

# The U.S. Political Campaign: Lies, Lies, Lies

## Excerpt

By Paul Gray, Michael Duffy, Priscilla Painton, and Elizabeth Rudulph  
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St. Augustine identified eight kinds of lies, not all of them equally serious but all sins nonetheless. The number Mark Twain came up with, not too seriously, was 869. In practice, there are probably as many lies as there are liars, but lying can be roughly classified according to motive and context. No hard boundaries exist between these categories, since some lies are told for more than one purpose. But most of them fall within a spectrum of three broad categories.

1. **Lies to protect others, or “I love your dress.”** Most “little white lies” belong here, well-intentioned deceptions designed to grease the gears of society. In this context, people want to be fooled. No one expects, and few would welcome, searing honesty at a dinner party. And the couple who leave early, saying the baby-sitter has a curfew, would not be thanked by the hostess if the truth were told: “Frankly, we’re both bored to tears.”

On rare occasions, lying to protect others can literally be a matter of life or death. Anne Frank survived as long as she did because those sheltering her and her family lied to the Nazis. The French Resistance during World War II could not have operated without deception. Military and intelligence officials will as a matter of routine lie to protect secret plans or agents at risk.

2. **Lies in the interest of the liar, or “The dog ate my homework.”** Here rest the domains, familiar to everyone, of being on the spot, of feeling guilty, of fearing reprimand, failure or disgrace, and on the other side of the ledger, of wishing to seem more impressive to others than the bald facts will allow. The liar wants to get away with something.
3. **Lies to cause harm, or “Trust me on this one.”** These are the lies people fear and resent the most, statements that will not only deceive them but also trick them into foolish or ruinous courses of behavior. Curiously, though, lying to hurt people just for the hell or the fun of it is probably quite rare. Some perceived advantage prompts most lies. If there is no benefit in telling a lie, most people won’t bother to make one up.

# It's the Truth: Americans Conflicted About Lying – ARTICLE 1

## Polls: Half Say It's Never Warranted, Two-Thirds Say It's Sometimes Justified

*Life on NBCNEWS.com, July 11, 2006*

- 1 It can be hard to get people to face the truth sometimes. Especially about lying. You don't want your kids to eat too much, so you say all the cookies are gone. You don't feel like going out, so you tell your date something important came up. You're overloaded with errands, so you call in sick.
- 2 Lies, all of them—but we don't really like calling them that. In a new Associated Press-Ipsos poll, over half of respondents said lying was never justified. Yet in the same poll, up to two-thirds said it was OK to lie in certain situations, like protecting someone's feelings.
- 3 Apparently white lies are an acceptable, even necessary, part of many lives—even though we dislike the idea of lying.
- 4 Rebecca Campbell knew exactly what she was doing when she recently told her 4-year-old son that there were no more cartoons on TV. And she didn't like it. "One day, he'll probably figure it out," she says. "There are cartoons on all the time!"
- 5 But, says the 25-year-old mother from Quincy, Ill., "We couldn't have the TV on all day." Deep in her heart, she knew that telling him the truth would have been better, though more time-consuming, as discipline often is. "It's the easy trap of a lie," she says ruefully. "It's easier than telling the truth."
- 6 Which is, of course, why new haircuts receive so many compliments, notes Teresa Velin, a mother in Palm Desert, Calif. Velin says it was just too darned hot and she didn't feel up to getting dressed and leaving home for a recent movie date. So she told a friend she was busy. "I'm not always as busy as I appear to be," says Velin, 27. "But I don't want to ruin a friendship over a broken movie date."
- 7 Nearly two-thirds of Americans agree. In the AP-Ipsos poll, 65 percent of those questioned said it was sometimes OK to lie to avoid hurting someone's feelings, even though 52 percent said lying, overall, was never justified.
- 8 Among those 52 percent, if he'd been alive and reachable, would have been the 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who believed all lying was bad—every single lie, even one that could save someone's life.
- 9 But most moral philosophers would disagree, assures noted ethics columnist Randy Cohen, who himself is so far from the Kantian view as to proudly proclaim: "I'm a big fan of lying."
- 10 "Not only is lying justified, it is sometimes a moral duty," says Cohen. An obvious example is when you're lying to protect someone from serious harm. But much less extreme cases often call for lies, Cohen says.

- 11 An example he likes: Your fictional spouse, about to accept a Nobel prize, asks if they look fat. "If you're on the way to the award ceremony, you say, 'You look fabulous,'" Cohen instructs. "Anything else would be cruel." If you're still in the hotel room, a suggestion of a different outfit might be appropriate.
- 12 Still, every lie has its cost, Cohen says, and that's just another factor you need to consider. One key cost is credibility: Once a person finds out you lied, you lose currency in their eyes.
- 13 For Harold Smith, it was worth the risk when he lied to his adult daughter about his health when undergoing treatment for a kidney tumor. "Why get her all traumatized?" says Smith, 64, of Pioneer, Calif. "I tried to protect her. It slowed down the anxiety. Later, I told her what really happened."
- 14 In the poll of 1,000 adults taken June 23-27, four in 10 people said it was OK sometimes to exaggerate a story to make it more interesting, and about a third said it was OK to lie about your age.
- 15 A third also said it was OK to sometimes lie about being sick to take a day off work. Very few would admit to thinking it was OK to lie on a resume, cheat on taxes or lie to a spouse about an extramarital affair.

### **Who says?**

- 16 Among the groups more likely to say lying was sometimes OK: people aged 18-29, college graduates and those with higher household incomes. "People have this idea that lying is bad," says Bella DePaulo, a visiting professor at UC Santa Barbara who's studied the phenomenon of lying. "But when you really start going through it, it's not that simple."
- 17 In a study in the late '90s, DePaulo asked 77 college students and later, 70 people in the Charlottesville, Va. community to track every lie, however small, in a journal for a week. Of the 77 students, only one reported having told no lie. Of the other 70 people, six made that claim.
- 18 "People who say lying is wrong are often thinking in the abstract," DePaulo says. "In our real lives, we can't always pick honesty without compromising some other value that might be as important"—like maintaining a happy relationship. If you're at a party and your partner is saying something you disagree with, for example, you might stay quiet, in the name of marital harmony.
- 19 Of course, there are inherent problems with any study that asks people to be honest about, well, being dishonest.
- 20 In the AP-Ipsos poll, for example, four in 10 people answered that they'd never had to lie or cheat. But one in 10 of THOSE people said in the very next answer that yes, they might have told a lie in the past week.
- 21 Which means they might have misunderstood the question—or, ahem, they may have lied.

# Rejecting All Lies: Immanuel Kant – ARTICLE 2

## Excerpt

**Immanuel Kant was a German philosopher who lived in the 18th Century.**

By Sissela Bok

1 Kant takes issue, first, with the idea that any generous motive, any threat to life, could excuse a lie. He argues that:

Truthfulness in statements which cannot be avoided is the formal duty of an individual to everyone, however great may be the disadvantage.

2 This is an absolutist<sup>1</sup> position, prohibiting all lies, even those told for the best of purposes or to avoid the most horrible of fates. For someone holding such a position, to be called a liar was a mortal<sup>2</sup> insult—perhaps cause even for legal action or duel; to be *proved* a liar could lead to self-exile out of shame.

3 Kant's view, if correct, would remove any effort to distinguish among lies, since he rejects them all. He takes the duty of truthfulness to be a "duty which holds in *all* circumstances." A lie, even if it does not wrong any particular individual, always harms mankind individually, "for it vitiates<sup>3</sup> the source of law." Even worse, it harms the liar himself, by destroying his human dignity and making him more worthless even than a small thing.

4 Kant defines a lie as "an intentional untruthful declaration to another person" and dismisses the idea that we owe the duty of speaking the truth only to those who have a right to the truth. In his view, *truthfulness is a duty which no circumstances can put aside*. Whatever else may be said about Kant's position, it seems to have the benefit of being clear and simple. Others may argue about when to lie, but he makes a clean sweep.

<sup>1</sup> Not dependent on situations or changeable

<sup>2</sup> Severe, even deadly

<sup>3</sup> Weakens, harms, or spoils

# Brad Blanton: Honestly, Tell the Truth – ARTICLE 3

## Excerpt

By Barbara Ballinger  
*RealtorMag*, May 2010

- 1 Think it's OK to shade the facts, tell a white lie, or withhold information? You may consider it harmless, but author Brad Blanton says you're unnecessarily complicating your life.
- 2 **How did you decide to write a book about lying?**
- 3 **BLANTON:** Through my work as a psychotherapist in the Washington, D.C., area, I found that lying was pervasive in people's personal and professional lives. But lying is stressful and hurts relationships.
- 4 **You've developed a technique called Radical Honesty. How is this different from plain, normal honesty?**
- 5 **BLANTON:** Being honest all the time is what's radical—and rare. Many people think they tell the truth, but they don't because they withhold information. Have the courage to be honest and have a relationship with others based on reality. Don't avoid the issues.
- 6 **Why is it so terrible to withhold information, especially if it means not hurting someone's feelings?**
- 7 **BLANTON:** Because it keeps you locked in the jail of your own mind. You have to remember what you told each person. You have to think about what the person's reaction might be, and you start manipulating information to control the outcome. Delivering the truth is easier, takes less time, and is less stressful.
- 8 **But if it's so stressful to lie, why do "we all lie like hell," as you say in your book?**
- 9 **BLANTON:** Because all our lives we've been taught to lie. We live our lives by what we think we should do. In many cases, we lie to maintain an image. But that isn't our real identity. We're playing a game.
- 10 **Aren't certain lies worse than others?**
- 11 **BLANTON:** Yes, but we shouldn't manipulate the truth except for rare times—if you're hiding Anne Frank in your attic because her life is in danger.
- 12 **Sounds great, but how realistic is it to practice radical honesty?**
- 13 **BLANTON:** Start by finding a friend. Agree to be radically honest with each other for two weeks. See how you like it.
- 14 **If we don't soft-pedal the truth at times, aren't we likely to offend people?**
- 15 **BLANTON:** Possibly, but it's just as likely that you'll end up losing people whom you don't want around you anyway. You should be able to get mad—even holler—but after a while be able to laugh and let things pass. Get away from those people who begrudge you, even if it means losing business or friendship.

16 **You're a funny guy. Do you find that humor makes being honest easier?**

17 **BLANTON:** Absolutely. I have Republican friends who I play golf with, and I'm not afraid to tell them when I think they're being idiots. If they don't like that, they can play golf with someone else.

# Teens Do their Share of Lying – ARTICLE 4

By Loretta Ragsdell

*Austin Weekly News*, March 25, 2009

## Talking to teens

- 1 Finally, the answer has arrived to the age-old question and unsettling mystery of why teenagers lie. I know many of you—especially parents of teenagers—think you know the answer to that question, and have known for years: "Teenagers lie because they can!"
- 2 Well, unfortunately, according to the teens I engaged in stimulating conversation as to why, when and how teenagers lie, "It's on an as needed basis."
- 3 "The key to lying," said 16-year old Margo, "is not to tell a whole lie, or a whole truth. That way you can always say you were confused or didn't remember the facts as they really were."
- 4 Curious as to how teenagers seem to develop their extraordinary ease in lying, I asked if there was some type of liars' club or workshop teenagers attend to learn such a skill.
- 5 "No, there's not a club that I know of," 18-year-old Tena said. "If you hear an especially good lie from one of your friends, and it fits your situation, you use it."
- 6 Based on my conversation with other teens, Tena's answer is correct, there is no Liars' Club; it seems lying is a trait children develop as toddlers and master with the onset of puberty. Also, many teens have excellent adult role models in their lives who have mastered the art of lying. It is widely accepted that children emulate behavior modeled before them and have a tendency to repeat what is said around them.
- 7 As a parent of two teenagers, I know when I hear some of those flamboyant, outlandish and outrageous lies. I am absolutely sure they had to have made them up in some laboratory or liars' club, but according to 14-year-old Debra of Austin Poly Tech, "most lies are made up on the spot. Some of my best lies have been off the top of my head," Debra said. "Like when I come in late and my mom asks where have you been? Now, the truth is I've been over to my boyfriend's house, or somewhere else, I should not have been, so I lie," she added. "I usually say I was with my best friend Alisha, knowing Alisha will back me up no matter what."
- 8 Curious as to if teenage boys lie differently than teenage girls, I asked the teens if there are certain situations in which they simply will not tell the truth, no matter what. After much laughter, many gave pretty much the same answer, "Yes."
- 9 Tim, 18, said the key to being good at lying is to keep it simple. "If you get caught in a lie," he said, "tell another one, and then tell another one to cover that one up, but keep it simple. You keep it simple so you can recap it in your head and keep your story straight."

10 Tim also said boys lie about different things than girls lie about. "Boys lie about their friends, taking the parents cars for joy rides, drinking beer and boosting stolen merchandise, whereas girls lie about being at the mall or over at some dude's house. A girl will lie about where she has been, but a boy will lie about what time of day it is. It doesn't matter; the key is to keep your business to yourself, and never admit to anything."

11 I asked the teens if there are certain things in their life they are especially prone to lie about. Most agreed you should never admit to doing badly in school or getting in trouble.

12 "You never tell your mother about a bad grade," Alisha said. "You let her find out on her own. Then, when they call your home or have your mother come up to the school, or when it comes in the mail, you make like you forgot to tell her."

13 Marianna, 17, says she lies about her attendance all the time. "When my school calls home about me missing class, I say I was there and that the teacher didn't take attendance," she said. "That works unless I really cut school a lot, and then I have to come up with a better line like I was sitting in the back with my head down reading."

14 Sabrina, an 18-year-old Harold Washington College freshmen said now that she is in college she doesn't have to lie as much because she has more freedom. "When I was in high school," she said, "I used to blame things on my friends. Like when I would cut school, I would say I was in the car with my friend and she didn't want to go to school, so I was stuck not going to school. "I have almost stopped lying altogether," Sabrina added. "But now I have to remember the lies I told when I was in high school because sometimes my mom asks about a person or thing I said I did back then. I really have to rack my brain to remember. The worst thing I could do now is to have her find out about lies I told when I was a kid; she would never trust me again."

15 I asked the teens how they get out of a situation when they are ambushed and caught in a lie.

16 "You lie again," Tim said.

17 "You use guilt," Sabrina said. "You say things like; I thought you were going to hit me, so I lied."

18 I asked the teens what were some of the best lies they have ever told. There was no shortage of examples. Marianna said her favorite lies always involved her friends and coming home late or some curfew violation.

19 "We would take turns calling each others' homes and pretend to be the teacher. We would say we had to stay after school to complete a project. Then, depending on what the weather was like, we would go to the mall or the park," Marianna said.

20 "The best lie I ever told was when I had taken the car and didn't get a chance to put it back before my mother knew it was gone," said 16-year old Shontea. "I told her I had taken it to get it washed for her as a birthday surprise, but the carwash was closed. She thought that was so thoughtful, she didn't even holler about me driving without a license."

21 "I lie about my outfits all the time," Yolanda, 15, said. "My mom is really strict, so I wear my real clothes underneath a baggy sweat shirt and pants and change once I get to school.

22 Sometimes I hide the outfit in my book bag. One time I forgot to change back and walked in with this short skirt and low cut blouse and my mom screamed for an hour. Now she searches my book bag before I leave for school, so I keep my real outfits over at my girlfriend's house."

23 It seems many teens learn from their friends who readily share examples of lies and techniques as to which lies work best in certain situations. The older the teenager, the more skillful the delivery of the lie usually is. The lies are more colorful and complex. "Becoming a good liar is a necessary life-survival skill," said Tim. "Sometimes, it's the only thing between you and a guaranteed beat down from your parents."