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Social value orientation and deception: are proselfs liars?

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Ample research has shown that social value orientations influence unethical behavior, and deception in particular: Proselfs (or individuals with situationally induced selfish motives) are often found to use more deception than prosocials (or individuals with induced cooperative goals). Previous research, however, has often focused on self-interest as the main motive for using deception, and overlooked prosocial motives for lying, like ingroup-favoring dishonesty or lies which aim at reaching fair outcomes. An instrumental perspective on deception [18], stating that bargainers select the most effective means to reach their goals, contends that deception by proselfs varies with the availability of alternative means, that proselfs and prosocials may deceive, but that they do so to reach different goals, and that the expectation of a counterpart's social motive is a crucial predictor of whether deception is an effective means to reach one's goals.

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Deception is widely considered a common tactic in negotiation and bargaining, which are seen as breeding grounds for unethical behavior [1]. These mixed-motive settings are characterized by the conflicting motives to cooperate so as to reach an agreement, and to compete so as to achieve personal gain. To solve this conflict, bargainers may be tempted to use deception. In fact, ethical decision-making in negotiation is mostly the choice between truth-telling and deception [2].

Deception, the 'deliberate attempt, without forewarning, to create in another a belief which the communicator considers to be untrue' [3], can be active or passive. Deception by *commission* entails actively falsifying information, while deception by *omission*, or passive lying, leads others to make incorrect inferences [4]. Deception is usually attributed to self-interest. For example, deception has been studied in an ultimatum game with two parties bargaining over money: An allocator proposed a division, and a recipient could accept or reject it. Upon acceptance, the money would be divided as proposed. Upon rejection, both bargainers would receive nothing. Only one party knew the amount of money at stake and informed the other party about it. Results showed that bargainers made their offers appear more generous than they actually were by pretending that a lower amount was at stake [5]. Similarly, bargainers may call their offers fair in order to increase the chance that the opponent will accept them [6].

Corroborating the idea of self-interest triggering deception, bargainers have been found to deceive more under win-oriented rather than cooperative conflict frames [7] or when it yielded higher profits [8]. However, self-interest is not the only goal individuals may pursue. Which goals someone pursues is influenced by the personality characteristic social value orientation, a relatively stable preference for distributions of outcomes [9]. Depending on the weight people assign to their own and others' outcomes, most people can be classified as either prosocial, individualist or competitive [10]. Prosocials prefer equality, individualists strive for high individual outcomes regardless of the outcomes of others, and competitors aim to maximize their outcomes relative to the outcomes of others. Individualists and competitors are often taken together as proselfs, because both assign more weight to own than to other's outcomes [11].

Besides being rooted in the personality characteristic of social value orientation, prosocial and egoistic motives can also be situationally induced, for example through instructions from superiors or organizational reward systems — bonuses for individual performance motivate people to act selfishly, while group-based reward systems trigger cooperative goals. Researchers have also used instructions or incentives to induce prosocial and egoistic motives. To induce an egoistic motive, participants in a dyadic negotiation experiment, for example, would be instructed to reach an agreement which is either as valuable as possible for them individually, or they would be promised a reward based on the value of their individual outcome. In order to induce a prosocial motive, participants would be instructed to reach an agreement which is maximally valuable for both negotiators together, or they would be promised a reward based on the collective value of a negotiated outcome (e.g., [4]). A meta-analysis [12] revealed that situationally induced social motives and dispositional social value orientations are functionally equivalent in the context of negotiation. Studies in which researchers used incentives to manipulate social motives

(rather than measuring social value orientations) therefore corroborate the effects of social value orientations in ethical decision-making, and are included in this review (Figure 1).

How does social value orientation influence ethical decision-making?

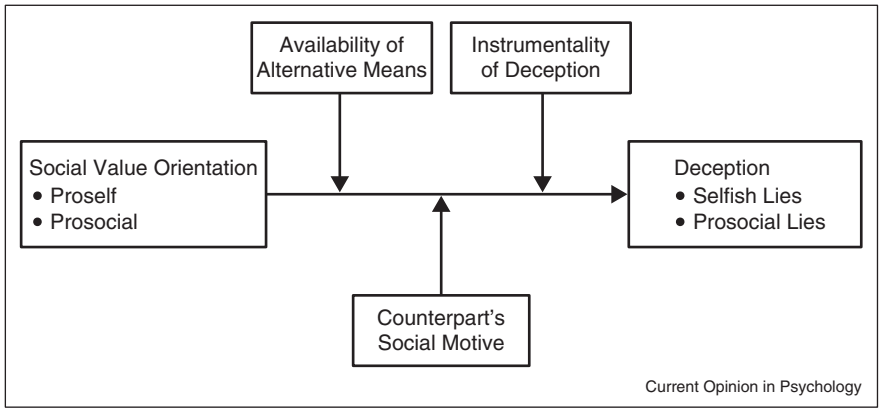
The question arises how social value orientation influence ethical decision-making, and deception in particular. To answer this question, I will review theoretical and empirical work, distinguish between different goals for deception and ways to deceive, and conclude with an instrumental model that relates the use of deception to the goals bargainers pursue.

In a review of deception research, Gaspar and Schweitzer [13•] describe how motivations and cognition of negotiators influence the deception process, and conclude that 'across negotiation situations, proself negotiators are more deceptive than prosocial negotiators' (p. 164). This conclusion echoes a prediction of the motivated information-processing in groups model [14], that 'group members with a prosocial motive are more likely to communicate accurate information, whereas group members with a proself motive engage in more lying, deception, and misrepresentation' (p. 34).

Indeed, there is ample evidence that proselfs deceive more than prosocials. In a role-play negotiation study, dyads who were either individualistically or cooperatively motivated negotiated over several issues. One issue was compatible, as both negotiators favored the same solution for it. By misrepresenting one's preference on this compatible issue, a negotiator could pretend to concede, ask for a concession on another issue in return, and get the preferred outcome on both issues. Most of the deception that occurred were acts of omission (e.g., bargainers concealed the fact that they held compatible interests on the common-value issue, when the counterpart made a favorable offer) instead of commission (i.e., active misrepresentation of their interests). Importantly, misrepresentations occurred more frequently in individualistically motivated dyads [4]. Similarly, in a group decision-making study [15], more strategic concealment and active lies were observed among individualistically than among prosocially motivated participants. In an ultimatum bargaining study, participants acted as allocators and proposed a division of chips, which were twice as valuable to them as to the recipient. Prosocial allocators were truly fair and compensated recipients for the lower value of chips, no matter whether recipients knew about the exchange rate advantage or not. Proselfs, however, compensated counterparts who knew about the exchange rate differences, but concealed their advantage to counterparts who were unaware [16]. In a study on coalition formation [17], groups of three participants had to form two-person coalitions and divide a number of chips within the winning coalition. One player had an exchange rate advantage, and could either reveal this private information to the other players, or lie and claim that the chips were of the same value to them as to the others. Proselfs lied more often than prosocials. As a consequence, prosocials were more successful, as revealing their exchange rate advantage made them attractive partners who were included in more winning coalitions, the prerequisite for materializing the payoff advantage.

So, in view of these findings: Are proselfs liars and prosocials saints? The remainder of this chapter aims to draw a more variegated picture. First, there are not only selfish, but also prosocial lies. Second, and more importantly, many studies qualify the finding of selfish liars, and describe how deception by proselfs depends on aspects of the situation. Furthermore, several studies support an

Figure 1



Proposed conceptual model: an instrumental approach to deception [18,24] presupposes that people select the means they find most instrumental to their current goal. Proselfs and prosocials alike use deception when they consider it the most effective means to reach their goals, and often refrain from deception when they have alternative means to reach their goals.