Everyday Lies in Close and Casual Relationships

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In 2 diary studies, 77 undergraduates and 70 community members recorded their social interactions and lies for a week. Because lying violates the openness and authenticity that people value in their close relationships, we predicted (and found) that participants would tell fewer lies per social interaction to the people to whom they felt closer and would feel more uncomfortable when they did lie to those people. Because altruistic lies can communicate caring, we also predicted (and found) that relatively more of the lies told to best friends and friends would be altruistic than self-serving, whereas the reverse would be true of lies told to acquaintances and strangers. Also consistent with predictions, lies told to closer partners were more often discovered.

To understand the role of lying in close and casual relationships, it may be important to understand both the nature of the lies that are told in everyday life and the nature of close relationships. Over the past several decades, a handful of studies of lying in everyday life have been published (Camden, Motley, & Wilson, 1984; DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996; Hample, 1980; Lippard, 1988; Metts, 1989; Turner, Edgley, & Olmstead, 1975), including most recently, the first such investigation to include a separate sample of adult participants who were not all college students (DePaulo et al., 1996). These studies have greatly increased our knowledge of the nature and frequency of lying in everyday life. They indicate that lying is a fact of daily life. In the DePaulo et al. (1996) studies, for example, in which lying was defined as "intentionally [trying] to mislead someone" (p. 981), the demographically diverse participants from the community reported telling an average of one lie in every five of their social interactions, and the college student participants reported telling a lie in every three interactions. In both groups, the participants were about twice as likely to tell lies that benefited themselves in some way (self-centered lies) than to tell lies that benefited others (other-oriented, or altruistic, lies). Of the self-centered lies, some of them were told in the pursuit of material gain or personal convenience, but far more of them were told for psychological reasons. By their own accounts, people told their everyday lies to try to make themselves look better or feel better, to protect themselves from embarrassment or disapproval or from having their feelings hurt, and to try to gain the esteem and affection of other people. Although participants told many lies about their achievements and their failures, their actions, plans, and whereabouts, and the reasons for their actions or inactions, the lies that they told most often were about their feelings. When people told other-oriented lies, they often pretended to feel more positively than they really did feel, and they often claimed to agree with other people when in fact they disagreed. In short, in everyday life, people lie about what they are really like and how they really do feel.

Rates of Lying in Close and Casual Relationships

When people talk about what is special to them about their personal relationships and about what closeness means to them (Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Maxwell, 1985; Parks & Floyd, 1996), they underscore the importance of talking, disclosing, and confiding—of "telling each other everything" (Parks & Floyd, 1996, p. 94) and of trusting that their confidences will be kept. They also describe issues of authenticity, noting that they can show their true feelings and be themselves, with no need to try to impress the other person. Although these self-reports may be idealized, the literature does offer some support for them. For example, people are more self-enhancing with strangers than with friends (Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995). Also, the relationship qualities that people value predict important relational outcomes. For example, self-disclosure predicts marital satisfaction (Hendrick, 1981), and trusting and confiding are positively correlated with the quality and enduringness of friendships (Argyle & Henderson, 1984).

People's reports of what they value in their relationships also dovetail with important theoretical statements about the

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significance of personal relationships. For example, Deci and Ryan (1991) believe that there are three primary psychological needs, and one of them is the need for relatedness (see also Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This need "encompasses a person's strivings to relate to and care for others, [and] to feel that those others are relating authentically to one's self" (p. 243). Similarly, Reis and Patrick (1996) argued for the profound importance of intimacy to human well-being. They define intimacy as "an interactive process in which, as a result of a partner's response, individuals come to feel understood, validated, and cared for" (p. 536). From attachment theory comes the proposition that "humans possess basic needs that are naturally satisfied by social relationships" (Hazan & Shaver, 1994, p. 10), and that the most basic need is for felt security. Feelings of security, in turn, depend largely on the answer to the question "Can I trust my partner to be available and responsive to my needs?" (p. 13). Trustworthy partners, according to Holmes and Rempel (1989), are dependable people who can be counted on to be honest and benevolent.

None of these theoretical perspectives offers explicit predictions about the rates of everyday lying in close and casual relationships. However, the prediction that lying occurs at lower rates in closer relationships would probably be consistent with all of them. Lying is by definition an inauthentic communication; as such, it cannot serve the need for genuine relatedness. When people lie about who they really are and how they really feel, they cannot elicit understanding or validation of the person they really believe themselves to be. They also cannot easily serve as targets of secure attachment, because people who lie especially often to promote their own needs are unlikely to be trusted to be responsive to other people's needs.

We predicted, then, that people will lie less often in close relationships than in casual ones. Also, because lie telling violates close relationship ideals such as openness and authenticity, we predicted that when people do lie to their close relationship partners, they will feel more distressed than when they lie to partners in casual relationships (Miller, Mongeau, & Sleight, 1986). They will feel more uncomfortable as they anticipate telling the lie, as they actually tell it, and just after they have told it.

Kinds of Lies in Close and Casual Relationships

The theoretical perspectives we described underscore the significance of authenticity and trustworthiness in close personal relationships. But they also point to the importance of caring and emotional support. One way that people might try to communicate their love and concern for the important people in their lives is by telling altruistic lies. They compliment them, pretend to agree with them, and claim to understand. The meta-messages of these lies may be supportive rather than threatening (cf. Ruesch & Bateson, 1951; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). By lying, the liars may be saying that they care more about the other person's feelings than the truth.

Our initial prediction was that people will tell fewer lies to closer relationship partners. We added a second prediction: When people do lie to partners in close relationships, relatively more of the lies will be altruistic than self-centered.

Beyond Closeness: Other Predictors of Lying

In addition to the emotional considerations we have described, there may also be practical reasons for a lower rate of everyday lying in closer relationships than in more casual ones. For example, the possibilities for successful deception in close personal relationships may be constrained by the knowledge that the partners share about each other. A college student can try to convince a casual acquaintance that his father is an ambassador (as one of ours did), but the same lie will not succeed with a close friend who already knows that the "ambassador" is actually a bartender. Relationship partners who have known each other for a long time may be especially likely to have, or to be perceived as having, detailed knowledge about each other's lives that would discourage many attempts at deceit.

In some instances, partners do not already know the truth that a person might be tempted to cover with a lie. Even in those cases, however, people may fear that their partners are more likely to discover the truth eventually if they are close partners, who typically interact frequently (Nezlek, 1995), than if they are only casual relationship partners. People who interact with each other on a regular basis may be vulnerable to this fear of eventual detection even if they are not emotionally close to each other.

These arguments predict that people will less often attempt to lie to their close relationship partners, to people they have known for a long time, and to people with whom they interact frequently. It also follows that when lies are told to such people, those lies are more likely eventually to be discovered. Objective evidence will surface that will betray the deceits, or the liars will become entangled in their own webs of deceit as they struggle to keep their stories consistent.

People in close relationships may also fear that their lies are more likely to be immediately transparent to close relationship partners, who may have developed a special sensitivity to their nonverbal and verbal clues to deceit, than to casual partners (Anderson, Ansfield, & DePaulo, in press). Regardless of whether this fear is justified, it can act as a deterrent to lying to close relationship partners. When people do lie to close partners, they may be less likely to feel confident that their partners believed their lies. In the present research, we asked participants to indicate whether they thought each lie had been believed at the time that they told it. Then, a week or so later, we asked whether the lie had been discovered.

Relationship partners are not always seekers of the truth. As Ekman and Friesen (1969) pointed out several decades ago, people can collaborate to maintain rather than discover each other's lies. Partners in close relationships, more so than those in casual ones, come to know each other's sensitive and taboo topics (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). By steering clear of such treacherous turf, they can reduce their partners' temptations to lie.

Other processes could also be important in predicting rates of lying in different relationships. For example, Millar and Tesser (1988) hypothesized that people lie when their behavior violates the expectations that another person holds for them. They found support for their predictions in role-play studies of parent–child and employee–employer relationships. The violated expectations model generates a prediction at odds with our own: Because close relationship partners hold more expectations about

each other than do casual partners, the rate of lying in close relationships might be higher. On the other hand, the expectations we hold about close relationship partners may be more realistic than the expectations we hold for acquaintances and strangers, and therefore they may be less likely to be violated.

Varieties of Closeness

When the study of personal relationships was just beginning, closeness was often operationalized in terms of different relationship categories (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989a). Marriages and parent–child relationships, for example, were sometimes assumed to be "closer" relationships than friendships. These kinds of assumptions were later questioned, as it became apparent that particular relationships within categories vary greatly in closeness, and that relationship categories vary in many important ways other than closeness. For example, romantic relationships may be uniquely characterized by certain kinds of self-presentational concerns. Relationships that are asymmetrical in power, such as those between parents and children, may also differ importantly in deception-relevant ways from those that are more symmetrical. For instance, people who have less power may be tempted to lie to those who have more power in order to obtain the resources they control (cf. Hample, 1980; Lippard, 1988).

In the present research, participants identified each of their interaction partners as a stranger, acquaintance, friend, best friend, romantic partner, spouse, parent, child, sibling, or other relative. To test our hypothesis that fewer lies would be told to closer relationship partners, we first considered only those relationship categories that we believed to vary primarily in closeness: strangers, acquaintances, friends, and best friends. Thus, romantic partners, spouses, parents, and other family members were not included. Our prediction would be supported if participants lied most frequently to strangers, then acquaintances, and least frequently to best friends. Second, we used three measures of closeness (described below) that are independent of relationship type, and we examined the relationship between closeness and rate of lying in analyses that included all dyadic interaction partners. Third, we tested the same links between closeness and rate of lying within each of the major relationship categories (friends, family members, acquaintances and strangers, romantic partners). In this most stringent test of our hypothesis, closeness and rate of lying should have been inversely related within every major relationship category.

Relationship researchers often assess "subjective closeness," which is a person's subjective emotional experience of "feeling close" to someone. This is usually measured on scales that ask people directly how close they feel to each of their partners. We used such a measure in the present research.

Still another measure of closeness was derived theoretically from interdependence theory. Kelley et al. (1983) hypothesized that close relationships are characterized by frequent and diverse interactions that endure over time and in which the partners influence each other's behavior and values. Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto (1989b) developed the Relationship Closeness Inventory (RCI) to measure the frequency, strength, and diversity components of interdependence, which they summed together to form their overall index of closeness (they considered the duration of the relationship separately). The RCI is a measure of "behaving close," which is distinguishable from the subjective measures of "feeling close" (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). We did not use the RCI because it had not yet been published when our data were collected. However, we did have access to information similar to that generated by the RCI frequency subscale in the form of the number of dyadic social interactions participants reported with each of their partners (using a version of the Rochester Interaction Record [RIR]; Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). This measure is probably a more accurate measure of interaction frequency than the RCI frequency subscale, which is based on participants' retrospective estimates of the amount of time they spent alone with each partner over the past week (Reis & Wheeler, 1991).

To assess endurance over time, we included the standard measure of relationship duration (participants' reports of the number of months or years they had known each partner). Thus, the present study measured three relationship qualities (subjective closeness, frequency of interaction, and relationship duration) as well as relationship type (e.g., friend, spouse).

We thought that all three operationalizations of closeness would predict rates of lying: People would lie less often to those relationship partners to whom they feel especially close, to those with whom they interact more frequently, and to those whom they have known for a longer time. However, because we believed that it is the emotional quality of close relationships that most strongly deters lying, we predicted that subjective emotional closeness would be the most important predictor. When the predictive power of all three types of closeness were tested together (by entering them into a simultaneous regression equation), only subjective closeness would remain a significant (negative) predictor of lying.

The Present Research

Our data are from two diary studies of lying in everyday life that were first described by DePaulo et al. (1996) and Kashy and DePaulo (1996). DePaulo et al. (1996) presented a profile of everyday lying (e.g., the types of lies that were told, the reasons for lying, gender differences in lying), and Kashy and DePaulo (1996) reported personality predictors of lying in everyday life. The present report represents a unique contribution in its focus on everyday lying in different kinds of relationships.

In the two studies, 77 college students and 70 people from the community recorded all of their social interactions and all of the lies that they told during those social interactions every day for a week. Participants described each lie and the reason for telling it in their own words, and they also rated the characteristics of their lie-telling experiences (such as how distressed they felt while telling it and whether they thought it was believed). At the end of the week, they described the nature and closeness of their relationship with each of the persons with whom they had interacted, and they indicated for each lie whether or not it had been discovered.

The present research builds on previous research on lying in relationships in several important ways. First, it is more comprehensive than previous studies in which participants selected just one particular lie (Hample, 1980) or conversation (Turner et al., 1975) or situation (Metts, 1989) to describe. Second, it is

the only research to include a measure of participants' opportunities to lie, that is, the number of social interactions they had with each partner. Previous studies that reported that people told more lies to close relationship partners than to casual ones (Hample, 1980; Lippard, 1988) are difficult to interpret, in that people interact more frequently with close partners than with casual ones (Nezlek, 1995). Rate of lying (number of lies per number of social interactions) is a more appropriate measure. Third, the community member sample described in this report (and in DePaulo et al., 1996, and Kashy & DePaulo, 1996) is the only group we know of in the literature on lying in everyday life that is not a group consisting solely of college students.[1] Finally, the present research is especially comprehensive in the number of ways that relationships are assessed. Relationship type was documented, and patterns of lying were compared across the different types. Closeness was operationalized in three ways: as subjective closeness, frequency of interacting, and relationship longevity. We examined the links with lying of all three operationalizations of closeness in analyses that included all relationship partners; we also looked at the same links within major relationship categories, such as family and friends.

Method

Participants

Participants in Study 1 were 30 male and 47 female undergraduates who participated in partial fulfillment of a requirement for an introductory psychology course. They ranged in age from 17 to 22 (M = 18.69, SD = 0.91). Sixty-four were White, 9 were Black, and 4 described themselves as "other" than White or Black. The 77 participants do not include one man who completed only 2 days of the 7-day record keeping.

Participants in Study 2 were 30 men and 40 women who were recruited by means of advertisements posted at a local community college, from lists of people who had taken continuing education courses, and from lists of names selected randomly from the area telephone directory. They ranged in age from 18 to 71 (M = 34.19, SD = 12.49). Sixty-seven were White and 3 were Black. Other demographic information is based on 53 of the 70 participants, as 17 were inadvertently given the undergraduate demographic questionnaire, which included no questions about employment, education, marital status, or children. Of those who did answer the more extended questionnaire, 81% were employed, 57% were married, 47% had children, and 34% had no more than a high school education. The 70 participants in Study 2 do not include one man who said that he had recorded only about 10% of his social interactions and 5% of his lies.

Procedure

There were three phases to the study: an initial introductory session, the 7-day recording period, and a final phase during which participants answered additional questions about their lies and their experiences in the study.

Phase 1: Introduction to the study. The Study 1 participants and the participants from Study 2 who were recruited from the community college initially had responded to notices posted on a bulletin board in an academic building describing the research. The study was described as one in which they would keep records of their social interactions and communications for 7 days. In Study 1, the notice indicated that participants would receive partial course credit for their participation, and in Study 2, the notice indicated that participants would be paid $35. Study 2 participants recruited from continuing education lists or from the phone directory were sent letters with the same description of the research; then they were contacted by telephone about a week later.

All participants attended an initial 90-min meeting in which the study and the procedures were explained. In Study 1, these were group sessions attended by 10–15 participants at a time. The Study 2 sessions were conducted individually or in small groups.

Participants were told that they would be recording all of their social interactions and all of the lies that they told during those interactions every day for a week. It was noted that their role in this research was especially important in that they would be the observers and recorders of their own behavior. The investigators explained that they did not condone or condemn lying; rather, they were studying it scientifically and trying to learn the answers to some of the most fundamental questions about the phenomenon. They encouraged the participants to think of the study as an unusual opportunity to learn more about themselves.

The key terms were then explained to the participants. A "social interaction" was defined as "any exchange between you and another person that lasts 10 minutes or more . . . in which the behavior of one person is in response to the behavior of another person." This definition, plus many of the examples used to clarify the definition, were taken or adapted from the ones used in the initial studies involving the RIR (for example, Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). We added an exception to the 10-min rule, which was that for any interaction in which participants told a lie, they were also to fill out a social interaction record, even if the interaction lasted less than 10 min. (For the college students and community members respectively, 8.9% and 10.5% of their lies were told during interactions lasting 10 min or less.) Copies of our adaptation of the RIR (see description below) were then distributed, and participants were told how to complete the form.

To explain what participants should count as a lie, we noted that "a lie occurs any time you *intentionally try to mislead someone.* Both the intent to deceive and the actual deception must occur. . . ." Many examples were given. Participants were urged to record all lies, no matter how big or how small. They were instructed that if they were uncertain as to whether a particular communication qualified as a lie, they should record it. (At the end of the study, two coders independently read through all of the lie diaries and agreed on the few that did not meet the definition and were therefore excluded.) The definition that we gave participants was interpreted broadly as encompassing any intentional attempts to mislead, including even nonverbal ones. The only example of a lie they were asked not to record was saying "fine" in response to perfunctory "How are you?" questions. Participants completed one deception record for every lie that they told. Sample records (see description below) were distributed, and the investigators explained how they were to be completed.

Participants were instructed to fill out the forms (social interaction records and deception records) at least once a day; it was suggested that they set aside a particular time or set of times to do so. During the week-long data collection period, the forms were collected by the experimenters at several different times. Participants were also given pocket-sized notebooks and were urged to carry them at all times. They were encouraged to use these notebooks to write down reminders of their social interactions and their lies as soon as possible after the events had taken place. Then they could use their notes as an aid to their memory if they did not complete their social interaction and deception records until later in the day. The notebooks were not collected.

Several additional steps were taken to encourage the reporting of all lies. First, participants were told that if they did not wish to reveal the contents of any of the lies that they told, then in the space on the deception record in which they were to describe their lie, they could

[1] The college students in the Metts (1989) study included adult reentry students, but they constituted less than a third of the sample and their data were not analyzed separately.

instead write "rather not say." That way, we, as investigators, would still know that a lie was told, and we would know other information about the lie and the social interaction in which it was told (from the other parts of the records that the participants completed). The content of 11 of the lies in the college student sample and none of the lies in the community sample were described as "rather not say." Second, we instructed participants that if they did not completely remember everything about a lie that they told, they should still fill out as much of the information on the form as they could. Third, we told participants that if they remembered a lie from a previous day that they had not recorded, they should still turn in a form for that lie.

The importance of accuracy and conscientiousness in keeping the records was emphasized throughout the session. To assure anonymity, we allowed participants to choose their own identification number, which they used throughout the study. Participants did not write their names on any of the forms.

At the end of the session, the investigators reviewed the amount of time it would take to complete all phases of the study and encouraged participants to terminate their participation at that point if they no longer had the interest or the time to participate fully. They were offered credit or payment even if they chose not to continue. All participants elected to continue.

Before they left, participants were given typed copies of all of the instructions and definitions they had been given during the session. This instruction booklet also included names and phone numbers of members of the research team with whom they had met and whom they could contact at any time with any questions or concerns they might have. Appointments were made with each participant to meet with a researcher in approximately 3 days to drop off completed social interaction forms and check on any questions related to the study. Researchers were available to collect forms at other times as well. Appointments were also made with all of the Study 1 participants to return once more at the end of the 7-day recording period to complete a final set of measures. Study 2 participants were shown an envelope and instructions that would be mailed to them at the end of the study so that they could complete the same measures.

Phase 2: Recording social interactions and lies. During the 7-day recording period, which began the day after the introductory session, participants completed a social interaction record for all of their social interactions and a deception record for all of their lies.

The *social interaction record* was adapted from the RIR (Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). On each record, participants wrote their identification number and the date, time, and duration of the interaction. For interactions involving three or fewer other people, participants recorded the initials and the gender of each of those persons. (They kept a list of the initials of each of their interaction partners in the small notebooks that we gave them so that they could remember the initials and use the same ones for any given person each time.) For interactions with more than three other people, participants simply recorded the total number of male and female interaction partners. Participants then completed several scales describing the quality of the interaction. (These social interaction variables, described in DePaulo et al., 1996, are not relevant to the present report.)

Printed on the same page as the social interaction record was the *deception record.* Participants again indicated the initials and gender of the person(s) to whom they told their lie if there were three targets of the lie or fewer, or the number of males and number of females if there were more than three targets. (This information was the same as for the social interaction record except when participants directed their lie to a subset of the people involved in the interaction.) Below this was a blank space for participants to "briefly describe the lie" and another blank space for them to "briefly describe the reason why you told the lie." Next were nine 9-point rating scales. Participants rated their degree of planning of the lie on a scale with endpoints labeled *completely spontaneous* (1) and *carefully planned in advance* (9). Then they indicated the importance of not getting caught, from *very unimportant* (1) to *very important* (9). On the next three scales, they reported their feelings before the lie was told, while telling the lie, and after the lie was told, on a scale with endpoints labeled *very comfortable* (1) and *very uncomfortable* (9). They also rated the seriousness of the lie: *very trivial, unimportant lie* (1), to *very serious, important lie* (9); and the target's reaction to the lie: *didn't believe me at all* (1), to *believed me completely* (9). Finally, they answered two questions—"How would the target have felt if you told the truth instead of the lie?" and "How would *you* have felt if you told the truth instead of a lie?"—on scales with endpoints labeled *much better if I told the truth* (1) and *much worse if I told the truth* (9). The three ratings of comfort and the measure of the target's belief are of primary importance to the present report.[2]

Phase 3: Additional measures. After the completion of the 7-day recording period, participants were asked to respond to one more set of measures. First, we gave them a list of all of the initials they had used to refer to all of their interaction partners, and we asked them to fill out a separate form for each of those persons. On the forms, participants indicated the person's age and gender. Then they completed several 15-point scales. The ones relevant to this report were responses to the questions "How close do you feel to this person?" and "How much do you like this person?" Participants' responses to those two questions were highly correlated (college: $r = .84$, $p < .001$; community: $r = .81$, $p < .001$), and so they were averaged to form our measure of closeness. Participants also indicated how long they had known the person, in years, months, and days. This was our measure of the duration of the relationship. Because the data were highly skewed, we used a square root transformation of the total number of months in our analyses. Finally, participants checked off the particular category that best described their relationship with the person (best friend, friend, acquaintance, stranger, parent or guardian, spouse, child, brother or sister, other relative), and they indicated whether the relationship was romantic or not romantic.

Next, participants were given photocopies of each of the deception records they had completed. They answered two questions about each lie: "Was this lie ever discovered?" (participants checked one answer: *no, not yet; don't know;* or *yes*) and "If you could relive this social interaction, would you tell the lie again?" (participants checked either *no* or *yes*). The results of the first question are described in this report. Participants also completed a postquestionnaire, which is not relevant to the present report (described in DePaulo et al., 1996).

The Study 1 participants returned to the lab to complete these forms. Afterward, they were interviewed by one of the investigators, who tried to determine the extent to which the participants had understood and complied with the procedure and believed the information they had been given about the research. This extensive interview uncovered no problems with the procedure. Therefore, in Study 2, all of the forms from this phase of the study were mailed to the participants, and a written debrief (plus payment) was included in the package. Participants returned the materials in an addressed and stamped envelope that was also included in the package.

Self-Centered and Other-Oriented Lies

As described in detail in DePaulo et al. (1996), the reasons participants gave for telling each of their lies were coded into the two major categories of self-centered and other-oriented. (The kappas were .69 and .68.) A third category of "neither self-centered nor other-oriented" was also coded, but those results are not relevant to the present report. That category included lies told to control an interaction, to create an effect (e.g., to entertain), to conform to conventions, or to simplify a response. Also coded but not included in the analyses were instances in which

[2] Results from the other measures can be obtained from the authors.

Table 1
Examples of Self-Centered and Other-Oriented Lies Told to People in Different Relationship Categories

Relationship category	Lie	Reason
	Self-centered lies	
Nonromantic		
Best friend	I lied about something I didn't want him to know.	I told the lie so I could keep some privacy about my personal life.
Friend	I told her that I admire her uninhibited way.	So she would not think that I was a prude.
Acquaintance	I said I was not worried about my grades.	I didn't want him to think I was stupid. That I am so smart that it is easy to pull them up.
Stranger	Told customer that if she likes her jeans that way, they weren't too tight.	To sell the outfit. (I did.)
Romantic		
Partner (not spouse)	Said I didn't mind him picking up a girl last night.	Wanted to appear untouchable.
Family		
Mother	I told her I'd been studying hard.	Because she's my mother and she'd kill me if she thought I hadn't been studying.
Father	Said we paid off all bills except standard monthly, but haven't.	So he would co-sign for new house I want even though he thinks it's too much money.
Spouse	I told her I had to be in D.C. to see a doctor.	Actually, I wanted to visit a friend to trade computer software.
Child	Told son to clean up room and get ready for the weekend and maybe we'd do something special.	Needed his room cleaned up.
	Other-oriented lies	
Nonromantic		
Best friend	I told her that I'd love for her to stay with me and my family if she wanted to when I really wanted to be alone with them.	She was lonely and I didn't want her to have to stay in the dorm by herself.
Friend	Took sides with her when I really think she was also at fault.	She's going through a divorce and I just didn't want to go against her because it's hard enough to deal with a divorce.
Acquaintance	I told her she was nice-looking even though she isn't.	To make her feel good.
Stranger	Acted like I didn't know the information she was giving me. She told me to "talk to so and so." (I had already talked to so and so.)	So she could feel helpful.
Romantic		
Partner (not spouse)	Told him I loved the food he ordered for me when it wasn't that great.	Didn't want to make him feel bad.
Family		
Mother	I told her I didn't mind going shopping if she wanted me to.	She needs my help but wouldn't ask if she thought I didn't want to go.
Father	I hid my wife's plans to leave.	He would be hurt by the truth and my wife may change her mind.
Spouse	After sex, I pretended to have experienced orgasm.	Did not want to hurt my husband.
Child	I told son maybe my husband was late because he had car trouble when I thought he'd stopped off for a drink.	Didn't want my son to worry.

participants said they did not know why they told the lie. Examples of self-centered and other-oriented lies are shown in Table 1.

Self-centered lies. Self-centered lies were defined as lies told to protect or enhance the liars psychologically or to advantage or protect the liars' interests (as described below). Also included were lies told to elicit a particular emotional response that the liars desired.

The lies told for psychological reasons included lies told to protect the liars from embarrassment, loss of face, or looking bad; from disapproval or having their feelings hurt; and from worry, conflict, or other unpleasantness. They also included lies told to protect the liars' privacy; to make the liars appear better (or just different) than they are; and to regulate the liars' own feelings, emotions, and moods.

The lies told for reasons of personal advantage included lies told for the liars' personal gain, to make things easier or more pleasant for the liars, or to help them get information or get their way. They also included lies told to protect the liars from physical punishment, or to protect their property or assets or their safety. Lies told to protect the liars from loss of status or position or to protect them from being bothered or from doing something they preferred not to do were also included.

Other-oriented lies. Other-oriented lies were defined as lies told to protect or enhance other persons psychologically or to advantage or protect the interests of others (as described below). Lies told to bother or annoy others or to cause them psychological damage (e.g., lie: "Told him the boss wanted to talk to him, but he really didn't"; reason: "so he'd look like a fool") were not included. Only 0.84% of the lies in Study 1 and 2.39% in Study 2 were of this nasty variety.

The other-oriented lies told for psychological reasons included lies told to protect another person from embarrassment, loss of face, or looking bad;

from disapproval or having their feelings hurt; from worry, conflict, or other unpleasantness. They also included lies told to protect another person's privacy; to make other people appear better (or just different) than they are; and to regulate another person's feelings, emotions, or moods.

The lies told for another person's advantage included lies told for another person's personal gain, to make things easier or more pleasant for others, to be accommodating, or to help them get their way. They also included lies told to protect others from physical punishment, or to protect their property or assets or their safety. Lies to protect others from loss of status or position or to protect them from being bothered or from doing something they preferred not to do were also included.

Results

Sample Characteristics: Closeness, Duration, and Frequency

Because we were interested in predicting rates of lying from the quality of participants' relationships with particular other people, we included in our analyses only those lies told to just one person (dyadic lies) and omitted those lies that were told to more than one person at a time. Dyadic lies constituted 61% of the lies told by the college students and 72% of the lies told by the community members.

Table 2 shows the mean level of closeness, the mean duration of the relationship, and the mean frequency of interaction with partners in each relationship category. (Fathers are not included as a separate category in the table because only 11 community members and 15 college students reported having any dyadic interactions with their fathers over the course of the week. Fathers are, however, included in the composite category of all family members.) The college students and community members were remarkably similar in their self-reported closeness to different categories of relationship partners, both in the rank ordering of the categories and the absolute values of the means. Both groups reported extremely high levels of closeness to their best

Table 2
Mean Closeness, Duration, and Frequency of Interacting for Different Categories of Relationships

Relationship category	*n*[a]	Closeness[b]	Duration[c]	Duration[d]	Frequency[e]
Nonromantic					
Best friend					
College	46	13.93	3.79	5.99	5.48
Community	25	13.43	8.51	9.23	4.68
Friend					
College	77	9.90	1.41	3.29	13.29
Community	62	9.41	4.23	6.00	7.94
Acquaintance					
College	64	4.57	0.41	1.77	3.36
Community	59	4.57	2.18	3.99	6.00
Stranger					
College	14	1.42	0.04	0.51	1.36
Community	27	1.34	0.05	0.36	1.30
All friends					
College	77	10.66	1.74	3.65	16.56
Community	64	9.98	4.68	6.34	9.52
All acq/str					
College	67	4.27	0.38	1.67	3.49
Community	60	4.21	1.98	3.57	6.48
Romantic (not spouse)					
College	59	13.48	2.28	4.44	6.36
Community	28	13.31	4.35	6.54	9.18
Family					
(All)					
College	54	14.02	18.21	14.67	2.35
Community	60	13.21	20.15	14.78	8.80
Mother					
College	39	14.53	18.83	15.03	1.64
Community	22	13.58	29.00	18.50	2.27
Spouse					
Community	30	14.42	18.30	13.76	8.07
Child					
Community	23	14.15	15.30	12.49	5.43
All partners[f]					
College	77	10.31	2.92	4.29	1.99
Community	69	9.23	6.80	7.10	2.20

Note. Means were computed by summing for each participant and then averaging across participants. Acq/str = acquaintances and strangers.
[a] Number of participants who had at least one dyadic interaction with someone in the category. [b] 1–15 scale, with higher numbers indicating greater closeness. [c] Years. [d] Square root of number of months. [e] Mean number of dyadic interactions for participants who interacted with someone in the category at least one time. [f] Includes partners not listed in this table (family members other than mother, spouse, and child).

friends, family members, and romantic partners. They also reported fairly high levels of closeness to their friends and very low levels of closeness to acquaintances and strangers. The community members, who were older than the college students, reported relationships of longer duration than those of the college students in every category except strangers. The rank ordering of the relationship types by duration, however, was identical for the two groups. With regard to the frequency of their interactions, the college students reported relatively more interactions with friends than did the community members, $t(137) = 4.03$, $p < .001$, whereas the community members reported relatively more interactions with acquaintances, $t(121) = 3.22$, $p = .002$, and family members, $t(112) = 6.69$, $p < .001$.

Correlations among the closeness, duration, and frequency of social interaction variables were computed separately for each participant, weighted by the number of partners, then averaged. (In all analyses to follow, a square root transformation was applied to the number of months of relationship longevity to form our duration measure.) Closeness was significantly correlated with duration (square root), $r(76) = .52$, $p < .001$, for the college students, and $r(68) = .56$, $p < .001$, for the community members, and with frequency, $r(76) = .33$, $p < .001$, for the college students, and $r(68) = .43$, $p < .001$, for the community members. Duration and frequency were not significantly correlated for either sample. rs = .04 and .24, respectively.[3]

Predicting Rate of Lying and Types of Lies From Closeness, Duration, and Frequency

One of the primary questions addressed in this study is whether the rate of lying to a partner relates to the closeness of the relationship between the participant and that partner. The rate of lying data have an unbalanced hierarchical structure such that each participant interacts with (and lies to) different partners, and some participants have interactions with many partners whereas other participants interact with relatively few partners. This hierarchically nested data structure can be analyzed using a multilevel regression approach (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, in press). This method of analysis involves two steps, the first of which estimates the relationship between closeness to a partner and rate of lying to that partner separately for each participant. The second step aggregates the relationship between closeness and rate of lying to the partner across participants and tests whether, across participants, the closeness and rate of lying relationship is statistically different from zero. The second step can also be used to examine whether this relationship differs as a function of participant-level predictor variables, such as participant gender.

Consider as an example the relationship between rate of lying (number of lies to the partner divided by number of social interactions with the partner) and relationship duration. Each participant generates two scores for each partner: the rate of lying to that partner and the length of time the participant has known the partner. In the multilevel modeling approach, a separate regression equation is estimated for each participant in which duration predicts rate of lying; interaction partner is the unit of analysis in each participant's regression. These regressions yield both an intercept and a slope for each participant. Interpretation of the intercepts from the multilevel approach is simplified if the predictor variable(s), relationship duration in this example, is centered around zero or standardized. The intercept estimates the participant's average rate of lying across all partners, and the slope estimates the relationship between how long a participant has known a partner and the rate of lying to that partner.

The regression coefficients (intercepts and slopes) estimated for each participant then serve as outcome measures in a second set of regression analyses that treat participant as the unit of analysis. This step of the analysis can include participant-level predictor variables, such as participant gender. In one second-step regression analysis, the intercepts from the first-step regressions are used as the criterion scores. If participant gender is used as a predictor (coded as men = −1, women = 1), this second-step regression would yield an estimate of the grand mean for rate of lying, as well as an estimate of the degree to which male participants lied more or less frequently than female participants. More important, when the slopes from the first-step regressions are used as the criterion scores and participant gender is the predictor, the second-step regression yields an intercept that estimates the average relationship between relationship duration and rate of lying for all participants. This analysis also provides an estimate of the degree to which the relationship between relationship duration and rate of lying differs for male and female participants.

The precision of the first-step regressions is likely to vary from participant to participant for two reasons. First, some participants will have interacted with more partners than others. Second, the relationship between relationship duration and rate of lying may be more consistent for some participants than for others. The two-step regression approach used in our analyses takes these factors into account using a weighted least-squares solution in which the second step regressions are weighted by the standard errors of the first step regression coefficients.

This two-step regression approach was used to examine the relationship between each measure of closeness and rate of

[3] Other studies in the literature have also reported descriptive data about relationship characteristics. For example, the mean number of social interactions per day reported by our college students, 6.6, is very similar to the number reported by Reis and Wheeler (1991) for Americans, 6.9. Our community members reported an average of 5.8 social interactions per day. Similarly, in a longitudinal study, Reis and his colleagues noted that participants reported more social interactions per day as college students, 6.9, than they did nearly a decade later, 5.1 (Reis, Lin, Bennett, & Nezlek, 1993). With regard to the correlations among different relationship qualities, our correlations between duration and closeness were stronger than those reported by Berscheid et al. (1989b) and Aron et al. (1991). In the studies reported in the latter article, the correlation between duration and closeness was stronger for men than for women; for women, the correlations were sometimes slightly negative. In our data, the average correlations (computed separately for each participant, omitting family members, and then averaged across participants) were very similar for men and women in the college sample (mean $r = .48$, $n = 30$, and mean $r = .44$, $n = 47$, respectively). For the community sample, there was a trend in the direction reported by Aron et al. (1992): The correlation was somewhat stronger for the men (mean $r = .55$, $n = 30$) than for the women (mean $r = .39$, $n = 39$), $t(67) = 1.88$, $p = .06$, for the test of the difference between the correlations.

Table 3
Predicting Rate of Lying and Types of Lies From Closeness, Duration, and Frequency of Interaction

Variable	Regressions with one relationship variable[a]		Simultaneous regressions with all three variables[b]	
	b	*t*	*b*	*t*
Rate of lying[c]				
Closeness				
College	−.084	4.99***	−.106	5.15***
Community	−.063	3.00**	−.055	2.07*
Duration[d]				
College	−.010	0.60	.033	1.78†
Community	−.039	2.07*	.016	0.65
Frequency of interaction				
College	−.036	2.42*	−.014	0.91
Community	−.045	4.47**	.001	0.05
Self-centered lies[e]				
Closeness				
College	−.064	2.56**	−.104	2.92**
Community	.050	1.01	.076	0.71
Duration[d]				
College	−.028	0.91	−.021	0.57
Community	.023	0.41	.080	0.80
Frequency of interaction				
College	−.002	0.09	.043	1.40
Community	.030	0.73	.094	1.49
Other-oriented lies[f]				
Closeness				
College	.073	2.74**	.069	2.05*
Community	.050	1.38	.071	1.01
Duration[d]				
College	.071	2.87**	.065	1.83†
Community	−.007	0.14	−.113	1.45
Frequency of interaction				
College	.010	0.40	−.038	1.09
Community	−.001	0.04	−.057	0.90

Note. Analyses of rate of lying were based on college: $n = 71$ and community: $n = 59$. Analyses of self-centered lies were based on college: $n = 41$ and community: $n = 21$. Analyses of other-oriented lies were based on college: $n = 34$ and community: $n = 21$.

[a] Two-step regression analyses with closeness or duration of frequency entered in the first step and participant gender in the second. [b] Simultaneous regression with closeness, duration, and frequency entered together in the first step and participant gender in the second. [c] Number of lies told to partner divided by number for social interactions with partner. [d] Analyses were based on square root of number of months. [e] Number of self-centered lies told to partner divided by the total number of lies told to partner. [f] Number of other-oriented lies told to partner divided by the total number of lies told to partner.

† $p \leq .10$ (marginally significant). * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

lying. We also used a variation on this approach to examine the unique predictive ability of each of the three closeness variables, partialing out the other two. That is, for each participant a multiple regression equation was estimated in which rate of lying to a particular partner was the criterion and subjective closeness to the partner, duration of relationship, and frequency of interaction with the partner were entered simultaneously in the first step regressions. The regression coefficients from these multiple regressions were then pooled across participants, again weighting by the standard errors of the regression coefficients. In the results and discussion below, each of the predictor variables was standardized.

Results for both the univariate and multivariate methods are shown in Table 3.[4] We also combined the results of the college and community samples using the meta-analytic technique of combining *p*s. When the results were not significant for one or both samples but were significant in the combined analysis, we mention the combined *p* in the text.

In the analyses that included just one of the relationship variables at a time, closeness, relationship duration, and frequency of social interaction were all (negative) predictors of the overall rate of lying and were significantly so for all except duration for the college students. Participants told fewer lies to the people in their lives to whom they felt closer, to those with whom they interacted more frequently, and (for the community members) to those whom they had known for a longer time. However, when all three variables were entered simultaneously, only closeness remained a significant predictor of lying. For both groups, participants lied less often to the people to whom they felt closer. The relationship variables did not interact significantly with either participant gender or partner gender.

The proportion of lies that were self-centered was not significantly predicted by either duration or frequency. For the college student sample, it was predicted by closeness: When participants told lies to the people in their lives to whom they felt especially close, relatively fewer of those lies were self-centered ones. However, a significant interaction of closeness with participant gender, $t(40) = 2.24$, $p = .031$, indicated that it was primarily for the men that closeness was a negative predictor of the proportion of self-centered lies (for men, the coefficient for closeness predicting rate of lying was −.12); for women, there was essentially no relationship (b = −.008). No other interactions with gender were significant.

As predicted, closeness was a positive predictor of the rate of telling other-oriented lies. When participants did tell lies to the people to whom they felt especially close, relatively more of those lies were other-oriented ones. This effect was in the same direction for both samples and was significant for the college students and in the combined analysis (the combined $p = .006$). The only other significant predictor of the telling of other-oriented lies was duration: For the college students (only), the longer they had known another person, the more likely it

[4] The results shown in Table 3 were all based on dependent variables that were ratios (i.e., number of lies divided by number of social interactions; number of self-centered or other-oriented lies divided by total number of lies). We also computed alternative analyses that did not involve ratios as dependent measures. To predict rate of lying from closeness and duration, we added number of social interactions as a predictor variable and used number of lies as the dependent variable. To predict self-centered and other-oriented lying from closeness and duration, we added the total number of lies as a predictor variable, and used the number of self-centered or other-oriented lies as the dependent variable. In these analyses, only one effect that was significant using a ratio dependent variable (the effect of duration on overall rate of lying for the community sample) was not even marginally significant in the new analyses ($b = -.021$). All other patterns remained the same.

was that the lies they told to that person would be other-oriented ones.[5]

For some family members, the duration of the relationship is sometimes equal to the participant's age. Therefore, for all results involving relationship duration, we recomputed them deleting family members. For rate of lying in the single-variable regression, the result for duration that was significant for the community sample became nonsignificant when family members were excluded, $b = -.028$, $t(54) = 1.24$, $p = .22$. For the simultaneous regression, the result for duration for the college sample that was marginally significant became nonsignificant, $b = .025$, $t(68) = 1.27$, $p = .21$. For predictions of self-centered lies for the community sample, the result for the single-variable regression for duration that was in the unpredicted direction (positive) became negative, though not significantly so, $b = -.041$, $t(18) = 0.97$, $p = .34$. In the simultaneous regression, the b for duration for the community sample also became slightly negative, $b = -.015$, $t(10) = 0.18$, $p = .86$. For predictions of other-oriented lies for the college sample, the result for duration in the single-variable regression dropped from significant to nearly significant, $b = .048$, $t(29) = 1.76$, $p = .09$. For the community sample, the result for duration in the single-variable regression that was in the unpredicted direction (negative) became positive and significant, $b = .075$, $t(20) = 2.14$, $p = .04$. For the simultaneous regression for the community sample, the result for duration also switched from negative to slightly positive, $b = .032$, $t(11) = 0.58$, $p = .57$. In sum, when analyses involving relationship duration were recomputed deleting family members, the results for rate of lying became slightly weaker, but the results for self-centered and other-oriented lying generally became somewhat more consistent with predictions.

Lying in Different Kinds of Relationships

Table 4 shows the overall rate of lying and the proportions of lies that were self-centered and other-oriented separately for each of the different kinds of relationship. In these analyses, we separated romantic relationships and family relationships from other relationships. We predicted that within the latter category, the overall rate of lying would be lowest for best friends, next lowest for friends, then acquaintances, and would be highest for strangers. In that closeness systematically decreased from best friends to strangers (see Table 2), this was another test of the closeness hypothesis, only with romantic and family ties removed. The ordering of the means for both groups was generally as predicted by the closeness hypothesis. The overall rate of lying increased systematically from best friends and friends to acquaintances and strangers. The linear trend was tested using a multilevel regression approach in which a regression equation was computed for each participant using the level of the relationship as a predictor (best friend = 4, friend = 3, acquaintance = 2, and stranger = 1) and the rate of lying to partners in that relationship category as the criterion. The test of the linear slope was significant for both groups, $t(41) = 2.83$, $p = .007$, for the college students and $t(24) = 2.15$, $p = .042$, for the community members.

We combined best friends and friends into a category called "all friends," and compared the rate of lying to that category with the rate of lying to the category of acquaintances and strangers combined. This test was significant for both groups (see Table 5). The college students and the community members told more lies per social interaction to acquaintances and strangers than to their friends. Comparisons of the category of all family members to the acquaintance plus stranger composite yielded a significant result for the community members, who reported a lower rate of lying to their family members than to acquaintances and strangers. The effect was in the same direction for the college students, and it was significant in the combined analysis ($p = .003$). Finally, the rate of lying to family members did not differ significantly from the rate of lying to all friends for either sample.

Although participants in both groups reported high levels of closeness to their romantic partners and to their mothers, the rates of lying in both of these categories were fairly high. Both the college students and community members told about one lie in every three of their social interactions to their romantic partners (not including spouses). The rate of lying to mother was especially high for the college students and approached the level of one lie in every two social interactions. In contrast, the rates of lying to spouses and children were the lowest of all: The community members told less than one lie in every 10 social interactions to them.

We could not compute the linear contrast on the proportions of all lies that were self-centered or other-oriented, because the number of participants who told those kinds of lies to partners in several different relationship categories was too small. However, we did compute the critical comparison between all friends and the acquaintance and stranger composite. This comparison was significant or nearly so for both samples and for both kinds of lies. As predicted, participants told proportionately fewer self-centered lies and proportionally more other-oriented lies to their friends than to acquaintances and strangers.

To determine whether the key relationship between closeness and overall rate of lying (shown in Table 3) would also occur within each of the relationship categories, we computed regressions using closeness as a predictor of number of lies per social interaction for the categories of (a) best friends and friends, (b) acquaintances and strangers, and (c) all family members. The *n*s for these analyses are necessarily smaller than those in Table 3 because only a subset of the relationship categories is included each time. In addition, the *n*s are reduced because some participants did not have multiple interactions within a relationship category (or did not lie to anyone in that relationship category) and were therefore not included in the analyses of that category. Also, participants who assigned identical closeness ratings to all of their partners within a given category had to be excluded as well. Consequently, we did not have sufficient *n*s to compute these regressions for the all family category for the college students (we had an n of 14 for the community sample). The other *n*s, for the college and community samples respectively,

[5] The *n*s decrease dramatically in the analyses of self-centered and other-oriented lying, compared with rate of lying. This is because the analyses can include only participants who told lies in at least two dyadic interactions and who told self-centered (or other-oriented) lies in some dyadic interactions and non-self-centered (or non-other-oriented) lies in other dyadic interactions.

Table 4
Rate of Lying and Types of Lies in Different Categories of Relationships

	Rate of lying[a]		Self-centered lies[b]		Other-oriented lies[c]	
Relationship category	*M*	*n*	*M*	*n*	*M*	*n*
Nonromantic						
Best friend						
College	27.96	46	37.28	23	36.67	23
Community	17.03	25	50.00	7	42.86	7
Friend						
College	27.62	77	38.16	61	28.29	61
Community	26.06	62	42.84	37	42.78	37
Acquaintance						
College	48.21	64	56.40	43	13.72	43
Community	32.86	59	55.78	36	24.27	36
Stranger						
College	77.38	14	54.54	11	18.18	11
Community	55.56	27	54.49	13	26.28	13
All friends						
College	27.47	77	38.31	63	30.22	63
Community	21.71	64	42.18	38	44.46	38
All acq/str						
College	48.31	67	58.26	44	14.39	44
Community	35.34	60	54.85	39	23.72	39
Romantic (not spouse)						
College	34.33	59	47.27	37	28.22	37
Community	31.78	28	64.22	17	19.61	17
Family						
(All)						
College	31.53	54	48.96	24	34.38	24
Community	15.36	60	60.77	29	18.94	29
Mother						
College	46.37	39	58.33	20	31.67	20
Community	30.08	22	66.67	9	11.11	9
Spouse						
Community	9.85	30	46.50	10	16.50	10
Child						
Community	8.08	23	65.48	7	34.52	7

Note. Acq/str = acquaintances and strangers.
[a] Number of lies divided by number of social interactions multiplied by 100. [b] Number of self-centered lies divided by total number of lies multiplied by 100. [c] Number of other-oriented lies divided by total number of lies multiplied by 100.

were 70 and 38 for best friends and friends, and 22 and 25 for acquaintances and strangers.

For four of the five slopes that we could compute, the predicted negative relationship between closeness and rate of lying occurred. Only for the all family category in the community sample was the slope positive, $b = .011$, but the effect was tiny, $t(13) = 0.10$, $p = .92$. For the category of all friends, the bs were $-.015$ and $-.040$ for the college and community samples. Although neither of these effects reached significance (ps = .26 and .12), the combined p was nearly significant ($p = .058$). Similarly, within the category of acquaintances and strangers, the bs were $-.067$ and $-.064$, which were individually nonsignificant (ps = .20 and .21) but nearly significant when combined ($p = .071$). In sum, within all of the major relationship categories, except the family category for the community sample, the key finding that fewer lies were told to closer relationship partners was replicated. That the significance levels were not as impressive as in the analyses using all of the data is attributable to the reduced power.

Perhaps what is important about lying in relationships is not the rate of lying, but whether any lies at all are told to a particular relationship partner. To examine this possibility, we looked at the percentage of partners within each category to whom any lies at all were told. For the college students, these percentages were 66, 44, 36, and 38, respectively, for the strangers, acquaintances, friends, and best friends. For the community members, the corresponding values were 47, 34, 30, and 33. (The percentage for the category of all family members was identical for both samples, 34.) In both samples, participants told lies to a smaller percentage of their best friends and friends than to acquaintances and strangers; for the college students, $t(67) = 1.72$, $p = .090$, for the community members, $t(57) = 2.12$, $p = .038$ (combined $p = .008$). The linear trend testing the prediction that participants would tell the greatest percentage of lies to strangers, next greatest to acquaintances, and lowest to best friends was nearly significant in each sample, $b = -.051$, $t(47) = 1.80$, $p = .078$, for the college students, and $b = -.078$, $t(27) = 1.96$, $p = .06$, for the community members, and was significant in the combined analysis ($p = .010$). In sum, considering the percentage of partners to whom any lies were told

Table 5
Comparisons of Lies Told to Family, Friends, and Acquaintances and Strangers

Comparison	Rate of lying[a]		Self-centered lies[b]		Other-oriented lies[c]	
	t	*n*	*t*	*n*	*t*	*n*
Friends versus acq/str						
College	2.75**	67	1.78†	39	3.00**	39
Community	2.20*	55	2.12*	25	3.29**	25
Acq/str versus family						
College	1.39	48	1.31	17	1.69	17
Community	2.99**	51	0.27	16	0.03	16
Friends versus family						
College	0.42	54	1.49	22	0.46	22
Community	1.24	55	1.11	18	2.09*	18

Note. Acq/str = acquaintances and strangers.
[a] Number of lies divided by number of social interactions multiplied by 100. [b] Number of self-centered lies divided by total number of lies multiplied by 100. [c] Number of other-oriented lies divided by total number of lies multiplied by 100.
† $p < .10$ (marginally significant). * $p \leq .05$. ** $p < .01$.

instead of the number of lies per social interaction does not change the conclusion that lying decreases as relationship closeness increases.

Predicting Characteristics of the Lies From Closeness, Duration, and Frequency

Multilevel regression analyses were used to predict characteristics of the lies (e.g., degree of planning, importance of avoiding detection) using relationship closeness, relationship duration, and frequency of interaction as predictors. As described earlier, in this analysis a separate regression was computed for each participant, treating partner as the unit of analysis. In this case, however, the criterion was the average rating of a lie characteristic to a particular partner, averaging across all lies told to that partner. The predictor was the variable measuring closeness of the relationship (standardized) with the partner. As before, the second step of the analysis involved predicting the regression coefficients from the first step, using participant gender as the predictor. This analysis resulted in an average regression coefficient estimating the relationship between the lie characteristic variable and the closeness measure (see Table 6), as well as an estimate of the interaction between participant gender and partner closeness in predicting the lie characteristic.

Table 6 shows the regression coefficients for the predictions of the characteristics of the lies for the two samples. We predicted that participants would feel more distressed about the lies that they told to their closer relationship partners. For the key variable of subjective closeness, all six results (distress before, during, and after, for the college and community samples) were in the predicted direction. For distress before, the *b*s were significant for the college students and in the combined analysis ($p = .04$), and for distress after, the combined result was nearly significant ($p = .06$). Generally, then, the participants did feel more uncomfortable about the lies they told to the people to whom they felt emotionally closer, though most of the individual results (before combining) were not significant.

The duration of the relationship was a consistent predictor of participants' distress across both samples. The college students and the community members felt more distressed before (combined $p = .02$), during (combined $p = .02$), and after (combined $p = .01$) the telling of their lies to the people they had known longer. However, when these analyses were recomputed omitting family members, all of the results became nonsignificant.

The results for frequency were in different directions for the two samples. The college students tended to feel more distressed about the lies that they told to the people with whom they interacted more frequently. The community members tended to feel less distressed about their lies to those people.

We also predicted that participants would feel less confident that their lies had been believed when the targets of those lies

Table 6
Predicting Characteristics of the Lies From Closeness, Duration, and Frequency of Interaction

Lie characteristic	Closeness *b*	Duration *b*[a]	Frequency *b*
Distress before			
College	.179*	.171	.328
Community	.110	.376†	−.725†
Distress during			
College	.060	.202†	.419*
Community	.023	.427	−.697†
Distress after			
College	.131	.233*	.377†
Community	.115	.265	−.509†
Target believed			
College	−.282**	−.182	.012
Community	.040	.116	.124
Was it discovered?			
College	.092**	.017	−.049
Community	.092	.189	−.345*

Note. The regression coefficients (*b*s) above were computed using standardized predictor variables.
[a] Analyses were based on square root of number of months.
† $p \leq .10$ (marginally significant). * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

were closer relationship partners. For the college students, the result for subjective closeness was as predicted. No other effects were significant.

Finally, we predicted that the lies would be more likely to have been discovered by the end of the study when they had been told to partners to whom the participants felt emotionally closer, whom the participants had known longer, and with whom they interacted more frequently. For subjective closeness, the results were in the predicted direction for both groups and were significant for the college students and in the combined analysis ($p = .01$). For relationship duration, the results were in the predicted direction but not significant. (This was also true when family members were excluded from the analyses.) For frequency, the results were in the direction contrary to predictions and were significant for the community members and in the combined analysis ($p = .05$). There were no significant interactions with participant gender for any of the lie characteristics.

In sum, the results for the characteristics of the lies were strongest and most consistent with predictions for the measure of subjective closeness. Participants tended to feel more distressed before and after telling lies to people to whom they felt emotionally closer. At the time that they told their lies, the college students were especially unlikely to think that their subjectively closer relationship partners believed those lies. And across both groups, participants reported that the lies they told to their subjectively closer relationship partners were more likely to have been discovered by the end of the study.

Characteristics of Lies in Different Kinds of Relationships

We computed the mean level of each lie characteristic separately for each of the three relationship category composites: all friends, acquaintances plus strangers, and all family members. We then did pairwise comparisons and combined the p values across the two samples. For the comparisons of friends with acquaintances and strangers, there were no effects that were significant and consistent across the two groups. For the college students, one effect was consistent with predictions: They thought that their friends were less likely to have believed their lies than were acquaintances and strangers, $t(37) = -2.36$, $p = .02$. For the comparisons of lies told to family members versus acquaintances and strangers, participants' feelings of distress during and after the telling of their lies were in the same direction for both samples and were significant in the combined analysis. As predicted, participants felt more distressed during and after the telling of their lies to family members, relative to acquaintances and strangers. For distress during, for the college students, $t(15) = 2.38$, $p = .03$; for the community members, $t(15) = 1.62$, $p = .13$; and the combined $p = .01$. For distress after, for the college students, $t(16) = 1.29$, $p = .22$; for the community members, $t(15) = 1.92$, $p = .07$; and the combined $p = .03$. Finally, for comparisons of lies told to family members with lies told to friends, only one effect was significant: The college students said that they felt more distressed while lying to family members than to their friends, $t(21) = -2.72$, $p = .01$.

Discussion

Closeness Predicts Lower Rates of Everyday Lying

Among the qualities that people value most in their close personal relationships are the self-disclosure and confiding that occur in those relationships, the freedom they feel to be themselves (Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Maxwell, 1985; Parks & Floyd, 1996), and their trust that their partners will care about them and be responsive to their needs. The same characteristics predict the quality and durability of personal relationships (Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Hendrick, 1981). Those characteristics are also described as deeply significant in some of the most influential theoretical statements about close relationships (e.g., Bowlby, 1988; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Holmes & Rempel, 1989).

In contrast, the lies that people tell in their everyday social interactions violate just those ideals. When people tell everyday lies, they pretend to be different kinds of people than they believe they really are, and they profess feelings that they are not actually experiencing and opinions they do not in fact embrace (DePaulo et al., 1996). We therefore expected to find lower rates of lying to closer relationship partners. The data were strongly supportive of that prediction. In both studies, when we examined the relationship between closeness and rates of lying for all of the people with whom the participants interacted, we found that the participants told fewer lies per social interaction to the people to whom they felt closer. Participants also told fewer lies to the people with whom they interacted more frequently, and for the community members, they told fewer lies to the people they had known longer. But when all of these relational aspects—closeness, frequency of interacting, and relational duration—were considered simultaneously, it was subjective closeness that emerged as the only significant predictor of rates of lying. It was also subjective closeness that most consistently predicted participants' feeling of discomfort about their lies. Participants felt more distressed before and after telling lies to partners to whom they felt emotionally closer.

Our position, then, is that everyday lies violate the nature of close relationships. If people's presentations of themselves to another person are so distorted as to be deliberately misleading, and if they hide and fake their feelings and opinions a bit too often, then their relationship with that person may no longer be a close one. Ideally, close relationships should provide some insulation from the need to present oneself dishonestly. People in close relationships know each other's weaknesses and annoyances as well as their strengths and charms, and yet they still value and care about each other. Reis and Patrick's (1996) account of the intimacy process highlights the importance of feeling understood and validated. Perhaps those feelings are what separate relationships that are emotionally close from those that are characterized only by longevity or by frequent contacts. Duration of the relationship and frequency of interaction by themselves provide little protection from the risks of honestly presenting one's true and vulnerable self.

Pragmatic Deterrents to Lying

Although we believe that the emotional deterrents to lie telling in close relationships are most important, we think that there

are important practical considerations as well. Partners in emotionally close relationships believe that they develop special sensitivities to each other's verbal and nonverbal cues and that they are therefore especially likely to see through each other's lies (Anderson et al., in press). Even in instances when close relationship partners believe that they might get away with their lies when they first tell them, they may still fear that the lies will be detected eventually or that the work of maintaining the lies would not be worth the effort. There are also certain lies that simply cannot be told to close relationship partners, who are already knowledgeable about the truth of the matter. All of these kinds of factors could have helped to account for our finding that people told fewer lies per social interaction to their closer relationship partners.

If participants were in fact deterred from telling lies that they believed had little chance of remaining undetected by their close relationship partners, then perhaps the lies they did tell were more successful. But that did not occur. The college students thought that their emotionally closer relationship partners were less likely to have believed their lies at the time they were told. They and the community members, considered together, also reported that the lies they told to their closer relationship partners were more likely eventually to have been discovered. We had predicted that lies would also be more often discovered by partners the participants had known for a long time, and by partners with whom the participants interacted frequently. We were wrong on both counts. We thought that frequent interactions would provide frequent opportunities to discover the lies and that longevity would provide relationship partners with an accumulated knowledge about each other that would also increase the odds that lies would eventually come undone. But neither opportunity nor knowledge may matter much if emotional investment is lacking. Perhaps relationship partners need to care about knowing the true facts and feelings of each other's lives in order to turn opportunity and knowledge into insight and lie-detection success.

The Special Place of Altruistic Lies in Close Relationships

In underscoring the link between honesty and closeness, we are not denying the presence and importance of deception in personal relationships (see also DePaulo, 1992; Parks, 1982). Even in relationships with spouses, for which the rate of lying was lower than for any other adult category, lies were told in nearly one out of every 10 social interactions. Efforts to eliminate totally all everyday lies from close personal relationships would probably be misguided. For instance, a little bit of light lying might serve important privacy needs for individuals in close relationships.

Other important functions of lying were suggested by the special place that altruistic lies seem to hold in close relationships. Although lying in general, and—in some analyses—self-centered lying in particular, occurs at lower rates in closer relationships, other-oriented lying occurs at relatively higher rates. People who tell the kinds of other-oriented lies that involve faking agreement with their partner's opinion or course of action may be conveying the message that they are on their partner's side. In discussing the importance of talk to the maintenance of relationships, Duck (1994) argues that talk serves to demonstrate a "symbolic union" between the relationship partners. Our data suggest that when partners in close relationships are not in fact united in their views, they may still pretend that they are.

Other kinds of altruistic lies serve to protect other people's faces and feelings. These are the kinds of other-oriented lies that may help to convey the caring and concern that have been deemed so essential to the processes of intimacy (Reis & Patrick, 1996), relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1991), and attachment (Bowlby, 1988).

We had a hint from our earlier work with this data set that other-oriented lies might play a special role in successful relationships (see also Metts, 1989). In our analyses of individual differences in everyday lying (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996), we found that individuals who reported greater satisfaction with their same-gender relationships characteristically (across all of the people with whom they interacted) told relatively more other-oriented lies than self-centered ones. Of course, that finding was about the ways in which particular individuals differ from each other as liars. We could not have known from that finding alone whether it would follow that people tell relatively more altruistic lies than self-centered ones to their closer relationship partners. Conceptually, though, the findings complement each other.

Perhaps we should have recognized another precursor to our findings in a process that has been shown to predict effective relationship functioning. That process is accommodation (Rusbult, Yovetich, & Verette, 1996). It occurs when people who are the target of a relationship partner's inconsiderate, humiliating, or otherwise destructive behavior do *not* articulate or act on the intense negative emotion that they experience. Instead, they behave constructively, and express sentiments that are kinder than the ones they really feel. Rusbult and her colleagues believe that this process involves a "transformation of motivation." We believe that it also involves deception.

When, in the process of accommodation, individuals set aside their own self-interest and instead behave more constructively, the target of their altruism is not so much their relationship partner as the relationship itself (Rusbult et al., 1996). But perhaps the liars are beneficiaries as well. Aron and his colleagues have argued that in close relationships, individuals behave as if some or all of the characteristics of their partner are also, at least in part, their own. That is, they feel more of a oneness or union with their partner (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). One implication is that acts that benefit the partner are also experienced as beneficial to the individuals themselves. This casts a new light on our findings. It suggests that people may tell relatively more other-oriented lies to their closer relationship partners because they are more likely to feel personally benefited by those lies.

Our argument has been that people tell relatively more altruistic lies in their closer personal relationships because they care more about their partners' feelings in those relationships. These lies, we believe, communicate understanding, validation, and caring—the essential components of intimacy. But in their discussion of the process of developing and maintaining intimacy, Reis and Patrick (1996) noted that partners can validate each other's experiences without necessarily agreeing with their point

of view. The implication, it seems, is that it should be possible to communicate caring and concern without lying. This lofty ideal may be admirable, but it is not always easy to achieve. If you really think your friend was at fault in her disastrous relationship with her husband, and that your best friend, who is dying of cancer, looks even worse than she did a few weeks before, how do you communicate those sentiments in a caring, validating, loving—and honest—way?

The Problem With Mothers and Lovers

There were some important exceptions to our findings that closeness predicted lower rates of lying. Participants reported very high levels of closeness to their mothers and to their romantic partners (who were not spouses). Levels of closeness to mothers and lovers were about as high as for best friends, and even higher than for friends. Yet the rates of lying to these partners were not especially low. Participants in both studies told about one lie in every three social interactions to their romantic partners, and community members lied at about the same rate to their mothers. The college students lied in almost every other interaction they had with their mothers. We think that these exceptions occurred because closeness is not the only important predictor of lying. Lying may also be predicted by the power of the targets of the lies (Hample, 1980; Lippard, 1988), and by their interpersonal attractiveness and appeal. For college students especially, mothers still control significant resources and privileges, and so students lie in order to obtain those things. Children of all ages may also continue to care about what their mothers think of them, and so self-presentational lies continue to be prevalent even among the adults from the community sample.

Romantic partners who are not spouses present a different set of lures for lies. People may want very much to impress their romantic partners and to be loved and admired by them, but they may be insecure about whether they will succeed. This, too, is a recipe for deceit. Uncertain about whether their "true selves" are lovable enough to attract and keep such appealing mates, people present themselves as they wish they were instead of how they believe they are in fact. Our explanations of the mother and lover problems are speculative, though, and in need of further testing.

Lying and Relationship Development

In comparing the rates of lying to different categories of relationship partners, we were especially struck by the differences between romantic partners who were or were not spouses. People lied in about one out of every three of their interactions with their romantic partners who were not spouses, but in less than one in ten of their interactions with their spouses. As intimate relationships deepen and romantic partners become spouses, do the rates of lying decrease along the way? Or are those romantic relationships that ultimately result in marriage characterized by greater honesty from the outset? Longitudinal studies would help to elucidate these and other possible explanations.

Is the Truth Bias Really a Bias?

One of the most robust findings in the literature on deception–detection is a truth bias: When presented with equal numbers of truths and lies to judge, people characteristically believe that more of the messages are truths than lies (DePaulo, Stone, & Lassiter, 1985). This truth bias is even stronger for close relationship partners, such as relatives and friends, than it is for strangers (Buller, Strzyzewski, & Comstock, 1991; Millar & Millar, 1995; see also Levine & McCornack, 1992; McCornack & Parks, 1986; for a review, see Anderson, Ansfield, & DePaulo, in press). Within the experimental paradigms in which the truth bias has been documented, it is indeed an error: People identify more of the messages as truths than lies when in fact the numbers are identical. But in the real world, truths are more common than lies (DePaulo et al., 1996). The present research has shown that rates of truth telling are not equivalent across relationships but are higher in closer relationships. Using real-world base rates as criteria, the stronger truth bias in closer relationship categories should not be regarded as a mistake (Funder, 1987).

Little Lies, Big Lies

Millar and Tesser's (1988) model of violated expectations holds that people tell lies when their behavior violates other people's expectations for them. Because close relationship partners have more expectations for each other, the likelihood that expectations will be violated and lies will be told is greater in close relationships than in casual ones. Our findings that fewer lies are told in close relationships are inconsistent with the Millar and Tesser (1988) predictions. Perhaps we were wrong in thinking that a greater number of expectations implies a greater likelihood of expectancy violation; if the expectations are accurate, then they may be violated only rarely. Another possibility is that the violated expectations model may be a more powerful predictor of serious lies than of the everyday lies that were the focus of the present research. Serious lies are often told to cover seriously bad behaviors, such as infidelities (DePaulo, Ansfield, Kirkendol, & Boden, 1997). In those instances, the truth (e.g., that an infidelity occurred) may seem to the liar to pose a greater threat to the relationship than a lie, which the liar might hope will never be discovered (cf. McCornack & Levine, 1990). In everyday lies, in contrast, it is the lie that is more threatening. One person's poor grades, for example, pose less of a threat to a friendship than the person's denial that the grades are poor or that she or he is concerned about them. In short, we believe that the relationship between closeness and lying will depend on whether the truth or a lie would pose a greater threat to the relationship. In the domain of serious lies, it is often the truth that would hurt the most and force a renegotiation of the relationship; in that domain, then, close relationships may be breeding grounds for deceit.

Methodological Issues

In this research, we asked people to tell us about an aspect of their own behavior that is considered socially undesirable in their culture. It is important, then, to address the question of

whether we can believe these self-reports of lies. The validity issue is one that concerned us deeply from the outset. We did everything we could think of to try to elicit accurate and thorough reports. For example, we had an extensive initial meeting with the participants in which we explained what counted as a lie in great detail and in which we emphasized the importance of accuracy and conscientiousness. We collected participants' diary entries several times throughout the week so that they would record their own behavior soon after it occurred, and we assured them that their anonymity would be protected (see DePaulo et al., 1996, for further details). So far as we know, no prior study of lying in everyday life instituted such procedures for encouraging accuracy.

Several aspects of our findings reassure us of the validity of participants' reports. First, participants reported a high rate of self-centered lying. They did not try to convince us that all or even most of their lies were altruistic. Second, in this report as well as our previous ones (DePaulo et al., 1996; Kashy & DePaulo, 1996), the most important findings were impressively similar across the two samples. If participants were misrepresenting their lying, they were doing so in strikingly similar ways in the two very different groups.

Still, it is possible that some motivations were shared by the two groups and thus produced similar, but invalid, results. For example, it is possible that when participants reported more altruistic motivations for the lies that they told to their closer relationship partners, they were simply rationalizing. We think that the best response to these kinds of challenges is to test them experimentally. For example, Bell and DePaulo (1996) experimentally manipulated participants' liking for an art student, who then questioned the participants about their opinions of her work. Consistent with our findings that people tell relatively more altruistic lies to the people to whom they feel closer, the participants who were induced to like the artist more also told more altruistic lies to her (see also DePaulo & Bell, 1996).

Another threat to the validity of our results is that the diary methodology may be a reactive one. For example, perhaps participants who noticed that they had told many self-centered lies to some of their interaction partners felt less close to those partners as a consequence, and rated their closeness to them accordingly at the end of the study. We do not find this particular challenge troublesome, as it does not explain why we also found fewer self-centered lies to close others when closeness was operationalized by relationship category (i.e., participants told fewer self-centered lies to best friends and friends than to acquaintances and strangers). Of course, it may be possible to generate still other alternative explanations of our findings that follow from the possible reactivity of the diary methodology. Our response again is to encourage experimental tests of any hypotheses that can be tested experimentally.

At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that the most basic questions that motivated this research—e.g., do people tell fewer lies per social interaction to the people in their lives with whom they share closer emotional bonds (as research and theory on close relationships would predict)?—are not testable experimentally. People cannot be randomly assigned to be spouses, parents, or best friends. We think that the diary methodology, despite its limitations, is the best available methodology for testing theoretically motivated questions about the rates and patterns of everyday lying in close and casual relationships.

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