

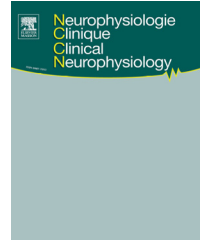


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REVIEW/MISE AU POINT

# Lying in neuropsychology

## *Mensonge et neuropsychologie*



X. Seron

Université catholique de Louvain, institut de psychologie, 70, avenue du Cor-de-Chasse, 1170 Bruxelles, Belgium

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tests

**Summary** The issue of lying occurs in neuropsychology especially when examinations are conducted in a forensic context. When a subject intentionally either presents non-existent deficits or exaggerates their severity to obtain financial or material compensation, this behaviour is termed malingering. Malingering is discussed in the general framework of lying in psychology, and the different procedures used by neuropsychologists to evidence a lack of collaboration at examination are briefly presented and discussed. When a lack of collaboration is observed, specific emphasis is placed on the difficulty in unambiguously establishing that this results from the patient's voluntary decision.

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**Résumé** La question du mensonge se pose en neuropsychologie surtout lorsque les examens sont conduits dans un cadre médico-légal. Lorsqu'un sujet présente intentionnellement des déficits inexistantes ou lorsqu'il exagère leur gravité dans le but d'obtenir une compensation financière ou matérielle, on parle de simulation (*malingering*). Dans cet article, la simulation est discutée dans le cadre plus général des travaux en psychologie sur le mensonge. Les différentes procédures utilisées par les neuropsychologues pour établir une absence de collaboration sont brièvement présentées et discutées. Enfin, lorsqu'un manque de collaboration est établi, une attention particulière a été apportée à la question de savoir si cela résulte d'une décision volontaire et consciente du patient.

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After a traumatic accident, when a person is physically and mentally disabled, it has become customary in forensic

medicine to conduct a neuropsychological examination to determine whether the patient presents a significant decrease of his/her cognitive abilities. The results of neuropsychological examination with other medical and psychosocial information will then be used to establish

E-mail address: [Xavier.Seron@uclouvain.be](mailto:Xavier.Seron@uclouvain.be)

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the extent of the financial, social or medical assistance to which the patient may be entitled (for example, financial reward, compensated time away from work, relief from legal consequences or obtaining medications) [98,118].

The results of neuropsychological assessment can greatly influence the size of the claim and therefore insurance companies require that this examination produce a credible appraisal of cognitive deficits and of their consequences on the patient's quality of life (economic and health status, but also psychological and emotional well-being). In the context of forensic evaluation, neuropsychologists have not only to evaluate the patient's deficits but must also exclude the existence of cognitive or behavioural deficits due to any pre-existing conditions such as dementia, learning disabilities, previous accident or psychiatric condition, unrelated to the accident.

Among the alternative causes of the exhibited deficits, neuropsychologists have to consider the existence of poor cognitive performance due to insufficient cooperation or even malingering. Later in this article, we employ the term malingering in the classic psychiatric sense, which refers to "the intentional production of false or grossly exaggerated physical or psychological symptoms, motivated by external incentives". We will examine malingering in the broader context of research on lying in psychology and neurosciences. We will then consider the difficult question of the relationship between lying and hysterical or somatoform reactions.

## The psychology of lying

There is no simple definition of lying, but in a general way to lie is to make a believed-false statement to another person with the intention that the statement be believed to be true [109]. However, in forensic psychology, lying is not restricted to the production of false statements, since it includes not only verbal statements but also any form of behaviour with the intention to make others form false beliefs regarding health and cognitive conditions. This larger definition includes lying by omission and withholding information [41,185]. A critical point is that lying implies *intentionality*. The intent of a liar must be to deliver information that he/she does not believe to be true, in a way that is intended to convince the receiver that it is true. Therefore, if a subject delivers false information that he believes to be true, there is no intent to deceive and thus there is no lie [47].

Although in some contexts lying is a deviant behaviour, there is wide acknowledgment that lying is a very common and socially useful behaviour. Most lies are produced for psychological motives: to protect ourselves, to obtain social support, to exchange supportive emotion. For instance, in an extensive study, De Paulo and her collaborators asked college students and unselected subjects of the community to keep daily records for a week of the lies they told in social interactions [31]. Based on the strict definition of a lie as "intentionally trying to mislead someone" they observed that lying was an everyday behaviour. Participants in the community study, on average, told one lie every day; while participants in the college student study told two. One out of every five times that the community members interacted

with someone, they told a lie; for the college students, it was one out of every three times. Interestingly, there was no effect involving either the sex of the liars or that of their victims. Although the diary method used by the authors was carefully controlled, it is highly probable that more lies were produced, since participants must have forgotten to report some lies, may have decided not to reveal some of them or even may have not realized that they were lying. People lie most frequently about their feelings, their preferences, and their attitudes and opinions. Less often, they lie about their actions, plans, and whereabouts. Lies about achievements and failures are also commonplace [30]. Lie-telling behaviour appears early in development since it emerges in the pre-school and early primary school years (3–8 years) [170]. Lying in children is associated with the development of their conceptual moral understanding of lies, with executive functioning, and theory-of-mind understanding. Lying is thus a frequent and normal behaviour acquired soon in life, socially and functionally useful in several situations [169].

At a behavioural level, lying can be examined in two directions: the *production* of lies and the *detection* of lies, and an important difference has indeed been observed between the human ability to produce versus to detect lies.

## Lie production

On the production side, people differ greatly in their ability to lie convincingly. Although little empirical research has examined the influence of personality factors on the ability to lie, it has been shown that fantasy-prone people are better able to fabricate stories that are judged more emotional, more plausible and richer by independent judges using standardized credibility criteria [116]. It has also been observed that individuals with high emotional intelligence (EI) defined as the ability to perceive, process, manage, and regulate emotion [146] are more efficient in adopting deceptive facial expressions (i.e., simulated more convincing deceptive emotions and maintained these displays for longer durations), relative to low EI participants [134]. Further, Grieve [68] found that varying levels of personality traits (i.e., high self-monitoring, low sincerity) contributed to efficient emotional manipulation. Previous studies have also shown that psychopathic traits – specifically, high level of interpersonal manipulation – are related to shorter duration of unintended emotional "leakage" during deceptive facial expressions. In summary, psychopathic individuals are good liars because they don't feel guilty or uncomfortable when lying; whereas subjects with high EI are potentially good liars because of their ability to control their emotion and a heightened ability to simulate emotional expressions [62,87,133]. However, the relationship between psychopathic individuals and lying efficacy is not always observed and in a recent study on a sample of prisoners, no relationship between higher level of psychopathic traits and feigned symptoms of major mental illness was observed [135].

Although it has been postulated that good liars will also be good at detecting liars, on the contrary, several older studies have shown that the ability to lie effectively is unrelated to the ability to detect the lies of others [28,192]. However, more recent studies indirectly raise some doubts about the absence of such link between lie production and

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