INFORMATION CONTROL IN CONVERSATIONS:

HONESTY IS NOT ALWAYS THE BEST POLICY[1]

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This exploratory research in the sociology of talk is focused on three questions for analysis: (1) to what extent does verbal information control occur in interaction, (2) what forms of verbal information control are used by people, and (3) what reasons do people give for controlling verbal information?

One hundred and thirty (130) dyadic encounters were recorded and analyzed; the "actor" is the respondent and the "other" is the person with whom actor has the conversation. An analysis of these encounters revealed that nearly two-thirds of the 870 instances of verbal communications were talk which controlled information. Frequency tables and typologies delineate (1) forms of information control and (2) reasons for information control.

Although most codes of ethics, religious canons, and humanitarian ideals deprecate deception in whatever form, conversations in everyday life are noticeably characterized by forms of deceit ranging from "white lies" to exploitative prevarication. Analysis of dyadic conversations shows that not only are forms of deception frequently employed, they are necessary, even mandatory discursive elements. In everyday conversations, honesty is not always the best policy.

Introduction

In his idealistic crusade for truth, honor, and virtue, Don Quixote with classic eloquence admonishes his sidekick, Sancho, that "honesty's the best policy" (Cervantes, 1703:666). In his farewell address in 1796, George Washington extolled the same cardinal virtue as applicable in both public and private affairs. In a spreading host of sensitivity training ideologies (e.g., "I'm O.K., you're O.K.")[2] and from a large number of religious pulpits both conservative and liberal, appeals for complete honesty in social relationships are common. Supposedly many interpersonal conflicts would be cleared up, and our society would be a better place in which to live if complete honesty were practiced by everyone.

In addition, the American court system requires a witness to swear under oath to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth..." However, even in courtrooms, and most certainly outside of them, life is not characterized by such honesty. For in a precarious, symbolically constructed world, it is doubtful that social relationships could be established, maintained, and nurtured if such "whole truth and nothing but the truth" discourse characterized human behavior. More commonly, actors see their own interests, and very often the interests of others, best served by communicating more or less than the "truth." Social psychologists have occasionally noted this fact. Anselm Strauss, for example, suggests that "social relationships could hardly exist without a certain amount of hypocrisy and conventional masking of thought and sentiment" (Strauss, 1969:87). And the highly influential work of Erving Goffman is a more-or-less continual elaboration of the point that people manage impressions by controlling information given others. Actors employ information shields, protect regions or "backstage" behavior, engage in masking or facework, cooperate in giving team performances to others who are not members of the team, and manipulate stage, props, equipment, and appearances to establish some impressions and mask others (Goffman, 1959: 1963; 1969). The upshot of this work is that people select the information they communicate to others, withholding some and supplying some; information control is an important and necessary process in everyday life.[3]

Research Questions

As a study of the sociology of talk (Lyman and Scott, 1970:112), this paper is focused on three questions for analysis:

1) To what extent does verbal information control occur in interaction?
2) What forms of verbal information control are used by people?
3) What reasons do people give for controlling verbal information?

Definitions

This research is confined to verbal dyadic encounters.[4] The two participants in each encounter are the actor and his audience who we will call the other. The actor is the respondent in the study; the other is the one with whom the actor has the conversation. Information will be seen as symbolic material which the actor knows about an encounter and includes the actor's knowledge of himself, others in the situation, the setting, what is taking place, what has taken place in the past, and inferences about what will or may occur in the future. Honesty is defined as a "complete disclosure" of information, that is, verbally communicating to the other all of the situationally relevant knowledge, "facts," or findings which the actor is cognizant.[5] Complete disclosure is utilized as a benchmark to compare and contrast forms of information control. Information control is a verbal expression which restricts and/or distorts communication to the audience and is seen as an actor's saying something other than what he would have said if, in his judgment, he had been completely honest.

Two forms of information control are utilized in this analysis: concealment and distortion. Concealment refers to relevant information kept from the other. In distortion, the actor gives information which misrepresents that

which he believes to be accurate or true. Typologies of the forms of information control are derived from the analysis of data. The "reasons" for information control are seen as accounts (Scott and Lyman, 1969:46-62) or motive vocabularies (Mills, 1940:904-913) mobilized to answer the question of why the actor did not give complete disclosure of relevant information in the situation.

Finally, a caveat should be entered that in this study we see the moral concerns of honesty in social relationships in quite an amoral way. While morality is of critical significance in interaction, we see no absolutist umbrellas under which to huddle when assessing the criteria by which honesty is established. Our objective here is to treat the morality of the matter as a situationally emergent, and highly problematic concern of the participants in the relationships we are studying.

Methodology

The method of inquiry was to record the conversations in dyadic encounters. One-hundred and thirty respondents were asked to make a verbatim record of a conversation with a relative, intimate (boy/girl friend or best friend), friend, or acquaintance shortly after the encounter which was in some sense important to them, rather than just a casual "hello and how are you doing" conversation. These encounters were those in which important matters were at issue or at stake. Respondents documented the general elements of the encounter; description of the setting, nature of the relationship with the other, and definition of the situation. Past experiences and future expectations relevant to the interaction were also elicited. The sex of the respondent was noted. Finally, the remaining five pages of the interview instrument were used to record the verbatim conversation of the actor and other.

After the narration of the actual conversation, each respondent was asked to review and evaluate each of his verbal expressions during the course of the encounter and to designate: 1) those statements which had been "completely honest," and 2) those statements which were not completely honest (i.e., statements which were something other than what he "felt was a true or accurate representation of his feelings." Such a procedure attempts to identify the actor's conception of reality. This is, of course, only one element in an emerging definition of a situation. For each of the statements in which the respondent had not been honest, he was then asked to record "what he would have said if he had been entirely honest." Finally, the respondent was questioned as to why he controlled information with the other; why there had been a discrepancy between what he said and what he would have said if he had been totally honest. (See Figure 1)

After pretesting the interview schedules, standardized instructions were constructed to insure common understanding of terms such as honesty, lies, definition of the situation, etc. Analysis of these conversations suggested the extent of information control in social relationships and established typologies of forms of both information control and rationales for engaging in such behavior.

Analysis and Results

Data were analyzed and evaluated from the standpoing of the respondent; no information was collected which revealed whether the person to whom our
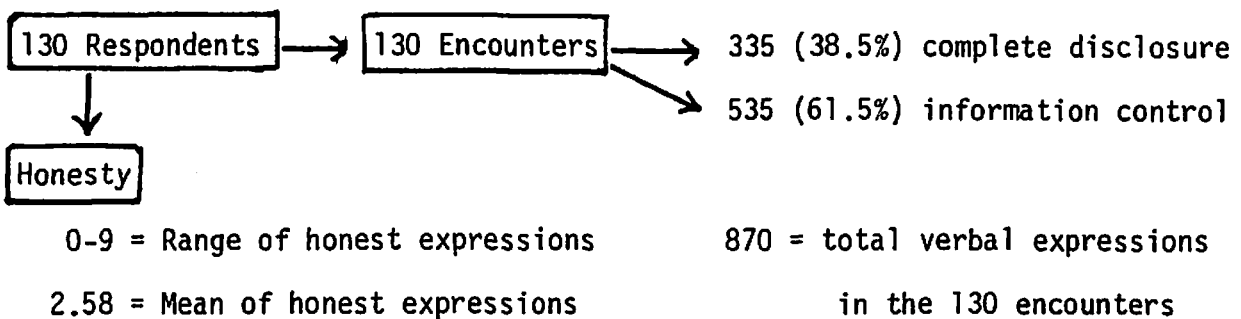
respondent was talking (the other) interpreted actor's conversation as honest or not. The focus is centered on the extent to which one member of the dyad, the actor, controlled information; what forms of information control he employed and his reasons or motives for doing so. We are assuming that the other is also engaging in information control for his own good reasons. We are relying on the actor's, our respondent's, recorded data in order to control the type and quality of data gathered.

This analysis explores a new vantage point by dealing with encounters in which the actor is successful in his performance by manipulating information. Previously, Goffman[6] has insightfully dealt with performances which are disrupted or "went to pieces."

Our analysis indicates that information control is indeed prevalent, that it takes various forms, and that there are standard vocabularies of motive that actors use to justify such conduct. Nearly all of our respondents felt that honesty was not always the best policy.

Incidence of Information Control

The one-hundred and thirty respondents recorded a total of 870 statements or replies to others; of those 870 responses, 61.5 percent were verbal expressions which controlled information. 38.5 percent of the actor's conversational statements were classified as complete disclosure, "what I felt to be a completely honest statement." The 130 respondents recorded a mean of 4.12 instances of information control with a range of one to fifteen; every respondent controlled information at least once in every encounter. On the other hand, the range of "honest" statements was zero to nine, with numerous respondents having no complete disclosures during the course of the conversation; the mean of honest disclosure was 2.58.

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┌──────────────────┐      ┌────────────────┐
│ 130 Respondents  │─────>│ 130 Encounters │────────> 335 (38.5%) complete disclosure
└──────────────────┘      └────────────────┘
         │                                     ────────> 535 (61.5%) information control
         ▼
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    0-9 = Range of honest expressions   870 = total verbal expressions

    2.58 = Mean of honest expressions   in the 130 encounters

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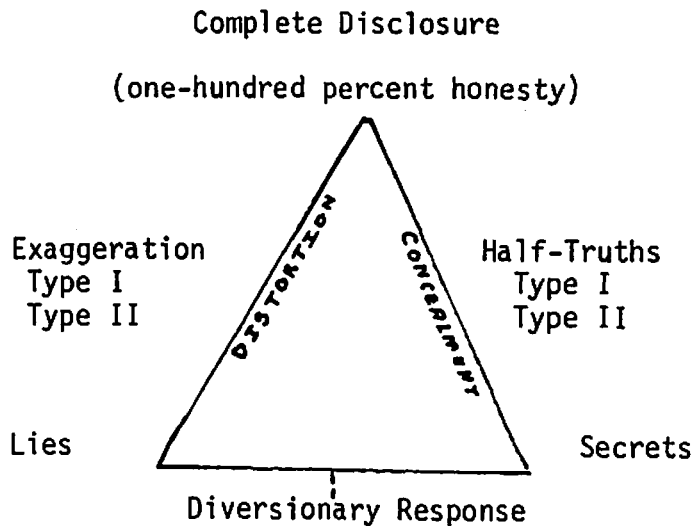
    1-15 = Range of controlled expressions

    4.12 = Mean of controlled expressions

Our data show that six out of every ten verbal statements made by respondents showed some form of information control. Furthermore, analysis of conversations shows that the controlling of information predominates the discourse. Out of the 130 encounters studied, there were no cases in which an actor was honest throughout

the entire conversation; however, there were numerous encounters that contained no honest conversation at all. Given the frequency of controlled verbal expressions, the next questions are how and why do people control information.[7]

Forms of Information Control

From our analysis of conversations, a number of forms of information control were derived. Recognizing two general forms of information control, distortion and concealment, a more discriminating typology of forms was developed.

Complete Disclosure

(one-hundred percent honesty)

Exaggeration   *DISTORTION*   *CONCEALMENT*   Half-Truths
Type I   Type I
Type II   Type II

Lies   Secrets

Diversionary Response

This research collected (1) what the actor actually said during the conversation and (2) what he would have said if he had been one-hundred percent honest. If "B" represents the former and "C" the latter, the following are the forms of verbal information control (Also see Figure 1):

1. Lies, information in B and C are contradictory.
2. Exaggerations: Type I, B contains C plus more information.
3. Exaggerations: Type II, B contains more information than C in the sense that verbal modifiers in B are the superlatives to those in C.
4. Half-Truths: Type I, B contains less information than C.
5. Half-Truths: Type II, B contains less information than C in the sense that the modifiers in B are the subordinates of those in C.
6. Secrets, B is absent of information, C is not.
7. Diversionary Responses, B and C contain different information.

Lies. Cases of information control were coded as lies when what actor said contradicted what he would have said if he had been totally honest. In this form of information control the same general theme is contained in both "B" and "C".

    B: You're really doing a nice job of sewing up the pants.
    C : Your sewing looks sloppy and messy.

The same central theme, "the sewing," is contained in both "B" and "C", but in "B" the actor tells the other that the sewing is a nice job; the actor actually felt the sewing was "sloppy and messy" (C). In the lie, "B" and "C" are contradictory.

Lies comprised thirty percent (30.7%) of the instances of information control recorded in our interviews (See Table 1). The lies told by the respondents ranged from "white lies" to exploitative prevarications; the majority of lies were seen by the actors as "white lie" types designed not to exploit the other, but rather to "save face" and other reasons which will be discussed later.

Our data show that the lie maximizes the amount of information controlled; that factor appears to be related to the frequent use of prevarication. Our respondents saw the lie as a very efficacious means of controlling information for whatever purposes they had in mind; it prevents communication of discourse which could embarrass, spoil presentation of self, insult the other, or be offensive in some way. In cases where there is actually little chance of being caught in the lie, and respondents viewed the consequences of complete disclosure as more negative than the risks of being discovered in falsehood. Given the consequences of giving an honest disclosure, controlling information via lies was an acceptable risk. But lies, if adroitly given, insulate the actor from being revealed by others as having prevaricated and maximize the control of information.

Exaggerations: Types I and II. In these forms of information control the actor gives more information in his actual communication to the other than what he would have if he had been perfectly honest. The following example, in which an actor wanted to terminate the encounter, exemplifies the first type of exaggeration:

>B: Well, I still have to finish writing my paper, read two chapters, and study for an exam.
>C: I still need to read part of my book.

In this instance, one sees that "B" and "C" contain some of the same information (the need to read part of a book), but "B", the actual conversation, contains additional statements (finish a paper and study for an exam). The actor was overstating the number of tasks that needed attention in order to justify terminating the encounter.

The second type of exaggeration differs from type one in that it is the modifiers that produce an overstatement; the modifiers in the actual discourse are superlatives to those in the wholly honest statement.

>B: The ski instructor took me down the advanced slope complete with moguls about thirty feet deep.
>C: The ski instructor took me down the intermediate slope complete with moguls. They were not thirty feet deep.

In this case the same basic core of information, "skiing," is communicated, but the modifiers in "B" are superlatives of those in "C" (advanced versus intermediate and thirty feet deep versus something less than thirty feet deep).

Exaggerations, types I and II, accounted for only five percent (5%) of

the total cases of information control (See Table 1). Respondent conversations indicate that exaggerations are not as effective as other means of information control because the overstatement "calls attention to itself" and is more likely recognized by the other as a magnification of the truth. Respondents reported that an exaggeration is not accepted as credible by the other; the overstatement is not as deceptive as other forms. Thus when an actor perceived a need to conceal or distort information, he typically chose another means to do so. It was not uncommon for others to interpret the exaggeration as humerous or "not really serious." In the very few cases in which our respondents utilized humor in controlling information, exaggerations were the forms they chose.

Half-Truths: Types I and II. Half-truths comprised twenty-eight percent (28.9%) of the instances of information control; type I alone accounted for twenty-five percent (25.2%). In the first type of half-truth the actor's actual discourse contains only a part of what the actor considered complete disclosure or an absolutely honest statement:

> B: I'm going to do what my parents tell me to do until we're married.
> C: You've got a lot of guts to think I should do what you say. I'm not committed to you. I'm going to do what my parents tell me until we're married.

In the type I half-truth, "C", what would have been a one-hundred percent honest answer, contains much more information than the actual statement (B) given to the other. The actor declined to tell the other that she was not as committed to him as he had assumed and that he was highly presumptuous; this half-truth partially conceals the truth, as defined by the actor.

The half-truth, type II, is distinguished not so much by less data than the one-hundred percent honest statement, but rather is a partial distortion by virtue of modifiers which alter the tenor or emphasis of the statement. The following example exemplifies the second type of half-truth in which the modifiers in the actual conversation "play down" the truth or "give less than" an honest evaluation:

> B: Well, I'm not certain, but I think John may have been ripping off at least a couple of bucks a day.
> C: Well, I know for a fact that John has been stealing money from the station every day.

The same basic information, "John is taking money," is included in both "B" and "C", but the modifiers in "B", "I'm not certain, but I think," are subordinate to the modifiers in "C", "I know for a fact." The modifiers provide a partial distortion of the truth.

Half-truths are efficacious and effective means of controlling information or deception because they combine some truth and some falsehood. In several conversations in our study, a half-truth was a most credible technique of information control because it incorporated an element of truth, which the other also recognized, that legitimated the falsehood included within the discourse. The actor couches the falsehood in a reliable or credible bit of information and/or frame of reference. In conversations where the lie, rather

than the half-truth was used, this credible frame of reference or bit of truth was not readily available for use by the respondent. In summary, an efficacious half-truth is based on the premise that it takes some truth to make a good lie.

As noted earlier, type I half-truths were much more common than type II. Our respondent data indicate that the type I maximizes information control more than the type II because it deceives by concealment rather than partial distortion by modifiers. In most conversations a half-truth which withholds certain data (type I) facilitates information control more than a half-truth which deceives by only modifying (type II) the central theme of the talk.

Secrets. The secret is a form of information control in which the actor remains silent when he has something to say, i.e., when he has information which is relevant to the conversation; although some secrets may be protected by employing lies, exaggerations, and other forms of information control, cases were coded as secrets only when the actor remained silent when he had relevant information or feelings to the conversation. The coding procedure was chosen because it was most consistent with our respondents' interpretation of secrets--silence or complete concealment. Ploys such as diversionary responses, lies, half-truths in which the actor verbally responded rather than remaining silent were not defined by respondents as "keeping a secret"; however, to some degree, all information control could be seen as keeping a secret.

In our respondents' records, a secret would be noted by the absence of communication in "B", but "C" would be a description of the secret information withheld. For example, in one encounter the other had asked our respondent why he had not received any comments on his latest work report from their boss. Actor remained silent.

> B: (silence)
> C: I was pretty certain that Mr. Hagerman (our boss) didn't like Jim's report. I didn't want to be the one to tell him.

Our study of dyadic conversations revealed an infrequent use of secrets as information control techniques, only three percent (3.2%) of our cases.

In conversations both actor and others are expected to take part in the talk, reciprocity is imposed. When a person speaks to another, he expects a response. An absence of that response is often seen as untoward behavior; silence places a strain on the conversation, as noted by one respondent, "I finally said something because the silence was so uncomfortable." Insofar as the secret is a form of information control in which the actor remains silent during some part of the encounter, it is disruptive to the interaction. Being disruptive to the conversation, secrets were used sparingly; most respondents chose some other form of control by which they could still conceal or distort information and continue the discourse.

Diversionary Responses. The term "diversionary" does not imply that the response is inappropriate or not suited to the conversation; the way it does fit into the conversation is what makes it a pragmatic form of social control. In the diversionary response, what is communicated in the actor's actual discourse is different from or irrelevant to what the actor would have said had

he been one-hundred percent honest. Consider the following example in which a
young lady does not want to be alone with a fellow who is an occasional date.
He suggested that they leave the ballgame and retire to his dormitory room:

> B: No, it's too nice outside to go indoors. I just love
>   this Colorado weather.
> C: I'm afraid to be alone with you right now. I know what
>   you have in mind.

The key element of the diversionary response is that "B" and "C" contain
different information, not contradictory as in the lie. The actual conversa-
tion (B) is intended and used by the actor to divert the topic of conversation,
being alone in the dormitory room, etc., to the niceties of the weather.

Diversionary responses were the most frequently used forms of information
control (32%); they maximize information control by completely concealing the
actor's one-hundred percent honest evaluation. In addition, it deceives by
distorting actor's true feelings by substituting a new topic of talk or
"changing the subject." An adroit concealer using a diversionary form of
information control can deceive another by "revealing" information seemingly
valuable, but which is irrelevant to or different from his honest feelings.
In essence, diversionary responses are efficacious means of information control
because they divert the conversation from the information the actor desires to
withhold. This tactic seals off certain information areas and opens up others
which have less potential for undesirable disclosure.

Respondents also saw the diversionary response as having certain other
advantages over other forms of control. When one falsifies the "truth," he
takes the risk of being caught in a lie or half-truth. The diversionary response
simply detours or circumvents the undisclosed information without falsification
or distortion; therefore the interactional risks of "discovery" are not as great.
In a sense the diversionary response was less morally reprehensible, especially
under conditions of discovery.

Reasons for Information Control

After researching the empirical frequency of information control in conversa-
tions and discovering the various forms of information control, the next
question was why do people control information in encounters with others.
At the conclusion of the conversations, respondents were asked why they said
something other than a one-hundred percent honest response in the instances
of information control. An analysis of these responses developed five reasons
actors justified concealment and distortion of information.[8]

1. Face, information control to protect actor's identity, the identity
    of the other, or identity of another person outside the encounter.
2. Relationship, information control to maintain, maximize, or
    terminate the degree of intimacy and/or social distance with the other.
3. Exploitation, information control to establish, maintain, or
    maximize power or influence over the other.
4. Avoid tension/conflict, information control to preclude conflict
    or tension with the other.
5. Situational control, information control to maintain, redirect,
    or terminate social interaction with the other.

Procedures and categories for coding the reasons actors gave for controlling information were developed by extensive interivews with our respondents after completion of their conversation records. It is obvious that some categories such as face and relationship or avoidance of tension and situational control are not unrelated and exhibit some conceptual overlap; however, respondents conceptualized differences in reasons of face (protection of identity) and reasons of relationship (controlling social distance).

Although similar in many respects, actors saw a difference between avoiding conflict with another and controlling the situational lines of action in an encounter in order to facilitate, redirect, or terminate the conversation.

Face. Face has been defined as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (Goffman, 1967:5). In other words, face refers to the positive feelings one has about his identity in a social situation. Analysis of reasons include three subtypes: (1) protection of the actor's face, (2) protection of the other's face, and (3) protection of another's face who is not a part of the dyadic encounter:

Protection of actor's own face
Jane has a rather perfect sex life and my ego didn't want her to
    know mine wasn't very good.
I didn't want him to think that I sit there and just study and
    wait for his call.
I didn't want her to think I was dumb enough not to check the
    gas gauge.
I shaded it with a few of the right words to make sure she knew
    it wasn't my fault.

Protection of the other's face
I didn't want to hurt his "big man" ego.
I didn't want to offend her by referring to her tightness with
    money.
The girl is fairly large and it would have hurt her a lot if I had
    told her my honest feelings about her new outfit.

Protection of another's face
I didn't give my honest feelings because I didn't want to offend
    his roommate.
I just couldn't tell my boss that John had been taking money.
    If I had, John would have been fired and he would have been
    crushed.

Not only was protecting of one's face frequently given as a reason for controlling information (27.7%), our respondents saw face as one of the most important and justifiable reasons (See Table 2). In relationships with others, one's identity and self-worth are of cardinal importance; controlling information given to others about one's self is central to managing impressions (Goffman, 1959). By selectively communicating information about one's behavior, desires, feelings, etc., an individual endeavors to negotiate a positive validation of his announced identity. Analysis of conversations reveals that respondents' dialogues with others were designed to effect such consensual validation of self (Stone, 1962).

Not only must one negotiate a positive sense of self worth in his social encounters, he must also protect the other's self. Goffman has noted a mutual acceptance of interactants in face-to-face talk to maintain face of both actor and other:

> Just as the member of any group is expected to have self-respect, so also he is expected to sustain a standard of considerateness; he is expected to go to certain lengths to save the feelings and the face of others present and he is expected to do this willingly and spontaneously because of of emotional identification with the others and with their feelings. In consequence, he is disinclined to witness the defacement of others (Goffman, 1967:10).

Simmel insightfully understood the protection of an other's face:

> All of human intercourse rests on the fact that everybody knows somewhat more about the other than the other voluntarily reveals to him; and those things he knows are frequently matters whose knowledge the other person (were he aware of it) would find undesirable (Simmel, 1961:321).

Twenty-five percent (25.6%) of the reasons given by respondents indicated that information control had been employed to prevent embarrassment, insult, or other negative implications of the other's self; respondents voiced altruistic motives in helping to protect the other's face. An actor is concerned with the face of the other because he has helped to create other's self image (Rose, 1969). The actor has invested a part of himself in the other, he has identified himself with the other (Goffman, 1967:10). Thus, he is not only protecting the other's self image, but reciprocally his own. Actor feels a sense of guardianship of the other's self; "in the social encounter the individual entrusts his 'face' to others and has a right to expect they will handle it gently" (Becker, 1971:88). In living up to this trust, actor controls information to affirm the other's face.

In a few cases respondents reported that information control was utilized to protect the face of another person who was not present but was known by both actor and other (1.9%). Actor "didn't want to fink on another" or felt the other might be upset if the person under discussion were criticized. There were a few instances in which an actor controlled information to attack the other's or another's face: "I was trying to make him feel bad." One-hundred percent honest statements were more frequently used if an actor voiced this intent.

The empirical data of this study reinforce and underline the work of Stone, Goffman, and others who stress the importance of self in human relationships.

Relationships. Not unrelated, but categorically different from reasons of face, are the reasons given by respondents which justify information control to maintain or modify social relationships. In contrast to the face game in which actors cooperate and reciprocate to undergird self-esteem and allow no one to lose face, the relationship game involves an actor seeking to maximize [or minimize] the relationship beyond mere face (Lyman and Scott, 1970:44). Relationship refers to the amount of social distance or the degree of intimacy

between actor and other. An actor may control information in order to achieve a greater intimacy, lessen intimacy, or terminate a relationship (Lyman and Scott, 1970:43).

Maintaining relationships
A true response would have shut B.J. off just when I was getting
     to know him and wanting to know him better.
I didn't feel like losing a friend that I've had for such a long
     time. So I said something other than the one-hundred
     percent truth.
She is a sensitive person, so honesty certainly wouldn't help
     our friendship.

In other such examples respondents reported that they were reluctant to respond to the other with a frank "no" to invitations or suggestions, but rather, couched their refusal or denial in a rhetoric of controlled information which softened or "toned down" the refusal. A regretted inability to comply with the other's requests or invitations served to maintain the relationship.

Terminating the relationship
I didn't like him much so I thought if I told him that I was
     engaged, he wouldn't bother me so much and keep calling.
By telling her what I did, it would make it easier to break up
     with her. It wasn't the truth, but it served the purpose
     of breaking up with her without any big hassle.

Approximately 10 percent (9.6%) of the reasons given were accounts to justify the manipulation of talk so as to facilitate or terminate relationships. Respondents recognized the fact that encounters cannot be terminated abruptly, but rather with subtlety, thoughtfulness, and grace. Information control, fabricating a justifiable reason for taking leave, was one of the ways whereby one "eased" his way out of the conversation. The typical social situation which information control was used to manipulate relationships were encounters of courtship and friendship.

"Relation building constitutes mutual and deepening reciprocal escalation of trust and commitment" (Lyman and Scott, 1970:45). Simmel insightfully pointed out that in the development of relationships that secrets and undisclosed information are basic ingredients of intimacy. Not only is the disclosure of these secrets to others outside the dyad an irreparable breach of the relationship, but also the discussion of many of these secrets is prohibited between the two (Simmel, 1950:307-378). The two individuals in the relationship selectively steer around the touch topics in their own conversations; thus information control is an element in the development and maintenance of mutual and reciprocal trust.

Exploitation. Exploitation, as a motive for controlling information, refers to the actor's attempt to gain power and control over other, that is, to manipulate other's actions in accordance with actor's own desires. The following statements are illustrative:

I was flattering her so that I could pick her up.
I said what I said to make him get on his knees and beg me to
     stay.
I didn't really like the kid at all, but his money was nice to
     pay for gas.

I was "playing" with her in order to manipulate her response.

By use of selectively chosen discourse the actor endeavored to establish a frame of meaning in the encounter which will be conducive to the procurement of his wishes and desires. The actor controls information in order to create a definition of the situation which facilitates the attainment of his goals.

Only a few of the reasons given by respondents were classified as exploitative (1.7%). There was some evidence that respondents, even under intensive interview, were unwilling to admit they had been exploitative of others. Analysis of conversations show that exploitation is implied in many of the instances in which face, relationship, and other reasons were given.

In several instances respondents reported that they concealed information to preclude the possibility of the other divulging that information to others; actors were concerned that they might be exploited by "blackmail." In these cases information control was employed to protect themselves from exploitation.

Avoidance of tension and conflict. Respondents often cited the use of information control to avoid conflict or tension with the other, twenty-two percent (22.2%) of the reasons. In these instances the actor was concerned with manipulating his conversations to avoid topics which might trigger arguments or tensions in the encounter:

> Because if I said what I thought was one-hundred percent honest,
> it would have been a bad scene.
> There are less hassles if I blame my parents rather than
> myself.
> If I had given an honest statement, Bob would have started
> another argument.

In some situations where an actor insists on his own definition of the situation, the continuation of the encounter may be threatened by open conflict or tension; in these instances the actor verbally negotiates around these "touchy" subjects. Respondents felt most interactions with others have a disruptive or conflicting potential and that controlling information was an effective means of preventing such from occurring.

Situation Control. Actors noted three other reasons which deal explicitly with the flow of interaction in an encounter. These reasons did not deal directly with the relationship with the other, but rather with the maintenance of the encounter, to keep it going (4.5%). Another reason was to redirect the conversation to move the dialogue to another topic (2.2%). The final type of reason was to terminate the encounter (3.2%). These reasons totaled approximately ten percent of the justifications for information control.

> Facilitate the encounter
> She was really interested in education so I expressed a so-called
> interest to keep the conversation going. I really wasn't
> interested, but I didn't want to disrupt the conversation with her.
> I didn't want to stop him from explaining by saying something that
> was contradictory. I agreed with him so he could continue.

Redirect encounter
I said something other than an honest answer in order to get Tom
    to stop worrying about the paper so we could talk about
    something else.
I didn't want to talk about something I felt inferior about so
    I simply ignored him and changed the subject.

Terminate the encounter
I felt uncomfortable and wanted her to leave me alone. So I told
    her that I had to study in order to end our discussion.
The easiest way to get her to stop talking and leave is to agree
    with her. I really didn't believe what I said to her.

Manipulating the flow of interaction in the encounter has implication for face, relationships, exploitation, etc., however, in these cases the respondent was more concerned with the interaction itself, the emerging definition of the situation.

Conclusion

The modest beginning that this research had made into the interactional dilemmas of honesty warrants equally modest conclusions. The most obvious and compelling implication of this study is that our own definition of honesty as "complete disclosure" of all relevant information may be quite inaccurate when placed in the kinds of social situations we have explored. For rather than using this commonsense and rather folklorish definition, our respondents instead seemed to see honesty more as fidelity to the maintenance of some on-going relationship, and consequently maneuvered information in such a way as not to jeopardize that relationship. Seen in this way, selectively controlling information, rather than being regarded as deceptive, hypocritical, morally wrong, or ethically questionable, was interpreted by our respondents as the right thing to do in order to prevent the agonizing experiences of embarrassment, disruption, and the severing of relationships which often had been built up laboriously over a period of time.

That is not to say, of course, that our respondents did not know the difference between what could be construed as an "honest" response and what they in fact said; they did know and our entire analysis was based on their knowledge of various disparities between the two. On the other hand, most of our respondents did not confuse honesty with either sincerity or frankness; misconceptions that are frequently found in the literature on honesty (Kaufmann:1973). While sincerity may be preferable to insincerity, it is not honesty, as our respondents seemed to know, for they engated in the telling of all sorts of falsehoods with charming conviction. In fact, we may say that in American society such confusion is rampant because sincerity is an appearance that we can easily put on and be put on by (as Goffman has so eloquently shown), whereas honesty is presumably buried in people's minds and not open to easy inspection. The frequent use of such terms as "sincerely," "really," "on-the-level," and "I'm not putting you on," suggests that if we are to be deceived, we want to have a good job done of it whether we are presenting the deception or are the recipient of it.

Our respondents also seemed to know the difference between honesty and frankness. If honesty is frankness, it becomes an extremely easy virtue to attain, for it turns extreme rudeness into moral superiority. It is clear,

however, that many of the forms of information control we have analyzed here
were engaged in to avoid the kind of frankness that might be taken for
honesty and bring the relationship tumbling down. Our respondents stressed
over and again that relationships are most important than truth, and that
the relationships are, after all, what social life is all about. Truth and
honesty are somewhat abstract notions, especially as they are expressed in
conventional American ideology. In order to make them useful they have to
be braided into the give-and-take of everyday situations. Is it honest to
tell someone a truth that would sever or greatly jeopardize your relationship
with a person if that is honestly not what you want to do? The answer seems
clear and may tell us that it is easier to tell someone the bald truth after
we have decided that we don't care what happens to our relationship with
them anyway. In other words, being truthful and honest at all times may have
consequences which are neither truthful nor honest, and that seems best to
describe our respondent's dilemma, and their adroitness in managing it.

What accounts for this concern about relationships? It has been said
that life in mass society has become increasingly impersonal, that we now
live in what is essentially a world of strangers (Lofland:1973). All of this
may be true but does not in itself link such structural conditions with the
interactional situations we have analyzed in this paper. What accomplishes
the linkage is the action of people such as our respondents who are anxious
that their relationships, put together with some care, are not torn apart by
what they see as a foolish and devastating fidelity to the ideological demand
that people be honest all the time. This may simply be more evidence for
the notion that abstract ideologies are losing their power to influence people's
behavior (Bell:1960). But more to the point seems to be the idea that
emerged from our data that since our culture is a tissue of lies and contra-
dictions, and since social meanings are human constructs anyway, the best one
can do is to engage in one polite fiction after another, thereby keeping
relationships and meanings alive in a world that may be rapidly losing both.

It is with naivete of social interaction that many observers of social
behavior make proclamations clothed in ethical and religious rhetoric that
many social problems would be solved if in all social relationships people
were one-hundred percent honest. It is obvious that Cervantes was ridiculing
Quixote who believed in such an empty platitude and a society which employs
such ideological mystification to cloak its deception -- because honesty is
not always the best policy.

Footnotes

1. Revised version of a paper presented to The Midwest Sociological Associa-
tion, Omaha, Nebraska, 1973.

2. See Thomas A. Harris, I'm O.K., You're O.K. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

3. Information control has been a point of concern in macro- as well as micro-
sociology. General systems or cybernetic models stress the importance of
free-flow of information (Blau and Scott, 1962:116-139; Wilensky, 1967) for
problem solving, decision-making, and creative thinking. Although information
control is generally regarded as undesirable by such points of view, sociologists
have sometimes argued that inter-organizational information control is beneficial

and necessary. Information screens which are intended to preclude a free flow of information and protect an organization from its social environment, insulate a system or organization from undesired outside evaluation, and allow a presentation of a unified front to others are seen as functional, and such control is a source of organizational power.

4. This focus on verbal interaction is one of the major weaknesses of this investigation. The selective presentation of information by an actor to his audience is an extremely complex process involving, obviously, not only verbal communication (in Goffman's terms expressions given) but also a host of non-verbal expressions given off. Furthermore expressions given off are not only vocabularies of communication in their own right, but may also qualify the meaning of verbal expressions given. This complex matrix of meaningful action is considerably simplified by our focus on only verbal programs and can be justified only by the extremely tentative and exploratory goals of this study.

5. This is but one of many definitions of honesty that are currently in use. We have selected this definition over others for it seems to us to be the definition most likely to emerge in relationships and interactions themselves. Interpersonally it is our contention that people tend to define virtually any sort of information control as less than honest. While we disagree with this definition, it is nonetheless the one most likely to be encountered in social relationships. For an extremely sophisticated discussion of honesty from the standpoint of existential philosophy, see Walter Kaufman, Without Guilt and Justice: From Decidiophobia to Autonomy.

6. Another interesting approach to this research would be to study the extent to which the other is or is not aware that actor is controlling information. Goffman has pointed out that an actor's performance may be sincere or cynical while the other can interpret the performance as either sincere or cynical. If the other deems the performance as insincere, the performance is discredited regardless of the cynicism or sincerity of the actor (Goffman, 1959).

7. Other analyses of data showed no significant differences between information control frequencies for males or females; nor were specific forms of or reasons for information control significantly related to gender. However, we did note that information control is more prevalent in secondary than in primary relationships. Because of familiarity and a high frequency of inter-action, there seems to be some evidence that a greater possibility of detection exists in primary relationships; therefore, actors are more careful in these encounters and use information control more sparingly. These data are under further research and are forthcoming.

8. Lyman and Scott's typology of game frameworks proved useful in analyzing our conversational data. In some ways this research is an empirical check of their ideas. See Lyman and Scott, 1970:29-69.

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Figure 1

The Elements of the Respondent's Record

(A) Encounter in General	(B) Dyadic Conversation	(C) Honest Response	(D) Reason for Discrepancy
1. Setting	What the Actor actually said to the Other:	What the Actor would have said if he had been one-hundred per-cent honest.	Why there is a discrepancy between "B" and "C" -- Why the respondent con-trolled information.
2. Relationship between Actor and Other	Actor "...." Other "...."	ditto	ditto
3. Definition of the Situation.	Actor "...." Other "...." Actor "...." Etc. And designations of those honest and dis-honest statements.	ditto	ditto

Table 1

Frequencies of the Forms of Information Control

Form	Raw Numbers	Percentages
Lie	164	30.7
Exaggeration (Type I)	12	2.2
Exaggeration (Type II)	15	2.8
Half-Truth (Type I)	135	25.2
Half-Truth (Type II)	20	3.7
Secret	17	3.2
Diversionary Response	172	32.1
Total Cases of Information Control	535	99.9

Table 2

Frequencies of the Reasons for Information Control

Reason	Raw Numbers	Percentages	
Protect own face	148	27.7	
Protect other's face	137	25.6	55.2
Protect another's face	10	1.9	
Attack other's face	7	1.3	
Attack another's face	1	.2	1.5
Maintain relationship	36	6.8	
Terminate relationship	15	2.8	9.6
Exploitation	9	1.7	
Avoid tension/conflict	119	22.2	
Maintain interaction	24	4.5	
Redirect interaction	12	2.2	9.9
Terminate interaction	17	3.2	
		. . .	
Totals	535	100.1	