that participants have potential awareness of the unfairness underlying their judgments.

Research on misattribution reveals evidence of similar rationalization processes. A classic example can be found in research on avoidance of disabled people by Snyder et al. (1979). In Snyder et al.'s experiment participants chose a seat from two options – one next to a person who was disabled and one next to a person who was not disabled. In front of each empty seat there was a television, and the two televisions sometimes showed the same program and sometimes a different program. Snyder et al. (1979) found that when the televisions were showing the same program, the majority of participants sat next to the disabled person, presumably to demonstrate to self and other that they were

not prejudiced against disabled people. In contrast, when the televisions were showing different programs, the majority sat away from the disabled person. These data show that people only avoided the disabled person when they could rationalize their behavior as caused by external factors.

Similar effects have been documented in differential helping rates for African versus white Americans, with a meta-analysis showing that whites are less likely to help African Americans than fellow whites, but only when there are actual situational impediments to helping, such as distance or risk (Saucier et al. 2005). When people cannot attribute their non-helping to such situational factors, they apparently feel compelled to help African Americans at equal rates to whites. In cases such as these, people are not denying or misremembering their cheating, self-serving choices, avoidance, or lack of helping. Rather, they are denying the socially undesirable motives that appear to underlie their behaviors by rationalizing their actions as the product of external forces.

Convincing the self that a lie is true: The classic form of self-deception is convincing oneself that a lie is true. This sort of self-deception can be difficult to verify, as it is difficult to know if the person believes the lie that they are telling others, given that situations that motivate lying to the self typically motivate lying to others. Nevertheless, there are examples of experiments in which this sort of process has been shown. Most of these examples rely on research paradigms in which the experimenter knows the truth, so the participant has little or nothing to gain interpersonally by lying and often has much to lose, given that lying makes the individual look vain, foolish, or deceptive.

An example of this sort of self-deception can be found in research on perceptions of control. When people are deprived of control they often endeavor to regain a sense of

control. In a self-deceptive example of this effect, Whitson and Galinsky (2008) found that when people are led to feel low levels of personal control, they perceive illusory patterns in random configurations and are more likely to endorse conspiracy theories to explain co-occurring world events. Importantly, these effects did not emerge when people had self-affirmed, suggesting that people have the potential to be aware of the absence of patterns and conspiracies. Similar findings have been documented by Kay et al. (2008), who argue that beliefs in a controlling God and a strong government serve people's need for control. Consistent with their reasoning, differences in the percentage of people who believe in God between countries can be predicted by the insecurities of existence within countries (e.g., availability of health care, food, and housing), with increased insecurity associated with increased religiosity (Norris & Inglehart 2004). Such a finding suggests the possibility of self-deception on a worldwide scale.

Another example of individuals deceiving themselves can be found in the research of Epley and Whitchurch (2008) reviewed earlier, in which people more rapidly located photos of themselves when the photo had been morphed to be more attractive than when the photo was unaltered. This finding suggests that people's self-image is more attractive than their actual one, as the enhanced self provides a quicker match to their internal template than the actual self. Finally, experiments in cognitive dissonance also suggest that people are facile at lying to others and then coming to believe their own lies. For example, when they believe that they have freely chosen to tell another person that a tedious task is actually interesting, people soon believe that the task really is interesting (Festinger & Carlsmith 1959), and again this effect is eliminated by self-affirmation (Steele & Liu 1983).

Preliminary Evidence for Self-Deception to Deceive Others

If these information-processing biases that favor welcome over unwelcome information have evolved to facilitate deception of others, then it should also be the case that people show these biases when they endeavor to deceive someone else. In this final section of the chapter we describe some of the preliminary evidence we have gathered in support of this possibility. In these experiments we relied on the encoding bias documented by Ditto and his colleagues as our indicator of self-deception, in which people gather more information when early returns are unwelcome but stop gathering information when early returns are welcome.

As an initial test of the possibility that people deceive themselves in their efforts to deceive others (Smith, von Hippel, & Trivers, 2011), participants were presented with a scenario in which they were to imagine that they were human resource officers at a local company. In two of the conditions their task was to report on abuse of employee privileges, such as when people take sick leave but are not really sick. Half of the participants in these conditions read about a very likeable colleague who appeared to have potentially abused her sick leave entitlements, and half read about a very dislikeable colleague who appeared to have potentially abused her sick leave entitlements. Participants were asked to imagine that they were in the coffee room when this colleague mentioned to another person how she had the best day yesterday (when she was known to have called in sick). Participants were then asked whether they would leave the room prior to her describing why her day was so good, or whether they would stay and listen to the conversation. In another control condition participants also imagined a highly likeable colleague who made the same statement, but this time their HR responsibilities only involved reporting

on abuse of internet privileges. Participants were significantly more likely to state that they would leave the room prior to their colleague describing her great day when they liked her and would potentially have to report on her abuse of entitlements than when they did not like her and would have to report on her abuse of entitlements and when they liked her but only reported on internet abuse. Furthermore, when asked to describe why they would leave, most of the participants noted that by avoiding the unwanted information they would be better placed to claim to their boss that their likeable colleague had not abused her sick leave entitlements.

These results suggest a self-conscious variety of self-deception, whereby people knowingly bias the manner in which they expose themselves to wanted and unwanted information to enhance their ability to persuade others of their preferred position. It is not clear from these results, however, whether this form of self-deception actually helps the self-deceiver in any way. To provide a test of this possibility, Smith et al. (2011) conducted a follow-up study in which all participants were told about the same likeable colleague and all participants were told that their task is to report on abuse of employee entitlements. After this information was provided and participants were told that their likeable colleague had a great day when she was on sick leave, they were again asked if they would stay or leave before she explained why her day was so good. Participants indicated whether they would stay or go and were then were told to imagine that before they could do anything the likeable colleague either left herself to answer her cell phone or blurted out that she spent an active day at the beach. Participants were then asked to indicate whether they would cover for her when they later met the boss or whether they would indicate that she abused her sick leave privileges. Finally, they were asked to imagine that

their boss later learned that she had abused sick leave privileges, and were asked to indicate how much trouble they would be in themselves had they chosen to cover for her.

About two thirds of the participants indicated that they would choose to stay to hear what the likeable colleague said and one third indicated that they would leave and avoid the information. Of those who chose to stay and then learned that the likeable colleague had enjoyed a day at the beach, about half chose to report her and half did not. Of those who chose to leave, virtually none reported her when they learned that she had in fact enjoyed a day at the beach. These data suggest that there are three types of participants in this sample: people who do not want to turn in their colleague and thus avoid the possibility that she broke the rules, people who do not want to turn in their colleague but gather the facts despite their unwillingness to report them, and people who will turn in their colleague if the evidence indicates she broke the rules.

When Smith et al. then compared how much trouble these different types of participants believed they would be in if they did cover for her and the boss discovered that she had abused sick leave, they found differences between all the groups. Not surprisingly, people who chose to turn in their colleague reported that they thought they would get in the most trouble if they covered for her and her abuse were later discovered. More interestingly, however, people who tried to avoid the information by leaving (i.e., the self-deceivers) thought they would get in more trouble if they heard their likeable colleague blurt out her day's activities and then covered for her compared to people who had chosen to stay but still covered for her after learning of her entitlement abuse. No such difference emerged between the leavers and stayers when Michelle never described her day, and left to answer her cell phone.

These data suggest that self-deceivers believe they will minimize retribution by preventing themselves from learning potentially bad news, whereas non-self-deceivers apparently believe they can avoid retribution even in the face of potentially bad news. Nevertheless, because the results are based on self-report and hypothetical situations, they are limited in what they can tell us about actual human behavior. In an effort to address this shortcoming, Smith et al. (2011) conducted a third experiment to examine behavioral evidence for information avoidance in the pursuit of deception.

In Smith et al.'s third experiment participants were brought to the laboratory and told that their task was to convince someone else that a soft drink either contained or did not contain sugar. Participants were further told that they would have the opportunity to test the soft drink prior to their persuasive efforts by dipping a test strip into it. Participants were told that the test strip is sugar sensitive, although in fact it was inert and thus never changed colors. As a consequence, those participants whose task it was to convince the person that the soft drink contained sugar would be telling the truth if the test strip changed colors and participants whose task it was to convince the person that the soft drink contained artificial sweetener would be telling the truth if the test strip did not change colors.

If people gather information in a biased fashion to support the claim they are about to make, then they should wait longer for the test strip to change colors when their task is to convince the person that the soft drink contains sugar than when their task is to convince the person that the soft drink contains artificial sweetener. Consistent with this possibility, participants waited over 60% longer when color change would be consistent with their upcoming claims than when it would be inconsistent with the upcoming claims. These

data suggest that people bias their information gathering to deceive others in the exact same manner (and even to the same magnitude) as they do when their task is ostensibly to deceive themselves. It now remains to be seen whether this behavioral avoidance also has beneficial consequences for avoiders.

Conclusions

There is a long history of treating self-deception in social psychology as if it is a defensive mechanism, designed to protect the individual from an imperfect world. In contrast to this tradition, we have argued that self-deception is an offensive strategy, intended to facilitate the deception of others. This deception can be about something specific, such as the behavior of a likeable colleague or whether a soft drink contains sugar, and this deception can be very general, such as whether one is likeable, attractive, trustworthy, or moral. In both cases, self-deception might be better conceived as a strategy intended to influence the information available to others rather than as a strategy intended to protect the self.

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