

Critical Observation of Habitual Lying in Addicted Individuals

Andrew Robertson

General Psychology

WH08BSP08

Alen Khudaverdyan, MA

December 16, 2008

## Critical Observation of Habitual Lying in Addicted Individuals

For the purpose of anonymity, the subject of this case study shall be called Johnny. Johnny is a methamphetamine addict born with cystic fibrosis, a terminal illness. Johnny attributes his addiction to his illness and to a stressful childhood in an adoptive family. Complicating his life further, Johnny is a habitual liar, a common symptom of substance abuse. Through the course of this case study, the behavior of lying shall be described along with some further information on the subject, Johnny. Next, the conditions that precede the lying behavior along with the consequences shall be examined, and the psychological explanations shall be used to interpret and explain Johnny's behavior. Last, ethical dilemmas that could arise from the observations within this paper shall be discussed.

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2008), to lie is “to make an untrue statement with intent to deceive” (lie, 2008). Unfortunately, everyone lies, even the most honest individuals. Lies can be verbal, or even as subtle as a woman wearing clothes that reshape and enhance her body, or a man exaggerating his work title or wearing shoes with heels to look taller. Lying is an evolutionary strength in humans, seen as an advanced cognitive ability almost exclusive to the human species. Starting as early as two years old, lying is a characteristic found in highly intelligent children at an early age (D’Aurizio, 2004, p. 1-2).

Although everyone lies to some degree, addicts are predisposed to habitual lying. Habitual lying itself is an addiction, as some individuals have paired telling the truth with experiences of punishment. In these cases, deception causes momentary senses of pleasure, in that the liar has momentarily escaped the anxiety of having to tell the truth (Scacrfalloto, 2003). According to Garrett (2002),

“Because addiction by definition is an irrational, unbalanced and unhealthy behavior pattern resulting from an abnormal obsession, it simply cannot continue to exist under normal circumstances without the progressive attack upon and distortion of reality resulting from the operation of its propaganda and psychological warfare brigades. The fundamentally insane and unsupportable thinking and behavior of the addict must be justified and rationalized so that the addiction can continue and progress” (para. 5).

Johnny exhibits the epitome of an addict in self deception, to the point that Johnny believes his own lies. Johnny lies about the severity of his addiction to himself and everyone in his life; unfortunately, Johnny has also become a habitual, even compulsive liar in every aspect of his life. Loved ones, including family, contradict recanted stories of his history of abuse and drug addiction. Johnny freely admits his history of drug use, but feels he is in control of his addiction, and claims to be the subject of domestic partner abuse, when family espouse an opposite retelling of the facts. When confronted with this information, Johnny acts confused as to why his family would say such things, and quickly attempts to change the focus of the conversation.

Although Johnny often suffers depressive episodes due to his cystic fibrosis, he craves attention, and seeks any kind of attention he can find. The disease itself gives him some level of attention, but not enough to fulfill his craving. Johnny grew up underweight, and short, and was not a popular child. Being a class clown allowed him to get attention and feel good about himself, and eventually, drugs and the community they bring allowed him to feel accepted and wanted.

Lying allows Johnny to fabricate his own reality and hide or twist the painful truth of the past. If a truth is uncomfortable or makes Johnny look bad, he finds it easier to lie about it than to

accept his responsibility in these past situations. This is made easier by a hidden abusive nature Johnny has, allowing him effectively to silence some of these individuals. Additionally, Johnny is very charismatic and has a knack for spinning lies that sound completely plausible.

Unfortunately, for Johnny, one of the worst things that can happen in a society is to be labeled a liar. Although lying is an evolutionary strength, humans also have a sense of fairness and moral values. According to most people's moral values and our innate sense of fairness, lying is not fair. Thus, the more a person lies, the more likely they are to be caught and eventually this will lead them to being labeled a liar (D'Aurizio, 2004, p. 1-2). This can lead to alienation, loss of friends, and general distrust. In some ways, this is beginning to happen to Johnny as people he has lied to in the past are beginning to come out and speak words of warning to other individuals about his behavior.

Although lying is morally wrong in most societies, people grow up with conflicting messages. From the time infants can speak most individuals are told that telling the truth is better than lying, but society teaches a different lesson. In school, if a child tells the teacher they just forgot to do the homework lesson, they are punished with a bad grade. But if some stressful situation occurs at home, sometimes teachers are lenient allowing additional time to work on the homework. The same applies to work where being stuck in traffic is considered acceptable, but oversleeping is not (Kornet, 2006). To an addict, however, lying can become a habitual process, and often becomes an addiction in its own right. Lying eventually becomes essential to the preservation of the addiction of choice, and once lying becomes an addiction in itself, it begins to spread to other areas of the addict's life until it becomes easier to lie consistently than to be truthful (Scacrfalloto, 2003; Garrett, 2002).

Ethically, lying is often considered wrong, although society does make exceptions (Kornet, 2006). But in the case of habitual lying, this can lead to distrust and social ineptitude. In the case of an addict, the addict is addicted to a substance or simply to the lying process itself, the addict will continue to lie about everything as long as they can, even lying about the lies themselves. In the case of Johnny, who lies about his drug use, sexual relations, and history of abuse, other people can be placed in danger due to Johnny's actions without proper knowledge with which to make the decision to be involved with Johnny or not.

To review, Johnny may or may not be a dangerous individual, but his habitual lying and drug abuse place others around him in danger from a variety of sources. Lying is a common side effect of addiction, and can become addictive itself. Upbringing and social learning can create or exacerbate addiction and the process of lying, and in fact, society teaches that some lies are acceptable. However, too much lying can cause tremendous backlash in social circles and in general society.

## References

- D'Aurizio, E. (2004, November 29). Truth is, everyone lies; professor delves into the world of deception. *The Record*, pp. 1-2. Retrieved December 14, 2008, from <http://media.www.westerncourier.com/media/storage/paper650/news/2004/11/29/News/T ruth.Is.Everyone.Lies.Professor.Delves.Into.The.World.Of.Deception-815824.shtml>
- Garrett, F. P. (2002). Addiction, lies and relationships. *Psychiatry and Wellness, Behavioral Medicine Associates*. Retrieved December 14, 2008, from [http://www.bma-wellness.com/papers/Addiction\\_Lies\\_Rel.html](http://www.bma-wellness.com/papers/Addiction_Lies_Rel.html)
- Kornet, A. (2006). The truth about lying. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved December 13, 2008, from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/pto-19970501-000033.html>
- lie. (2008). In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved December 14, 2008, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lie>
- Scacrfalloto, R. (2003). The alchemy of opposites. *iUniverse*, p. 93. Retrieved December 14, 2008, from <http://books.google.com/books?id=QNHOh0r0kQQC&printsec=frontcover#PPA93,M1>