DECEPTIVE MESSAGE INTENT AND RELATIONAL QUALITY

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This study examines the popular belief that deception is necessary for maintaining relational quality. A total of 517 undergraduate students involved in close relationships served as research participants in this study. Eighty-nine participants were married, engaged, and / or living together, 200 were seriously dating, 100 were casually dating, and 128 were involved in close friendships. Members of relationships with low suspicion and high relational quality reported less use of deceptive messages and more use of other types of communication strategies to sustain their relationships than those in relationships with higher suspicion and lower relational quality. Additionally, lies told with the intent to protect a partner were related to higher suspicion levels in a relationship, as were lies told with the intent to benefit self or hurt a partner. Other types of messages designed to contribute to a positive relational environment were not strongly related to deceptive messages.

Given the Zeitgeist in both the United States and the United Kingdom, it may well be that lies and other forms of deception will continue to increase in incidence and range. The drift toward individualism per se, where obligations toward state, community, and family decline and concern for self becomes increasingly the only constant in life, dictates that winning for the self should transcend other objectives and constraints.
—Robinson (1996, p. 326)

Question: "Why shouldn't you tell lies?" Answer: "Because it's naughty. Because then they tell lies."
—Robinson and Rackstraw (1972, p. 1)

W. Peter Robinson has spent more than 25 years contemplating the use of lies by children and adults in a variety of contexts (see also Robinson, 1994; Robinson, Shepherd, & Heywood, 1998). From the lies of countries to the lies of relationships, deceptive communication has been an ongoing concern for Robinson, along with his work in many other areas of study.

In his research, Robinson (1996) suggests that certain environments are so fraught with peril that individuals feel compelled to lie to

survive. One thinks of people living under totalitarian governments or striving to exist in deplorable working conditions when one reads Robinson's references to such environments that promote lies for the survival of self.

What may not spring to mind immediately when contemplating Robinson's perspective on environments conducive to deception are the lies told in our close relationships. It is hard to reflect on our personal relationships as environments in which we may feel the need to lie to preserve our interests in these relationships. Instead of an environment of safety and openness, could our relationships be such perilous environments that deception would be a reasonable self-protective strategy?

In examining the deception literature, it appears that personal relationships are environments in which people resort to deception. DePaulo and Kashy (1998) found that deception is actually quite common in personal relationships, with 1 out of 10 communicative acts between spouses being reported as deceptive.

When looking at justifications for these lies, it appears that researchers have described these lies as other-oriented, or lies to protect their relational partner or to protect the relationship itself (Vrij, 2000). Such lies are described as polite and necessary to preserve the fabric of a relationship (Metts, 1989). Anderson, Ansfield, and DePaulo (1999) further suggest that deception may be used in relationships when the truth threatens the relationship.

In light of the perspective advanced in the scholarly literature that deceptive messages serve a relational maintenance function, the study presented in this article will examine deceptive messages as they relate to other techniques for preserving relationships. Although implicitly considering deception to be a communicative action for maintaining relationships, to date, deception researchers have not examined the association of deceptive messages with other communication intended to sustain relationships. Furthermore, Robinson's (1996) work suggests that environments conducive to deception are ones in which individuals feel threatened and insecure. In this study, the current perspective that lies are positive communicative techniques for maintaining relationships will be specifically investigated in the context of the overall relational environment that may be conducive to the perceived need for using deceptive communication.

MESSAGES IN RELATIONSHIPS

If an individual is lucky enough to have a relationship that brings some level of pleasure, it is easy to see how one may endeavor to keep this relationship a continuing part of one's existence. Researchers have studied the techniques that relational partners may employ in sustaining their relationships (such as Flora & Segrin, 1998; Messman,

Canary, & Hause, 2000; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999). These techniques can be such things as sharing feelings with a partner, doing activities with partner, and listening to a partner.

Primarily, investigators have used one of several categorical sets of strategies in their studies. The Stafford and Canary (1991) set of relational maintenance strategies is the most frequently used in recent research. These strategies consist of messages designed to encourage (a) positivity (having cheerful, friendly interaction with partner), (b) openness (having discussions and self-disclosure with partner), (c) assurance (reaffirming commitments to partner), (d) networking (interacting with partner's friends and family), and (e) tasks (helping the partner meet responsibilities). Dindia and Baxter's (1987; Baxter & Dindia, 1990) set of relational maintenance strategies is also used in studying relational maintenance. It differs from Stafford and Canary (1991) most notably in their inclusion of antisocial and prosocial action strategies in their list of possible relational maintenance behaviors. Antisocial strategies would be actions such as being rude, insulting, impolite, or disrespectful toward one's partner, whereas prosocial strategies would be actions such as spending time with one's relational partner. The Stafford and Canary and the Dindia and Baxter strategies form a complimentary set of messages and actions that can be used in keeping relationships alive.

The underlying premise of these relational maintenance strategies is that the intent of the relational partners is one of honesty. This becomes interesting when considered in light of the literature on deception in relationships, which contends that deceptive messages are used to maintain relationships in light of information that one would prefer not to share with a relational partner.

Vrij (2000) describes lies as social devices that allow for smooth conversation, which would be unnecessarily rude if the conversational partners were honest in their true perspectives. In this case, lies seem merely to be linguistic devises designed to keep order. Kashy and DePaulo (1996) further describe lies as being self-oriented and other-oriented. Self-oriented lies would be lies that make the deceiver look better than he or she really is, and which may give the deceiver an advantage over the other person. Other-oriented lies would be lies that appear to protect another person, whether it be his or her self-esteem, livelihood, or whatever may matter to the other person. Researchers have focused closely on selfless motives; for example, Metts and Chronis (1986) looked at lies to avoid hurting the relational partner, lies to avoid relational trauma, and lies to protect the partner's self-image. Other researchers, such as Hample (1980), have focused on more selfish motives for deceit and lies that may be designed to harm a partner.

Whether to obtain an advantage, avoid a punishment, make a good impression, or simply ease social interaction, it would seem that one

way to categorize lies is along three deceptive intents: the most socially acceptable "lies to spare other," the more clearly self-serving "lies to benefit self," and the most blatantly malevolent "lies to harm other." Although there is no doubt an infinite variety of other ways to categorize intentions to lie, these three deceptive motives that emerge from the literature provide a broad perspective on deceptive messages.

When considering the use of these differing message intents in relationships, it is important to consider Duck, Rutt, Hurst, and Strejc's (1991) finding that the conversations held between relational partners may differ significantly across relational types. This may help explain the difference found in the types of deceptive communication used by relational partners at varying relational stages. For example, DePaulo and Kashy (1998) found a lower rate of lying in closer relationships than in more casual ones. Metts (1989) and Metts and Hippensteele (1988) also note that the type of deception used by relational partners varies in accordance to relational development, with less intimate relationships relying on falsifying information and more developed relationships on adopting methods of concealment. Kalbfleisch (1992) suggests that members of close relationships feel the impact of deceptive communication more acutely than individuals in relatively public or social encounters. Simply put, the repercussions for deception may increase as relational intimacy increases, which may account for lowered use of deception and the type of deceptive message evident in a relationship.

It is reasonable to assume that common threads exist when comparing significant relationships across contexts; the differences in these relational types could affect the other types of messages under consideration in this study. Specifically, Stafford and Canary (1991) and Canary and Stafford (1993) also found differences in the usage of maintenance strategies across relational types. Therefore, a careful examination of the use of relational maintenance strategies and deceptive messages should consider the type of relationship in which these messages occur, and the potential association of relational type with use of relational maintenance strategies and deceptive communication. This leads to further consideration of the relational environment in which deceptive messages occur and in which partners may strive to sustain their relationships.

RELATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In examining the complexities of deceptive communication, Robinson (1996) would suggest that the underlying tenor of the relationship warrants attention. Relational partners experiencing distrust of their partner and poor relational quality could be expected to communicate differently than those who are less suspicious of their partners and who are more satisfied with their relationship. Consideration of these

issues is particularly important when investigating efforts to maintain relationships and the types of lies that may be implemented in these relationships.

Relational trust / suspicion. Trust is an ingredient that researchers have previously referenced as an important part of human relationships. For example, Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna (1985) state that past studies on trust suggest: (a) Trust appears to evolve from past experiences and prior interactions; (b) dispositional attributions are made about relational partners regarding their reliability and dependability; (c) trust entails a willingness to be vulnerable or put oneself at risk, in terms of self-disclosure or belief in another's promises; and (d) trust is characterized by feelings of security and confidence in one's relational partner, and is viewed as a relational symbol of strength or weakness. Thus, trust appears to be a variable that underlies the significance of relational communication patterns and behaviors.

LaFollette and Graham (1986) suggest that there is more to honesty than just providing a truthful response. The key is that the listener (or relational partner) must be able to assemble an honest picture of the speaker. Thus, merely telling the truth may not be enough if the message is not communicated in a context built on trust.

Relational suspicion appears to be the primary indication that a partner's perceived trust may be in question. Research has focused on the impact of relational outcomes when members begin to question the honesty of their relational partners (Aune, Metts, & Ebesu-Hubbard, 1998; McCornack & Levine, 1990; Sagarin, Rhoads, & Cialdini, 1998). In particular, McCornack and Levine (1990) found that the ability to detect deception in romantic relationships was influenced by the relational partner's degree of suspicion. In other words, those partners who were moderately suspicious were the most successful at detecting deception. A further link to deception is drawn by Sagarin et al. (1998), who found that individuals who deceived their partner were also more suspicious of their partner than individuals not employing deceptive messages. This leads us to a consideration of the element of the overall quality of the relational environment.

Relational quality. Relational quality is a global assessment of the express nature of a relationship. Research on relational satisfaction offers the strongest indicators of how relational quality impacts friendships and dating relationships. Although the majority of relational satisfaction research has focused on comparing relational dimensions of happy versus unhappy couples (Bowman, 1990; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990), factors impacting relational satisfaction also appear to impact satisfaction levels for different relational contexts. For example, Kelley and Burgoon (1991) found that intimacy, noncomposure/arousal, and

equality/trust were central components in determining levels of marital satisfaction. Jones (1991) and Monsour (1992) studied friendship satisfaction and intimacy, and also found that self-disclosure, trust, and friendship enjoyment had the greatest impact on friendship satisfaction. Monsour (1992) noted that self-disclosure, emotional expressiveness, unconditional support, physical contact, and trust were important factors when evaluating relational intimacy in friendships. Thus, the findings suggest that relational satisfaction in friendships and marriages may share many intrinsic qualities at the onset, with the degree of relational intimacy magnifying the significance of these variables.

When considering deceptive communication, Lawson (2000) reports that deceivers perceived the relationships in which they used deception to be less pleasant than other relationships, and they felt less close in these relationships. DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, and Epstein (1996) found a similar effect for deception, in which respondents reported less intimate and less pleasant interactions when lies were told than when lies were not told in interactions. It would seem that use of deception would have a definite impact on the overall quality in a relationship. Likewise, Zak (1995) reports that trusting behaviors increase relational trust, whereas nontrusting behaviors decrease trust in a relational partner, and Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, and Agnew (1999) suggest that commitment to a relationship, prosocial behavior, and trust are closely related.

It seems clear from the deception literature and the literature concerning relational maintenance that lies and maintenance strategies do not occur in a relational vacuum. It also appears that the more positive relational maintenance strategies and deceptive message intents may not appear in tandem, whereas the more antisocial maintenance strategies and deceptive messages intending to harm a relational partner may occur in concert.

Overall, these variables, along with the relational environment, have not been considered together previously, and such a study is necessary at this point in our development of research on deceptive communication. If we do not first look to the overall relational environment in which deceptive messages are likely to occur and examine the co-occurrence of strategies designed to maintain relationships, we do not have a picture of the environment in which relational partners decide to enact deceitful messages. Because relational partners have communication options for maintaining relationships other than deceit, these other options are also relevant to building theory on the use of deception in relationships.

With this in mind, the following hypotheses and research question are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Deceptive messages will be negatively associated with positivity, openness, assurance, networks, tasks, and prosocial relational maintenance messages.

Hypothesis 2: Deceptive messages intending to harm others will be positively associated with antisocial relational maintenance messages.

Hypothesis 3: Participants in relationships with high relational quality will use fewer deceptive messages than participants in relationships with low relational quality.

Hypothesis 4: Participants in relationships with high relational quality will use more positivity, openness, assurances, networks, tasks, and prosocial relational maintenance messages and less antisocial relational maintenance strategies than will participants in relationships with low relational quality.

Hypothesis 5: Participants in relationships with low suspicion will use fewer deceptive messages than participants in relationships with high suspicion.

Hypothesis 6: Participants in relationships with low suspicion will use more positivity, openness, assurances, networks, tasks, and prosocial relational maintenance messages and less antisocial relational maintenance messages than will participants in relations with high suspicion.

Research Question 1: How does relational type affect the use of deceptive messages and relational maintenance messages?

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 517 undergraduate students from a large state university took part in this study. Research participants were offered extra credit to complete a questionnaire on communication in close relationships. These participants were asked to identify the most intimate relationship in which they were currently involved. Of the research participants, 89 identified married, engaged, and/or living together relationships; 200 identified seriously dating relationships; 100 identified casually dating relationships; and 128 identified friendships.

On the average, the research participants identifying married, engaged, or living together relationships had been with their partners for 3.8 years; those referencing seriously dating partners had been together an average of 1.65 years, casual daters had been involved for an average of 9 months, and the friends had been together for an average of 4.98 years. The average age of the participants was 21.5 years, and the equivalent reported age of their relational partners was 22.1 years. The majority of participants (81%) classified themselves as full-time students, as well as their relational partners (66.2%). In terms of ethnic background, most participants were White (80.2%), with the rest being drawn from Asian (6.1%), Black (5%), Native American (2.7%), or other ethnic groups (6.0%). The majority of the relational partners were also reported to be White (82.4%). There was

approximately an equal distribution of males (50.8%) and females (49.2%) participating in this study.

PROCEDURE

Participants were first given an orientation to the study by a researcher. They were told that this study was one that examined communication in close relationships and how relational partners communicate. Participants were told to refer to the most intimate relationship that they were currently involved in when answering the questionnaire. They were asked to label the type of relationship they would be referencing when they filled out the instrument. Scale items were written so that the respondents could apply them to one of several types of relationships through the use of the term *partner*. For example, the prosocial strategy of "give partner gifts" and the antisocial strategy of "give partner cold shoulder" both list the relational partner simply as partner rather than spouse, friend, and so forth. Responses to scale items were recorded on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). Respondents also answered demographic questions pertaining to their own and their relational partner's background.

INSTRUMENTATION

Maintenance. Stafford and Canary's (1991) maintenance strategies (positivity, openness, assurance, networking, and tasks) were used in this study to measure techniques to sustain relationships. The means and reliabilities for these strategies in this study were: positivity, 2.456 (α = .89); openness, 3.0678 (α = .89); assurance, 2.526 (α = .89); networking, 2.85 (α = .91); and tasks, 2.66 (α = .81). In addition, two sets of Dindia and Baxter's (1987) marital maintenance strategies (prosocial and antisocial strategies) were included, because they approached maintenance from a slightly different perspective than Stafford and Canary (1991) by emphasizing positive and somewhat negative elements in relational maintenance. The means and alpha coefficients for these measures were as follows: prosocial strategies, 2.378 (α = .73); and antisocial strategies, 5.36 (α = .80). Forty-five items were used to measure these types of messages and actions. See Table 1 for listing of the categories of relational maintenance messages.

Deceptive message intent. The deceptive message intent scale was composed of nine items. These items were categorized by the intent of the deception: (a) to harm relational partner, (b) to benefit self, or (c) to spare relational partner. Each of these categories is further broken down into lies that are direct falsification, lies that are distortion of the

Table 1
Relational Messages

Deceptive message intent scale items
  Deceptive intent: Harm other
    Make things up to hurt him or her in some way
    Distort information to hurt partner
    Don't tell partner important information that he or she needs to know
  Deceptive intent: Benefit self
    Invent stories to make yourself look good
    Exaggerate personal praise received to partner
    Don't discuss personal weaknesses
  Deceptive intent: Spare other
    Make things up to spare partner's feelings
    Minimize severity of problem(s) to not upset partner
    Don't discuss problems that would trouble or worry partner
Relational maintenance message categories
  Positivity: Have cheerful, friendly interaction
  Openness: Encourage discussions and self-disclosure
  Assurance: Reaffirm commitments to partner
  Networks: Willing to interact with the relational partner's friends and family
  Tasks: Help the relational partner meet responsibilities
  Prosocial: Spend time with relational partner
  Antisocial: Be rude, insulting, impolite, or disrespectful toward partner

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truth, and lies of omission. The means and alpha coefficients for these three message intents were: harm other, 5.946 (α = .66); benefit self, 5.189 (α = .53); and spare other, 4.288 (α = .68). Nine items were used to measure deceptive message intent (see Table 1 for scale items).

Relational trust. Levine and McCornack's (1991) suspicion scale was used to evaluate perceived levels of trust and suspicion by relational partners. This scale was selected over other measures of trust because the Levine and McCornack scale items are communication based and are germane to the study of relational deception. Modifications were made to make this scale applicable across relational types. Examples from this measure include: "My partner seldom lies to me," "My partner rarely tells me what he or she is thinking," and "My partner only tells me what he or she thinks I want to hear." The mean and alpha coefficient for this scale were 2.525 and .89. Study participants who were married, engaged, or living together had a mean suspicion of 2.273. Serious dating participants had a mean of 2.51, casual dating participants had a mean of 2.959, and participants who were in friendship relationships had a mean of 2.474, where lower mean suspicion ratings were indicative of less relational suspicion. Ten items were used to measure participants' level of relational suspicion in this study.

Relational quality. Norton's (1983) Quality of Marriage Index (QMI) was chosen because it has been cited as a strong, global self-report for

relationships (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Sabatelli, 1988). Examples of relational quality items include: "The relationship is very stable," "The relationship makes me very happy," and "I feel like part of a team." Norton's (1983) QMI scale has been previously applied to relationships other than marital relationships. For example, Stafford and Canary (1991) used a modified version of this scale to measure relational satisfaction and maintenance strategy usage in difference relational types. The mean and alpha coefficient for this measure were 2.32 and .90. In this study, participants who were married, engaged, or living together had a mean relational quality of 1.915. Participants in serious dating relationships had a mean of 2.242, participants in casual dating relationships had a mean of 3.116, and participants in friendships had a mean of 2.180, where lower means indicate higher relational quality. Five relational quality items were used in this measure.

RESULTS

To examine the association of deceptive messages with corresponding relational maintenance strategy usage, seven sets of maintenance strategies (positivity, openness, assurance, networking, tasks, prosocial, antisocial) were regressed on the intent of the deceptive intent messages (harm other, benefit self, spare other) using stepwise multiple regression. Table 2 reports the stepwise multiple regressions for each set of relational maintenance strategies.

As Table 2 indicates, relational maintenance strategy usage was predicted by the intent of deceptive communication. Although the magnitude of variance predicted for the maintenance strategies varied across the intent of the deceptive communication (.45 to .04), several patterns did emerge.

First, deceptive communication designed to "harm other" was the primary predictor of antisocial strategies, accounting for 41% of the variance; positivity and prosocial strategies accounted for 20% of the variance for each strategy; and tasks, assurance, and networks accounted for 12%, 7%, and 6% of the variance, respectively. Although the deceptive strategy of harm other was not the primary predictor of openness, it was still significant and explained 5% of the variance. Interestingly, all of the maintenance strategies can be predicted (in varying degrees) from deceptive communication that harms the other. However, the expected relationship of the maintenance strategies (other than the antisocial strategies) with harms-other deceptive communication is negative, with increased usage of this form of deceptive communication associated with lower levels of positivity, openness, assurance, networking, tasks, and prosocial strategies. Conversely, the antisocial strategies are strongly positively related to deceptive communication designed to harm other. Thus, if the deceptive motivation is

Table 2
Stepwise Regression of Relational Maintenance Strategies

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable		F Value	R^2
Positivity	Harm other	−.45	131.65	.20
	Spare other	−.15	73.89	.22
	Benefit self	−.10	51.32	.23
Openness	Benefit self	−.20	21.75	.04
	Harm other	−.11	13.63	.05
Assurance	Harm other	−.26	38.75	.07
	Benefit self	−.13	13.63	.08
Networks	Harm other	−.25	34.43	.06
	Spare other	−.17	25.01	.09
Tasks	Harm other	−.34	68.80	.12
Prosocial	Harm other	−.45	132.49	.20
	Benefit self	−.09	69.14	.21
	Spare other	.10	48.12	.22
Antisocial	Harm other	.65	375.71	.41
	Benefit self	.20	213.91	.45

Note. All items are significant at $p < .001$.

to harm a relational partner, it would appear that antisocial maintenance strategies could be predicted to accompany this form of deceptive communication.

Second, the deceptive strategy of "benefit self" was also shown to predict additional variance in antisocial strategies, accounting for 45% of the variance; positivity, 23% of the variance; prosocial strategies, 21% of the variance; and assurance, 8% of the variance. The deceptive strategy of benefit self was the primary predictor of openness, although it only accounted for a small portion of the variance (4%). The relationship between the deceptive messages designed to benefit self and the antisocial strategies is positive, whereas the relationship between these deceptive messages and positivity, prosocial strategies, assurance, and openness is negative. In general, it appears that individuals may use deceptive communication designed to benefit themselves while employing antisocial maintenance strategies. However, it should be noted that the additional variance accounted for by this type of deception is small in relation to that accounted for by deceptive communication that harms other.

Finally, the deceptive strategy of "spare other" was found to have some predictability for relational maintenance strategies. Spare other was the second predictor for positivity and networks, accounting for 22% and 9% of the variance, respectively. Spare other was the third predictor for prosocial strategies, accounting for 22% of the variance in that maintenance strategy. Thus, it would seem that lying to spare a relational partner is negatively related to the maintenance strategies of positivity and networks, and not predictive of any other mainten-

ance strategies, with the exception of a positive relationship to the prosocial strategies. However, spare other provides only minimal prediction beyond that provided by the deceptive strategies of harm other and benefit self. Specifically, the spare other intent accounts for .02 additional variance for positivity, .03 additional variance for networks, and .01 additional variance for the prosocial strategies.

In examining how maintenance and deceptive strategies might vary according to relational type, relational quality, and trust, a multivariate analysis of variance was employed. The dependent variables in this analysis were the seven sets of maintenance strategies (positivity, openness, assurance, networking, tasks, prosocial, antisocial) and the three deceptive message types (benefit self, harm other, spare other). The independent variables were relational type (married/living together, seriously dating, casually dating, friends), quality level (high/low), and trust/suspicion level (high/low). The high and low relational quality was split at the mean, as was the high and low trust/suspicion level.

No significant three-way interaction was identified in this analysis, $F(3, 502) = 1.17$, $p > .05$. However, there was a significant two-way interaction reported between relational type and quality, $F(3, 502) = 1.6$, $p < .05$. Subsequent univariate effects were significant for positivity, $F(3, 502) = 4.24$, $p < .01$; harm other, $F(3, 502) = 2.76$, $p < .05$; and antisocial strategies, $F(3, 502) = 4.89$, $p < .01$. Examination of the means showed that the perceived relational quality differentially affects reported usage of maintenance strategies and deceptive messages across relational types. Whereas participants in high-quality serious and casual dating relationships and friendships reported increased use of positivity and decreased use of messages designed to harm other and antisocial strategies, participants in high- and low-quality committed relationships (married/living together) were unlikely to use antisocial strategies and were the least likely of any of the groups to report use of deceptive communication that harmed the relational partner.

Significant multivariate effects were found for relational type, $F(3, 502) = 7.77$, $p < .001$; quality, $F(1, 502) = 16.98$, $p < .001$; and suspicion, $F(1, 502) = 21.10$, $p < .001$. Significant univariate effects for relational type included positivity, $F(3, 502) = 5.92$, $p < .001$; openness, $F(3, 502) = 16.98$, $p < .001$; assurance, $F(3, 502) = 52.19$, $p < .001$; tasks, $F(3, 502) = 7.05$, $p < .001$; and prosocial strategies, $F(3, 502) = 15.79$, $p < .001$. Analysis of the means revealed that relationships having greater levels of intimacy (married/living together or seriously dating) used significantly more openness, assurance, and prosocial strategies than the casual daters and friends. Additionally, research participants in married/living together relationships used significantly more tasks than casual daters and friends, and the serious daters used significantly more tasks than the friends.

Univariate analyses of quality levels were significant for all maintenance strategies and two of the deceptive strategies at the .05 level: positivity, $F(1, 502) = 80.80$; openness, $F(1, 502) = 24.07$; assurance, $F(1, 502) = 60.24$; networks, $F(1, 502) = 34.01$; tasks, $F(1, 502) = 61.09$; prosocial strategies, $F(1, 502) = 72.24$; antisocial strategies, $F(1, 502) = 57.86$; harm other, $F(1, 502) = 9.07$; and benefit self, $F(1, 502) = 8.77$. The deceptive strategy of spare other was not significant, $F(1, 502) = .10, p > .05$. Additional analyses of the means indicated that relational partners reporting high levels of relational quality had greater usage of all relational maintenance strategies and less usage of antisocial maintenance strategies. Furthermore, those participants involved in high-quality relationships reported significantly less usage of the deceptive strategy of benefiting self.

The univariate analysis of suspicion levels indicated that suspicion was significantly related to all of the strategies analyzed at the .001 level: positivity, $F(1, 502) = 42.98$; openness, $F(1, 502) = 7.72$; assurance, $F(1, 502) = 14.85$; networks, $F(1, 502) = 11.71$; tasks, $F(1, 502) = 17.04$; prosocial strategies, $F(1, 502) = 30.32$; antisocial strategies, $F(1, 502) = 142.07$; harm other, $F(1, 502) = 123.74$; benefit self, $F(1, 502) = 51.34$; and spare other, $F(1, 502) = 23.14$. Examination of the means revealed that low levels of perceived suspicion in relationships is associated with greater usage of all relational maintenance strategies except antisocial strategies, and reduced use of antisocial strategies and deceptive communication that harmed other, spared other, and benefited self. Finally, it is interesting to note that the respondents reporting lower levels of suspicion in their relationship also reported using fewer deceptive strategies that spared their relational partner.

DISCUSSION

What is striking about this data is the relationship of the use of deceptive messages to other messages designed to maintain relationships, and the overall relational environment in which these messages occur. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were confirmed in this study, with deceptive messages intending to spare other, benefit self, and harm other all being negatively associated with positive messages designed to sustain relationships, such as positivity, openness, assurance, networks, tasks, and prosocial strategies, whereas deceptive messages intending to harm other were positively associated with antisocial relational maintenance strategies. This was as expected, with messages with deceptive intent not associated with other positive message strategies designed to maintain relationships. Antisocial relational maintenance strategies were positively associated with deceptive messages designed to harm other, and also positively associated with deceptive messages designed to benefit self.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 found support with participants in high-quality relationships reporting less use of deceptive messages intending to harm other and benefit self, less use of antisocial relational maintenance messages, and more use of positivity, openness, assurance, networks, tasks, and prosocial relational maintenance messages. However, use of deceptive messages intending to spare other was not related to relational quality.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 were confirmed with participants in relationships with low suspicion levels using fewer deceptive messages than participants in relationships with high suspicion. Furthermore, participants in relationships with low suspicion levels used more positivity, openness, assurances, networks, tasks, and prosocial relational maintenance strategies and less antisocial relational maintenance strategies than participants in relationships with high suspicion levels.

In answer to the research question, the type of relationship is associated with message use with participants in married, living together, and engaged relationships being the least likely of any group to use deceptive communication intending to harm the partner or antisocial relational maintenance strategies, regardless of their relational quality. Furthermore, participants in committed relationships and in serious dating relationships used more openness, assurance, and prosocial strategies than other study participants.

It appears that Robinson's (1996) prediction regarding environments conducive to deceptive communication applies to relational environments and larger societal milieus. In this study, participants in relational environments with higher suspicion and lower relational quality were more likely to use deceptive messages than participants in less suspicious, higher quality relational environments.

It also appears that for the most part, messages with deceptive intention and messages designed for relational maintenance are not positively related. This raises questions about the assumed use of deceptive communication for relational maintenance purposes. Only the messages designed to harm other and the antisocial relational maintenance strategies were positively related in this study. From this study, it is apparent that there may be more going on in our message use than what our common sense would tell us.

To get at this issue, several things must occur. First, there needs to be further development of a measure of intent in deceptive messages. The scale used in this study had lower reliability than is optimal for this research. The inclusion of the three types of lies (falsification, distortion, and omission) within each message intent category is no doubt the culprit. In an effort to streamline the questionnaire and minimize the number of questions that participants are asked to respond to, the questionnaire loses reliability, requiring more messages per category for a better measure.

Second, this research should go live, with actual interactions between relational partners in response to experimental dilemmas. The interpersonal deception theory research by Buller, Burgoon, and their associates (e.g., Buller, Burgoon, White, & Ebesu, 1994; Burgoon, Buller, White, Afifi, & Buslig, 1999) would be one model for studying deceptive interactions in relationships.

Third, this research needs to become more international in focus. The majority of research on communication in relationships has taken place in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. We know virtually nothing about how individuals use deception in relationships where English is not their primary language. We also have little understanding about how other cultural morals and expectations may affect the use of deception in relationships, whatever its purpose may be.

In the end, it comes down to the relationship and the environment. Robinson suggests that lies beget lies, and this should give us cause for pause when lying to our intimate partners and close friends and associates. What relational environment do we create with our deceit, and what environment fosters the use of deceptive messages? In any case, simply believing that we are telling lies for the good of our partner and our relationship may well be the biggest deceit of all.

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