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To tell the truth sometimes it pays to lie

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Abstract

Thou shalt not lie. Kant famously said one must always tell the truth. Even with a murderer at the door one cannot lie. Probably no one else holds this extreme view. There are times a lie is appropriate, ethical. When might it be permissible to lie? Are there times when it might be not only OK to lie but be appropriate to lie? But others remind us that a business cannot succeed in the long run by lying, In education we help people learn how to make effective and ethical choices. Specific examples and mini-cases related to these issues help get classroom or online conversations started. Question are discussed, usually in dyads. The discussion does not end here. Our classroom experiences and feedback from students convinces us: to tell the truth, sometimes it pays to lie.

To tell the truth sometimes it pays to lie

Business educators provide tools managers need to make choices. In business education we teach, we help people learn, how to make decisions, including decisions with ethical implications (Gibbons et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2016). In our classes we use cases and scenarios. One principle that appears in many of these cases involves whether or not to lie.

We learned in school that the famous and wise philosopher Immanuel Kant bluntly stated that it is always wrong to lie. Once a person even considers possible exceptions, "that person is already potentially a liar" (Kant, 1949 [1799] p. 349). Kant was not the last to say do not lie and was certainly not the first. The Judeo-Christian tradition includes as one of the Ten Commandments "thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" which some newer versions reword as "you must not tell lies…" (Exodus 20:16, New Century Version). Why not lie? Even setting the issue of morality aside, forgetting right and wrong, there are many who warn against lying. Thomas Becker says it bluntly: "a business cannot, in the long run, succeed by lying" (Becker, 1998, p. 159). This is a business education issue.

We must not tell lies. This sounds reasonable but the story is more complex than this. I show that sometimes lying is appropriate, even ethical. To tell the truth, sometimes it pays to lie. While everyone from Becker to the Ten Commandments tell us "thou shalt not bear false witness," lying persists. The following pages show that lying is sometimes correct in society and at times in business. Where and when? These questions deserve exploration. This essay helps move forward the discussion as follows, in overlapping sections: (1) what is lying and what is meant by lying in this paper, (2) how to determine whether and when lying might be ethical, and (3) limitations of this analysis and suggestions for further study.

The title of this paper includes ambiguous wording. A literal translation of the phrase above "to tell the truth, sometimes it pays to lie" would not convey the meaning of the sentence. The words "to tell the truth" often means the same as "actually" or "as far as I know" and are not necessarily related to truthfulness. One dictionary says "to tell the truth" idiomatically can mean "actually" (Free Dictionary, 2019). For example, the phrase "to tell the truth we never did find a good Mexican restaurant last night but we did find a great Chinese restaurant" has nothing to do with truth. The wording means "actually." In popular usage in English, the phrase to tell the truth may bring memories of a television show that ran on a US TV network from 1956 to 1981, then restarted in 2001 and again in 2006. Meanwhile, the whole idea of "TV networks" and "TV shows" has changed over the years, but the issues suggested in that American television entertainment program series remain. Today social media also looks at truth and lying. The same topic is definitely a subject for scholarly attention as well. A search in Google Scholar for "lying in business" in quotes brings up 109 entries. A search for lying in business not in quotes shows 950,000 entries. Even though Google Scholar sometimes double counts and sometimes misses things, the entries that are shown illustrate significant, current, interest in the topic of lying.

The second part, "pays to lie," also is often not taken literally word for word. "It pays to lie" might have nothing to do with paying or with money. "It pays to" is a slang phrase suggesting that something can be beneficial, necessary, and/or required (Hwang & Kim, 2009; 2017). The use of ambiguous words to start this discussion helps introduce the complex philosophical issue of lying. If anyone has the misfortune of being asked to translate this essay from English into another language she or he might be driven nuts when trying to translate "it pays." And the term "driven nuts" is also not directly translatable. This topic of lying is important and is receiving a lot of attention in society (Bhattacharjee, 2017; Lundquist et al., 2009) and in business (Eenkhoord & Graafland, 2011). The topic is also timely. A person who is caught lying once can never again regain 100% credibility. Without credibility one can not gain full trust and trust is fundamental to all interpersonal and inter-organizational interactions. Without trust, reputation can never be the same. This small essay contributes to the understanding of one component within this big picture. Better understanding of lying can help us better understand trust and better manage reputation, both important in business and society.

Lying occurs in life and in business. But what exactly do we mean by lying? Might it be appropriate to lie? Might there be cases where the ethical thing to do would be to lie? If so how to decide when to lie? What ethical decision-making criteria can help one decide? What theories of ethics can guide a person? Do theories yield similar advice? These questions are very broad and volumes have been written on related areas. I focus narrowly in this paper leaving much work for scholars and practitioners who will follow.

What is lying and what do i mean by the word lying?

In this essay to lie is to intentionally deceive someone by using words the speaker knows to be untrue. The definition by Pruss conveys much the same meaning: sincerely asserting what you do not believe (2012). Although this is the definition used here it is not the only accepted definition. Indeed there are hundreds of articles and books which attempt to define lying (Carson, 1988; Gaspar et al., 2019; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2017; Jones, 1986). One very interesting scholarly article on "lying in everyday life" gives examples of different categories of lies (See appendix 3, taken from DePaulo et al., 1996). But that same article inadvertently shows how complex the topic is. In the very first paragraph various perspectives on "lying" are provided. But the second paragraph of that paper, summarizing the first paragraph, discusses the widely varying "pronouncements about deceit" (p. 979). The topic "lying" now becomes the topic "deceit." While both deserve study and analysis, they are not identical.

In this paper I look at lying by individuals, not at honesty, not at deceit. There are times when individuals intentionally mislead others by saying nothing, or by saying something that is truthful but misleading. One can mislead others by using body language. We do not discuss these "non-lying" methods to mislead, reserving those for future study. I also

exclude statements one believes to be true but are in fact false. In 2018 reports about US Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh there were claims that Kavanaugh lied even in Senate hearings (Feller, 2018). But even if the allegations about misconduct including teen-age drinking were true, it is possible that Kavanaugh might not remember those incidents. Kavanaugh might now three decades later be stating what he remembers. Although some witnesses said he was not telling the truth, Kavanaugh may have believed what he said. He may not think he was lying. If he believed he was telling the truth, by my definition he was not lying. There are those who observe the same Senate hearings and conclude that the main Kavanaugh accuser, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, "lied" (MediaBuster, 2018). But again here, even if some of Dr. Ford's statements are shown to be untrue, she may have stated them believing they were true. Thus, by my definition, they would not be lies. Having watched parts of the testimony of both parties, I can imagine that both believed they were telling the truth. Thus, it is possible that neither was lying. Lying is the *conscious stating as fact something a person knows to be untrue*.

There is no accepted "theory of lying" but "the traditional view of lying holds that this phenomenon involves two central components: stating what one does not believe oneself and doing so with the intention to deceive" (Lackey, 2013, p. 236). Without that second part, most but not all agree there is no lying. Arguments continue as to the minimum requirements for a statement to be classified as a lie. In the examples relating to US Supreme Court Justice Brett Cavanaugh above the first part may be missing. If one believes she or he is telling the truth that is not lying. This may help reclassify many of the "lies" of US President Donald Trump.

Lying is a popular area of discussion in the years following the 2016 US Presidential election. In one well-publicized case President Trump said that the size of the crowd at his inauguration was much larger than reported by the media. This might fit into the third category, statistics, from the popular phrase "lies, damned lies, and statistics." Trump was widely accused of lying about the numbers in attendance. When confronted with proof Trump's statistics were incorrect, his White House counsel Kellyanne Conway called these exaggerations not lies but "alternative facts" (McGranahan, 2017). One academic clearly agrees with those who say Trump lies too much: "it has long been a truism that politicians lie, but with the entry of Donald Trump into the US political domain, the frequency, degree, and impact of lying in politics are now unprecedented" (McGranahan, 2017, p. 243). Some in the news media also focus on Trump's statistics and conclude that:

> Trump is different. When he is caught lying, he will often try to discredit people telling the truth, be they judges, scientists, F.B.I. or C.I.A. officials, journalists or members of Congress. Trump is trying to make truth irrelevant. It is extremely damaging to democracy, and it's not an accident. It's core to his political strategy (Leonhardt, Philbrick, & Thompson, 2017, p.1).

However, many of Trump's "lies" are not "lies" as defined in this paper. Trump often says whatever he thinks even when he has no idea what the truth is. Trump may think he is telling the truth (Knight & Tsoukas, 2019). In this analysis which follows I look only at *lying*.

By limiting our focus I defer study on many interesting behaviors. There are scholars looking at the imprecise and ambiguous word "paltering" (Rogers et al., 2017). Sometimes the word paltering (which the English language probably does not need) means telling the truth to mislead, but other times the term is used more broadly. The word paltering is sometimes used as a synonym for misleading, which then could include lying. There are other ways a person can communicate with intention to mislead also. All these areas deserve attention, as honesty and integrity are seen as an essential in business transactions. In this paper I do not look at integrity in business, as important as that is (Bauman, 2013). Nor do I look at honesty (Cable & Kay, 2011). I do not look at trust (Alm, 2015; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015; McAllister, 1997; Shapiro, 1987). I do not look at truth, which according to pragmatists "cannot be absolute; it is always provisional and instrumental" (Jacobs, 2004, p. 218). I look only at one small component of this huge complex, lying.

Types of lying and where might one encounter lying

American humorist Mark Twain used the "phrase lies, damned lies, and statistics." Twain did not claim that he originated the phrase, and apparently the words have been around for a long time (Martin, 2018). This categorization scheme appears widely and is commonly used. Indeed, the use of statistics to lie is noteworthy. President Trump's fuzzy statistics are mentioned above and were discussed again and again as Covid-19 spread across America (Balog-Way & McComas, 2020; Barrios & Hochberg, 2020). Some academics criticize other academics for drawing incorrect conclusions based on faulty statistics or misuse or misinterpretation of possibly correct statistics (Hilbert, 2011).

Leaving numbers aside, a look at the literature shows numerous ways to categorize lies. Western society uses a number of euphemisms to describe "harmless" or "insignificant" lies. The term white lies is common (Erat & Gneezy, 2011). Winston Churchill used the words "terminological inexactitude" (Fisher & Lovell, 2009, p. 72). The phrase "economical with the truth" suggests misleading others at a threshold lower than actually telling lies. Some make a distinction between "self-oriented" and "other oriented" lies (DePaulo et al., 1996). One similar but not identical categorization looks at who might *benefit*, self or others, or perhaps both (Erat & Gneezy, 2011). A "benevolent falsehood" would often be seen positively. A student might lie to benefit self: copy another student's paper or take passages or take entire papers from the web and state "I declare that all materials included in this report is the end result of my own work." That statement is required in my university but some students signing that statement are lying.

Sometimes a student will lie to help others. Many universities have various attendance tracking systems. In one university students vote during a class on various issues using a "Personal Response System," a PRS device. The actual device which looks like a TV remote is issued to each student at the beginning of the semester. Various websites used by academics in the 2020s allow a student to vote on issues in a mobile phone using Mentimeter (Rudolph, 2018). An issue is discussed in class and on conclusion of the topic students select answer A or B or C or D. Votes can be tallied and shown to the class, a great instructional tool. But at my prior university the same PRS device also tracked attendance. A professor at that university found one student carrying 5 PRS devices, allowing 4 students to be counted as attending while not in class. My university has a system to track student attendance. Students use their chip-enhanced university ID cards to "tap in" on a device on the wall by the door upon entering the class and "tap out" when class is over. In a sad but true recent case, one very very short student entered the classroom and had to jump a bit to reach the tap-in device on the wall by the door. She then repeated the jump four more times, seen by everyone in the room, helping four absent friends "lie."

Sometimes in business lies are told to benefit the individual liar. The business misconduct literature is full of cases where executives used lies to enrich themselves. But sometimes people in business lie "for the good of the business." That argument sometimes goes, "many jobs are at stake here, a temporary adjustment of earnings will be to the benefit of all" (Loomis et al., 1999). For years, some business executives have lied about political contributions, believing the nation needed the "right" political candidate to win (Epstein, 1976).

In a classic paper in Harvard Business Review, Albert Carr (1968) asked, "is business bluffing ethical?" Carr does not clearly answer the question but does make a convincing case that "bluffing," lying, is common in some situations. Carr described his Harvard course on negotiations, and the publicity which followed embarrassed Harvard (Seligmann, 1979). Even today that article provokes strong reactions (Eabrasu, 2018).

An immense literature exists on lying for the greater good and lying to benefit oneself. But even "lying to benefit self" can be complex. Sometimes lies are told not for financial gain but to manage self-identity. Leavitt and Sluss (2015) convincingly show that lying can be a socially motivated behavioral response to identity threats. I take this line of thinking one step further. I show that lying can be socially motivated even in instances not directly related to protection of identity. Lying can be, purely and simply, altruistic. Lying can occur for the sole or primary purpose of helping another. This can occur frequently thus can be considered an element of individual ethics. Altruistic lying can occur in society, and in business. Whether and under what conditions altruistic lying might be unethical and when it might be seen as ethical has been discussed for centuries (Kant, 1949, original 1799) but remains open for discussion.

Lying is seen in everyday life, as careful research by Bella DePaulo and colleagues shows (DePaulo et al., 1996). Their work has been expanded on by more than a thousand papers citing their work since their original "lying diaries" study was published. Parents lie to children often for reasons they can (try to) justify (Vanderbilt et al., 2011). Lying occurs in interactions between organizations as in negotiations (Moosmayer et al., 2016; Wertheim, 2016). Lying is found in ways organizations communicate with the outside world (Bauman, 2013; Morrison et al., 2018; Rockness & Rockness, 2005). For example, there is a huge literature on "greenwashing," where organizations lie or mislead to create "favorable stakeholder impressions without substantially improving the organizations' environmental performance" (Cadez et al., 2019, p. 2. See also Andreoli et al., 2017; Walls & Bulmer, 2017; Wang et al., 2018). While these studies cited here often have a broader scope than our topic, each also includes lying, *conscious stating as fact something a person knows to be untrue*. In case after case, study after study, lying is seen as harmful. As one executive stated "What really bothered me was when I was being lied to" (Moosmayer et al., 2016. p. 135).

When lying might be unethical and when ethical

Some lying is widely seen as neither ethical nor unethical. In responding to "how are you?" one is expected to say "fine, how are you?" The research by DePaulo and colleagues cited above (DePaulo et al., 1996) started from diaries where individuals were asked to keep track of and record lies. As that article explains (p. 981), "the only example of a lie they were asked not to record was saying 'fine' in response to perfunctory 'how are you?' questions." A Mandarin speaker does not reply to the common greeting "chi fan le ma?" by saying yes, I had rice already. These questions and responses are omitted from studies on lying. Why? Some lies are not unethical.

In American culture one is allowed, expected, to be a little but loose when talking abut weight, especially if the person's weight is more than is currently socially acceptable. In answer to a traffic patrol officer's question, "how fast do you think you were going?" no one would be expected to exaggerate but most would not be surprised if you fudged downward a bit. The words "a little bit loose" implies that this is not a big bad lie. But when translated, again, the term might be lie. The same would apply to "fudge a bit." Replace with lie and it can be seen that there are circumstances where the word lie is avoided, but untruthfulness, lies, are expected. If being untruthful is lying, these examples illustrate that lying is at times in American culture considered okay. Lying in a court of law may be one of the worst times to lie. There are reasons not to lie to a judge. One is often asked before testimony "do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" (Grover, 2005). A respondent typically agrees, "I so swear." Then when asked how fast were you going, an expected response might be similar to "I do not remember clearly." In the US a political appointee of President Donald Trump may say, after being fired, say "I felt it was time to leave." In many business cases of employment termination a person is asked, or given the chance to, "voluntarily" resign. Then later when asked, "were you fired?" the person might say "no, I quit."

In business making a sale is often contingent on the purchaser having positive impressions about the product or service quality or timing. The sentence "I'm sure they can deliver this by the first of the month" may in fact mean that the sales person hopes the product can be delivered by a specific date, but delivery schedules are not within the control of the sales person. Given this, the sales person believes it is okay, ethical, to give hopes as facts in order to make sales.

All these cases are enough to show that some lies are expected and are in the USA culturally acceptable. However, the examples here shed little light on business ethics or on business ethics education. It would be helpful to consider the question when might it be ethical to lie in a broader context. Indeed the original Kant blanket prohibition against lying involved a life or death scenario given by a philosopher Benjamin Constant with whom Kant strongly disagreed. Constant had said if there is a murderer at the door, asking if the person he now wants to murder is in this house, the answer must be no, that person is not here. Kant held that even in this case it would not be permissible to lie. Probably even Kant knew few would be convinced by his unequivocal stance. But at least, Kant was clear and consistent. How can all this be connected to business ethics education? A discussion of the issues above might help get a conversation started. Then students can be asked to think and respond to questions. For example, one could use some variation of the survey shown below and also in appendix 1 of this essay.

Educational imperative: Teach when lying can be ethical, how to decide

Students typically become engaged when discussing potentially controversial topics such as lying. A lecture approach seems less likely to generate thought as compared to small group activities attempting to solve hypothetical or real problems where lying might be appropriate. We asked students to react to mini-cases where a decision was required. We first asked students to answer individually, and then discussed in twos or threes. The responses that follow are from adult learners in part-time undergraduate business courses offered by a European University in Singapore. Singapore has a very rich mixture of cultures, and there might be differences between cultural groups. For example, those of Singaporean-Chinese heritage might respond differently that Indian or Malaysian or Western or even Mainland Chinese. But these surveys were used only for the purpose of helping students learn about lying, and demographic data were not considered: whatever the culture, the scenarios used require decisions, lie or tell the truth.

For each of four questions, students were asked to decide between five options: a) in this case it would be best to lie, b) maybe best to lie, c) not sure, d) probably not ethical to lie, and e) definitely not ethical to lie. The questions, first answered individually by adults taking university business courses, follow:

1. You told the client that it would be a three hour job. You work hard and finished the job in two hours. You write up a bill saying you worked three hours. In this situation, is it OK to lie?

2. You read the reports: this line of tires your boss wants you to sell has serious safety problems. The tires will be discontinued but first "we need to clear out all the old stock." You need this job, and your boss insists you MUST SELL these tires. A family of five shows up in an older car and is ready to buy four new tires. It looks like the deal may be finalized then the motorist asks, "any safety problems with this tire?" In this situation, is it wrong to lie? You KNOW there are safety issues. But you need your job. Should you tell the truth?

3. The time is the 1940s, during the Second World War. You live in Holland, and your nation has been taken over by Hitler's German army. One move by the Hitler forces was to round up all who were then marched off to trains to be shipped to what rumors said were concentration camps. This seemed strange and even barbaric to all so a number of Jewish people were secretly moved to hidden attic apartments, and secretly supplied food by neighbors. One day you are stopped by a Gestapo agent who asks, "are there any Jews living in hiding on this street?" In this situation, is it wrong to lie? Should you tell the truth?

4. Your spouse or close friend shows up wearing clothes that make him or her look a bit funny, like an adult dressing up in the latest teenager style. He or she says, "How do I look?"

For purposes of this paper, and the educational goals of this exercise, the first interesting conclusion is that in this group of adult learners, most see times when lying is appropriate. Question 3 gives an opportunity to (after completion of the survey) discuss the Anne Frank case. Most students today in Singapore have very little idea about the Holocaust and no knowledge of how Anne Frank and her family was hidden safe, for several years before a local answered "honestly" that there was a Jewish family living "over there." The capture of that family led to her death, along with the 6,000,000 to 11,000,000 others. Historians still argue the number of deaths caused by Hitler but no estimates are below 5,000,000 (Berenbaum, 1981). And the bringing that huge impersonal, even incomprehensible, number down to one teenage girl who died because one person did not lie when he should have, helps make the discussion valuable educationally. But even with little or no idea about the holocaust or about Anne Frank, 375 out of 519 chose a), "it would be best to lie" Another 103 chose b) "maybe best to lie. Only 22 chose responses saying d) or e) indicating that it would be unethical to lie but after the discussion, even those came to agree that Kant was wrong, there are times one should lie.

The next part of the class discussion introduces the JUSTICE framework which is then applied to all four scenarios. The JUSTICE idea lists seven distinct approaches to issues of ethics, each letter for an approach such as Justice, Utiitarian, etc (see appendix 1). The discussions are invariably energized, even heated, with a lot of disagreement. The educational point is that *different approaches yield different answers*. The spiritual values approach resonates with all Singaporean cultures: it seems that all religions represented have an idea similar to the Judeo-Christian "Golden Rule," do unto others as you would have then do unto you. Problems with utilitarian approaches become clear when other famous cases are introduced. In Jim and the Jungle Jim can save a group of captured enemies if he agrees to kill one, the leader (Almond, 2001; Bedau, 1999), Very few in our classes say they could murder one to save many. Another famous mini-case is also introduced. You can save several victims from certain death from an oncoming trolley car by pushing one fat innocent bystander to her death, thus derailing the trolley and thus saving the group (Di Nucci, 2013). The discussions that follow show that utilitarianism can be impossible to apply: rarely will any student say, yes, I would push that fat person to her death to save many. Yet utilitarianism is still used to excuse many misdeeds, many lies.

The classroom exercise asked other questions also, relating to overcharging in business and misleading in order to make a sale, and in those scenarios, responses were made in each of the five categories. The point is, there are some cases where it is widely agreed one should lie. The facts of the Anne Frank case which are discussed in class AFTER the survey illustrates. Sometimes lying is appropriate, ethical. Different ethical decision making criteria (utilitarian, Golden Rule, justice, etc.) yield different answers. There are a number of frameworks that could be used in classes (see the web page of the Markula Center for Applied Ethics: scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/a-framework-for-ethical-decision-making/).

Suggestions for further study

The survey which is described and discussed here should be replicated globally. Responses could be analyzed, exploring variations between genders, cultures, age groups. But more important than added study might be additional thinking. In my opinion, quantitative approaches to this analysis may not be enough. Many big questions have not yet been answered: When might lying be unethical and when ethical? For example, when might even altruistic lying be unethical? Further studies and additional thoughtful essays must follow. The timing is good. In the year 2020 people in the US and around the world are looking at lies in Washington DC (Balog-Way & McComas, 2020). More attention to the topic, more answers, may have significance for business and society and for business education.

The literature tells a lot about when and why people lie (for example Beck et al., 2020). It would be valuable to turn the topic upside down and explore when and why people tell the truth. As Abeler, Nosenzo, and Raymond report, "data from 90 experimental studies in economics, psychology, and sociology, and show that, in fact, people lie surprisingly little" (2019, p. 1115).

Much has been written on the value of, or difficulties with, educating students about making ethical choices (Piper et al., 2007; Sandel, 2011). Many educators explore a wide array of educational techniques, from role-play and simulations (Revoir, 2011) to debates (Lau, 2017) to case analyses (Wines, Anderson, and Fronmueller, 1998). One approach uses "bluffing games" (Shut Up and Sit Down web site, 2020) which could be followed by reflective discussions. Another stream of research looks at when and why academics lie (Bilos, 2019).

Limitations of this analysis

The focus here was, purposefully, at the individual level of analysis. By approaching lying in business and society from a business perspective we miss contextual factors. Individuals operate inside organizations, organizations which have their own cultures and are influenced and constrained by factors in the institutional environment (Baur et al., 2019; Hulpke, 2016; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2020). These other perspectives on lying would provide additional insights.

Further, this paper is written in English. The works we cite are in English. In English we can give distinct and different definitions for lying, misleading, obfuscation, paltering, integrity, honesty, trust, and truth. As mentioned above, translating terms such as these into a different language might yield different insights. To cite a simple example, consider a yes/no question in English, such as "do you agree with me?" Now consider the dictionary translation of 'yes' into Japanese. 'yes' in Japanese is 'hai'. However, 'hai' translated back into English might mean "I am thinking about what you said" or "perhaps" or "you make a good point." A waitress in a Japanese restaurant who approaches a recently seated customer may greet the customer by saying 'hai'. The waitress is not saying she agrees with what the customer has said as the customer has not said anything, the waitress is indicating hello, how can I help you, not stating "yes I agree." Thus a US President may say "the Japanese prime Minister lied to me" when the interpreter oversimplifies the 'hai' into 'yes' when the Japanese Prime Minister was telling the American president "we will consider that" not 'yes'.

'Manana' translated from Spanish to English is 'tomorrow' but 'manana' stated in a conversation may mean tomorrow or later or sometime in the future, maybe. 'Ken chon sumnida' might be translated as 'no problem' by the Korean to English interpreter but in daily usage the Korean saying 'ken chon sumnida' is not lying even if the speaker knows there is a problem, 'ken chon sumnida' often means "don't worry, everything will work out one way or another." Similarly, 'mei you wen ti' may be translated from Mandarin to English as 'no problem' but often means "don't worry things will probably work out." When asked "is this deal going to happen?" the Arab speaking respondent may say 'inshallah'. An interpreter may translate this as 'yes', it will happen, while a more correct literal translation may be 'God willing, or if Allah wills it'. But 'inshallah' might better be understood as 'only God knows, it may happen, it may not',

even when an interpreter may say 'she said yes'. These few examples illustrate that this English language paper simply can not be translated into any other language. The phrase on the first page, "to tell the truth, sometimes it pays to lie," hinted that transferability of ideas from one language or culture to another can be problematic.

One US business representative working in China in the 1980s came to the conclusion that cultural factors explained why his Chinese partners lied:

> I began to suspect more and more that the Chinese were, on occasion, lying to me, and eventually situations developed where I felt certain of it. My suspicions were reinforced when I read of the experiences of a Special Magistrate in Hong Kong… discussing the use of oaths in courtroom procedures. He stated, "naturally in a Chinese court no one is expected to tell the truth, and few ever do. Perjury is a word all but untranslatable into Chinese… No Chinese is going to tell the truth unless he can see some advantage in doing so. Why should he? Truth is private property" (Bauer, 1986, p. 123).

Bauer had the disadvantage of understanding neither the culture nor the language, but was probably not the only person to conclude that lying is influenced by culture. This essay bypasses this issue.

A further limitation relates to gender. Most business professors are still male (Lau & Hulpke, 2018) and academic cases are more likely to feature males than females. In the survey we use, students often assume the decision maker is male (especially for the first three of the four cases). The prison guards in Nazi Germany were predominately male, the person who told the truth which led to the death of Anne Frank was male, the decision maker in Jim and the Jungle is male, the key persons in the famous Sadhu case and video are all male (McCoy, 1983). In the original trolley car scenario the key figures are male. It is almost as if we live in a totally-male world. Future versions of the survey used here could be more careful to insure examples of decision makers are closer to the 50/50 male/female representation in the real world.

Additional study could tie lying to impression management. Birnbaum and colleagues note that individuals use various tactics to improve their chances of obtaining sexual partners even if these tactics "involve deliberate lying" (2020, p.7). Job seekers may carefully craft employment search to maximize opportunities, sometimes including lying (Weiss & Feldman, 2006). As science progresses, it might be possible for neuroscientists to explore this question further. As one example, Carson found neural hyperconnectivity in some individuals and drew connections to personality traits (Carson, 2013). Neurology and biology more generally may shed light on lying. Various scholars seek medical explanations for pathological lying (Grubin, 2005; Yang et al., 2005). Monteleone and colleagues (Monteleone et al., 2008) examine studies by Phan and others (Phan et al., 2005) and see patterns of activity in the medial prefrontal cortex when individuals lie. For more than 150 years the world has known the tragic story of Phineas Gage, who amazingly survived a steel rod having penetrated his skull and brain. His personality changed radically even though he managed to live a somewhat ordinary life for 11 years after the accident. Some scholars say, without proof, that the accident turned a personable dependable Gage into a pathological liar (Macmillan, 2000). Today neuroscientists are learning more about the physical characteristics of lying and liars.

The research on lying to date has been illuminating. From studies of diaries and other methodologies, we know that lying can sometimes be classified as *not* unethical. If lying can then be seen as within the realm of ethical behavior, when? Our motivation here is both academic and practical.

The questions addressed in this essay are more at the individual level, personal level. The questions here are at the managerial level more than at an organizational level. We do not address the question, "can companies lie?" Some organizations are said to have a culture of lying (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2020; Hulpke, 2017). What environmental and institutional factors might influence individuals who perceive themselves as honest to lie? After the widely publicized Carr paper on "bluffing" serious students of ethics sometimes look with disfavor at academic models or frameworks such as the JUSTICE model I discuss with students in conjunction with the four-question survey. Some of my colleagues have criticized my attempts to build ethical decision making abilities without first grounding students in the works of classic philosophers over the centuries. Covering Aristotelian thought in one sentence and Bentham and Mill in half a sentence each grates against the grain for many of my respected colleagues. But, as one professor put it, "students do not need Kant's third formulation of the categorical imperative – they need a simple values toolkit'' (Lau, 2010, p. 570). Unfortunately, even such models as the JUSTICE Model do not give clear and distinct guidelines as to when and where to lie. But, even though the discussion does not end here, our classroom experiences and feedback from our students convinces us: to tell the truth, sometimes it pays to lie.

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Appendix 1: Lying survey

Lying? is it wrong to lie? Should you tell the truth? Consider these cases:

1. You told the client that it would be a three hour job. You work hard and finished the job in two hours. You write up a bill saying you worked three hours. In this situation, is it OK to lie?

2. You read the reports: this line of tires your boss wants you to sell has serious safety problems. The tires will be discontinued but first "we need to clear out all the old stock." You need this job, and your boss insists you MUST SELL these tires. A family of five shows up in an older car and is ready to buy four new tires. It looks like the deal may be finalized then the motorist asks, "any safety problems with this tire?" In this situation, is it wrong to lie? You KNOW there are safety issues. But you need your job. Should you tell the truth?

3. The time is the 1940s, during the Second World War. You live in Holland, and your nation has been taken over by Hitler's German army. One move by the Hitler forces was to round up all who were then marched off to trains to be shipped to what rumors said were concentration camps. This seemed strange and even barbaric to all so a number of Jewish people were secretly moved to hidden attic apartments, and secretly supplied food by neighbors. One day you are stopped by a Gestapo agent who asks, "are there any Jews living in hiding on this street?" In this situation, is it wrong to lie? Should you tell the truth?

4. Your spouse or close friend shows up wearing clothes that make him or her look a bit funny, like an adult dressing up in the latest teenager style. He or she says, "How do I look?"

	In this case it would be best to lie	Maybe best to lie	not sure	probably not ethical to lie	definitely not ethical to lie
Case 1					
Case 2					
Case 3					
Case 4					

This is part of a BIG survey, and one thing that may be analyzed later has to do with WHO completed the survey. So, thanks, a few personal questions… circle the best answer
AGE: 25 or younger 26 -34 age 35 and up MALE FEMALE

Years in work force, years you have worked 0-5 years 6 or more years

Countries where you have lived: One country Two countries Several countries

Figure 1: Lying survey

Appendix 2: The JUSTICE model (Lau, Hulpke, Kelly and To, 2007)

Lying? is it wrong to lie? Should you tell the truth? Consider these cases:

How to decide ethical questions? The below list contains seven different ways to look at any question with ethical implications. We will discuss in class. These seven each have supporters. The trouble is, when you use different tools to help you decide you may come up with different answers. Is there one best way? No. But, you might pick one favorite, which you will use first when an ethical question comes up. You might pick two or three favorites. The next section may help you see plusses and minuses of different ways to approach ethical questions. Here are seven ways to decide when faced with an ethical question:

Justice, applying same rules to all fairly, evenly
Utilitarian thought, does good outweigh bad
Spiritual values, Golden Rule, do unto others as you would want others to do unto you
Tv rule, knowing you must explain your decision on TV with your family watching
Influence, considering how big an influence (if any) your actions would have
Core values, the deepest human values, things
Really important in life
Emergency requiring immediate action, urgency of decision, a life or death issue

Different decision rules will give different answers. Applying the same rules to everybody is fair to the individual but *may not be the best decision for the group*. Should you save one life even if it means risking many lives? JUSTICE says 'yes'. Utilitarian says 'no'.

Appendix 3: Typology of lies (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkenol, Wyer, and Epstein, 1996)

As shown by DePaulo and colleagues, there are many ways to categorize lies:

- Content of the lies
  - Feelings
  - Achievements
  - Actions, plans, whereabouts
  - Explanations
  - Facts, possessions
- Reasons for the lies
  - Self-centered
  - Other-centered
- Types of lies
  - Outright
  - Exaggerations
  - Subtle
- Referents of the lies
  - Liar
  - Target
  - Other person
  - Object or event

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