

Deception Techniques as Communication Strategies of Cheating Spouses

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ABSTRACT

Marital infidelity has become increasingly prevalent, often leading to the destruction of marriages and families when discovered. However, some individuals successfully conceal their affairs through strategic deception. This qualitative study explores the communication strategies employed by cheating spouses to hide their infidelity. Using a phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with five individuals (three men and two women in their 30s) engaged in long-term extramarital affairs without being caught. Turner's typology of deception—lies, exaggeration, half-truths, secrets, and diversion—served as the conceptual framework. The findings revealed that all informants utilized these deception types to mislead their spouses, with lies being the most common tactic. Half-truths and diversion were also frequently employed to avoid suspicion. The study highlights the manipulative behaviors and psychological dynamics underlying these strategies, suggesting a potential link to narcissistic traits. The research contributes to the understanding of deceptive communication in marital relationships and underscores the need for further studies on protective communication factors to mitigate infidelity's harm.

Keywords: marital infidelity, communication strategies, deceptions

INTRODUCTION

For the past decade, studies on spousal interpersonal communication have emphasized how couples interact with each other and how such interaction proceeds to achieve marital satisfaction and influence marital decisions (e.g., Oguchi, 2015 and Doho & Setiawan, 2022). Previous research has established a link between communication and marital satisfaction, although there is no consensus on the direction of this relationship. The debate persists on whether marital satisfaction leads to better communication, or whether good communication fosters marital satisfaction. Karel et al. (2014) explored how international spouses living in *Manado* communicate in their daily lives—focusing on the patterns, intensity, and challenges they face due to cultural differences. The study found that informants experienced various cultural barriers in their communication despite adopting open and intensive communication styles. However, in the Balinese context, it was found that communication among those married to foreigners was generally positive, thanks to cultural tolerance and respect (Tedjanegara & Azeharie, 2021). In the Sundanese context, migrant husbands who worked and lived away from their families were found to have better communication and relationships (thus, higher marital satisfaction) with their wives when they earned higher salaries (Herawati & Nurajizah, 2016).

Regarding marital satisfaction, Renanita & Setiawan (2018) found that among both working and non-working wives, communication and financial relations played significant roles. However, sexual satisfaction was also a key factor for working wives. In studies examining Indonesian couples' communication regarding contraceptive methods, it was found that half of the respondents had never attempted to communicate with their spouses about their choices of contraception (Oktabriani & Riono, 2019). In Nepal, families were more open to discussing contraceptive options due to higher levels of couple concordance (Underwood, 2019). These findings inspired the conclusion that lack of communication is a significant barrier to the national family planning program (Irawaty, 2021). Nevertheless, some couples have become more aware and creative in maintaining connection and intimacy, making use of mobile phones to stay connected with their spouses (Rahtikawati & Ratnasih, 2021).

One intuitively well-known aspect of infidelity is that it inevitably involves lying by one partner to disguise their extramarital activity in order to keep it undetected and ongoing.

Levine (2018) investigated how lies are perceived from specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors in a communication context, but the findings showed that meta-analyses and primary studies contradicted the validity of cue-based lie detection and what qualifies as reliable scientific evidence in this research area. Verigin (2018) explored the relationship between laypeople's self-reported ability to deceive and their frequency, types, and strategies of deception in daily life. Higher self-reported deception ability was positively correlated with telling more lies each day, telling inconsequential lies, lying to colleagues and friends, and communicating lies face-to-face. The study also revealed that self-reported good liars primarily rely on verbal strategies such as: 1) embedding lies within truthful information, 2) keeping statements clear and simple, and 3) providing plausible accounts.

In daily life settings, DePaulo & Kashy (1998) conducted diary studies in which students recorded their social interactions and lies told over the course of a week. Since lying is generally seen as a violation of openness and authenticity, it was predicted—and confirmed—that people told fewer lies to individuals with whom they felt closer connections and felt greater discomfort when doing so. White lies (i.e., those that communicate caring or aim to save face) were more frequently told to close friends than to acquaintances or strangers, and vice versa. Lies to close partners were also common, as anticipated. Notably, the study discussed altruistic lies (or white lies) as a way to protect someone's feelings, categorizing lies as either good or bad: bad lies are self-motivated, while good lies are not motivated by selfishness. Furthermore, the research found that among romantic partners who are not spouses, people lie in about one out of every three interactions, whereas spouses lie in fewer than one out of ten interactions. However, it remains inconclusive whether deeper intimacy causes more trust (and thus fewer lies), or whether relationships with inherent trust are more likely to progress to marriage.

Only a few studies have specifically addressed infidelity and communication, a topic that bridges psychology and sociology. Prior research has primarily focused on dating relationships. Dillow et al. (2011) examined the effects of communicative motives for infidelity on relationship communication and outcomes, finding that sexual depression moderated perceptions of partner uniqueness and the discussion of the aftermath of infidelity. Donovan & Sommer (2012) investigated how responses to infidelity are predicted by gender and attachment style, using scenario-based surveys, and found that different kinds of infidelity led to different communicative resolutions.

Frousakis (2010) discovered that marital satisfaction influences how the betrayed party communicates with the unfaithful partner. Kleine (2019) found that concession serves as a protective communication strategy for the psychological health of victims in the long run and emphasized that the unfaithful partner must be open to discussing their transgression. Hertlein (2021) attempted to identify the stages suffered by parties in recovering from the trauma of online infidelity (i.e., cheating via social media), which include intuition, investigation, discovery, confrontation, response, forgiveness, termination, and establishing new rules.

As people become more adventurous and open regarding sexuality (Levine et al., 2018), it might be assumed that the decision to commit infidelity is strictly personal. However, marital infidelity is particularly damaging—prior studies have indicated that it is often the “final straw” precipitating divorce (Scott et al., 2013). Rais (2014) argued that families invariably bear the negative impacts of extramarital affairs from either spouse. To worsen matters, the individuals involved may experience subsequent physical and psychological problems. Russell et al. (2013) reported higher levels of distress, anxiety, and even depression among victims of infidelity. The issues may also impact physical health: Shrout & Weigel (2018) found that trauma from being cheated on can lead to riskier behaviors such as unprotected sex and increased substance use, with possibly lasting effects. Most previous studies of deception in dyadic relationships have not focused exclusively on marriage (Shrout & Weigel, 2018); have centered on benign lies

that do not threaten marriage (Guthrie & Kunkel, 2013; Horan & Booth-Butterfield, 2013); or have relied on hypothetical scenarios via surveys or questionnaires (e.g., Stoll, 2013).

Existing research highlights a significant gap: namely, how actual perpetrators of infidelity communicate with their spouses to conceal their acts. This study differs from previous research on deception and romantic relationships in four ways. First, it focuses exclusively on marital relationships. Second, it addresses bold-faced deception in long-term marital affairs. Third, data are collected from real-life experiences of those involved in marital infidelity. Fourth, data gathering occurred over several months via semi-structured interviews, casual meetings, and instant messaging.

This study seeks to explore the real-life experiences of individuals who have engaged in marital infidelity without being caught by their spouses, focusing on the deception tactics employed in their communication with spouses in order to avoid detection.

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study attempted to explore the nature of our informants' experiences in deceiving their spouses to hide their affairs, as they truly occurred. In such situations, the study employs *phenomenology* as its approach. *Phenomenology* is "a study of phenomena as they manifest in one's experience, of the way we perceive and understand, and of the meaning phenomena have in one's subjective experience" (Smith, 2018). Husserl (1970), a prominent figure in *phenomenology*, defined it as "the science of the essence of consciousness." His work highlighted the importance of the concept of intentionality and how meaning is extracted from the actor's point of view. The purpose of *phenomenology* is defined as "to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation" (Lester, 1999).

This study is geared towards *hermeneutic* (interpretive) *phenomenology* as it: 1) obtains findings through a collaboration of understanding between the subjects and the researcher, and 2) acknowledges its limitations of universality, meaning this work welcomes individual differences and recognizes how people shape experience based on their own foundations (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). However, as Larsen and Adu (2021:105) propose, *phenomenology* does not always operate in only four ways. It is considered valid as long as it is: 1) inductive, 2) uses frameworks only descriptively, 3) involves experiences, 4) involves phenomena, 5) uses interviews as a data collection method, 6) has *epoche* and reduction, 7) is oriented towards obtaining meaning, 8) is based on various literature, and 9) is justified by literature. All these criteria are fulfilled in this study.

Regarding *epoche* and reduction, Tymieniecka (2003) argued that these are feasible by dissecting the phenomenon, analyzing it, setting aside the researcher's preconceptions, and consulting the subjects themselves to ensure that the extracted meanings genuinely reflect the owners' experiences. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted by the first researcher to highlight "the most important influences, experiences, circumstances, issues, themes and lessons of a lifetime" (Atkinson in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). On other occasions, when the first author met informants casually or interacted via instant messages or video calls regarding the topic, notes were also taken. None of the informants agreed to a second person being present during the interviews. Informants were notified that the conversations were being recorded. The information sought included how they lied to their spouses to conceal their affairs in various situations.

Data collection took place from September 2021 to November 2022, reflecting the nature of the relationships between interviewer and informants. To ensure reliability, informants were provided with transcripts of their interviews, including notes, to confirm the accuracy of what was recorded. Each informant had the right to review the data and decide whether their information should be disclosed or kept confidential.

Although infidelity is known to be split into three categories (i.e., emotional only, sexual only, and emotional + sexual), it is, in fact, a subject on which different people hold different views (Moller & Vossler, 2015). Therefore, this research focuses specifically on what is known to be the most destructive form of infidelity in marriage—namely, cases involving sexual acts (Scott et al., 2013). There must also be lasting and discreet factors in the relationship for the dishonest parties to be considered credible. The criteria for informants were as follows: A) being in a lawful marriage (not merely cohabiting or engaged), B) having engaged in sexual encounters with a partner outside the marriage, C) having been in the courtship for more than a year, and D) never having been caught by their spouses. Five informants—three males and two females—who met these criteria consented to participate, on the sole condition that their identities remain anonymous. All informants are in their 30s, identify as heterosexual, and have been married for at least four years. Each was interviewed separately.

Data analysis consisted of: 1) recording all conversations, along with crucial notes from both formal interviews and casual conversations; 2) accurately transcribing the interviews and relevant notes; 3) extracting themes, trends, and conversational modes, then grouping these into broader deception strategies employed by the informants. Similar analysis methods were used by Byrne & de Tona (2014) in their study of parental negotiation of multi-culture and decision-making for children's secondary education, by Nugraha & Barinong (2020) in studying divorce factors due to sexual infidelity, and by Shaleha in investigating motives for women's infidelity in marriage. However, the sample sizes in Byrne & de Tona (2014) were larger, preventing individual description of each informant, whereas Nugraha & Barinong (2020) and Rizky & Shaleha (2021) had relatively small samples, allowing for case-by-case descriptions. The extraction of themes, trends, and conversational modes to be grouped into broader deception strategies is based on the assumption that, although each informant's situation is unique, there are common strategies among those who deceive their spouses to conceal infidelity.

For this study, we used the typology of deceptions proposed by Turner et al. (1975, in Fan, 2018), which includes: lies (giving false statements), exaggeration (amplifying facts), half-truth (giving partial honesty while keeping the rest hidden), secret (saying nothing), and diversion (shifting topics in conversation). This typology is intended not as a theory to be validated, but as a *converter*—to borrow Larsen & Adu's (2022) term—to conceptualize and label the observed themes from the data analysis. A *converter* allows for pre-studied labels to be applied to the results of the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lies As A Communication Strategy of Cheating Couple

A lie, as Vrij (2008: 15, in Gündüz, 2017) is defined as “a deliberate successful or unsuccessful effort of an individual without any stimulus to create a belief that the source is not true.” For an information to be classified as a lie, one has to have the intention of doing so—a mistaken fact, thus, does not qualify as a lie. As an illustration: a lie is when we purposely want our kids to believe that a police officer will arrest them if they refuse to take a nap. There has to be an aspect of doing it on purpose.

In this study, our findings showed that this strategy of deception was done the most by spouses in concealing their marital infidelity. The informants had been deliberately telling things to their wives or husbands false actuality to be able to get away with their affairs. All of our informants at one point in their romantic liaisons had used this maneuver to escape the jeopardy of being caught by their spouses.

This strategy is especially rampant when they needed an excuse to be away from home for some time to stay overnight with their boyfriends or girlfriends. Informant we coded as M1 who had been on a long-run liaison with his girlfriend had always lied to his wife on that matter.

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“Every time I had to spend the night with my girlfriend, I told my wife that I had business out of town. I would pack my outfits as if I had been going to go to (mentioning a name of a city). Usually they would have been two pairs of clothes, because I would sweat a lot for sure (laughing), two or three pieces of undergarments, my toothbrush, mouthwash... Basically stuff the hotel did not provide. Oh and my praying kits. My wife needs to see that I would still be praying (laughing) instead of doing sin. I always packed light and dress rather informally because I do not want to lead her to think that I had been paid a lot if I somehow looked like I would be attending some serious meetings”. (Interview with M1, 21 September 2021)

M1 also admitted that he not only lied to his wife, but also to his children as he answered where he was going when he was about to spend the night together with his girlfriend.

“My kids understand that part of my job requires me to go out of town often, so with the big one I said nothing, but with the little one I said that I had to work so that I can afford the toys and ice cream. But I did always buy them stuff after I came back home even if it was cheap ice cream from a nearby convenient store.” (Interview with M1, 21 September 2021)

Also, lying has almost always been done when they were almost caught up red handed in the middle of chatting or video-calling with their boyfriends or girlfriends. Here is how M1 narrated his story.

“I was hiding inside my car because I had missed her so bad that I video-called her. We were laughing together when suddenly my kid ran to me. It was an unfortunate event. I had no time to hang up the call, so I flipped the screen away from my child. It was very foolish of me. The picture of my girlfriend reflected on the window of my car. My kid asked me who SHE was, so clearly, my girlfriend was seen in the reflection. I was very nervous because they two had met years before and she has this specific look. You know, the beautiful, young lady that is not easy to forget about. I told my kid that she was my friend and to get inside the house while I was buying time to say goodbye to my girlfriend. This happened many times, actually. Once I was sitting on the porch of my house, video-calling my girlfriend. We always talked a lot and at that time I was forgetful that I had been at home. I was giggling and smiling to the screen when my wife suddenly appeared. She asked me who I was video-calling, so it was also obvious that I was having a conversation with another person instead of just scrolling through Instagram. I told her that (mentioning a name) from work was video-calling me, telling me very funny jokes. My wife is not the suspicious type. She’s rather simple-minded”. (Interview with M1, 21 September 2021)

The theme of dodging suspicion when getting almost caught up during a phone call, video call or simply chatting apparently is pointing out a particular name of a person their spouses knew in real life as the person they were contacting. This is a consistent finding of our informants as they did it when they were on the verge of getting busted by their husbands or wives.

“I was eating my breakfast when he called me all of sudden. I had to pick up the call because it had rung for quite some time. Hanging on the call would have been more suspicious. So I ran upstairs with my plate in one hand (laughing) and told my husband that my friend (mentioning a name) was calling from a place with bad signal reception. You can tell now that I was clearly lying, but he had not really been paying attention so I got away with that easily.” (Interview with F1, 2 August 2022)

Another similar admission was given by a female informant who had been in a long-term and long-distance affair, F2.

“It was a day off of work for me and my boyfriend was working from home. His wife was working from office. (researcher’s note: all three worked at three different places) I was having this urge to video-call him so I did it, in my bathroom. We did not really talk because voices would echo inside the bathroom. Then I heard my husband coming for me, so I hung up the call. I told him it was my friend. Sometime after that I video-called my boyfriend again, but this

time I was on the bed with my husband (laughing). I laid facing him so he could not see what I was doing with my phone. I was on the call with my boyfriend (laughing).” (Interview with F2, 8 May, 2022)

Another informant, M3, also pleaded guilty of telling lies to his wife when he was almost got busted during a phone chat with his girlfriend. He told us that the wife had been acting weird, but he refused our idea that his affair might have been a topic of suspicion for her. He was 100% sure that his wife was only being nosy.

“We do not video-call. That is too big of a commitment because I do not normally video-call anyone. At home I tried to keep it as normal as possible, so no videocall. I do chat with my girlfriend. Small topics such as whether we had eaten or not. Very juvenile I know (laughing). My wife sometimes would try to peek at my screen, but I always told her it was (mentioning a name of his friend) trying to mess with me. Of course I needed to mention him. He had always been a friend I messed up with, my whole life. Otherwise, my wife would not believe me.” (Interview with M3, 8 November 2021)

On the topic of going out for a date that does not require spending the night together with their boyfriends or girlfriends, lies are also used. Those informants provided very similar excuses in this discussion, that is, they would all use their friends as the exemption.

Interestingly, M2 said that all of his closest male friends had this bro-code to let each other be the excuse should anyone in the group ever need permission to be away from their wives for a short rendezvous.

“We are all men and we have been friends for so long that we understand each other. Sometimes I did not go straight home after work because I was eating with that girl. My wife rarely asked anything, but if she did, I would tell her I was with (mentioning names of his friends).” (Interview with M2, 8 November 2022)

M1 also depicted his lies to his wife when he had to go out with his girlfriend. Again, friends are used as an excuse. We personally view that his relationship with the girlfriend might have been the closest as they have been on this forbidden liaison for the longest among the five informants. They also meet the most in a month, compared to the other four. Here is how he narrated his lies to his wife on this subject.

“We see each other a lot although now is less often than it was before. We used to meet daily back then. Now probably once or two a week. My wife is never a sensitive type, so she is easy to lie to. I dress better, I use skincare now but she doesn’t realize anything (laughing). If those never catch her sight, what will? For me to go out every weekend or after work is easy. I tell her I hang out with friends. Any names will do. Sometimes it is friend from work, sometimes it is my old classmates from school or university coming to town. As long as I come home afterward, she’s okay with that.” (Interview with M1, 21 September 2021)

F1 who had also been in a long-term affair mentioned the same thing. Being with friends apparently is the most generic excuse for these people to be away from home anytime.

“[Lying about short dates is] the easiest. I just told him I had errands to run or friends to see. I randomly mentioned names and my husband wouldn’t even ask twice.” (Interview with F1, 3 August 2022)

We noted that the theme underlying their confidence of never getting caught stems from the belief that their spouses somehow are intellectually inferior to them—that it is impossible for them to gasp that their significant others are lying to them due to lower cognitive ability. We sense narcissistic behavior behind their credence, which might coincide with the findings of Ngoc, et. al (2020) that narcissists tend to be more manipulative.

Half-truths As A Communication Strategy of Cheating Couple

A half-truth is defined as “a statement that is intended to deceive by being only partly true” (Cambridge Dictionary: accessed on November 18, 2022) It is a form of

controlling the extent of information given to the audience by giving partial falsehood to what otherwise perfect facts. Half-truths might be embedded in the whole information delivery: they may be given in the beginning, middle or last part of a remark. However, Barchetti et al., (2022) proposed that the sequence of conveying the false message plays an important role in the receiver's belief—a false piece of information given in the middle or last part of the delivery will be more likely to be perceived as plausible. In this case, we can illustrate that a credible piece of half-truth information should contain a logical fact in the opening, then followed by sequences of lies. The basis of this notion might be that a convincing fact allows the lies within to have a smoother reception as the audience has already bought the first information undoubtedly.

In the study, the half-truth strategy was also used repetitively. First, informant F1 used it many times during which she would acclaim her husband that she had meetings with colleagues to attend. The part about meeting colleagues was actually a fact—she did meet with her teammates. What is not true is the part afterward: she would not go home after the meeting. She would, instead, take time to see her boyfriend for an hour or two. When she got home, she would tell his husband the event of her meeting her copartners, but said nothing about her date following that.

She also uses this strategy when she bought things for her boyfriend. Now and then she would buy stuff to give to her men, online. As the information of her online purchase might be accessed by her husband (as it might be sent to her email on their shared laptop and the husband might see the package being delivered to their house), she would make a strategy of buying both of them similar things. Once, she was caught buying something for her boyfriend which happened to be the same size as her husband and had to give up the stuff for him because she had nothing to say about her buying a thing the size of her husband. She learned her lesson. She would then buy two similar things and give each man one.

Informant F2 used this tactic once when she had to be away for a work task out of town. F2 had been on a long-distance affair with her boyfriend for years, and the city she was assigned work at that time was nearby from her boyfriend's area. What she told her husband was that she had to go to the city for work (true part) and that he could not come with her during the first days because she would be sharing a hotel room with her workmate (false part). However, she told her husband that after the first days, he could come to join her and they would have a vacation together in the city. The fact was, during the first days, she had been with her boyfriend because it was on weekdays. Later on the weekend, the boyfriend needed to be with his wife, so there came the husband to fill in the spot.

Informant M1, who had been in the relationship the longest among the five, believed that in his case, this strategy is the one he had used the most to deceive his wife. He recounted many times he strategically said true things, followed by lies, to keep his relationship with his mistress safe. One is on occasional weekday's dinner out, and two is on mysteriously gone bonuses.

“On weekdays when I had a date appointment with my girlfriend, I would tell my wife that I would not have dinner at home. It was true, of course. I would have eaten by the time I got home from dinner with my girlfriend. Only, I mislead her that it was my boss who bought me dinner. Two, every time I got assigned work out of town or overtime, I would get a bonus. My wife and I don't share banking information, so neither of us knew how much was inside our separate accounts. Sometimes I would save up to buy my girlfriend stuff and my wife would ask me what I had done to my bonuses (laughing) so I told her the amount, which was the truth, but I said it had already gone to buy our kids things, which was the lie.” (Interview with M1, 21 September 2021)

The common theme about half-truth seemingly lies in the person's whereabouts when they needed to be with their boyfriends or girlfriends. It was apparent from our informants' responses that they deceive their spouses by giving their true location first, but then lie about

whom they are with. Sadly, in this topic, some of them revealed that it was their best effort of being “honest” with their spouses without jeopardizing their affairs.

Exaggeration As A Communication Strategy of Cheating Couple

An exaggeration is defined as “the fact of making something seem larger, more important, better, or worse than it really is” (Cambridge Dictionary: accessed on November 18, 2022). In the definition, it has an aspect of amplifying something to have more perceivable value than the truth. One type of exaggeration is hyperbole, that is, an overstatement of the actual situation by giving “numerical, adjectives, nouns, adverbs and many others” (Al-Tufaili & Al-Jobori, 2016).

In concealing their marital affairs, our informants employed this type of deception as well. M2 is one of our informants that we perceived as having the most casual kind of relationship with his mistress. Unlike M1 who had spent many years with his mistress and confessed of being “susah” (in sorrow) when he was away from her, M2 is more lenient about his affair in terms of not meeting her regularly would never bother him the way it did to M1. That being said, at times he needed to see the girlfriend, he would tell his wife again that his job required him to meet a lot of women. The thing is, he worked in a rather exclusively male-dominated sector that did not really entail meeting women, or anyone, for that matter. We also capture that he exaggerated the significance of his job by several degrees by the way he conveyed to his wife.

“I told her many times that I work for the country and for safety of a million of people, so she cannot nag me with childish complaints such as why I have to meet a lot of women. Meeting a lot of women is part of my job.” (Interview with M4, 8 November 2022)

As he had already pointed out that meeting women was the norm of his work, things got very easy for him. He did not even have to lie when seeing his girlfriend to his wife. He would casually say he was with a woman should his wife ask.

On this, M1 told us that he mostly exaggerated the level of his overtime work to his wife. His normal overtime was never past 8 in the evening, but he would stretch the fact by saying that he had to work until midnight while actually he was watching movies with the girlfriend.

M5 once used this gambit when he met his girlfriend in the evening after telling his wife that he would fill up his car tank. They had this brief rendezvous of one hour or two, and it was not normal for a person to go to a gas station for that long. When the wife asked him why it took him so long to fill up the gas, he told her there was a major queue of vehicles in the gas station due to a shortage of supply. He did not even go to the gas station and the wife never really checked the gas indicator.

F2 told us that the affair made her “way more dramatic” now that she had more things to hide. F2 had been on a certain medication and she used that a lot as an excuse for the change of her behavior to her husband. She went out of town several times with an excuse of her medication side effect that caused her to stress out while actually she was seeing the partner. On the bright side, she perceived that she had become a more “verbally romantic” person to her husband as she said “I love you” more, which she attributed to her guilt. She used exaggeration not only to cover her infidelity, but also to make up for it.

Exaggeration is ubiquitous in daily life as it has been internalized to be a figure of speech (Al-Tufaili & Al-Jobori, 2016; Lubis et al., 2020). Therefore, even when a person realizes that the speaker does it, one might think of it as an expression instead of intentional deception. In regard to this, it might be a reason why exaggeration is easy to believe, even when they are aware that their partners are amplifying the facts.

Secret As A Communication Strategy of Cheating Couple

A secret is a piece of information that is only known by one person or a few people and should not be told to others (Cambridge Dictionary: accessed on November 18, 2022). As a

deception, a secret is when a person totally keeps silent on a certain topic to make sure that the one they keep it from, never finds out. In the context of this study, secret plays a pivotal role in keeping the affairs of our informants safe. Some of them totally keep their spouses in the dark to the extent that the spouse had never heard of even the name of the mistress, while others stay silent to keep their activities of infidelity under the radar.

M5 is an example of very serious concealment of infidelity by mentioning none about his mistress to his wife. She did not even know that person existed. When things are concealed this tightly, it gets very easy for M5 to go on with his affair as the wife never suspected anything. This is due to the fact that the mistress was a person that M5 had known long before she met his wife and they did not really see each other that often, unlike F1 and M1. We found it to be staggering, as keeping total secrecy is stressful to a person's overall wellbeing (Jaffé & Douneva, 2020).

To F1 and M1, it is intricate for them to keep tiptoeing from their spouses as their spouses had met with their partners on several occasions before. The only thing they could keep secret about is their activities. It is unfathomable to keep a person as a secret when they are already known.

F2 is arguably a middle case as the husband knew him as an acquaintance of his wife that she knew during her years abroad. However, the story ended there. She never mentioned him ever again in front of her husband. The story about him vanished as the husband might have even forgotten his name. According to F2, this had set her drawbacks to keep a secret about a person, that is, when she missed him, she could never talk casually about that person in front of her husband.

To M4, the case is that the wife knew of his mistress as a friend. He kept zero secrets about her as he casually threw conversations about her in front of his wife. He even jokingly said he might take her as a second wife, but the wife never really took it as a serious matter. The only secret he kept was his real affair and activities with her.

Secret keeping is difficult, not only for the mental, but also on the physical level. Strangely, keeping a secret is associated with heightened bodily fatigue to a person (Jaffé & Douneva, 2020; Nuzuli, 2022). For that reason, all of our informants confessed to having shared their affairs with their trusted friends to let go of the part of the burden.

Diversion As A Communication Strategy of Cheating Couple

Diversion is defined as “the fact of something being sent somewhere different from where it was originally intended to go (Cambridge Dictionary: accessed on November 18, 2022). In the theme of deception, diversion is when a person changes the subject when a certain topic is brought into the conversation.

In this study, we found that diversion is something that is also done repeatedly. Most of our informants confessed to using this strategy when they thought they could not come up with plausible excuses and they would not risk getting caught while lying.

F1 changed the subject once when her husband asked why she had always been smiling at her phone, while in fact, she was on chat with her boyfriend. She told him internet memes were so funny and proceeded to show him memes she screenshotted on her phone. The husband laughed with her and forgot what he had asked her previously.

F2, who sometimes got very visibly emotional when she missed talking to her boyfriend, got asked why she had been looking sad by her husband. She would instantly change her facial expression and said many unrelated things, such as their future planning of opening a new business or turning on Netflix to watch a show together. When she could not handle it, she would ask her husband to rub her or give her a massage.

M1 was off-guard and left the internet on when he took a shower in the morning. His girlfriend called him for some reason, unbeknownst to her that his phone was being away from

the owner. She had been named her actual name on the phone and the wife told him that she had called. Very calmly he responded with a short “ooh” and told his wife to hurry to take a shower because they had to wake up the kids and take them to school.

M2 also had a similar phone situation with his wife. Once he was away from his phone and the wife opened it. She had discovered that her husband had talked to women and tried to confront him about that matter. Scarily manipulative, he said that he did not have to answer her questions as it was her fault to open his phone without his permission in the first place. Before it got tensed, however, he went on by telling her jokes. Her questions had never been answered.

The diversion technique also falls into the dark side category of manipulative behaviors (Ngoc et al., 2020). A person with manipulative traits usually scores high on Emotional Intelligence tests as they are capable of understanding other people better emotionally. Nonetheless, like any other aptitudes, this might or might not result in dysfunctional behaviors, especially when they already have altruistic motives to begin with.

CONCLUSION

As people engage in vow-breaking actions by committing extramarital adultery, they also cross boundaries by risking the future of their *matrimony*. Their violations extend to deception in all its manifestations—namely, telling lies, revealing only half-truths, exaggerating things, keeping secrets, and manipulating through diversion. We are hopeful that the findings of this study will be theoretically beneficial to the body of knowledge on deception in the context of familial interpersonal communication. We are equally hopeful that, in practical terms, these findings provide a foundation for future studies to further explore the protective factors in communication that can help safeguard marriages from infidelity.

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