



# Lies, truths, and attachment orientations in late adolescence

Eitan Elaad <sup>\*</sup>, Shiri Lavy, Diana Cohenca, Ester Berholz, Pnina Thee, Yaara Ben-Gigi

Ariel University Center, Ariel 40700, Israel

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 26 May 2011

Received in revised form 28 November 2011

Accepted 14 December 2011

Available online 14 January 2012

### Keywords:

Lies  
Truths  
Lie-detection  
Truth-telling  
Attachment  
Biases

## ABSTRACT

In this paper we examine the association between adolescents' attachment orientations and their perceived abilities to tell and detect lies and truths. The 121 adolescents who participated in this study (a) self-assessed their abilities to tell and detect lies and truths and (b) completed a measure of attachment orientations (ECR). Results indicated that participants overestimated their truth-related abilities (i.e., truth telling and truth detecting) and their lie detection abilities, but not their lie-telling abilities. Attachment anxiety predicted poor subjective abilities related to lies (i.e., telling and detecting lies) and poor subjective abilities related to delivering messages (i.e., telling lies and truths). Attachment avoidance predicted low self-ratings of truth-telling abilities. This is the first study to link insecure attachment orientations with perceived abilities to tell and detect lies and truths, and the first to link avoidance to lack of self-confidence in delivering truthful messages. The implications of these findings for interpersonal relationships, criminal interrogation, and court litigations are discussed. Suggestions for future studies examining broader implications of the results are offered.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Bond and DePaulo (2008) conclude that people differ little from one another in their ability to detect lies. Their report implies that most people's unbiased self-assessment of lie and truth detection abilities should be reported as: "as good as others". However, earlier studies showed that most people overestimate their own ability to detect lies (Ekman & O'Sullivan, 1991; Elaad, 2003). This bias fits general human assumptions that most communications are truthful and that if they are not, their lack of veracity can be unveiled (e.g., Simpson, 2007).

In this paper, we will focus on investigating self-assessments of the perceived ability to tell the truth convincingly, the perceived ability to identify truth told by another person, and the perceived abilities to tell lies convincingly and detect lies in others. Earlier studies demonstrated that these perceived abilities are biased (e.g., Elaad, 2009, *in press*). We will further examine attachment differences related to these perceived abilities because evidence suggests that attachment orientations are connected to issues of truth and deception (e.g., Gillath, Sesko, Shaver, & Chun, 2010; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). As far as we know, this is the first study to examine association between attachment orientations and self-assessments of the four abilities mentioned above.

Different biases in self-assessed abilities to tell and detect lies and truths have been found when different populations were examined. For example, studies showed that law-enforcement

officers estimated their lie-detection ability as being higher than average (Elaad, 2003, 2009), but students did not (Elaad, *in press*). Similarly, research showed that police interrogators estimated their lie-telling abilities as higher than average, but prisoners, laypersons and students did not (Elaad, 2009, *in press*). These differences may be related to contextual factors (i.e., individuals' vocational environment), but also to personality underlying vocational choice or development (e.g., the choice of working at a job focused on detecting lies may be related to certain perceptions of relatively high a priori self-evaluations of lie-detection abilities).

Thus, in the current study we aimed to explore associations between abilities of telling and detecting lies and truths and attachment factors. We chose to focus on attachment orientations which reflect internal working models of self, others and relationships (Bowlby, 1982), as an exemplary case for individual characteristics which are linked to the related perceptions of the four mentioned abilities. We hypothesized that differences in self reported abilities to tell and detect lies and truths would be related to differences in attachment orientations.

Attachment theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1982; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) suggests that caregivers (usually parents), who provide security in childhood by responding effectively to the child's needs, help the child develop positive mental representations of the self and his/her relationship partners. These sensitive, responsive, attachment figures also support the development of effective emotion regulation strategies and adaptive techniques to cope with threats and stressors. Consequently, secure children and adults are less defensive, establish relationships that are more open, and demonstrate greater emotional awareness (Gillath et al.,

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author. Tel./fax: +972 25865634.

E-mail address: [elaad@netvision.net.il](mailto:elaad@netvision.net.il) (E. Elaad).

2010). Secure adults report being honest (Gillath et al., 2010), and trusting, and describe other people as basically good, and well-intentioned (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Conversely, unsupportive and unreliable caregivers facilitate development of insecure attachment orientations, characterized by negative representations of the self and/or of others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), often leading to frequent use of self-protective defenses that interfere with empathy and openness, and encourage dishonesty (Gillath et al., 2010).

Two distinct dimensions reflecting different kinds of insecurity are attachment anxiety and avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Individuals who have high attachment anxiety are characterized by fears of rejection or abandonment, a low sense of self-worth, negative beliefs about themselves and others, and low trust in others. These individuals obsessively try to please others and avoid conflict, confrontation, and disappointments (Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Lydsdottir, & Olafsdottir, 2008). In contrast, avoidant attachment is characterized by discomfort with closeness and reluctance to depend on relationship partners. It is associated with negative representations of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991); unwillingness to disclose feelings to others; reluctance to seek and provide help; and low relationship satisfaction, trust, and commitment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Despite attachment orientations' connection to issues of honesty, very few studies have examined attachment insecurities and lie/truth related issues (Gillath et al., 2010). The few studies that examined these issues linked attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) with dishonesty: Cole (2001) found that attachment anxiety and avoidance were both related to dishonesty in romantic relationships, and Ennis, Vrij, and Chance (2008) showed similar associations between anxiety and lying to strangers and best friends, and between avoidance and lying to romantic partners. Gillath et al. (2010) also reported association between attachment insecurities, reported lying, and beliefs that one's romantic partner is lying. Lopez and Rice's (2006) study of the Authenticity Relationship Scale supported these findings by revealing strong negative links between attachment anxiety and avoidance and the unacceptability of deception scales.

Taken together, these findings suggest that insecure (anxious and avoidant) individuals tend to lie more, and may imply that their ratings of lie-telling abilities would be higher. But high self-ratings of lie telling abilities do not reflect common use of lies, but rather the subjective evaluation of how successful the individual is in delivering them and in convincing others that they are truths. Thus despite their lie-telling tendencies, typical low self-esteem, and strong need for others' reassurance, we hypothesized that attachment anxiety will be associated with lower self-reports of the abilities to tell and detect lies and truths. As to avoidant individuals, despite empirical indications of their lacking relationship skills, they do not tend to have a lower self-esteem or devalue their interpersonal skills (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). We hypothesized that avoidant individuals' disbelief in others will lead them to rate their truth-related abilities relatively low, but we are not sure if and how it would affect their self evaluations of their lie-related abilities.

Understanding the relationships between perceived abilities to tell and detect lies and truths and attachment insecurities will not only increase our knowledge about the effects of attachment factors on these perceived abilities, but may also shed light on the choice of communication mechanisms that insecure individuals use in their interpersonal relationships. This choice may, in turn, influence their relationships.

The current study focused on a sample of adolescents. This age group's lying has hardly been studied (Warr, 2007), and their inclinations to adopt lie and truth biases have not been studied at all. Adolescents possess unique attributes, such as spending increasing

amounts of time with peers (Warr, 2005), and often telling lies to their parents in an attempt to achieve greater autonomy (Arnett-Jensen, Jensen-Arnett, Feldman, & Cauffman, 2004). Gaining lying experience may further develop their lie-telling abilities and their overall self-confidence in their telling and detecting skills, but can also reflect reduced emphasis on truth related issues.

It is hypothesized that adolescents with anxious attachment will have more difficulties negotiating their autonomy than secure adolescents, due to their negative self-perceptions and over-dependence. As a result, we believe that anxious adolescents will have more doubts about their perceived abilities to tell and detect lies and truths. Findings in support of this hypothesis further strengthen our previous hypothesis about a negative association between anxiety and self-ratings of the mentioned abilities.

If supported, the links between attachment insecurities and poorer perceived lie and truth related abilities may have important implications. Adolescents with insecure attachment orientation are more likely to acquire delinquent friends (Fergusson & Horwood, 1999; Warr, 2007) and be themselves interrogated for criminal acts. The expected association between insecure attachment orientation of adolescents and the inability to deliver their truth convincingly may impair their chances to convince the interrogators and the court of their innocence.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

We surveyed 121 Israeli adolescents (54 males and 67 females), ranging in age from 14 to 18 ( $M = 17.0$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ), who volunteered to take part in the study.

### 2.2. Materials

Participants were asked to complete two measures

- (a) The Hebrew version of the *Experiences in Close Relationships* (ECR) questionnaire (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998), which was translated and validated by Mikulincer and Florian (2000). The questionnaire comprises two distinct subscales tapping attachment anxiety (e.g., "I worry about being abandoned") and avoidance (e.g., "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down"). Participants rated each of the 36 items (18 on each scale) on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale. In the current study, the two subscales were uncorrelated, as expected ( $r = .17$ , ns), and showed satisfactory internal reliabilities ( $\alpha = .89$  and  $\alpha = .79$ , for anxiety and avoidance, respectively).
- (b) The *Lies and Truth Related Abilities Questionnaire*, in which participants self-assessed their own lie-telling, lie-detecting, truth detecting, and truth-telling abilities relative to other people's abilities, on a scale ranging from 0 (much worse than others) to 100 (much better than others), with 50 (as good as others) serving as the middle point. This scale has been used in previous studies (e.g., Elaad, 2009, in press).

To control for potential order effects, one half of the participants received the questionnaire in the above described order and one half in reverse order.

### 2.3. Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaires individually at their schools. They were told that the goal of the study was to explore students' attitudes toward lying and truth-telling, and were

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/891087>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/891087>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)