



Telling the Truth or Lying



Ideas in Conversation

Read this conversation between an author and a radio show host on honesty vs. dishonesty.

Host: Good evening and welcome to "Insight Hour." Tonight, we explore the **gray areas** of honesty vs. dishonesty. Joining us is Dr. Lara Fields, an esteemed **ethicist** and author of 'The Truth Spectrum'. Dr. Fields, it's a pleasure to have you with us.

Dr. Fields: Thank you for inviting me. It's a topic **close to my heart** and crucial for our society.

Host: Let's start at the basics. Lying, at its core, involves intentionally misleading someone. But it's not always **seen in negative light**. Can you **elaborate on** that?

Dr. Fields: Absolutely. Lying doesn't come in just one form. There are less serious types, such as **white lies**, which are often told to avoid hurting someone's feelings or to handle **socially awkward situations**. Then there are **nastier lies** which are meant to **deceive** or **manipulate** for **personal gain**. The intention behind a lie often dictates its ethical weight.

Host: **That brings us to the ethical dilemmas**. In your book, you discuss several situations where lying might be considered **the lesser of two evils**. Could you share an example with our audience?

Dr. Fields: Of course. Consider a scenario where lying might protect someone from harm. For instance, during wartime, lying about the whereabouts of innocent people to protect them from enemies. Here, the lie **serves a greater good**, challenging the **black-and-white notion** that lying is **inherently wrong**.

Host: It's a thought-provoking example. How do cultural perceptions influence our understanding of lying and truth-telling?

Dr. Fields: Culture plays a significant role. In some cultures, honesty is the supreme virtue, while in others, the context of the lie—its purpose and outcome—holds more weight. For example, in collectivist societies, **saving face** might **justify a lie**, whereas in more individualistic societies, the emphasis might be on absolute truthfulness, regardless of the social cost.

Host: When it comes to personal relationships, there's sometimes a **fine line between** truth and deceit. What's the best way to deal with such tricky situations?



Dr. Fields: It may sound **counterintuitive**, but it's true that even in intimate relationships the divide between truth and lies can sometimes be **blurred**. For instance, imagine your partner has worked for weeks on a meal for a special occasion, but the result is **less than stellar** (=mediocre, disappointing). What's the best approach when honesty could hurt, yet lying doesn't feel right? The answer is short: empathy. In relationships, **transparent communication** is key, but so is sensitivity to the other person's feelings. Sometimes, **brutal honesty** can be more damaging than a carefully considered white lie. The challenge is to **maintain integrity** while also being compassionate. Another example could involve dealing with past relationships. When one partner insists on knowing about the other's past, choosing to share details in a way that is honest but also mindful of the current relationship's peace can be challenging. It's about **revealing the truth** without causing unnecessary hurt or jealousy. These complexities should be addressed **with care**.

Host: That's a fascinating perspective, Dr. Fields. On that note, some argue there's a distinction between **outright** lying and simply not revealing the whole truth. They believe that choosing not to share information is not always **equivalent to** lying. What's your take on this?

Dr. Fields: It's an important distinction to make. Lying, by definition, involves intentionally making a false statement. On the other hand, choosing not to share certain details can be a matter of **discretion** or protection, rather than an attempt to deceive. It's about **context and intention**. If choosing not to share is meant to protect someone's feelings or the relationship itself, without manipulating the truth for personal gain, then it can be seen as a form of emotional intelligence, not deceit.

Host: Interesting. But there's a counter-argument that regardless of intentions, **withholding information** can be dishonest and lead to mistrust and feelings of betrayal. How should people approach this potential pitfall?

Dr. Fields: Transparency is crucial, but so is **fact**. It's about finding a balance. We should all strive for honesty but also understand the value of timing and presentation. It's not just what you say, but how and when you say it. It's also important for partners to ask themselves why they feel the need to withhold certain information and whether it serves the relationship's health or **undermines** it. But as a general rule of thumb, withholding information in itself is not **synonymous with** dishonesty or betrayal.

Host: Switching gears to the digital age, misinformation and "fake news" have become **widespread**. How does this impact the societal value of truth?

Dr. Fields: The digital age has complicated our relationship with truth. The **spread of misinformation** can have serious consequences. And this underscores the need for critical thinking and **media literacy**—to **question** and **verify** information rather than **accepting it at face value**.

Host: With that in mind, what steps can we take to promote honesty and discourage dishonesty in our society? In many cultures, lying **is not exactly frowned upon.**

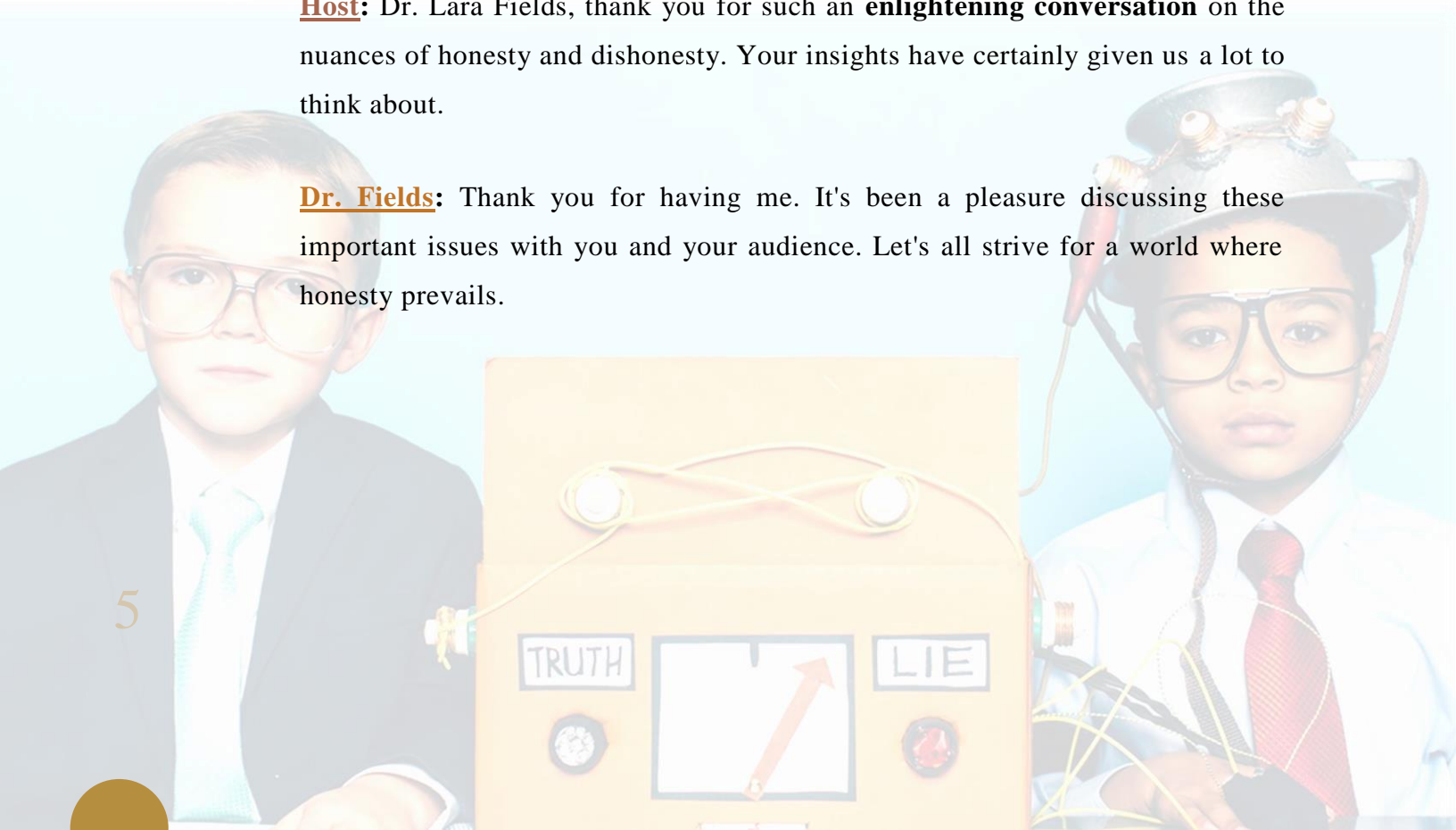
Dr. Fields: Education is key. Teaching critical thinking and ethical reasoning from a young age can help. Also, societal norms and laws that **reward honesty** and **penalize dishonesty** play a role. Ultimately, it's about creating an environment where truth is respected and valued, and where there are real consequences for deceit.

Host: Before we conclude, any final thoughts on how we can individually contribute to a more honest world?

Dr. Fields: It starts with **self-reflection**. Ask yourself why you might **feel tempted** to bend the truth and challenge yourself to be more transparent in your daily life. Practice active honesty by choosing to share your true thoughts and feelings, even when it's uncomfortable. Additionally, when you **catch yourself or others in a lie**, address it constructively rather than ignoring it. This encourages a culture of **accountability**.

Host: Dr. Lara Fields, thank you for such an **enlightening conversation** on the nuances of honesty and dishonesty. Your insights have certainly given us a lot to think about.

Dr. Fields: Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure discussing these important issues with you and your audience. Let's all strive for a world where honesty prevails.



Useful Language

The following collocations, idioms and expressions may be useful in your discussion about honesty vs. dishonesty.

truth be told

Meaning: A sentence opening used to admit something honestly.

Example: *Truth be told, I wasn't at the library yesterday.*

Word Family: truth (noun), truthful (adjective), truthfully (adverb)

white lie

Meaning: A harmless or small lie told to avoid hurting someone's feelings.

Example: *I told a white lie about loving her cooking to keep her spirits up.*

Collocations: tell a white lie, harmless white lie, small white lie

bend the truth

Meaning: To say something that is not entirely true.

Example: *He tends to bend the truth to make his stories more interesting.*

come clean

Meaning: To confess or be honest about something that was previously hidden.

Example: *After months of denial, he finally came clean about his mistake.*

Collocations: come clean about, decide to come clean, finally came clean

a pack of lies

Meaning: A series of lies or completely false statements.

Example: *The story he told was nothing but a pack of lies.*

keep someone in the dark

Meaning: To deliberately keep someone uninformed about something.

Example: *They kept me in the dark about their plans until the last minute.*

honesty is the best policy

Meaning: It's always better to be honest, even if it's difficult.

Example: *I decided to tell the truth about the accident because honesty is the best policy.*

gray area

Meaning: A situation that is not clear or where the rules are not known.

Example: *The legality of the issue falls into a gray area that's open to interpretation.*

the lesser of two evils

Meaning: Choosing the less harmful of two bad options.

Example: *Voting for him felt like choosing the lesser of two evils.*

Collocations: choosing between the lesser of two evils, facing the lesser of two evils

save face

Meaning: To avoid embarrassment or to maintain dignity in a difficult situation.

Example: *He apologized just to save face after making a mistake.*

Collocations: attempt to save face, manage to save face

be blurred [formal]

Meaning: To make or become unclear or less distinct.

Example: *The boundaries between right and wrong were blurred.*

Word Family: blur (verb, noun), blurring (noun, verb)

Collocations: lines being blurred, distinction being blurred, one's vision being blurred

withhold information [formal]

Meaning: To refuse to give information to someone.

Example: *The company was accused of withholding information from investors.*

Collocations: deliberately withhold information, accused of withholding information

tact (n.)

Meaning: Sensitivity in dealing with others or with difficult issues.

Example: *She handled the situation with great tact.*

Word Family: tactful (adjective), tactfully (adverb), tactlessness (noun)

Collocations: show tact, lack of tact, exercise tact

accept/take something at face value

Meaning: To believe something is exactly as it appears without questioning it.

Example: *He accepted the offer at face value without looking into the details.*

Collocations: take at face value, should not accept at face value

be frowned upon

Meaning: To be disapproved of or discouraged.

Example: *In this office, taking long lunches is frowned upon.*

catch somebody in a lie

Meaning: To discover or expose someone who is lying.

Example: *During the meeting, when inconsistencies in his story were pointed out, we managed to catch him in a lie about his whereabouts last Friday.*

More phrases: caught him in a lie, catch someone red-handed, catching in the act

Discussion

Read the following discussion questions and think about them.

1. How do you define a "white lie," and can you share an example from your own life where you told one? Why did you choose to do so?
2. Dr. Fields mentions "less serious" lies and "nastier" lies. Can you think of examples that fit these categories from your experiences or observations?
3. Have you ever faced a situation where lying felt like the lesser of two evils? What did you decide, and why?
4. How do cultural differences impact perceptions of honesty and lying in your experience or knowledge?
5. In what ways have you noticed the digital age influencing societal values around truth and dishonesty?
6. Have you ever been in a situation where someone withheld information from you for what they believed was a good reason? How did you feel about it once you found out?
7. Discuss the statement "withholding information in itself is not synonymous with dishonesty or betrayal." Do you agree or disagree, and why?
8. Reflect on a time when you had to "save face" in a social or professional setting. What happened, and how did you manage the situation?
9. What role does media literacy play in combating misinformation and "fake news"?