

third—proved to be totally honest. Another study (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998) found that both community leaders and undergraduate students lied about once in every 10 conversations with people they were close to, such as romantic partners, best friends, and family members. More of the lies told to best friends and friends, however, were benevolent rather than self-serving, and the reverse was true of lies told to acquaintances and strangers, a finding replicated in a recent study (Ennis et al., 2008).

Most people think benevolent lies are told for the benefit of the recipient. For example, the majority of subjects in the DePaulo et al. (1996) study claimed such lying was “the right thing to do.” Other research paints a less flattering picture of who benefits most from lying. One study found that of 322 lies recorded, 75.8 percent were for the benefit of the liar (Lippard, 1988). Less than 22 percent were for the benefit of the person hearing the lie, while a mere 2.5 percent were intended to aid a third person. Table 3.1 identifies various reasons for lying, adapted from Camden et al. (1984) and other studies cited in this section.

Not all lies are equally devastating. Feelings like dismay and betrayal are greatest when the relationship is most intense, the importance of the subject is high, and when there was previous suspicion that the other person

TABLE 3.1 Some Reasons for Lying

REASON	EXAMPLE
Save face for others	“Don’t worry—I’m sure nobody noticed that stain on your shirt.”
Save face for self	“I wasn’t looking at the files—I was accidentally in the wrong drawer.”
Acquire resources	“Oh, <i>please</i> let me add this class. If I don’t get in, I’ll never graduate on time!”
Protect resources	“I’d like to lend you the money, but I’m short myself.”
Initiate interaction	“Excuse me, I’m lost. Do you live around here?”
Be socially gracious	“No, I’m not bored—tell me more about your vacation.”
Avoid conflict	“It’s not a big deal. We can do it your way. Really.”
Avoid interaction	“That sounds like fun, but I’m busy Saturday night.”
Leave taking	“Oh, look what time it is! I’ve got to run!”
Present a competent image	“Sure I understand. No problem.”
Increase social desirability	“Yeah, I’ve done a fair amount of skiing.”
Exaggeration	“You think <i>this</i> is cold? Let me tell you about how cold it was on that trip....”