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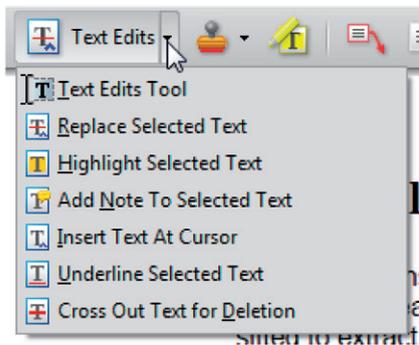
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Instrumental lying by parents in the US and China

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The practice of lying to one's children to encourage behavioral compliance was investigated among parents in the US ($N=114$) and China ($N=85$). The vast majority of parents (84% in the US and 98% in China) reported having lied to their children for this purpose. Within each country, the practice most frequently took the form of falsely threatening to leave a child alone in public if he or she refused to follow the parent. Crosscultural differences were seen: A larger proportion of the parents in China reported that they employed instrumental lie-telling to promote behavioral compliance, and a larger proportion approved of this practice, as compared to the parents in the US. This difference was not seen on measures relating to the practice of lying to promote positive feelings, or on measures relating to statements about fantasy characters such as the tooth fairy. Findings are discussed with reference to sociocultural values and certain parenting-related challenges that extend across cultures.

Keywords: Deception; Socialization; Interpersonal communication; Crosscultural differences.

Cette recherche effectuée aux États-Unis ($N=114$) et en Chine ($N=85$) porte sur l'habitude des parents de mentir à leurs enfants pour encourager la conformité de leur comportement. La grande majorité des parents (84% aux États-Unis et 98% en Chine) rapportent avoir menti à leurs enfants pour cette raison. Dans les deux pays, cette habitude s'exprime le plus souvent par la fausse menace d'abandonner l'enfant seul en public s'il refuse de suivre le parent. Il y a des différences selon la culture : une plus grande proportion des parents chinois rapportent qu'ils utilisent le mensonge instrumental pour obtenir la conformité de comportement et une plus grande proportion d'entre eux approuvent cette habitude comparativement aux parents américains. Une telle différence n'existe pas pour les mesures concernant l'habitude de mentir afin de promouvoir des sentiments positifs ou à l'égard des mesures ayant trait aux assertions à l'égard des personnages de fiction tels que la petite souris. La discussion des résultats prend en considération les valeurs socioculturelles et certains défis parentaux communs quelle que soit la culture.

La práctica de mentir a los propios hijos para alentar el cumplimiento del comportamiento se investigó en padres de EE.UU. ($N=114$) y China ($N=85$). La gran mayoría de los padres (84% en los EE.UU. y el 98% en China) informó haber mentido a sus hijos con dicho propósito. Dentro de cada país, la práctica más frecuente tomó la forma de falsa amenaza de dejar a el/la niño/a solo/a en público si él o ella se negaba a seguir a los padres. Se observaron algunas diferencias transculturales: en comparación con los padres de los EE.UU., una mayor proporción de los padres de China informó que habían empleado la mentira instrumental para promover el cumplimiento de comportamiento, y una mayor proporción de padres aprobaba esta práctica. Esta diferencia no se observó en las medidas relativas a la práctica de mentir para promover sentimientos positivos ni en las medidas relativas a declaraciones acerca de personajes de la fantasía, como el Ratón Pérez. Se discuten los resultados en relación a los valores socioculturales y a ciertos desafíos relacionados con la crianza que se extienden a través de las culturas.

Moral dilemmas regarding the acceptability of different forms of lying are pervasive across human societies. Although lying can damage interpersonal relationships by undermining trust,

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45 it can also provide speakers with a means to obtain
a number of desired outcomes. By lying, a person
may be able to protect another person's feelings,
gracefully disengage from an unpleasant interac-
tion, or persuade others to do things they would
50 not otherwise do. Dilemmas regarding the accept-
ability of lying can take on particular moral
significance when they involve parents and their
children. This significance derives from a range of
factors, including the extent to which children are
55 dependent on their parents, limitations in chil-
dren's cognitive ability and social experience, and
the special obligations parents have to promote
their children's wellbeing (Bok, 1978).

It is important to investigate parental lying
60 because this practice may play a role in children's
lying behavior and evaluations of others who lie,
two issues that are widely recognized as central to
moral development (Bussey, 1999; Fu, Xu,
Cameron, Heyman, & Lee, 2007; Perkins &
65 Turiel, 2007; Peterson, Peterson, & Seeto, 1983).
Because promoting honesty is a major focus of
socialization efforts (Barnes, 1994; Lewis, 1993;
Robinson, 1996; Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986), par-
ents often teach children that lying is wrong in all
70 cases, and commonly use stories such as *The Boy
Who Cried Wolf* to emphasize the negative
consequences of lying (Heyman, Luu, & Lee,
2009). Children who discover that their parents
have lied to them to achieve a desired goal may
75 wonder why different standards of conduct should
apply to different people, and they may begin to
justify their own lying with reference to lies their
parents have told. The study of lying as a
parenting practice also has the potential to provide
80 insights into contexts in which the goals and
desires of parents are likely to clash with those of
their children. In addition, this research can reveal
how parents grapple with the question of whether
lies can ever be morally justified, a subject of
85 longstanding philosophical debates (Austin, 1962;
Bentham, 1843; Kant, 1797/1949).

Although previous research has yielded a wealth
of valuable information about the contexts in
which children lie to their parents (Cumsille,
90 Darling, & Martínez, 2010; Jensen, Arnett,
Feldman, & Cauffman, 2004; Knox, Zusman,
McGinty, & Gescheidler, 2001; Marshall, Tilton-
Weaver, & Bosdet, 2005; Perkins & Turiel, 2007;
Smetana, Villalobos, Tasopoulos-Chan, Gettman,
95 & Campione-Barr, 2009; Wilson, Smith, & Ross,
2003), the topic of parents' lying to children has
been almost completely ignored. In one of the only
studies addressing this topic, Brown (2002)
observed Tzeltal-speaking Mayan corn farmers
100 who lived in the rural community of Tenejapa, in

southern Mexico. Brown reported that parents in
this community often lied to their children in an
attempt to influence their behavior, and that they
did not consider it morally problematic because
they believed there is a general expectation within
105 their community that each person will lie at times
in the service of self-interest.

Heyman et al. (2009) investigated a phenom-
enon among parents in the US that they described
as "parenting by lying." Nine example statements
110 were presented that described a parent lying to a
child to influence his or her behavior or emotions.
Participants were asked whether they had made
similar statements to their own children. Seventy-
eight percent of parents reported saying something
115 similar to one or more of the example statements,
and the parents who reported that they were
strongly committed to the goal of teaching their
children that lying is always wrong were no less
likely to have lied to their children than were other
120 parents.

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

This study focuses on instrumental lying, which we
define as lying to influence the behavior of others.
This definition appears straightforward but it can
125 be difficult to apply, which is not surprising given
the longstanding philosophical debates about the
definition of lying. For example, there is wide-
spread disagreement about whether an intention-
ally misleading statement that is not strictly false
130 should be considered a lie (Kind, 2010). It is also
difficult to develop an operational definition of
lying because it is often difficult to ascertain a
speaker's beliefs or motives. A false statement can
be made because the speaker is trying to be
135 entertaining, or for more sinister reasons. In
addition, a lie that appears to serve one purpose
can be based on other motives as well.

In light of the theoretical challenges of develop-
ing a sound operational definition of instrumental
140 lying, as well as the limited amount of prior
research on instrumental lying as a parenting
practice, we focused on cases of parental lying
that were relatively unambiguous and in which the
desired behavioral outcome was clear, such as
145 when a parent tries to encourage a child to finish
his or her dinner. However, we were not so
restrictive in our choice of for which that we
expected universal agreement among adults that
each of our statements would constitute a lie. For
150 example, we included statements that could be
interpreted as being partially true, or having some
basis in folk beliefs.

We examined instrumental lying by parents from a crosscultural perspective by comparing the reports of parents from the US and China. Like the question of parental lying itself, conducting crosscultural research is never a straightforward proposition. Samples often differ in important ways other than culture, and they may not be representative of the broader culture in which the participants live. Despite these limitations, we determined that a crosscultural comparison would provide a means to gain insights into the extent to which certain types of instrumental lies tend to be culturally specific.

We were particularly interested in making a crosscultural comparison between parents in the US and China, in light of recent evidence that individuals in Eastern and Western societies tend to hold different beliefs about lie-telling that are associated with broader differences in cultural values. For example, children and adults in East Asian countries tend to view telling a lie for the purpose of appearing modest (e.g., by assigning credit for one's own work to others) more favorably than do children in the West (Fu, Lee, Cameron, & Xu, 2001; Heyman, Itakura, and Lee, 2011; Lee, Cameron, Xu, Fu, and Board, 1997), and this difference is associated with a greater cultural emphasis on modesty in East Asia (e.g., Bond & Hwang, 1986). Cultural differences have also been seen in relation to lying for the benefit of the self versus the collective. Fu et al. (2007) found that a group of children of ages 7 to 11 years in China were more likely to disapprove of lies that were told to benefit a specific individual rather than a group, whereas Canadian children of the same ages showed the reverse pattern. It is possible that there are crosscultural differences in reasoning about parental lying in particular. Heyman et al. (2009) found that within a sample from the US, Asian American parents were more likely to endorse the practice of parental lying than were other parents, a finding that parallels a greater emphasis on promoting obedience and respect among people who live in East Asia (Chao, 1995; Lin & Fu, 1990).

We asked parents in both the US and China to report about their own instrumental lying, and the extent to which they approve of a set of specific lies that had been collected from individuals in each country. We also asked parents about untrue statements that were designed to influence children's emotions, and ones that involve fantasy characters (Clark, 1995), to serve as a basis for comparison. Additionally, parents were asked about their beliefs concerning lying by children.

METHOD

Participants

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Participants were parents from the US ($N=114$) and China ($N=85$) who had at least one child who was three years old or older. Most of the participants from each country were recruited using letters or emails that were sent from their child's school that invited them to participate. Parents were given the option of responding on a printed form or using a confidential web-based survey. According to self-reported ethnicity, participants from the US were 15.8% Asian American, 8.8% Latino, 0.9% Middle Eastern, 71.9% Caucasian, 0.9% biracial, and 1.7% other. The Chinese sample was 100% Han Chinese.

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Participants from the US reported having an average of 2.2 children (range 1 to 7, mean 1.0 girls and 1.2 boys), and participants in China reported having an average of 1.2 children (range 1 to 3, mean 0.6 girls and 0.6 boys). Among participants from the US, 91% reported having some college education and 77% reported having a college degree; among Chinese participants, 59% reported having some college education and 29% reported having a college degree. The sample from the US was 80% female and the sample from China was 48% female.

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Materials and procedure

Before answering any questions, participants were told, "We are interested in how parents socialize their children, and we are collecting information through this survey to learn about parents in general rather than to assess individual people." Parents were also told that they should only participate if they have at least one child age 3 or older, that their responses will be confidential, and that they should feel free to skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering.

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Participants were presented with a set of lies (see Table 1) that included a series of different categories. The overall reliability for the lying items was .92, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha. Reliabilities for individual categories are also presented in Table 1.

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Of central theoretical interest were four categories of instrumental lie items, with four items in each category. The four categories of instrumental lies consisted of lies related to eating (e.g., telling a child, "You need to finish all your food or you will get pimples all over your face"), leaving or staying at a specific location (e.g., an insincere threat such

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260 as “If you don’t come with me now, I will leave
you here by yourself”), misbehavior (e.g., an
insincere threat such as, “If you don’t behave, I
will call the police”), and spending money (e.g.,
falsely telling a child, “I did not bring money with
265 me today. We can come back another day”).

In addition to the instrumental lie items, parents
were also asked to respond to a set of untruthful
comparison statements, including statements
intended to promote positive emotional outcomes
270 (e.g., telling a child “That was beautiful piano
playing,” when the playing was terrible) and a set of
statements concerning supernatural beings (e.g., “If
you put this tooth under your pillow, the Tooth
Fairy will come and change it into a gold coin”).

275 Items were developed through an iterative
process involving teachers, school officials, and
college students from both countries. An initial set
of items was developed based on discussions with
parents and school officials in both countries, and
280 students described lies that their parents had told
them. The resulting statements were then grouped
into categories based on the apparent goal that the
statement was intended to achieve. The most
common topical categories were chosen, and
285 another group of college students in each country
were asked to generate example items from within
each category. From this set, items were chosen
that could be explained in simple terms, and that
were mentioned frequently (especially if they were
290 generated by individuals in each country, a
category that comprised about half of the final
list of items). The final list contained four items in
each category, with at least two being mentioned
by individuals in the US, and at least two being
295 mentioned by individuals in China.

After participants were presented with each
item, they were asked whether they had ever said
something similar to their own child or children
(the *parent lie measure*). The possible response
300 options were *yes*, scored as 1, and *no*, scored as 0.
Each statement was also assigned a *lie category*
score of 1 if it matched one of the four examples in
a given category, and 0 otherwise. Category scores
were summed across the four instrumental lie
305 categories to create a *parent instrumental lie score*
that ranged between 0 and 4.

After each response to the parent lie measure,
participants responded to a *moral approval mea-*
sure in which they were asked, “On a scale from 1
310 to 5, with 1 meaning very bad/extremely not okay
and 5 meaning very good/extremely okay, rate
whether it is okay for a parent to say something
similar to this example to his or her child.”

All participants were also asked to provide
315 demographic information, such as their ethnicity,

and were asked to report on how religious they are
on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all religious*) to
7 (*very religious*). Participants in the US were
asked to rate their political philosophy on a scale
320 ranging from 1 (*liberal*) to 7 (*conservative*). These
items were included for exploratory purposes. The
religious items were included because Heyman
et al. (2009) found that some parents brought up
factors associated with their religious beliefs when
325 discussing topics of lying and honesty with their
children (e.g., a parent reported telling her child
that he should always tell the truth because Baby
Jesus knows when he lies). Additionally, it has
been suggested that religiosity may be associated
330 with differences in fundamental moral beliefs
(Graham & Haidt, 2010). The political philosophy
questions were included in light of evidence that
moral judgments sometimes differ as a function of
political philosophy (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek,
335 2009). For example, having a politically conserva-
tive orientation has been found to be associated
with greater concern with authority and respect.

Participants in both countries completed a *child*
lie acceptability scale that involved the following
340 child lie scenarios: (1) a child breaks his mother’s
rule by eating cookies before dinner, and then tells
her that the cat ate the cookies; (2) after a child
knocks over his friend’s cup of juice, the friend
explains to their teacher that the cup was knocked
345 over by the wind; (3) a child tells her father that
she has read a book that she did not actually read;
and (4) a child tells his classmates that his father is
an astronaut when his father is actually a truck
driver. For each item, parents rated the lie on a
350 scale that ranged from 1 (*very bad*) to 5 (*very*
good). Responses were averaged across these items
to create a *child lie acceptability rating* for
each participant. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale
was .75.

RESULTS

The percentage of parents who reported telling
each specific type of lie and the percentage of
parents who reported telling at least one lie in each
category are presented in Table 1.

The most common lie, which was reported by at
360 least two-thirds of participants in each country,
involved a false threat to leave a child alone if he
or she refused to follow a parent. Another lie that
was told by nearly half of participants in the US
and more than two-thirds of participants in China
365 was the false promise to buy a toy on another
occasion in response to a child’s request for it.

TABLE 1
 Complete set of instrumental lies and comparison lies, by category

Category	US	China
Instrumental lies		
<i>Untrue statements related to eating (.75)</i> “You need to finish all your food or you will get pimples all over your face.”	6.3	52.3
“If you swallow a watermelon seed, it will grow into a watermelon in your stomach.”	13.5	29.4
“Finish all your food or you’ll grow up to be short.”	9.9	60.7
“There’s no more candy in the house.” (even though there actually is)	57.5	42.9
<i>Reported at least one item in category</i>	63.2	90.7
<i>Untrue statements related to leaving or staying (.79)</i>		
“If you don’t come with me now, I will leave you here by yourself.” (when parent has no intention of doing it)	67.5	77.9
“I won’t go out while you’re taking a nap.” (when parent intends to go out)	6.2	48.8
“If you don’t follow me, a kidnapper will come to kidnap you while I’m gone.”	17.5	67.4
“Daddy is not out having fun. He is at an important business meeting.” (when the father is actually out for fun)	9.7	38.4
<i>Reported at least one item in category</i>	71.9	87.2
<i>Untrue statements related to misbehavior (.79)</i>		
“If you don’t behave, I will call the police.” (when parent has no intention to)	13.4	47.7
“If you lie to someone, your nose will grow longer.”	21.2	40.7
“If you don’t quiet down and start behaving, the lady over there will be angry with you.” (it is clear the lady wouldn’t care)	34.5	49.4
“If you don’t behave, we will throw you into the ocean to feed the fish.”	4.4	21.2
<i>Reported at least one item in category</i>	45.6	80.2
<i>Untrue statements related to spending money (.84)</i>		
“We don’t have enough money to buy you that toy.” (when family has plenty of money)	35.4	54.1
A child wants to buy candy and his mother says, “there is no candy in this store.” (when it’s not true)	21.1	33.7
When passing by a toy shop, child asks to go in and buy a toy. Parent says, “we will come back to buy toys next time.” (when parent has no intention to do so)	47.8	61.6
“I did not bring money with me today. We can come back another day.” (when the parent did have money and has no intention to go back)	32.7	62.8
<i>Reported at least one item in category</i>	59.6	77.9
Comparison lies		
<i>Untrue statements to related to positive feelings (.79)</i>		
“That was beautiful piano playing.” (the playing was terrible)	59.3	50.0
“It’s not your fault that the plate broke. It broke because it was too old.” (when child accidentally drops a dish)	15.9	37.2
“Your pet went to live on your uncle’s farm where he will have more space to run around.” (pet has passed away)	7.1	21.2
“I never liked that teapot anyways. I was going to get a new one anyways.” (child broke mom’s favorite teapot)	15.8	16.3
<i>Reported at least one item in category</i>	66.7	70.9
<i>Untrue statements related to fantasy characters (.74)</i>		
“If you put this tooth under your pillow, the Tooth Fairy will come and change it into a gold coin.”	65.8	72.1
“Santa Claus will come to deliver your present on Christmas Eve.”	87.6	44.1
“Your Fairy God Mother can see all the things that you do.”	15.8	25.9
“The moon is not round because the Moon Rabbit took a bite out of it.”	2.7	30.6
<i>Reported at least one item in category</i>	92.1	83.7

The percentage of participants in each country that reported telling a lie similar to the item is also shown. Category reliabilities are given in parentheses.

370 Preliminary analyses showed no systematic differences in responses between mothers and fathers in either country, so parent gender was not included in further analyses. Parent instrumental lie scores were significantly correlated with a tendency to approve of instrumental lying in both the US ($r = .562, p < .001$) and China ($r = .308, p = .004$). However, parent instrumental

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lie scores were not significantly correlated with the tendency to approve of children’s lie telling in either country. Parent instrumental lie scores were not significantly correlated with religiosity in either country, or with political ideology, which was measured in the US only. There was no effect of the number of children in the family in the US, and this relation was not tested for participants in

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385 China due to the very small proportion of families
with more than one child. Parental instrumental lie
scores were not related to parental education in the
US, but in China, parents with a higher level of
education tended to have higher parental instru-
390 mental lie scores: Among Chinese college gradu-
ates the average score was 3.88, as compared to
3.15 for those with no college degree, $t(84) = 3.32$,
 $p < .001$.

Parent instrumental lie scores were significantly
higher in China ($M = 3.4$) than in the US
395 ($M = 2.4$), $t(198) = 5.3$, $p < .001$. This crosscultural
difference was also seen on the measure of moral
approval for instrumental lies: For participants in
China the mean score was 2.3 and for participants
in the US it was 2.0, $t(198) = 4.0$, $p < .001$.

400 The crosscultural differences that were seen on
the parent instrumental lie measure did not extend
to the comparison statements. There were no
significant differences between parents in China
and the US in their reports about telling their
405 children untrue statements to make them feel
happy, or untrue statements about fantasy char-
acters. Approval of telling untrue statements about
fantasy characters to children was greater among
parents in the US ($M = 3.0$) than in China
410 ($M = 2.6$), $t(198) = 3.3$, $p < .01$, which was the
reverse of the pattern seen for telling instrumental
lies to children.

Crosscultural comparisons of beliefs about the
acceptability of lying by children showed that
415 while parents in both countries tended to dis-
approve of such lies, ratings were significantly
more negative in China ($M = 1.5$) than in the US
($M = 1.8$), $t(198) = 3.8$, $p < .01$. This suggests that
even though Chinese parents were more approving
420 of instrumental lying by parents, they were less
approving of lying by children.

DISCUSSION

425 The present findings indicate that the vast majority
of parents in both the US and China lie to their
children in an attempt to influence their behavior.
In the US, 84% of parents reported telling their
own child at least one lie that was similar to the 16
examples they were asked about, and 98% of
430 parents in China did so. A clear majority of
parents in each country reported telling lies to their
children concerning three of the four categories
they were asked about: food, leaving and staying,
and spending money. Lies in the final category,
435 misbehavior, were also very common (reported by
45.6% of parents in the US and 80.2% of parents
in China). The pervasiveness of instrumental

parent lying is striking, given that parents in
both the US (Heyman, Luu, & Lee, 2009) and
China (Zhang, 2001; Zhang & Du, 2007) consider
socializing children to tell the truth to be an
440 important cultural value.

In both countries, the most commonly endorsed
lie to influence behavior was a false threat that a
child who refuses to follow a parent will be left
alone. The pervasiveness of this lie may relate to
445 the universality of the challenge parents face in
trying to leave a place against their child's wishes.
Another lie that was among the most common in
both countries was a false promise to buy a
requested toy at some indefinite time in the future,
450 a lie that may relate to the challenges posed by
consumer culture, in which parents often feel
pressure to make purchases that they consider
unwise.

Our results suggest that instrumental lying may
455 be more common among parents in China than in
the US, a difference that was most evident with
reference to lies concerning eating and misbeha-
vior. Chinese parents reported telling 15 out of the
16 specific instrumental lies at higher rates than
460 parents in the US. The only exception was a false
claim that there is no more candy in the house,
which was reported by 57.5% of parents in the US
as compared to 42.9% of Chinese parents. Chinese
parents also expressed greater acceptance of parent
465 instrumental lies. These findings parallel differ-
ences that have been seen between Asian
Americans and Americans of European descent
(Heyman et al., 2009). This crosscultural difference
may reflect greater concern with social cohesive-
470 ness (Bond & Hwang, 1986; Fu et al., 2007) and a
greater emphasis on respect and obedience (Chao,
1995; Lin & Fu, 1990) in Asian cultures that
encourages parents to be more willing to lie to
achieve these ends. As is consistent with this
475 possibility, many Chinese parents made comments
indicating that they think lying can be an effective
tool for socializing children. For example, one
parent said, "When teaching children, it is okay to
use well-intentioned lies. It can promote positive
480 development and prevent your child from going
astray."

Another possible explanation for the greater
willingness on the part of Chinese parents to tell
instrumental lies is that they are more accepting of
485 lying in general. However, Chinese parents made
more negative evaluations of children's lies. They
also expressed a more negative view of lies
concerning fantasy characters than did parents in
the US. Many parents in the US commented on
490 the importance of these characters for children's
development, or spoke negatively of parents who

denied the existence of such characters to their children. As one such parent commented, "Santa and the tooth fairy are harmless, fanciful stories that kids seem to find out the truth about slowly. To deny them these characters seems mean-spirited."

If parents are concerned about socializing their children not to tell lies, why do they lie to them? One possible reason is that parents often feel considerable stress about their children's noncompliance, as was suggested by one parent in the US who explained, "When a parent is going nuts, they will do whatever it takes." Another said, "Most of the lies I've told my children are last resorts and out of despair. If I could get them to do what I'm asking another way, I would."

Some parents appeared to be engaging in a sort of cost/benefit analysis. One parent reported, "My policy would be to go ahead and lie about [what a store sells] because it saves time and anxiety and isn't hurting them." Others reported lying to their children when they felt the truth would be too difficult for them to understand, such as concerning the family budget. Some parents appeared to be focused on the immediate goals they hoped to achieve, as with a parent who told us, "We sometimes tell our 2-year-old daughter that something is broken when it's not so she'll leave it alone." This view of lying as a means to an end is also consistent with findings that have been seen among adults outside of the context of parenting relationships (Camden, Motley, & Wilson, 1984; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Lindsfold & Walters, 1983).

One limitation of the present research is that parents may not have always been completely accurate in their reports about lying. Presumably, any social desirability effects would translate into an underestimation of lying rates, but it is unclear whether these effects could be expected to differ between the two countries.

There are also limitations relating to the fact that participants were asked whether they had ever told lies such as those that were presented to them. It is possible that some parents underreported their own lying because they forgot about incidents that occurred months or years before. It is also likely that parents sometimes responded using general heuristics rather than based on memories of specific episodes, for example by asking themselves whether it was the kind of thing they could imagine themselves saying. Although the use of such heuristics still provides information about the kinds of lies parents tend to tell, it will be important to separate them out from more concrete memories. For example, it will be

valuable to ask parents about lies they have told very recently. This approach would also allow for the investigation of the frequency of particular types of lies, something that was not examined in the present research.

As noted previously, there were also limitations related to the crosscultural comparison. Ideally, one would compare two samples that differ only in terms of culture, but our samples differed in other ways, such as the average number of children per family, the proportion of mothers versus fathers, and the participants' level of education. However, it is unlikely that these factors alone can explain our results, given there was no effect of the number of children among children in the US, or of parent gender, and that higher levels of education were associated with higher rates of reported lying in China. Still, it is likely that there were important differences between the samples that were not assessed. In addition, because we were not able to collect data from random samples in either country, there remain important unanswered questions about the generalizability of effects within each country.

Another limitation concerns the specific way we investigated parenting by lying. We focused on reports of untruthful statements that were aimed at achieving instrumental goals, and compared them to reports of untruthful statements aimed at helping children to feel better, and to reports of untruthful statements about fantasy characters. However, it is important to note that these categories are not always well defined. For example, telling a child who has played the piano poorly that she is playing well was classified as a lie aimed at making a child feel better, but such a statement could also be made for instrumental reasons, such as to encourage her to practice more often. Similarly, telling a child that Santa Claus is coming was classified in the fantasy characters category even though such statements can also be made for instrumental reasons (e.g., to motivate a child to behave properly). It may also be that there are more effective ways to categorize lies than what we have done in the present research (e.g., in term of high-level goals). Additionally, the same information might be conveyed for different reasons in different countries (Heyman, Fu, & Lee, 2008).

Because we only asked parents about simple statements in straightforward social situations, the results do not extend to complex situations in which parents face decisions about lying to their children, such as when a teenager asks his mother about her experiences with illegal drugs. Some of these situations involve difficult emotional issues, as was the case for the mother who reported that

605 she told her son that the phone was broken when
 his biological father neglected to call him.

The present investigation also leaves broader
 issues unresolved concerning what it means to lie.
 Several parents in the US stated that they do not
 610 consider false statements about fantasy characters
 to be lies because of their positive implications for
 their children. Some participants mentioned state-
 ments that could be seen as examples of parental
 lying or as figurative speech, depending on the
 615 child's state of knowledge. For example, one
 parent stated, "I used to tell my kids I had eyes
 in the back of my head. They thought it was
 literally true. I still say this, but they now get that it
 is a figurative statement."

620 Despite the limitations of this research, it helps
 to fill a void in an understudied area that may have
 strong implications for children's social and moral
 development. The work documents many of the
 types of lies that parents tell, and provides
 625 information about the extent to which different
 types of instrumental lies tend to be culturally
 specific. These findings provide a descriptive basis
 from which to begin to understand the conse-
 quences of parent lying.

630 One aspect of this topic that deserves further
 scrutiny is the implications for the parent-child
 relationship. It seems plausible that the most
 commonly reported lie, a false threat to abandon
 a child who refuses to follow a parent, could
 635 increase children's fears of abandonment. Given
 the evidence that deception and lying can under-
 mine trust among friends in elementary school
 (Kahn & Turiel, 1988), it also seems plausible that
 if children find out their parents are intentionally
 640 providing incorrect information it could under-
 mine trust within the relationship. Additionally, it
 will be important to determine whether parental
 lying should be interpreted as love withdrawal in
 some cases (see Siegal & Cowen, 1984), whether
 645 the exposure to parental lying makes children
 more likely to tell lies themselves (see Stouthamer-
 Loeber, 1986), and how parental lying affects
 children's compliance immediately and in the
 long term.

650 More research is needed to examine how
 mothers and fathers differ in their beliefs about
 parental lying in light of common differences in
 their roles within the family. Although the present
 research did not find any evidence of differences
 655 between mothers and fathers, it is possible that
 such differences could be uncovered by more
 nuanced measures. There might also be cross-
 cultural differences. For example, gender differ-
 ences might be weaker in cultures such as China
 660 where fathers' involvement in childcare may tend

to be greater than in the US. It will also be
 important to look at factors related to family
 structure, such as the role of single parenting.

More research is also needed to examine how
 665 parental lying influences children's developing
 beliefs about themselves and the world. Several
 parents reported telling their children untruthful
 statements about specific foods, such as that
 failing to eat carrots makes people become blind,
 670 or that the parent can see the child grow after
 every bite of broccoli. It may be that children
 quickly learn the truth about these kinds of
 statements, but it also may be that such statements
 influence children's developing beliefs about nutri-
 675 tion and biology.

Taken together, our findings suggest that the
 vast majority of parents in the US and in China lie
 to their children to obtain behavioral compliance.
 The findings raise questions about how this
 practice influences children's developing beliefs
 680 about themselves, their parents, and the world.
 They also raise important moral questions for
 parents about when, if ever, parental lying is
 justified (Bok, 1978; Kind, 2010) and broader
 questions for society about how to support parents
 685 in dealing with the challenges they face.

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