

SWEET LITTLE LIES: DECEPTION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

BY

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### **Abstract**

Undoubtedly, deception plays a complex role in romantic relationships. This study examines the use of deception in romantic relationships by utilizing 67 participants' responses to qualitative methodology whereby participants recorded their use of deception and the motives to use deception as these speech patterns occurred within their romantic relationships. This study sought to gain a richer understanding of the extent deception is used in the relationship, common topics of deceptive messages, common motives for deceiving romantic partners, and how the use of deception functions in romantic relationships. Results exemplified the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of deception in romantic relationships as participants reported it can function in both positive and negative ways.

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## **Chapter One:**

### **Introduction and Rationale**

Although many would like to believe their romantic relationships are built on absolute truth and openness, 92% of individuals admit that they have lied to or were not completely honest with their romantic partner (Knox, Schacht, Holt, & Turner, 1993). When not directly lying to their romantic partners, many people acknowledge that they withhold information from their romantic partner or use avoidance strategies to evade discussion of certain issues (Metts, 1989; Roloff & Cloven, 1990).

Research has found that forms of deception are relatively common between romantic partners when compared to other types of relationships (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Lippard, 1988). However, according to Anderson, Ansfield, and DePaulo (1999), “Overall, the closer the relationship, the lower the rate of lying within that relationship” (p. 379). For example, in DePaulo and Kashy’s (1998) study, they found that rates of lies told were highest with strangers, and rates of lies decreased in relationship types as relationships grew closer. This finding seems sensible considering self-disclosure and openness with a partner are essential in order to progress to deeper levels of relational closeness and intimacy (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Upon reaching deeper levels of intimacy through self-disclosure, romantic partners have the possibility of feeling comfortable enough with their partners to “be themselves,” share their thoughts and opinions, and to be open and honest with their partners.

While people tend to lie less to their romantic partners than in other relationships, serious lies occur more often in close relationships (Anderson et al. 1999). As Anderson et al. (1999)

explain, “When describing the most serious lie they ever told to someone else, or the most serious lie anyone ever told to them, people overwhelmingly report that the teller and the target of these lies were close relationship partners” (p. 380). One possible explanation for these findings is that there is more at stake in romantic relationships in regard to a person’s overall well-being and happiness. According to Glenn and Weaver (1981), “Practically no one is likely to disagree with the thesis that, for most married people in modern societies, the quality of their marriages has a strong effect on their happiness and satisfaction with life” (p. 161). Therefore, since happiness in romantic relationships is strongly tied to overall happiness in life, romantic partners may perceive greater costs from revealing potentially harmful information to their partners, and thus, may choose to deceive their partners in an attempt to maintain the relationship. Concerning serious lies in romantic relationships, “the information covered by the lie may be more threatening to the relationship than the lie itself” (Anderson et al., p. 379). In these cases, one might choose to deceive instead of face the consequences of the truth being revealed.

Undoubtedly, deception plays a complex role in romantic relationships. Although researchers know that lovers lie, deceive, withhold information, or avoid disclosure, most research regarding deception focuses on people’s ability to detect whether and when others are lying (Berkowitz, 1981; Buller, Strzyzewski, & Hunsaker, 1991; Burgoon & Buller, 1994; Burgoon, Buller, & Floyd, 2001; DePaulo, Zuckerman, & Rosenthal, 1980; Hocking, Bauchner, Kaminski, & Miller, 1979), or it has focused on the consequences following the discovery of deception (Buller & Aune, 1987; Burgoon, Buller, Dillman, & Walther, 1995; McCornack & Levine, 1990). However, few research studies have examined the motives for deceiving a romantic partner. The research on motives for deception typically involves asking participants to

list what they believe to be motives for deception (Ekman, 1989; O’Hair & Cody, 1994). Thus, the results depend on participant recall and perception. Moreover, although some researchers address the ethics of using deception in romantic relationships (Bok, 1979; Cole, 2006; Deetz, 1990; Kursh, 1971; O’Hair & Cody, 1994), few studies have addressed how deception functions in romantic relationships – whether positively or negatively. Past research furthers knowledge about the use of deception in romantic relationships, but more research needs to be conducted on how deception functions in romantic relationships through examining the extent to which it is used, common topics for the use of deception, and the motives for using deception.

Thus, this study examines the use of deception in romantic relationships, the common topics for the use of deception, the motives for using deception with romantic partners, and how deception functions in romantic relationships by utilizing a qualitative methodology whereby participants record use of deception and the motives to use deception as these speech patterns occur within their romantic relationships. Because research shows that deception is common in romantic relationships, examining these issues will help researchers, practitioners, and those involved in romantic relationships more clearly understand deceptive behavior within romantic relationships. This study addresses the need for further exploration of deception in romantic relationships through applications of pertinent research regarding the role of deception in romantic relationships by providing definitions of deceptive speech patterns, addressing past research concerning the motives for using deceptive behavior, and the function of deception in romantic relationships. Additionally, results of a qualitative study are provided in effort to examine the reported extent deception is used, common topics of deception, common motives for deception, and perceived functions of deception in romantic relationships provided by 67 participants who were currently in romantic relationships. Finally, a discussion includes the

implications and conclusions of the study, as well as suggestions for further research on deception in romantic relationships.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Defining Deception**

O’Hair and Cody (1994) define deception as “the conscious attempt to create or perpetuate false impressions among other communicators” (p. 183). However, research has found that although using deception may be a “conscious” attempt, romantic partners often deceive each other with little effort or planning, and the use of deception is often ruled by emotion (Cole, 2006; Lippard, 1988; McCornack, 1997). Nonetheless, one still chooses whether or not to use deception, and it is a deliberate act. Along these lines, O’Hair and Cody state that “deception is a message strategy much like other forms of communication in that it is purposeful, often goal directed, and frequently functions as a relational control device” (p. 181). Thus, deception serves to provide false impressions to accomplish the goals of the deceiver – whether those goals are aimed to satisfy the needs of the deceiver or the one being deceived. These definitions do not apply to unconscious deception such as self-deception or mistakenly providing false information.

Categorizing forms of deception and differentiating these forms has received a great amount of attention in deception research (Hopper & Bell, 1984; Metts & Chronis, 1986; Turner et al., 1975). Ekman (1985) specified two categories of deception: concealment and falsification. Concealment occurs when “one person withholds information from the other in order to perpetuate an erroneous assumption about facts or emotions” (O’Hair & Cody, 1994, p. 185). Alternatively, falsification “is a tactic used to conceal true information, but goes even further by deliberately conveying false information” (O’Hair & Cody, 1994, p. 185). Ekman’s categories are useful when conceptualizing deception because of the categories’ broad terms; however,

Turner et al.'s (1975) categories shed more light on the variety of forms concealment and falsification can take.

Turner et al. (1975) found five categories of deception: *lies*, *exaggerations*, *half-truths*, *secrets*, and *diversionary responses*. *Lies* are messages that falsify the truth; they provide false information entirely. *Exaggerations* are messages that stretch the truth or modify the extent of the truth; they afford more information than the truth. *Half-truths* are messages that conceal the whole truth; they occur when part(s) of information is/are withheld in order to minimize the effect of the whole truth. *Secrets* occur when the truth is completely withheld; they are a form of keeping entirely silent about something. Finally, *diversionary responses* are avoidance tactics used in order to divert attention away from the concealed information (Turner et al.). Given that Turner et al.'s characterization more clearly defines the different forms of deception within the categories of concealment and falsification, than does Ekman's (1985), Turner et al.'s category system is utilized in this project.

The practice of using preexisting types or forms of communication patterns in research is hotly debated among researchers because of concern that using preexisting typologies can "limit both the validity and generalizability of the constructed taxonomies" (McCornack, 1992, p. 2). However, the primary purpose of this study does not focus on exploring the specific forms deception takes in romantic relationships; instead, the focus is the *extent* to which deception is used, common topics, common motives, and functions of deception in romantic relationships. Moreover, for this study, using preexisting forms of deception helps participants conceptualize their own deception while making it less challenging to recognize when acts of deception occur; it provides a schema of deception for better understanding.

## **Motives for Deception**

In Goffman's (1974) exploration of "the structure of experience individuals have at any moment of their social lives," he attempts to distinguish the basic frameworks people employ while defining and understanding interactions in social situations (p. 13). While utilizing this methodology for deceptive acts, Goffman dichotomized the motives for deception in two categories: benign and exploitive fabrications. Goffman defines a fabrication as "the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have false beliefs about what is going on" (p. 83). This definition strongly resembles O'Hair and Cody's (1994) definition of deception mentioned earlier. According to Goffman, benign fabrications are those deceptive acts that serve the interests of the person being deceived or at least are not conducted *against* the interest of the person being deceived. Conversely, exploitive fabrications serve the interests of the deceiver. Although goals of deception can vary immensely, Goffman essentially argues that the underlying framework of deception depends on intent; deception can be most simply categorized by whether the intentions of the deceiver were self-motivated or other-motivated. The following section describes possible motives for deception in romantic relationships – whether the motivations stem from goals regarding the other (benign) or the self (exploitive).

**Benign motives.** While romantic partners may use exploitive fabrications, research has found that "deception among romantic partners is more likely to be motivated by a concern for the relationship and for a partner" (Cole, 2001, p. 108). Thus, romantic partners may use benign fabrications more often than exploitive fabrications because the use of deception occurs more frequently in order to protect the interests of the relationship and partner. According to Meltzer (2003), forms of benign fabrications such as "*altruistic, compassionate, or 'white' lies*" are

“those whereby others are saved from assaults upon their sense of self. From the standpoint of the societal generalized other, such fabrications are usually fully acceptable or excusable” (p. 67). Accordingly, romantic partners’ use of benign fabrications may be considered a tolerable act since it serves the interest of the partner.

***Politeness theory as a motive for benign fabrications.*** Politeness theory supports this idea that some uses of deception are possibly considered admissible or even appropriate in some circumstances. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), communicators strive to construct messages that protect others’ face because being “polite” is a culturally accepted and upheld value. When people are completely honest in some situations, they may easily be perceived as being impolite. Even children are taught to tell others who give them gifts at birthday parties that they should say they like the gift – even if they do not. This act of deception is understood as being polite and protecting the giver’s feelings; in this sense, deception is *encouraged* in certain situations. Within romantic relationships, politeness theory may operate in a slightly more complex way. Even though romantic partners surely appreciate honesty and openness from their partners, they almost certainly also appreciate politeness and expressions of respect and positivity.

For example, A. J. Jacobs, journalist and author of two *New York Times* bestsellers, decided to live in accordance to the ideals of a movement known as “Radical Honesty,” which was created by Brad Blanton (Jacobs, 2009). According to Jacobs (2009), Blanton believes “everybody would be happier if we just stopped lying” and people should “tell the truth, all the time” (pp. 41-42). Jacobs decided to follow this advice and try living a life of “radical honesty.” He writes about the experience in his book, *The Guinea Pig Diaries*, and explains that he “spent a month without lying. But more than that, [he] vowed to say whatever popped into [his] head”

(Jacobs, p. xii). He explains further: “This, by the way, was probably the worst month of my life” (p. xii). One particular incident he describes clearly relates to politeness theory within romantic relationships:

My wife tells me a story about switching operating systems on her computer. In the middle, I have to go help our son with something, then I forgot to come back.

“Do you want to hear the end of the story or not?” she asks.

“Well...is there a payoff?”

“Fuck you.” (Jacobs, p. 48)

Jacobs’ wife was clearly upset by his candor and honesty. Although his communication was honest, it was not “polite,” and it caused a confrontation (whereby his wife also replied in a very “impolite” way). Jacobs (2009) explains, “It would have been a lot easier to have kept my mouth closed and listened to her” although it’s “manipulative and patronizing to shut up and listen” (pp. 48-49). He adds, “But it’s exhausting not to” (p. 49). Understandably, politeness theory serves as a likely motivator for deception in some circumstances.

***Facework as a motive for benign fabrication.*** Along the lines of politeness theory, the concept of *facework* further enriches our understanding of why romantic partners may deceive: to protect their partners’ feelings. According to Tracy (1990), face is the “socially situated identities people claim or attribute to others” (p. 210). Cupach and Metts (1994) define face as “the conception of self that each person displays in particular interactions with others” (p. 3). Thus, face is strongly tied to one’s self-concept or concept of others. According to Goffman (1967), no matter the context or relationship, “it is assumed that each person’s face is supported and maintained during interaction” (Cupach & Metts, p. 3). Therefore, in romantic relationships,

it is assumed partners work to protect one another's face (or self-concept) out of respect or considerateness (Cupach & Metts).

However, Cupach and Metts (1994) explain the concept of face as perhaps more complicated in the interactions of those in close relationships:

Paradoxically, complexity of managing face is increased for partners in close relationships because familiarity entails some degree of exemption from the obligation to create and support face during private interactions. Thus part of the reason a couple defines itself as intimate is that the need to "perform," in Goffman's sense of performance, is considered unnecessary; yet in this very act of dropping pretense arises the probability of threatening each other's face and, ultimately, sense of social competence. (p. 2)<sup>1</sup>

Thus, although romantic partners may enjoy the freedom from having to "perform," they may choose to deceive their partners in order to protect or support the partner's face while avoiding a face threat. A face threat occurs "when a person's desired identity in a particular situation is challenged" (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 4). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), people have two types of universal face needs: positive face and negative face. (Negative face is discussed in the following section.) Positive face is the "desire to be liked and respected by the significant people in our lives," while negative face is the "desire to be free from constraint and imposition" (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 5). Accordingly, romantic partners may deceive in order to protect the positive face of their partner (e.g., telling partners their new haircut is attractive when it is not). Moreover, deception could even serve as a means of facework, which "is communication designed to counteract face threats to self and others"

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<sup>1</sup> Goffman's (1959) concept of "performance" will be closely examined in a subsequent section, *The presentation of self as a motive for exploitive fabrication*.

(Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 6). Used in this way, deception would be considered a benign fabrication because the underlying motivation is to protect the partner's feelings by supporting their positive face.

**Exploitive motives.** Although romantic partners may use benign fabrications more frequently in order to protect the interests of the relationship and partner (Cole, 2001), romantic partners may also use exploitive fabrications in order to serve the interests of the deceiver, whether it is to protect their own interest or the interest of the relationship. As O'Hair and Cody (1994) state, deception "frequently functions as a relational control device" (p. 181), and partners can intentionally deceive their partner in order to meet their own goals.

***Facework as a motive for exploitive fabrication.*** As mentioned in the previous section, people have two types of face needs: positive face and negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As noted above, negative face is the desire for autonomy and freedom from unnecessary constraint (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 5). As Cupach and Metts (1994) explain, balancing the needs of positive face and negative face can be extremely complex because oftentimes, meeting one need is a threat to the other. For example, consider the following scenario: Samantha invites Jim to a dinner with her family, but Jim does not want to go. If Jim decides to go anyway, he is simultaneously protecting his positive face (by fulfilling the need to be liked and appreciated by Samantha and her family) while threatening his own negative face (by attending the dinner even though he would rather not). However, Jim could also use deceptive tactics to make an excuse to "get out of" having to go to the dinner. In this sense, partners may deceive to protect their own negative face needs in order to be free from constraint of the relationship while simultaneously preserving their own sense of positive face.

*The presentation of self as a motive for exploitive fabrication.* The presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) is also perhaps a common motive for the use of exploitive fabrication. Using a theatrical metaphor, Goffman (1959) explains that people resemble actors in that they use performances to make an impression on others. In other words, people present themselves in various ways (or as a variety of characters) for different people depending on the audience and the interests of the actor. Regarding the motives of people who present themselves to others, Goffman states:

He may wish them to think highly of him, or to think that he thinks highly of them, or to perceive how in fact he feels toward them or to obtain no clearcut impression; he may wish to insure sufficient harmony so that the interaction can be sustained, or to defraud, get rid of, confuse, mislead, antagonize, or insult them. (p. 3)

Although deception may not always be used to accomplish these goals, it is understandable that romantic partners might use deception to accomplish the goals of presenting themselves in a way that serves their interest. For example, most people probably want their romantic partners to “think highly” of them; therefore, some might use exaggeration to make themselves seem better or smarter to their partners.

As mentioned earlier, those in close relationships may be able to enjoy more freedom from having to “perform” with their partners than in other relationships, but romantic partners still feel the need to have their positive face supported by their partners; they have a “desire to be liked and respected by the significant people in [their] lives” (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 5). Therefore, the presentation of self may be a powerful motivator for deception in romantic relationships in order for the deceiver to protect his/her own positive face needs and for their partners to view them positively.

***Dialectical tension as a motive for exploitive fabrication.*** Other motives for deception in romantic relationships perhaps stem from the dialectical tensions romantic partners experience in their relationships. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) describe that relationships consist of ongoing tensions between desires that are simultaneous yet contradictory. They describe how these tensions should not be viewed as “either/or” but as “both/and” because people simultaneously desire both ends of the tension. However, these tensions should also not simply be viewed as polar opposites because the tensions extend beyond two separate poles in a situation. As Baxter and Montgomery state, “dialectical thinking is not directed toward a search for the ‘happy mediums’ of compromise and balance, but instead focuses on the messier, less logical, and more inconsistent unfolding practices of the moment” (p. 46). With dialectical tensions, people desire both contradictory needs, which results in those “inconsistent unfolding practices of the moment.”

Motives for deception may stem from the dialectical tensions romantic partners feel between one of the dialectical tensions: the tension between openness and closedness. According to Wood (2000), “Within a relationship this dialectic is experienced as friction between partners’ desire to be open and their need to have some parts of self that are closed, even to intimates” (p. 84). Besides wanting to keep some parts of the self private, being open with someone else can make one feel vulnerable, so one may be motivated to maintain privacy for the sake of self-protection (Baxter, 1990). Research shows that romantic partners need both expression and privacy to maintain relational satisfaction (Baxter, 1990, 1988), but romantic partners may be motivated to use deception in order to maintain privacy regarding some matters.

Moreover, a second dialectical tension, that of autonomy and connection, may also motivate some romantic partners to deceive. As Baxter (1988) explains, people need to

“sacrifice some individual autonomy” in order to have a relationship; however, “too much connection paradoxically destroys the relationship because the individual identities become lost” (p. 259). Thus, romantic partners may choose to deceive in order to achieve goals of autonomy.

### **Functions of Deception in Romantic Relationships**

Although the use of deception might threaten trust between romantic partners (Bok, 1979), the use of deception may be more desirable than complete honesty at times. As Saxc (1991) explained, “An individual obsessed with being totally honest might, in fact, become a social isolate” and “complete honesty could make relationships tedious, if not conflict laden” (p. 414). As previously mentioned, Jacobs (2009) referred to his month of being completely honest as the “worst month of [his] life” because of the uncomfortable and upsetting situations that arose from complete honesty (p. xii). Jacobs would more than likely agree with Saxc’s assertion that complete honesty could cause one to “become a social isolate” (p. 414). In one experience Jacobs explained, a friend told Jacobs the following after witnessing Jacobs tell their server at a diner his honest opinion about the quality of the coffee served there: “‘I’m embarrassed for you,’ he said. ‘And I’m embarrassed to be around you’” (Jacobs, p. 53). Jacobs replied, “‘I know. Me, too’” (Jacobs, p. 53). Understandably, being completely honest at all times could possibly make someone difficult to be around because of the conflict, awkward situations, or hurt feelings it may cause.

Moreover, Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) state that, “lying in intimate relationships functions to avoid relational trauma and conflict, processes that might be substantively more dysfunctional than deceptions” (p. 15). Although romantic partners may want to believe their relationship is built on trust and honesty, the use of deception may actually serve a positive

function in romantic relationships as a means for avoiding conflict or protecting the others' interests.

Furthermore, as stated previously, individuals in a romantic relationship need both privacy and expression (openness and closedness) and both autonomy and connection to maintain satisfactory relationships. Cole (2006) argues that there is a need for deception in romantic relationships because romantic partners can be overly constrictive of one another and overly inquisitive into the personal lives of each other. Thus, "deception is often the best way to deal with the constraints that intimacy creates" (Cole, p. 5). By using deception to mitigate these dialectical tensions, romantic partners may perceive more satisfaction in the relationship.

### **Theoretical Significance of the Current Project**

Whether motives are benign or exploitive, exploring the motives for using deception in romantic relationships will increase our understanding of politeness theory, facework, the presentation of self, and relational dialectical theory. The knowledge gained will not only shed light on the intricacies and application of the theories, but also on the effects of applying the theories. For example, the use of deception in order to protect someone's face may serve as a function in the relationship, or deception may serve as a means to manage the dialectical tensions of autonomy versus connection and openness versus closedness. Moreover, deception may be used as a means to be polite to romantic partners (in accordance with politeness theory). By examining these issues and others, we can learn even more about these significant theories.

### **Research Questions**

The various goals of the present study and the need for more research regarding deception in romantic relationships lead to the research questions below. First, there is a need for research examining the extent to which deception is used by means other than recall. Also, in

order to eliminate weaknesses in evidence based on recall, further research needs to be conducted regarding romantic partners' motives for using deception as the deceptive interaction occurs. Finally, although researchers have stated how they believe deception functions in romantic relationships, research needs to be conducted regarding how romantic partners perceive deception functions in their own relationships. The research questions for this study are:

RQ1: To what extent do individuals in long-term romantic relationships use deception?

RQ2: What topics are most frequently the basis for deception in individuals' long-term romantic relationships?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of individuals in long-term romantic relationships regarding their motives for using deception?

RQ4: What are the perceptions of individuals in long-term romantic relationships regarding the functions of deception?

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Method**

#### **Design**

In order to achieve the purposes of: 1) collecting data regarding deception as it occurs, and 2) gathering information based on the attitudes and perceptions of individuals in romantic relationships, this study utilizes a qualitative methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) state that using qualitative methods allows researchers to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 4). Because this study aims to discover how people use deception on a daily basis and make sense of their use of deception, qualitative methods are most appropriate. The qualitative data was received from diary entries and written responses to an open-ended question. Additional information was received from open-ended interview responses.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest that researchers should use diaries for gathering data regarding activities that are spontaneous or secretive. Thus, diaries were utilized in this study in order to record the spontaneous, secretive acts of deception as they occur. Moreover, Duck (1991) explains that there are several advantages to utilizing diary methods because participants regularly record entries pertaining to their own behavior, and they themselves are recording the situations examined. Thus, the participants “can report what is actually felt while it is still ‘hot,’ no invasive measurement techniques are involved, the flow of the interaction is not interrupted, and subjects are not observed by anyone external to the interaction while it is occurring” (Duck, p. 151). Because the topic of this study pertains to sensitive information or information that might be difficult for some to share with a researcher face-to-face, diaries are an effective

method to unobtrusively gather data from participants regarding their perceptions, motivations, and analysis of their own behavior and social interactions.

In addition, the use of diaries allowed for the gathering of data that does not depend on participants' recall of the use of deception over a long period of time. Although some participants may have waited a short amount of time before making some entries in order to keep their partner from knowing about the study, participants were encouraged to memorize the details of the use of deception as it occurred until they found an appropriate time to record the details of their deceptive act. This preparation enabled them to make complete entries at a more convenient time shortly following the interaction.

This study included: daily diary entries for seven consecutive days in order to answer RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3; a diary entry response to an open-ended question to answer RQ4; and additional questions were used to obtain demographic information.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted in order to test the methods and assess their effectiveness in garnering useful information regarding deception among romantic partners. All procedures and methodology for this pilot study was approved by the Human Subjects Committee. Four participants in romantic relationships recorded diary entries for three days and then participated in a semi-structured interview regarding the data collection process and their overall perceptions of the study. Results of the pilot study confirmed the diaries as an effective way to capture the use of deception as it occurs, as all four participants expressed clarity of the instructions for the study and the accuracy of recording deceptive acts as they occurred. The pilot study also showed that thematic analysis was an appropriate method of analysis to effectively categorize the motivations for using deception.

## Main Study

**Participants.** This study included 67 participants (52 women, 15 men,  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.51$  years;  $SD = 2.44$ ; age range: 18-36 years) who were currently in romantic relationships. Initially, 91 packets containing all information and materials needed for the study were distributed. Sixty-eight out of 91 packets were returned yielding a response rate of 74.7%. One of the 68 packets was deemed unusable, so the data collected was discarded. The data was unusable because the participant did not make diary entries as instructed and did not answer the overall question participants were instructed to answer in the diaries. Moreover, another returned packet was only partially usable since this participant also did not complete the diary entries as instructed; however, this participant did answer the overall question in the diary, so this data was used to assess the last research question. Both participants completed diary entries regarding their perceptions of their partners' use of deception and not their own use, so the data was mostly unusable. Given that one of these "unusable" cases was partially useable, subsequent demographic data is reported for 67 participants.

For RQ4, 10 diaries were only partially usable because the participants completed daily diary entries but did not respond to the open-ended question regarding functions of deception in romantic relationships (RQ4). Accordingly, 57 participants completed diary responses for RQ4.

Participants were undergraduate and graduate students at a large Midwestern university. Participants were recruited entirely through word-of-mouth or direct solicitation. Multiple graduate teaching assistants and professors at the university either: 1) allowed me to visit their classes, explain the study to the class, and distribute study materials, or 2) announced the study to their classes and interested students simply arranged meeting times with me to receive all

needed information and materials. All participants received research credit or extra credit for their class by participating in the study.

In order to participate, participants were required to currently be in a romantic relationship at the time of the study ( $M_{\text{relationship length}} = 22.5$  months;  $SD = 23.47$ ; relationship length range = 1 month -168 months or 14 years). Of the 67 participants, 60 (89.5%) of the participants were not currently living with their romantic partners, while seven (10.4%) were currently living with their romantic partners ( $M_{\text{cohabitation length}} = 16.29$  months;  $SD = 11.4$ ; cohabitation length range = 4 months - 36 months). Participants' reported relationship statuses were as follows: dating ( $n = 63$ ), engaged ( $n = 3$ ), married ( $n = 1$ ). Of the participants, 66 (98.5%) reported that they were committed to the relationship, and one participant (1.5%) marked both yes and no in response to the question.

The ethnic composition of the sample was: 83% Caucasian, 4% White-Hispanic, 2% Asian, 2% African-American, 2% Other, 1% American Indian, and 1% Hispanic. Three participants did not identify an ethnic background. Participants were 29% Freshman, 23% Sophomores, 23% Juniors, 14% Seniors, and 2% Graduate Students. Three participants did not identify a current education level.

### **Procedures.**

**Initial meeting.** An initial meeting was needed before participants could begin the study in order to give them all relevant information and materials. Initial meetings took place in two forms: 1) class visits or 2) individual meetings. For class visits, I visited their class during the first few minutes of their scheduled class time and gave them all the information needed to participate in the study (about 10 minutes). Then, I gave the materials needed for the study to those students who were interested in participating. For individual meetings, instructors and

professors announced the study and the purpose of the study to their classes. They also provided the class with blocks of times on various days in which they could meet me in person at a selected location, and I would give them the information and materials required.

*Introductory information.* During the initial meeting, I began the information session by explaining that participation in the study was confidential and voluntary. I then explained the full purpose of the study. Next, I explained the risks of participating in the study. First, I let them know that participation in the study would be time-intensive, and they would be asked to complete diary entries for seven consecutive days, complete a questionnaire, and answer an open-ended question in the diary. I also let them know there was a slight possibility they might be called for a short, 15-minute follow-up interview. Second, I explained that the information regarding this project could be potentially sensitive, and they may feel uncomfortable at times during the process, but counseling and other referral services would be provided if they were needed. Finally, I reminded them that when the diary is not in my possession, there is a possibility that a third party (e.g., the romantic partner) could view its contents; however, measures to aid them in keeping their diaries confidential would be explained and provided.

I then explained to the potential participants the benefits they would receive from completing the study: 1) the gratification from contributing to the understanding of deceptive speech patterns, and 2) either research credit or extra credit for their class for participating in the study.

*Materials overview.* Next, I presented an example packet (sealable manila envelope containing all pertinent research materials). This “example” packet served as a visual aid and explained the relevant materials and the instructions for how to complete the study. I showed

them how the packet contained a consent form, a questionnaire, a page of referral services (local counseling services), a small diary, and multiple pages of adhesive tabs.

*Explanation of consent form.* I began by explaining the consent form (see Appendix A for complete consent form). I reminded them that the information I was providing them was also on the consent form for their reference, but that they should also read the form before signing. I explained that if they signed the consent form, they would be giving me authorization to use the information they provide, but that it would be kept confidential. I also reminded them that the study would be voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time – even if they signed the consent form. Before we moved to the next item, I reminded them to return the signed consent form at the completion of the study, but that they could keep the first pages for their records.

*Explanation of referral services.* The next item we discussed was the referral services information sheet. I reminded them that local counseling service information was provided on this page for their reference in case they became uncomfortable or upset during the process of the study (see Appendix B for referral services sheet).

*Explanation of questionnaire.* Next, we discussed the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C). I told them they could complete the questionnaire at any point during the seven-day study. I assured them that there are no right or wrong answers, but encouraged them to be as accurate as possible while completing the questionnaire.

*Explanation of diary and adhesive tabs.* The final contents of the packet were the diary and the multiple pages of adhesive tabs. Based on feedback received during the pilot study that the diaries should be smaller in order to be more unobtrusive, I explained that the small notebook (4.5 x 3.25 inches) could easily be carried in a purse, backpack, or pocket in order to have it available when needed and to make it more inconspicuous. I explained that they should make

complete, honest diary entries for seven consecutive days regarding their use of deception with their romantic partner only (excluding deceptive acts with friends, family, etc.). I also explained that they should complete the diary entries independently, and they should only make entries pertaining to their *own* use of deception and not perceptions about their partner's use of these forms of communication. Throughout the initial meeting, I continuously referred to the use of deception as "these forms of communication" when possible to make the participant feel more comfortable; however, at the beginning of the informative session I made sure it was clear that the focus was on deception and deceptive acts.

After asking them to make complete diary entries for seven consecutive days, I opened the example diary and showed them the templates on the first two pages that were also present in the diary they would receive. All dispersed diaries had a template on the first page for information needed to make the entries as deception occurred (see Appendix D for images of the diary, the template on page one, and the open-ended question on page two of the diaries). I explained that whenever they noticed they used one of these forms of communication, they should make an entry that followed the example template with the date, time, form of deception used, topic, reason, and additional thoughts. I then gave the details for each aspect of the template.

For date and time, I explained they should simply record the day and approximate time the act of deception occurred. For the form of deception used, I assured them that they should simply do their best at deciding which form was used because feedback from the pilot study revealed that this section was difficult for some participants. Moreover, although Turner et al.'s (1975) categories of deception (lies, exaggerations, half-truths, secrets, and diversionary responses) were utilized for the diary entries, participant responses from the pilot study revealed

that participants better understood the definitions and applications of the forms when two of the forms were referred to by a different name. Thus, although the forms themselves and their definitions did not change, simply referring to the forms using a different label enabled participants to better understand the forms and enhanced their ability to remember the forms when completing diary entries. Therefore, since some of the pilot study participants reported they were able to better relate and remember these labels, the form of half-truths were referred to as “withholding,” and the form of diversionary responses were referred to as “avoiding.”

After reassuring the participants they should just give their best effort when identifying the forms, I then explained that the forms were “lies,” “withholding,” “avoiding,” “exaggerating,” and “secrets.” Next, I explained the definition for each form and gave examples of a possible use of deception for each form. The same examples were used for each participant. Definitions and examples were given so participants could understand the differences in the forms and could be able to articulate which form of deception they used. This also served the purpose of letting them know that they should also record “small” acts of deception and acts that might seem trivial or unimportant.

For example, regarding withholding, I told participants that this form occurs when we only make part of the truth known and withhold other information. I then gave them the following example: “Let’s say my partner really hates my ex-boyfriend, and last night, I hung out with my friend Angela and my ex-boyfriend. When my partner asks what I did last night, I might say, ‘I had dinner with Angela and we went shopping.’” I then explained that this was a form of withholding because I did tell *part* of the truth – the three of us did eat dinner together and go shopping. However, I withheld the information pertaining to my ex-boyfriend. After giving the definitions and examples of each form, I let them know that they should only share

forms of secrets in the entries if they were comfortable doing so because I wanted them to feel comfortable during the study. I asked them to be honest and open about the other four forms, but because the form of secrets could possibly be uncomfortable to share, this form was optional.

The next items on the template on page one that were discussed were topic, reason, and additional thoughts. I encouraged them to be as detailed as possible with these items. For topic, I asked the participants to explain the topic of the deceptive message with as much detail and context as possible. For reason, I explained they should reflect on their underlying motive for using this form of communication at that time and explain their reason for its use. Finally, I explained they could include any additional thoughts they believed might be helpful for the study. I also let them know they could use as much space and as many pages for their answers as necessary because the pages are relatively small and they might require several pages for one entry.

After describing the template on page one and how to make the diary entries, I explained the procedures for answering the open-ended question on page two. I told participants that they should answer the question provided on page two of the diary after their last entry on day seven of the study. I then read the question and explained that they could answer the question anywhere in the diary. Next, I asked participants if they had any questions regarding how to make the entries.

Based on participant questions during the pilot study, I then told participants that it was their choice regarding whether they told their partner about completing the study. However, I mentioned that if they chose not to tell their partner, they should make an entry about this in their diary. Also, I reassured them that if they could not find a chance to record in their diary immediately after the use of deception (more than likely because there was not a way to interrupt

interaction with their partners), they should simply focus on remembering all relevant details and make the entry as soon as possible.

I again asked if there were any questions, and then began the discussion of the adhesive tabs. I reminded participants that there is a chance of the diaries being viewed by a third party when the diary is not in my possession. However, I assured them they could use precautionary measures during the seven days in order to keep their diaries confidential. They could simply do this by using the provided adhesive tabs to seal pages of the diaries closed after they had made an entry. I then demonstrated how they could take the page they had just written on and use the adhesive tabs to secure it to the page(s) before it or the cover of the diary. I reminded them that this method is not full-proof because a third party could still break the seal; however, by utilizing this strategy, it might deter someone from looking and they would at least know if someone else had tampered with the diary.

*Concluding information.* After providing the participants with instructions on how to complete the study, I described what they should do upon completion of the study. I told them they should: 1) detach the signature page from the consent form, 2) place the signed page of the consent form, the completed questionnaire, and the completed diary in the manila envelope provided, 3) seal the envelope, and 4) return the completed packet directly to me or my mailbox (where the information would be kept confidential).

I then reminded the participants that the study was voluntary and confidential and explained the procedures I would take to keep their information confidential when it was in my possession. I explained that their identity would be kept separate from all information provided. I also explained that the questionnaires and diaries would be coded by numbers, and I would keep the key matching the numbers to their names in a securely locked location. Also, all other

information obtained would be kept in a secure, locked location until the completion (and possible future publication) of the study. At that time, all information obtained would be destroyed. Finally, I once more asked if the participants had any questions and thanked them for participating in the study.

***Diaries.*** During the first phase of the study, participants completed diary entries for seven consecutive days. During this phase, participants recorded the date and time that any of the following speech patterns were used with their romantic partners: withholding information, exaggerating information, avoiding information, lying, or keeping secrets. Turner et al.'s (1975) category scheme for deception was utilized; however, as mentioned earlier, participants were given different labels for two of the categories; diversionary responses were referred to as "avoiding," and half-truths were referred to as "withholding."

Participants also recorded the topic of the deceptive message and their motives for utilizing the speech pattern at that time. Furthermore, participants were asked to include any additional thoughts they wanted to provide at the bottom of the entry. Participants were encouraged at the initial meeting to "make complete, truthful entries" in their diaries (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 119) and to complete the diaries independently.

Shortly after completion of the diary, participants returned the diary in the sealed manila envelope directly to me or my mailbox. All participant material and information pertaining to the study, including the diary, was kept securely in a locked location.

***Supplemental interviews.*** In the initial design of the study, 20-30 brief follow-up interviews were originally planned in order to gain a more complete understanding of the responses. However, after examining the complete diary entries that were returned, the Committee Chair and I concluded that the data from the diaries was rich enough in order for

themes to emerge and to develop a solid understanding of participants' perceptions of the function of deception in romantic relationships. Although supplemental interviews were not deemed necessary for those participants who fully completed the diaries (answering RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4), a decision was made to seek responses to RQ4 from the 10 participants who did not answer the question in their diaries.

As previously described in the participant section, of the 67 diaries included in the study, 10 were not usable for RQ4 because these participants did not answer the open-ended question in their diaries. Therefore, these participants were contacted in an attempt to schedule a follow-up interview in order to garner their response to the question. Five participants responded and agreed to a brief, semi-structured interview where the function of deception within their romantic relationship was discussed.

### **Data analysis.**

*Diary data.* Two separate methods of analysis were utilized while examining the diary data. Deductive coding was utilized for the responses regarding what form of deception was used in that instance because the forms the participants chose from were predefined by Turner et al. (1975). However, although participants provided the form of the deceptive act, further analysis revealed that some forms were incorrectly identified by participants when applying Turner, Edgley, and Olmstead's (1975) definitions of those forms. Thus, I utilized deductive coding in an attempt to discover the true form of the deceptive act. I was cautious in doing so, however because I understood that I may not be able to decipher the true form without knowing the whole context. Consequently, even if I suspected a participant misidentified a form, I recorded the form the participant recorded if there was not enough evidence in the entry for me to be positive it was the incorrect form of deception that was listed. Conversely, if the details of the

participant's response clearly indicated the use was a different form than the one recorded, the correct form was recorded. For example, if participants noted "withholding" as the form of deception, but the diary entry clearly explained that the participants will never tell their partner the information and they plan on keeping silent about the entire issue, then the form was changed to "secret" in accordance with Turner et al.'s (1975) definitions of the forms. I also took note of each change to the forms I made, and the number of changes made is reported in the discussion. Once the forms were refined after analyzing the data multiple times, calculations were made regarding total uses of deception and total uses of each form. Results are presented in the following chapter.

The second method of analysis was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as proposed and utilized by Owen (1984), was used to analyze the responses given regarding common topics of the deceptive message, the reasons for using deception with their romantic partner, and the function of deception within romantic relationships. Owen (1984) defines a theme as "the patterned semantic issue or locus of concern around which a couple's interaction centers" (p. 275). A theme emerges when three criteria are met: 1) recurrence, 2) repetition, and 3) forcefulness. Recurrence occurs when ideas are repeated. Repetition occurs when key words, phrases, or sentences occur numerous times. Forcefulness occurs when vocal cues or pauses stress certain pieces of discourse (Owen). For the written responses, forcefulness occurred when participants added such things as underlining, exclamation marks, capitalizing an entire word, or drawing pictures such as smiling or frowning faces. When these three criteria were met, the data was coded and placed under themes.

Upon return of the diaries, each diary was read immediately in order to gain a general understanding of the data. Then, I recorded notes for each of the 327 occurrences of deception in

a spreadsheet with columns labeled: diary number, day, form, topic, reason words, reason ideas, reason intensifiers (for forcefulness), and notes. In the diary number column, I kept track of which diary the entry came from using the confidential numbering system created as the diaries were returned. In the day column, I took note of which day during the seven consecutive days the deceptive act took place. For the form column, I noted which form the participants noted as the particular form they utilized in that instance. In the topic column I noted the underlying idea behind the topic response provided. Then, in accordance with Owen's (1984) criteria for themes, in the words column I noted specific words the participants used when describing their reason for deceiving their partner. For the ideas column, I noted particular phrases the participants used when describing their reason for deceiving. I also noted any intensifiers that were utilized in the response, and any other potentially significant information. I repeated this process multiple times – each time refining my notes until overarching themes began to emerge. My first pass through the entries consisted of very detailed notes with particularly specific themes, but with each repeated analysis, more general themes began to emerge as I was able to utilize Owen's (1984) thematic analysis technique in order to find similarities and patterns within the responses. Thus, a theme was comprised of responses similar in words, ideas and intended meaning, and intensifiers. If there was not enough information provided in the diary entry to constitute a clear connection to any theme or even a theme of its own, that entry was categorized as “other.” This was only done when the response lacked any clear motive or reason for deception.

The diary responses regarding the topic of the message and the responses to the open-ended question regarding the function of deception within their romantic relationships were coded in the same fashion; however, each response to the question regarding functions of

deception was transcribed before I began taking notes in accordance with Owen's (1984) criteria as described above.

After relevant themes emerged from the data and were identified, conclusions were drawn regarding common motives for deceiving romantic partners and how deception functions in romantic relationships. The themes are further discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Results**

This chapter specifies the data and themes found in 67 diaries' entries in an effort to answer the four research questions. The extent to which deception is used (RQ1) was calculated using deductive coding in which data was analyzed within the framework of preexisting categories. Themes regarding frequent topics of deception, motives for deception, and functions of deception in romantic relationships (RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4) emerged using thematic analysis. The following sections report results pertaining to: the extent deception is used in romantic relationships (RQ1), frequent topics of deception in romantic relationships (RQ2), themes of motives for using deception in romantic relationships (RQ3), and themes regarding how deception functions in romantic relationships (RQ4).

To preserve confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms are used in place of any names or identifying markers mentioned in the data. However, for the most part, participants' words are preserved with misspellings, abbreviations, etc. In addition, participants will be identified using the number that was assigned to them.

#### **RQ1: The Extent Deception is used in Romantic Relationships**

Of the 68 diaries returned, there were 66 usable diaries' entries for RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 because (as noted earlier) two participants completed diary entries regarding their perceptions of their partner's use of deception instead of their own use. From the 66 usable diaries, there were a total of 327 recorded acts of deception within the seven-day period. Of those deceptive acts, 147 (45%) were lies, 61 (19%) were exaggerations, 56 (17%) were half-truths, 35 (10%) were diversionary responses, 26 (7%) were secrets, and two (.6%) uses of deception were unknown due to lack of detail provided in the diary entry. Of the 327 reported uses of deception, the

average use per participant was 4.95 uses during the week with a range from 0-11 uses of deception per week (see Appendix E for frequencies of each diary).

There were 12 entries (nine participants) concerning acts and interactions that were not considered deceptive although the participant recorded that they were acts of deception. According to O’Hair and Cody (1994) deception is “the conscious attempt to create or perpetuate false impressions among other communicators” (p. 183). Accordingly, in all of these cases, deceptive acts did not occur because the act was either not purposefully deceptive or was clearly not an attempt to conceal information, create false impressions, or relay false information. For example, one participant noted the following as “avoiding,” but she did not convey a half-truth or commit a deceptive act; instead, she simply did not contact her partner.

*After the [team] game, I was super tired, and he never text or called me saying I could come over so I simply went to bed w/o contacting him. (Participant 49)*

In another entry, a participant noted how he did not intentionally conceal information; thus, because the act was not purposeful, it was not considered deception. He wrote:

*I just forgot to tell her, I didn’t do it on purpose. (Participant 7)*

In another entry, the participant and his partner willfully agreed he should keep a secret in order to not ruin a surprise for her. Because the partner knew he was concealing this information, it was not deception. He noted:

*I know the winner of the Bachelor from a spoiler site. She does not want to know the winner so I’m not telling her. This is a different kind of withholding info since she wants me to. (Participant 63)*

## **RQ2: Frequent Topics of Deception in Romantic Relationships**

Participants reported the topic of the deceptive message in their diary entries. Specific reported topics of the deceptive acts varied greatly, but common topic categories were found when examining the underlying idea behind the topic response provided. Of 327 topic responses, 95 topic themes were found. Of those themes, the four with the most frequencies are discussed. Both future plans and the participants' true feelings occurred the most frequently with 37 (11.35%) responses for future plans and 37 (11.35%) responses for the participants' true feelings. The next most frequent topic theme concerned deceptive messages regarding the participants' past activities. This theme had 32 occurrences (8.99%). The final most frequent topic theme was the participants' current activities at the time of deception, which had 23 occurrences (7.06%) (see Appendix F for the complete list of topic themes reported and frequencies).

**Future plans.** Of the four most frequent themes, deceptive messages regarding future plans had 37 occurrences. In order to qualify for this theme, the response for topic needed to either be regarding what the participant was planning to do, what the participants' partners were planning to do, or what the couple was planning to do together. An example of participants using deception regarding their own future plans is as follows:

*My bf is mad at me b/c I'm not telling him what I'm doing tonight...I just want to be w/ the girls tonight...he just never leaves me alone so that's why I haven't really told him what my plans are tonight. (Participant 6)*

Another participant noted:

*My boyfriend wanted to know what my plans were for the evening and I told him that there was a party I was going to, however, The party was a "date party" and I was*

*invited by another guy I told him I was going w/ a bunch of girls and didn't tell him about going with Richard. (Participant 40)*

Although many participants used deception regarding their own future plans or their partners' plans, others used deception regarding joint future plans between the two of them. One such participant wrote:

*I said I didn't care what we did for Valentine's day but honestly, I don't want to do anything. (Participant 45)*

**True feelings.** Of the four most frequent themes, deceptive messages regarding the participants' true feelings in the situation had 37 occurrences. In order to qualify for this theme, the response needed to be regarding how the participant actually felt about a person, place, event, or thing. In other words, it needed to be obvious that they felt one way but led their partner to believe they felt another way or avoided the situation entirely to avoid talking about their feelings. An example of participants using deception regarding how they actually felt is as follows:

*I told her that I wished she was with me, too, when really I was glad I got to hang out with my guy friends. (Participant 7)*

Another participant recorded:

*Told him I wished I stayed the night to cuddle. But really I was excited to sleep in my own room. (Participant 11)*

**Past activities.** Topics of deceptive messages regarding what the participant had previously done at some point before the interaction had 32 occurrences. In order to qualify for this theme, the response was required to mention using deception to conceal or avoid something the participant had previously done. For example, one participant mentioned:

*Told her I didn't dance with any girls, when I actually danced with 5. (Participant 1)*

Another participant wrote:

*It was silly. David asked if I just had brushed my teeth and I said "yes" but I didn't.*

*(Participant 46)*

One participant noted two acts of deception that occurred in one interaction involving concealing what she had done:

*He asked did you drink something? I said no, just probably smell weird for some reason.*

*He would have asked where I drank at. Additional thoughts: I drank with the same guy I met up with. Does this count as cheating? Lying x2 (Participant 15)*

Another participant mentioned concealing something he had done on Facebook:

*I removed my relationship status on facebook / hid it when I met a different girl that was into me. I put it back up later though cause I felt bad. She never noticed it. (Participant 63).*

**Current activities.** Topics of deceptive acts regarding what the participant was currently doing at the time of the interaction with their romantic partner occurred 23 times. To be eligible for this theme, the response for topic needed to either conceal or avoid something the participant was doing at the time of interaction. For example, one participant wrote:

*I told him I was doing homework when I was really on Facebook. (Participant 41).*

Another participant noted using deception in order to conceal completing diary entries for the study when she wrote:

*I made some homework up so I wouldn't have to tell him I was doing this. (Participant 54)*

One participant noted:

*I told him I was taking a nap because I didn't want him to come over because then I wouldn't be able to get any work done. (Participant 19)*

### **RQ3: Themes of Common Motives for Using Deception in Romantic Relationships**

Of the 327 total deceptive acts, 359 various motives for using deception with their romantic partner were reported by participants. Utilizing Owen's (1984) thematic analysis as described in Chapter Three, messages constituting themes were comprised of similar words, underlying ideas, and intensifiers. Because the sample was relatively small, all of the themes and sub-themes that emerged were coded, and some participants noted more than one motive for using the deceptive act at that time. Within the 359 reported motives, 12 themes emerged. In order of decreasing frequency, the 12 themes regarding motives for using deception with romantic partners were: avoiding an unwanted response (n = 88, 24.5%), self-serving (n = 68, 18.94%), protecting the partner's feelings (n = 44, 12.26%), need for independence (n = 39, 10.86%), eliciting an emotional response (n = 21, 5.85%), self-presentation (n = 20, 5.57%), unknown (n = 14, 3.9%), complying with the partner's wishes (n = 11, 3.06%), maintaining previous deceptive acts (n = 7, 1.95%), surprising (n = 6, 1.67%), perceptions of partner's lack of interest (n = 2, 0.56%), and retaliation (n = 2, 0.56%). However, 37 (10.31%) responses from 21 participants did not provide enough detail to clearly reveal a theme or motive. If there was not enough information reported in the diary entry to clearly distinguish a reported motive for the use of the deceptive act, the motive was placed under the category of "other" (see Appendix G for complete table of frequencies for themes and subcategories.)

**Avoiding an unwanted response.** The theme of avoiding an unwanted response from the participants' partners was the most frequently reported motive for using deception (88 occurrences). Within this major theme, four subcategories of motives emerged: avoiding

confrontation (n = 61), avoiding suspicion (n = 21), avoiding negativity (n = 3), and avoiding an awkward situation (n = 3). Reported motives for using deception under this theme included all participant responses that noted using deception in order to avoid or prevent: a fight or confrontation with their romantic partner, negativity or a negative topic, an awkward situation, or the partner from becoming suspicious.

***Avoiding confrontation.*** For this subcategory, participants noted they used deception with their romantic partner in order to avoid some type of conflict between them lest the information was shared or discussed. One such participant wrote:

*Tim would get really mad at me - there are just times when you shouldn't tell your partner.* (Participant 6)

Another participant noted:

*I avoided a fight by not telling her about my night. She would've gone bezerk b/c there was a girl at the party that likes me.* (Participant 17)

An additional participant succinctly noted her motivation for using deception with her partner:

*I did not want to start an unnecessary fight.* (Participant 27)

***Avoiding suspicion.*** The second most frequently occurring subcategory for avoiding an unwanted response was the motive to use deception in order to prevent the partner from becoming suspicious of the participant or the participant's actions. Numerous responses for this motive mentioned spending time with opposite-sex others as a possible reason their partners would become suspicious. Thus, they chose to use deceptive acts to prevent the partner from becoming suspicious. One such example notes:

*Denied being attracted to a friend. GF worries too much that I will cheat on her and I don't want her to worry as much.* (Participant 52).

Similarly, another participant reported:

*I didn't tell my bf this guy, Ron, was calling. Instead I told him it was my friend, Caitlin. he knows I hung out with Ron the other weekend when I was mad at him...didn't want him to suspect anything was going on w/ Ron. (Participant 3).*

Another participant reported using deception to conceal working with her ex:

*I didn't want to tell him that I was working with my ex because he would constantly question me when he really knows I would never cheat on him. (Participant 19).*

**Avoiding negativity.** Other participants noted using deception because they wanted to avoid discussing negative topics or negativity in the interaction. The two participants who reported this motive wrote:

*Ask if I felt ok, and said yes even though I didn't...I did not want to bring both us down. (Participant 9)*

Similarly, the other participant who mentioned this theme noted:

*I wanted to avoid complaining too much and I don't like dwelling on negativity. (Participant 30)*

*But I didn't want to be negative so I didn't say anything. (Participant 30)*

**Avoiding an awkward situation.** The last motive participants reported regarding avoiding an unwanted response from their partners was to avoid an awkward interaction with their partner. One such participant noted:

*Today I started having a pregnancy scare, but I didn't want to tell him, because if it was nothing, he would have been scared & worried for nothing. Thank Goodness I am not pregnant though I found out. I guess by not telling him I avoided an awkward position for us, a situation that I am not sure how he would react to. (Participant 18)*

**Self-serving.** The theme of participants having a self-serving motive for using deception with their romantic partners had 68 occurrences. Within this major theme, four subcategories of motives emerged: motives to serve ones' own interests (n = 31), motives to ensure a desired outcome (n = 14), motives to coerce (n = 14), and motives to avoid an unwanted activity (n = 9). Reported motives for using deception under this theme included all participant responses that noted using deception in order to fulfill their own goals.

***Serving one's own interests.*** The self-serving motives that participants reported generally involved fulfilling various person goals. In order to qualify for this theme, participants' entries noted using deception in order to serve their own interests. One participant wrote that he used deception because he:

*Didn't feel like getting into that kind of conversation early in the morning. (Participant 60)*

Another participant noted his motive for exaggerating an experience. Although the consequence of the deceptive message "made him happy" because it made his partner laugh (seemingly partner focused), his reported motive mentioned the goal of serving his own interests by making the story interesting:

*I wanted an interesting story and something to talk about. It made her laugh, which made me happy. (Participant 63)*

***Ensuring a desired outcome.*** The motives reported under this theme all entailed using deception in order to fulfill the participants' desires or to ensure participants acquired a desired outcome from the use of deception. Some participants used deception in order to reach an outcome they desired – even at their partners' detriment. One such participant noted:

*I'm in a coed fraternity and my gf had been talking about wanting to join but I Really didn't want her to: We had been planning a trip to [city] in March for a conference and I didn't tell her about it until tonight b/c we had Rush (Recruitment) so it'd be too late for her to be allowed to go so tonight I told her I was going to [city] and she seemed mad and asked me when we had planned it and I said tonight but it was a lie. I didn't want her to know I'd been planning it but didn't want her to go. (Participant 38).*

Similarly, another participant reported:

*A friend of mine who gets along really well w/ my girlfriend kept texting me about getting lunch & watching the game together, us 3. I ignored his texts & didn't tell my girlfriend about the because she probably would have wanted to hang out.*

*I didn't tell her because I wanted her all to myself & it makes me uncomfortable when they hang out (even though I'm ALWAYS present). (Participant 57)*

On the contrary, some participants' motives to use deception in order to reach a desired outcome positively affected their partners. One such participant noted:

*TOLD HER I don't mind taking her out to dinner tonight & have plenty of money. I'm pretty broke but I want to anyways. (Participant 52)*

Another example of using deception in order to reach a desired goal is as follows:

*I wanted my boyfriend to understand why I needed to go shopping. It worked and now I have a new dress :) (Participant 68)*

**Coercion.** Motives occurring under this theme all mentioned the participants using deception in order to ensure the result of their partners doing something the participants wanted them to do. One such participant noted his motive for exaggerating the effect his partner had on his schoolwork in order for her to do what he wanted:

*I didn't really mean it but I said it was her fault I was so behind b/c we are together so much. I love hanging out with her but if I spent as much time reading and studying as I do having sex and watching TV I'd definitely be a 4.0 student. I think I just exaggerated her responsibility to get her to let me have more time to do my homework but I really hurt her feelings b/c we both know she doesn't force me to hangout w/her instead of studying.*

(Participant 38)

In another example, a participant noted using exaggeration to get her partner to do something she wanted:

*Josh is really the only one I want to be with while I'm sick and he was really busy with homework but I was being selfish and over exaggerated my symptoms so he would stay with me.* (Participant 46)

Someone else wrote:

*Told her I missed the bus, but I didn't even wait for it bc I wanted her to come pick me up.* (Participant 1)

***Avoiding an unwanted activity.*** The motives reported under this theme all concerned the participants using deception in order to not have to do something they did not want to do. One participant reported:

*time I was going to spend in the library was more than it actually was so I didn't have to drive into [city] to help his sister move. felt guilty after but I wanted to catch up on sleep and Homework.* (Participant 8)

Another responded:

*...so I didn't have to drive him to class. I was lazy.* (Participant 35)

An additional participant mentioned using deception to avoid having to go to dinner with her partner. She noted:

*I was tired and working on homework and didn't feel like getting ready for dinner.*

(Participant 44)

**Protecting the partner's feelings.** The theme of protecting the partner's feelings as a motive for deception in the romantic relationship occurred in 44 (12.26%) entries. Recorded motives qualified for this theme when the participants' entries referred to using deception in order to protect their partners' feelings in some way. For example, the following participants recorded using deception in order to prevent hurt feelings about appearance:

*She asked me if I thought her cheeks were getting fatter. I kind of did but I told her no. I didn't want to hurt her feelings.* (Participant 7)

Similarly, another participant wrote:

*His looks - He isn't dressed well, he asked how he looked I said fantastic but he looked average at best. That would have crushed him.* (Participant 15)

Yet another participant wrote:

*I didn't feel like going over to his house but didn't want to hurt his feelings.* (Participant 26)

**Need for independence.** The theme of using deception because of a want or need for independence from the romantic partner occurred in 39 (10.86%) entries. Within this theme, two subcategories of motives emerged: need for space (n = 32) and need for privacy (n = 7).

Reported motives for using deception in this theme included all participant responses that noted using deception in order to gain more "space," (or independence) from their partners or to maintain privacy regarding some issues in the relationship.

**Need for space.** Entries categorized in this theme noted participants used deception in order to gain more independence from their partner. All 32 entries mentioned needing “alone time” or time away from their partner for various reasons as the motive for using deception with their partner. An example of wanting time alone is as follows:

*I made it sound like I had more work than I did so that I had an excuse to have some “alone time.”* (Participant 30)

Another participant mentioned deceiving in order to be able to sleep alone:

*...so I lied about homework so I could sleep alone for once.* (Participant 36)

Similarly, an additional participant mentioned his motive for using deception was:

*To get away from her and the house for a little while.* (Participant 39)

**Need for privacy.** Reported motives in this theme mentioned the participants using deception with their romantic partners in order to maintain some extent of individual privacy.

One such participant succinctly wrote:

*Don't feel it's any of his business.* (Participant 25)

Similarly, another responded:

*It's private & I wouldn't tell him.* (Participant 42)

Although the following response included more than one theme, she mentions using deception with her partner in order to keep “certain things” private:

*Helped cute guy in my class with homework in library. Didn't tell bf. It would just bring up drama. Nothing happened & nothing would. I would never cheat, so I don't see the need in telling him certain things.* (Participant 10)

**Eliciting an emotional response.** The theme of using deception in order to elicit an emotional response from the romantic partners occurred in 21 (5.85%) entries. Within this

theme, seven subcategories of motives emerged: eliciting guilt (n = 5), eliciting sympathy (n = 5), eliciting jealousy (n = 3), eliciting gratitude (n = 3), eliciting a reciprocal emotional response (n = 3), eliciting encouragement (n = 1), and eliciting respect (n = 1). Reported motives for using deception in this theme consisted of participant responses noting using deception in order to evoke a desired emotional response from their partners or to “make” them feel a certain way.

***Eliciting guilt.*** In this subcategory, participants mentioned a desire to make their partners feel guilty about various topics. One such participant wrote his motive to deceive was:

*To make her feel bad about sleeping all day and getting nothing done. (Participant 39)*

***Eliciting sympathy.*** Other participants mentioned their motive to deceive was evoking sympathy from their partners. An example is as follows:

*I wanted him to feel sorry for me, so I exaggerated my homework situation. (Participant 14)*

***Eliciting jealousy.*** Reported motives in this subcategory involved a desire for the participants to make their partners jealous. For example, a participant wrote:

*I also lied to him to induce jealousy...I used this lie to make myself appear wanted and to not be taken for granted I guess. (Participant 51)*

***Eliciting gratitude.*** Three participants reported using deception in order to evoke gratitude from their partners. One such participant noted how he used exaggeration in order to receive gratitude for spending time fixing his partner’s car. He wrote:

*After spending hours looking for the right part at the right price, I finally found it. When I picked her up from work and got back home she saw that her car was in the garage and clearly had been worked on. To my surprise, she casually dismissed it and instead complained that she was having to shell out a few hundred dollars for parts. In an*

*attempt to light the mood I greatly exaggerated the cost of labor if she were to have a mechanic shop complete the repair, instead of having me do it for free. After which she was grateful for my efforts to help. (Participant 23)*

***Eliciting a reciprocal emotional response.*** In this subcategory, reported motives described the participants using deception in order for their partners to feel the same way they were feeling. Two of the three responses involved wanting the partner to be mad at someone the participant was angry with. An example is as follows:

*I was mad at her and wanted him to be mad at her to. (Participant 66)*

***Eliciting encouragement.*** In this subcategory, one participant reported he used deception so his romantic partner would give him encouragement. He noted:

*I was looking for some encouragement or a vote of confidence that I would perform well on my speech. (Participant 20)*

***Eliciting respect.*** Similarly, one participant noted she used deception in order to garner respect from her partner. She responded:

*...and tried to get his respect by telling what he didn't know. (Participant 55)*

***Self-presentation.*** The theme of participants using deception in order to present themselves a certain way to their partner occurred in 20 (5.57%) entries. Participants' reported motives for using deception in this theme noted desires for their partners to view them in particular ways. For example, one participant noted:

*He wants me to do good & I didn't want to look like a slacker. (Participant 10)*

Another person wrote:

*I don't want him to ever view me as dumb! (Participant 36)*

An additional participant mentioned:

*Told her I was fine with her not wanting me to spend the night. Just said this to not make me seem so lusty and single minded.* (Participant 65)

**Unknown.** The theme of participants using deception in an interaction with their romantic partner for unknown reasons occurred in 14 (3.9%) entries. Participants whose responses compose this theme reported that they did not know why they used deception in the noted interaction. For example, one participant wrote:

*I went to a movie and didn't tell him. I don't know why.* (Participant 5)

Similarly, an additional participant responded:

*I told him I would come over to his house after work to spend the night but really I knew I would be too tired to. Instead, I went home. I don't know why I told him this.*

(Participant 14)

Another participant mentioned unknown motives for using deception:

*I don't know why I lied, it made no sense to.* (Participant 65)

Someone else mentioned unknown motives after reflection:

*I have thought about this, And I honestly can't come up w/ why I did it.* (Participant 18)

**Complying with the partner's wishes.** The theme of participants using deception in order to comply with their partner's wishes occurred in 11 (3.06%) entries. Reported motives in this theme described using deception in order to adhere to something their partner wanted to do or some way their partner felt. For example, one participant noted she used deception because:

*I want him to be happy & make friends even if I don't like how close they get.*

(Participant 64)

Another participant reported using deception to comply with her partner's wishes, even when she was reluctant to do so. She wrote:

*...I'm not comfortable w/ this situation at all. I said yes because I know he really wants me to go. (Participant 18)*

An additional participant reported using deception in order to adhere to a belief that was important to his partner. He noted:

*I told her I was having a good time when I really wasn't. I know it is important to her that I get along with her work friends. (Participant 39)*

**Maintaining previous deceptive acts.** Participants' responses regarding using deception with their romantic partners in order to maintain a previous deceptive act occurred in seven (1.95%) entries. Within this theme, two subcategories of motives emerged: concealing a former act of deception (n = 4) and continuing a former act of deception (n = 3).

***Concealing a former act of deception.*** Reported motives for using deception in this subcategory included all participant responses that noted the participant used deception with their partner in order to conceal a previous deceptive act that occurred with their romantic partner. For example, one participant explained her partner wanted her to text message one of their friends. However, she decided not to, but she told her partner she did send their friend the text message. The next day, she completed the following entry:

*This was a follow up lie from the last page..I had mentioned that it was strange she hadn't texted me back. (Participant 26)*

***Continuing a former act of deception.*** Participants' entries categorized in this theme noted participants used deception in order to continue a former deceptive act that occurred with their romantic partners. For example, one participant wrote their motive for using deception was:

*I don't know, just to keep the lie up, I guess. (Participant 65)*

**Surprising.** The theme of participants using deception in order to surprise their partners occurred in six (1.67%) entries. For example, one participant wrote his motive for using deception was because:

*I wanted to surprise her early on Friday. (Participant 7)*

Another participant noted using deception in order to surprise his partner. He noted:

*I did not want her to know that I was speaking to a jeweler about an engagement ring.*

(Participant 20)

**Perceptions of partner's lack of interest.** The theme of participants using deception because they thought their partner was not interested in the topic occurred in two (.56%) entries. For example, one participant noted:

*I'm really scared to tell him that I get so upset because I guess I think he won't*

*care... (Participant 50)*

**Retaliation.** The theme of participants using deception in order to retaliate against their partner for some reason occurred in two (.56%) entries. One participant noted:

*I was mad at him for not charging his phone all weekend so I did not tell him about my*

*weekend even though he asked how it was. (Participant 12)*

The other participant who mentioned using deception as a form of retaliation wrote:

*I know that it really eats her up when she doesn't know why I'm not telling her what's*

*wrong. I do this as a form of retaliation for her hurting my feelings. (Participant 57)*

#### **RQ4: Themes of the Function(s) of Deception within Romantic Relationships**

Of the 67 completed diaries utilized in this study, 57 diary entries were useable in order to answer RQ4. The remaining 10 diaries were not utilized to answer RQ4 because these participants did not answer the open-ended question on page two of their diary, as instructed by

the participant consent form and the initial meeting described in Chapter Three. However, as previously noted, further clarification was sought from those who did not answer the question by conducting brief interviews in order to receive these participants' responses to RQ4. The five participants' responses are reported in the section below, *Supplemental information*.

The 57 available diary responses to RQ4 were coded utilizing Owen's (1984) thematic analysis as described in Chapter Three. Participants provided written responses in their diaries to the following open-ended question: Overall, how do these forms of communication function in your relationship? Messages constituting themes were comprised of similar words, underlying ideas, and intensifiers. Within the 57 entries regarding the function of deception in the participants' romantic relationship, 191 words, phrases, or ideas constituted four major themes. In order of decreasing frequency, the four major themes regarding the function(s) of deception in romantic relationships were: deception and honesty functioning in negative and positive ways ( $n = 65$ , 31.71%), relational maintenance functions of deception ( $n = 63$ , 30.73%), the extent to which deception functions in the relationship ( $n = 45$ , 21.95%), and the functions of perceived consequences of deception ( $n = 18$ , 8.78%) (see Appendix H for complete participant responses to RQ4.) In addition, another theme emerged from the data although it does not specifically answer the research question. Unexpectedly and without prompt, 14 (6.83%) participants reported in their response to the open-ended question what they had learned from completing the study. Examples of the data comprising this theme are reported since the theme received a frequent occurrence in participants' responses to RQ4.

**Deception and honesty functioning in negative and positive ways.** Deception and honesty functioning in negative and positive ways was the most frequently discussed theme in participants' responses to the open-ended question of how deception functions in their romantic

relationships (65 occurrences). Participants' responses constituting this theme all entailed opinions regarding the use of deception in general. Within this major theme, nine subcategories emerged: deception functioning negatively (n = 9), deception functioning positively (n = 6), deception simultaneously functioning positively and negatively (n = 10), how deception functions with "big" issues (n = 8), how deception functions with "small" issues (n = 15), and the function of honesty (n = 17).

***Deception functioning negatively.*** This subcategory included all participant responses that noted how deception functions in generally bad, wrong, or hurtful ways. For example, one participant succinctly reported:

*These forms of communication in my relationship are not good. I shouldn't be using them.* (Participant 3)

Another participant commented on how the use of deception made her feel bad. She notes:

*The lying is absolutely not necessary and I felt bad about it.* (Participant 68)

An additional participant referred to acts of deception as "*unhealthy patterns*" (Participant 12).

***Deception functioning positively.*** This subcategory was comprised of participant responses that mentioned how some deception functions in good or helpful ways or that not all deceptive acts function in negative ways that are bad for the relationship. For example, Participant 45 mentioned how a form of deception noted in the diary was "*helpful.*" An additional participant noted how deception can be used in a "*harmless manner*" (Participant 30). Moreover, one participant added:

*We don't lie to each other to hurt anyone. We do it because we care.* (Participant 17)

***Deception simultaneously functioning positively and negatively.*** While some participants noted how deception functions in negative or positive ways, 10 participants noted

how deception can paradoxically function in both positive and negative ways. Those responses comprise this theme. One such participant explained:

*Overall, I feel these forms of communication function in both positive and negative ways in my relationship. (Participant 20)*

Similarly, another participant wrote:

*This type of communication has a key role in our relationship. Good and bad. (Participant 62).*

Someone else noted intentionality while conceptualizing deceptive forms of communication.

The participant noted:

*These forms are a major part of relationships. Allow the relationship to be good or bad depending on how you use these forms. (Participant 47)*

Without explaining the “price” referred to, another participant wrote:

*Overall, think we all are human & use these tricks to only make the relationship a healthy and happy one. Even if it’s at a price. (Participant 62)*

***How deception functions with “big” issues.*** The participants’ responses in this subcategory all included the idea that deception should not be used within a romantic relationship in order to conceal or avoid serious, “big,” or important issues. One participant wrote:

*...I would never lye about something huge to him. (Participant 66)*

While describing her own use of deception, one participant noted:

*I hate doing it anyway and would never do it over big issues! (Participant 11)*

Although most participants did not explain or give examples of what “big issues” or “emergencies” entail, one participant mentioned a specific topic that is not acceptable to be deceptive about. She explained:

*Unless it is cheating, I don't think it is always bad to withhold, lie, or avoid topics in our relationship.* (Participant 67)

**How deception functions with “small” issues.** In contrast with the ideas described above, the participants’ responses in this subcategory all included ideas regarding how deception can function in useful ways when dealing with small or insignificant issues in the romantic relationship. For example, a participant wrote:

*The smaller things, such as little white lies function very well.* (Participant 61)

Another participant concisely responded:

*Relationship very good, small lies to keep smooth, not cover up something negative.*  
(Participant 43)

An additional participant wrote:

*Whenever using these forms I think more for the better of the relationship as a whole and to avoid the stupid things that may tear a relationship apart.* (Participant 37)

**The function of honesty.** Although many participants discussed deception’s functions in terms of questioning its overall value and function, others conversely discussed the function of honesty. In order of descending frequency of occurrence, sub-themes of the functions of honesty included: honesty as an important function of relationships (n = 7), honesty as a difficult function in relationships (n = 5), and honesty does not always function positively in relationships (n = 5).

*Honesty as an important function in relationships.* Participants' responses comprising this group all mentioned how honesty is an important function in romantic relationships. One participant wrote:

*...because honesty is so important to me in my relationships, I try not to use these forms of communication... (Participant 4)*

Another participant wrote how she wants both her and her partner to be honest. She notes:

*I don't want to lie to him – OR be lied to! (Participant 16)*

Someone else responded:

*...I have not always been completely honest, and feel as though if you truly care about someone there is no need for any type of deception whatsoever. (Participant 53)*

Another participant who wrote about discovering a deceptive act of his partner noted:

*I mean we should know everything about one another if we are getting married. (Participant 61)*

While these participants mention how honesty is important to them in their relationships, others noted how honesty can be difficult to achieve at times.

*Honesty as a difficult function in relationships.* Responses in this group mentioned how it can sometimes be difficult to tell the truth. One such participant explained:

*I'm really afraid to completely put myself out there I don't feel that I could truly say what I'm feeling, sad, happy, mad. (Participant 50)*

Another noted:

*... it is just human nature to use the forms to avoid conflict, but sometimes it is better to just bite the bullet and tell the truth and go from there. (Participant 34)*

Despite the fact that participants mentioned honesty can be difficult, others explained how they believe that sometimes honesty is not the best policy in order to function in positive ways in the relationship.

*Honesty does not always function positively in relationships.* The five participants' responses forming this group all mentioned how it is not always “*necessary to tell the truth*” (Participant 13), and how always telling the truth may even function in harmful ways in the relationship. One such participant wrote:

*If people were really honest all the time no one would really be happy.* (Participant 38)

Similarly, another participant added:

*I do not think that lies are the best form to use or any of the forms discussed are good for a relationship but if you think about it, if you were completely honest all the time about everything then you wouldn't have a relationship because no one would want to put up with it.* (Participant 34)

**Relational maintenance functions of deception.** The theme regarding the relational maintenance functions of deception had 63 occurrences in participants' responses to the open-ended question of how deception functions in their romantic relationships. Participants' responses constituting this theme all entailed how deception functions in ways that maintain the relationship – either through protecting the partner, the self, or the relationship as a whole with aims to “keep things smooth” in the relationship. The themes that emerged regarding the functions of deception in romantic relationships echoed some sentiments of the reported motives for deception outlined in the previous section (RQ3). However, the previous were “reasons” or motives the participants reported for using deception in that specific instance, whereas the following results report participants' perceptions of how deception functions in their relationship

over time and as a whole. Within this major theme, 12 subcategories of deception's functions emerged. The seven most frequent categories for relational maintenance functions of deception were: keeping the peace (n = 19), avoiding hurt feelings (n = 18), meeting personal goals (n = 4), entertaining (n = 4), maintaining personal independence (n = 3), maintaining personal privacy (n = 3), and avoiding unwanted situations (n = 3).

***Keeping the peace.*** This theme was solely comprised of participants' responses that included keeping the peace, avoiding or preventing conflict or fights, or keeping things "smooth" in the relationship as a function of deception. One participant wrote:

*I think they make things go smoothly. If we told each other everything we probably would fight a lot. (Participant 56)*

Another person noted:

*They serve to maintain the relationship by allowing deception to be used in a harmless manner to avoid small conflict. (Participant 30)*

An additional person explained:

*Overall, these forms of communication are used in our relationship to simply avoid an unnessecary fight. (Participant 35)*

***Avoiding hurt feelings.*** Similarly to the motive of using deception to protect the partner's feelings (RQ3), numerous participants mentioned the function of deception in romantic relationships was to avoid hurt feelings in the relationship (RQ4). One such participant concisely noted:

*They protect your partner from getting hurt. (Participant 48)*

Another participant responded that he uses deception:

*Mostly to avoid hurting feelings. I'm as honest as I can be at all times but white lies are safer sometimes in order to protect her feelings. (Participant 52)*

An additional participant mentioned that protecting her partner is the only instance when she uses deception. She wrote:

*I do not lie just to lie, I only use deception when I do not want to hurt him. (Participant 54)*

**Meeting personal goals.** This subcategory closely resembled responses to RQ3 regarding self-serving purposes as a motive for deception. The responses in this group all mentioned how deception functions to meet one's own goals. For example, one participant wrote:

*These forms of communication help to...get what I want... (Participant 15)*

**Entertaining.** Other participants noted how deception functions as a form of entertainment (mostly regarding exaggeration). One such participant wrote:

*I may use exaggerated info more when telling a story to keep him more interested or make him laugh more. (Participant 37)*

**Maintaining personal independence.** Three participants noted how deception functions as a way to maintain a level of independence in the relationship. Participant 15 mentioned this as another primary function of deception when she wrote:

*These forms of communication...help me feel less smothered.*

Another participant noted:

*These forms of communication function in my relationship day to day by still allowing each of us to be individuals. We each have our own lives and different friends.*

(Participant 46)

***Maintaining personal privacy.*** Three other participants noted how deception functions as a way to maintain a level of privacy in the relationship. One participant explained:

*Although we are a team we are both different people w/ different lives, sometime the lives have to be a little bit private. (Participant 56)*

***Avoiding unwanted situations.*** Three participants claimed that a function of deception in romantic relationships is to avoid doing something they do not want to do or to avoid certain situations. For example, one participant wrote:

*These deceptive forms of communication function as a “way to get out of having to do something.” I feel like I would lie because I felt bad about not being able to hang out with him. Overall, it was basically to make me feel better about making an excuse. (Participant 44)*

***Remaining subcategories of relational maintenance functions of deception.*** The remaining subcategories emerged from the participants’ responses, but each of the following only had one or two occurrences. The remaining subcategories of relational maintenance functions of deception in romantic relationships are: surprising (n = 2, Participants 7 and 62), eliciting an emotional response (n = 2, Participants 51 and 57), gaining attention from partner (n = 2, Participants 12 and 24), self-presentation (n = 1, Participant 48), avoiding suspicion (n = 1, Participant 13), and deferment (n = 1, Participant 60) (see Appendix H for complete participant responses to RQ4.)

**The extent to which deception functions in the relationship.** The theme of the extent to which deception functions in the relationship had 45 occurrences in participants’ responses to the open-ended question of how deception functions in their romantic relationships. Participants’ responses constituting this theme all either mentioned judgments regarding how

often deception functions in the relationship, how the relationship was strong regardless of any deceptive acts during the week, or how deception is naturally-occurring in every relationship. Within the major theme, the following three subcategories emerged: how often deception functions in the relationship (n = 28), the positive status of the relationship regardless of the function of deception (n = 11), and deception's functions are common in all relationships (n = 6).

***How often deception functions in the relationship.*** This subcategory was comprised of participants' responses that referred to how often deception functions in the romantic relationship. Of the 28 occurrences mentioning how often deception functions: five participants noted deception functions often, three described how deception may function to an unexpected extent, 17 noted how they do not believe deception functions often or ever in their relationships, and three described occasions when deception is likely to function.

*Deception functions often.* Five participants noted how deception occurs daily. For example, participants noted deception functions: “*day to day*” (Participant 46), “*on almost a daily basis*” (Participant 2), and “*in a couple's everyday routine*” (Participant 67). Moreover, one participant mentioned that deception is “*somewhat useful in everyday life*” (Participant 68), and another noted how deception is used to “*avoid fighting over small or insignificant topics within our daily lives*” (Participant 20).

*Deception may function to an unexpected extent.* Two participants mentioned how deception functioned more than they thought it would during the study, and one mentioned it functioned less than predicted. For example, one participant noted:

*These forms in my relationship functioned more than I thought it would. I never used to think about it in that way until I realized I was doing it. (Participant 6)*

Another participant who shared the sentiment wrote:

*I never realized how much this is prevalent in our relationship. (Participant 63)*

In contrast, one participant expressed:

*I was actually surprised. I didn't use it as much with him as I thought I did. I did catch myself doing it with my friends a lot more. (Participant 18)*

Although this participant only recorded deceptive acts that occurred in the romantic relationship, she apparently was aware of her general use of deception during the week of the study.

*Deception does not function often in the romantic relationship.* 17 participants noted how deception is not common in their romantic relationships and does not function in prominent ways. Responses ranged from explaining how they are honest most of the time (n = 13) to responses explaining how they never lie to their romantic partners (n = 4).

For example, one participant wrote:

*I would NEVER lie to him. Ever. Even if it would upset him, it'd be better outright and immediately than later. (Participant 31)*

In the above entry, the participant underlined the word “never” three times. Similarly, another participant noted:

*I honestly do not lie or even “hide” things from my [partner] whatsoever...I have been in a relationship where I have not always been completely honest, and feel as though if you truly care about someone there is no need for any type of deception whatsoever.*

(Participant 53)

*Deception as a reliable function in certain circumstances.* Two participants mentioned in three occurrences that deception likely functions more prominently under certain circumstances.

For example, one participant noted how:

*These forms of communication always seem to arise when I feel vulnerable. (Participant 51)*

Moreover, the other participant mentioned:

*I tend to lie when I'm upset...[and] ... We both like to exaggerate stories but we do that when we are upset with each other or when we need a good laugh. (Participant 62)*

Some participants reported deception functions often in romantic relationships or during certain circumstances, while others noted it does not function often, or it never functions in their relationships. Regardless, many participants reported their relationships with their partners were positive despite the functions of deception.

***The positive status of the relationship regardless of the function of deception.*** This subcategory was comprised of 10 participants' responses that commented on the positive status of the relationship during the study regardless of the extent of the function of deception.

Descriptors of how positive the relationship was had 11 occurrences, and participants noted how their relationships were “good” (Participants 6), “very good” (Participant 43), “great” (Participant 17), and “strong” (Participants 27, 29, 31, 42). Moreover, one participant explained:

*I'm very happy with our relationship. (Participant 16)*

Thus, although deception did occur in these relationships, participants noted how their relationships were in a positive condition.

***Deception's functions are common in all relationships.*** In this subcategory, participants reported how deception is a relatively common function in all relationships. One such participant wrote:

*Everyone has them in every relationship whether it is romantic partner to family members, it is just human nature to use the forms. (Participant 34)*

Other participants noted how it is “normal” to use forms of deception in relationships. One participant wrote:

*I think any normal relationship has its “secrets.”* (Participant 36)

Another noted:

*It’s only normal to leave out information that will only bother our partner.* (Participant 67)

Although some participants reported that deception is a normal or common function in every relationship, other participants discussed the consequences of the use of deception.

**Functions of perceived consequences of deception.** Within this subcategory, participants’ responses discussed the functions of either perceived personal costs of using deception or of the consequences when deception is discovered. For example, one participant noted how the use of deception (diversionary responses) in her romantic relationship made her feel and how she responded to that feeling. She notes:

*Avoiding information just made me feel weird and I ended up telling him anyway.*

(Participant 68)

She also explained how:

*The lying is absolutely not necessary and I felt bad about it...* (Participant 68)

Another participant noted how the use of deception “*caused problems*” (Participant 45), and another explained:

*I have a rough past of getting my heart broken by lies.* (Participant 57)

Other participants mentioned how deception can “*definitely hinder communication between my partner and me*” (Participant 49), how it can “*weaken our relationship*” (Participant 6), and how

it can be “*very harmful to a relationship if the people in it use forms of deceiving communication frequently*” (Participant 4).

While some participants noted the negative consequences of the function of deception in their romantic relationships, others mentioned the positive consequences. For example, some participants noted how deception consequently functions as a way to “*maintain the relationship*” (Participants 24, 26, 30). Also, as mentioned above, although participant 6 mentioned deception can weaken the relationship, she also noted:

*But these forms have also made us a strong couple.* (Participant 6)

Other participants reported how deception can consequently function as a way to “*better the relationship in the long run*” (Participant 37) or how deception functions as a way to “*protect the relationship we have now*” (Participant 35).

**What was learned from examining personal use of deception.** As stated previously, unexpectedly and without prompt, 14 participants reported in their response to the open-ended question what they had learned during the course of the study about deception, their relationship, or how deception functions in their relationship. Participants’ responses constituting this theme all mentioned something they had learned from examining their own use of deception or how they plan to behave moving forward. For example, one participant explained:

*This was really helpful for me to identify the deception that both of us are introducing into our relationship. I only see positive outcomes for that!* (Participant 23)

Another participant mentioned what she learned during the study:

*I learned to not do these forms and to just tell him the truth. Trust him as a person.*  
(Participant 6)

An additional participant explained how she wants to behave moving forward. She notes:

*After doing this experiment it made me want to be more open and honest with my partner, not that we were full of lies before, but I want to share more instead of withhold from him. (Participant 34)*

Yet another participant wrote:

*I try to be more honest about all of my actions now. (Participant 54)*

However, although most mentioned positive outcomes or additional things to ponder, one participant noted:

*I never realized how much this is prevalent in our relationship. Some things are small, but others are more serious. Maybe we have gone out long enough and I'm just tired of it. (Participant 63)*

**Supplemental information.** As previously described, 10 participants did not answer the question to RQ4 in their diaries; therefore, these participants were contacted in an attempt to schedule a follow-up interview so they could respond to the question regarding their perceptions of the function of deception in their relationship. Five participants participated in a brief, semi-structured interview where the function of deception within their romantic relationship was discussed. Interview lengths ranged between five and 25 minutes ( $M_{\text{interview length}} = 16.2$  minutes). A description of relevant ideas discussed by each participant follows.

***Interview one: Participant 14.*** In this interview, the participant mentioned how deception in general, such as in non-romantic relationships, is hurtful whether it is a “big” lie or a “small” lie because “It’s just bad to lie,” and it “causes problems.”

However, she added:

*I think it depends on how you use it...to make stories more elaborate...that’s just kind of natural in a way but I think there’s a point where you can like go way too far with it, um,*

*and if you're being like sort of deceptive about like your feelings and so you can't, that sort of hinders your, you know, your communication in a certain way, then it can just not really be like a very genuine relationship I guess.*

She also mentioned she is a “bad liar,” but “at the same time I think I can like withhold truth pretty easily.”

She also explained:

*In a romantic like relationship, to feel really like connected to someone you have to be really honest otherwise I mean I think both of you just sort of know like in the back of your minds that I don't know, something's not being like talked about or discussed like if it should be, you know if there's a problem or a conflict.*

Finally, when discussing an entry she had made regarding a deceptive act, she said,

*...and it wasn't worth it so it's better to just say a little lie.*

**Interview two: Participant 39.** This participant mentioned how sometimes with deception, “it's easier to go that way really” in order to avoid conflict and protect his partner's feelings. He also explained:

*I guess I kind of noticed that I did it more than what I thought...you know I just kind of, I never really thought of it as avoiding....that kind of surprised me because I was thinking about what I was doing.*

When asked how deception functions in his relationships, he said:

*I don't think in a catastrophic way it affects it...so I would say it affects it but not in like a big way.*

He added that with “bigger things like if an ex calls or something like that,” he would tell his partner about the issue.

The participant also mentioned the importance of honesty in terms of trust in a romantic relationship. He said:

*I think that's what a relationship is based on, it has a lot to do with trust. You know I think, from my perspective, trust is a huge factor. If I can't trust you to go out, then why are we together really, you know?*

**Interview three: Participant 28.** This participant discussed using deception as a way to avoid conflict, and she also mentioned what topics should be discussed in romantic relationships and how the use of deception may change for every relationship depending on the context of that relationship. While discussing deceptive acts in her own relationship she said:

*It's to the point where like petty arguments are just not worth it.*

She further explained what topics partners should be honest about. She explained:

*So I think things that like could get out and like, I mean anything that could like really hurt you, I think need to be said in a relationship. I think for a relationship to be completely, like, functional and healthy it needs to, it needs to be honest.*

However, she added that each person may vary their use of deception depending on the relationship. She explained:

*I think it also like bases a lot off of past experiences. Cause I think that like people in a relationship may not have an issue with a certain thing so they don't care if their partner reveals that information, but another you know, a different relationship might have past experiences with something and so, you know, it is important in that relationship for that to be brought up...so I think that whatever the conflicts are, like, it kind of grows from that what needs to be told to one another.*

**Interview four: Participant 55.** This participant explained how she believes deception can be necessary at times in order to maintain the relationship and individual independence and to seek compromise. While describing the function of deception, she said:

*I am not intentionally trying to deceive my partner but many, tiny such deceiving-like behavior happening during the conversation, maybe it's for relational maintenance or just, um, needed for the context of the conversation. But such an unintentional process is very interesting for me to reflect.*

She also explained how her partner becomes jealous when she spends time with other males, so she often withholds the information or uses half-truths to conceal this information from him. She mentioned when she has told him of such instances in the past, he has responded with a “kind of extreme response.” She added:

*He is the kind of guy who wants to, how can I say? cover me with a huge brown bag...so he doesn't want to share me with other guys...so even he never want to hear my past romantic relationship or doesn't want to know my relationship with other males...and therefore, I cannot disclose how the activity goes.*

She further explained that this deception serves the purpose of “seeking a compromising point.” She also said:

*As long as I can take full responsibility, I can hide not to hurt the relationship.*

She further explained how deception can be “necessary” at times in order to reach compromise in the relationship. When explaining how she sometimes will not tell her partner when she goes to lunch with a male colleague, she said:

*I may secretly go out with him for lunch without telling anything to my husband because I am fully, how can I say, confident about the situation. So that could be necessary deceiving. Yeah, if we call it deceiving, it's necessary to maintain the relationship.*

**Interview five: Participant 59.** This participant discussed the procedures of the study, how deception functions, and how she believes honesty is not always the best policy. Regarding the study, the participant described:

*It was pretty much a standard week...but I didn't like stop myself from saying anything like I went with my first impulse like whether to say something deceptive or something truthful. But, I was still overly aware of the fact that I was doing the study, so I was like, I don't want to be overly deceptive just like so I could right stuff down or anything.*

She further explained that the interactions that occurred with her romantic partner during the week of the study were reflective of their usual day-to-day interactions.

When discussing the function of deception in romantic relationships, the participant explained:

*When I looked back at it, I just like, mostly just used some form of deception just either to avoid conflict or just not to hurt his feelings.*

She also discussed her perceptions of honesty:

*It totally affects our relationship because he's a huge stickler for just brutal honesty and I have never been, so even when I am completely honest like people end up getting hurt so I don't think honesty is the best policy.*

She added:

*Deception just serves to kind of make everyone happy, like it's not dishonest, it's just to level the playing field and keep everyone emotionally stable.*

However, she explained that:

*Honesty is great and a very important part of any relationship, but, then you get into brutal honesty and there are limits of what you should and shouldn't say to someone. You shouldn't have to say everything you're feeling because that's when you can intentionally hurt someone's feelings and just damage your relationship I think. I don't think you have to be completely 100% honest all the time, but I also don't think you should lie about how you're feeling because then you're just hurting yourself.*

### **Summary of Results**

The preceding sections have summarized the responses recorded in 57 diaries and five semi-structured interviews as they related to four research questions. The extent that deception is used in romantic relationships and common topics of deceptive messages have been identified. Moreover, themes of motives for using deception in romantic relationships and how deception functions in those relationships have been identified and described. The subsequent chapter will offer an interpretation and discussion of the results.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Discussion**

The goal of this study was to examine the use of deception within romantic relationships. Qualitative methods were used to investigate the following: the extent to which deception is used in romantic relationships, common topics of deceptive messages in romantic relationships, motives for using deception in romantic relationships, and functions of deception in romantic relationships. The findings of this study facilitate a clearer understanding of the complex nature of deceptive behavior within romantic relationships.

Results showed that, on average, participants used 4.95 deceptive strategies within one week with their romantic partners (RQ1). Moreover, numerous common topics of deceptive communication were found (RQ2), as well as common themes of motives for deceptive behavior (RQ3) and common functions of deception within romantic relationships (RQ4). This chapter offers an interpretation and discussion of the results, strengths of the study, a description of possible limitations of the study, recommendations for future study, and concluding thoughts.

#### **RQ1: The Extent to which Deception is used in Romantic Relationships**

As mentioned above, results indicated that participants used deceptive messages strategies with their romantic partners an average of 4.95 times in seven days. Almost 45% of these deceptive messages were lies, 19% were exaggerations, 17% were half-truths, 10% were diversionary responses, and 7% were secrets.

In DePaulo and Kashy's (1998) study, they found that both college student participants and participants from the community "told about one lie in every three social interactions to their romantic partners" (p. 72). Conversely, they also found that participants from the community reported they told less than one lie in every 10 interactions with their spouses. Although the total

number of interactions compared to the number of deceptive acts with romantic partners was not a focus of this study, the findings of this study appear to correlate with previous findings. In an interview summarizing her research over two decades, DePaulo said, “In my studies people tell an average of two lies a day and that’s the ones they’ll admit to telling, so I think lying is an everyday behavior that probably everyone engages in” (Johnson, 2007). When comparing daily lying in general found in past research and daily deception with romantic partners in this study, it is possible the findings are in accordance with DePaulo and Kashy’s (1998) assertion that, although deception is relatively common in romantic relationships when compared to other types of relationships, the rates of lying per day with romantic partners were less than DePaulo’s estimate of lies told in everyday interactions.

Of the five forms of deception examined in this study, lies consisted of almost half of the deceptive messages reported. One possible explanation for the high frequency of lies when compared to other forms of deception is that perhaps lies are more easily identifiable. It may have been easier for participants to realize when they told their partners lies than to identify when they told half-truths, kept secrets, exaggerated, or used diversionary responses. Since the latter forms alter or withhold the truth, these forms may not have been as prominent to participants as lies because this form blatantly provides false information.

Moreover, although some participants reported to be “bad liars,” lying may be a more attractive form to use because it could possibly eradicate further questioning from partners. If someone were to use diversionary responses, half-truths, or exaggerations during an interaction, the romantic partner might have follow-up questions pertaining to the information provided or withheld. However, although lying may be more difficult to successfully execute for some,

when successful, lying may forestall continued conversation on the topic since the receiver would believe the false information to be true.

### **RQ2: Frequent Topics of Deception in Romantic Relationships**

Although topics of deceptive messages varied greatly among participants, results indicated that topics regarding future plans (11.35%), the participants' true feelings (11.35%), the participants' past activities (8.99%), and the participants' current activities (7.06%) had the most frequent occurrences. The fact that these were the most frequently occurring topics for deceptive messages is understandable considering the average age of the participants.

Future plans was one of the most frequently occurring topics of deceptive messages. For some participants, deception occurred while discussing plans for events, parties, and other activities that were to happen in the near future, but many participants used deception while discussing future plans after graduation such as living arrangements or the status of the relationship after graduation. Since dating in the college years may often involve joint recreation such as parties, group events, or hanging out (Arnett, 2000), it is understandable that this topic often arose in interactions. Moreover, the college years include a great transition into the "real world" when people make decisions that will possibly affect the rest of their lives (Arnett, 2000). Since many of the participants are in the midst of this transition, it is also a reasonable explanation for why this topic occurred so frequently.

Moreover, many participants reported they used deception as a way to "get out" of doing something they did not want to do. In these cases, politeness theory may be at work.

Participants often reported they used deception as an excuse to not have to attend future events. Thus, instead of being "impolite" by telling their romantic partner they simply do not want to participate in the event, an excuse in the form of a deceptive message may deflect hurt feelings

or an unwanted response. In addition, many participants who reported using deception in order to avoid discussions of plans after graduation or future events provided responses that mentioned something similar to the following example. While avoiding a discussion of plans after graduation, a participant noted there was “no point in discussing something I haven’t planned for” (Participant 23). Because many participants may feel uncertainty or anxiety about their lives after graduation, it is understandable they might use deception in order to avoid discussing these future plans.

It is also comprehensible that how the participants’ true feelings in the situation, the participants’ past activities, and the participants’ current activities were also the most frequent topics of deceptive messages. As will be discussed in the following section, three of the four most common motives for using deception were avoiding an unwanted response, protecting the partner’s feelings, and need for independence. Upon examining these findings, it is understandable how these topics would appear most frequently. According to participants’ responses, many participants used deception while discussing how they really felt in order to avoid an unwanted response and to protect the partner’s feelings or positive face. Moreover, participants frequently reported that using deception when discussing what they did and what they were currently doing was based on a motivation to maintain independence or avoid an unwanted response.

### **RQ3: Themes of Common Motives for Using Deception in Romantic Relationships**

Results found the most commonly reported motives for using deception in romantic relationships were: avoiding an unwanted response (24.5%), self-serving (18.94%), protecting the partner’s feelings (12.26%), need for independence (10.86%), eliciting an emotional response (5.85%), self-presentation (5.57%), unknown (3.9%), complying with the partner’s wishes

(3.06%), maintaining previous deceptive acts (1.95%), surprising (1.67%), perceptions of partner's lack of interest (0.56%), and retaliation (0.56%). The following section will examine the most frequently reported major themes and their implications.

While Cole (2001) explained that “deception among romantic partners is more likely to be motivated by a concern for the relationship and for a partner” (p. 108), the findings of this study do not clearly exemplify this assertion. Based on the reported motives and themes of motives that emerged, it appears that roughly half of the uses of deceptive messages were motivated by a concern for the relationship or partner, and the other half were motivated by personal goals. However, it should be understood that reported motives of avoiding unwanted responses could be classified either way. For example, when participants reported they were motivated to use deception in order to avoid conflict, the motivation may have either stemmed from concern for the relationship (e.g., a fight might damage the relationship) or concern for the self (e.g., avoid getting into “trouble”).

**Avoiding an unwanted response.** This theme occurred the most frequently (24.5%) in participants' reported motives for using deception with their romantic partners. This finding closely aligns with Spitzberg and Cupach's (2007) assertion that “lying in intimate relationships functions to avoid relational trauma and conflict, processes that might be substantively more dysfunctional than deceptions” (p. 15). Thus, one possible explanation for this theme's frequent occurrence is that participants' viewed the cost of telling the truth as more damaging to the relationship than using deceptive strategies with their partners.

**Self-serving.** This theme was the second most occurring theme of motivations for deceiving a romantic partner (18.94%). This finding possibly reflects the sentiment that deception is frequently used “as a relational control device” (O'Hair & Cody, 1994, p. 181) in

order to meet the deceiver's personal goals. Participants may have used deception as a way to control and ensure they received desired outcomes in the relationship.

Furthermore, the age of the participants and average relationship status may have played a role in the finding that self-motivated deception was frequently used. Since most participants were not married or cohabitating with their romantic partners, it may be possible that many of them are not as concerned as married or cohabitating couples with "joint decision making regarding issues that will affect both in the future" (Messersmith, 2005, p. 7). It is important to note that this does not mean the relationships of most participants are necessarily lacking in commitment or teamwork (participant reports strongly suggest otherwise); this simply suggests that the majority of participants' relationships are possibly different than married or cohabitating individuals because there might be less focus on instrumental discussions and joint-decision making.

**Protecting the partner's feelings.** This theme accounted for 12.26% of reported motives for using deception with romantic partners. These findings imply that a strong motivator for deception was a concern for the partner since most participants' responses in this theme explained that they used deceptive strategies in order to prevent hurting their partners' feelings. Thus, this finding also has strong implications regarding facework and politeness theory.

These findings suggest that both facework and politeness theory still have prominent functions in romantic relationships. Even though romantic partners may feel more comfortable sharing their true feelings with each other, the findings allude to the fact that these theories continue to play a prominent role in romantic relationships. Thus, these findings may slightly contrast with Cupach and Metts' (1994) assertion that "familiarity entails some degree of

exemption from the obligation to create and support face during private interactions” (p. 2).

With 44 occurrences in participants’ responses, it is clear that protecting the partner’s face and being polite with romantic partners continue to motivate behavior in romantic relationships.

**Need for independence.** This theme comprised 10.86% of participants’ reported motives for using deception in their romantic relationships. This finding has strong implications regarding Relational Dialectical Theory (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Within this theme there were 32 responses that mentioned the need for space or independence and seven responses that reported the need for privacy as motives for using deception with romantic partners. Thus, it is clear that the dialectical tensions between openness and closedness and between autonomy and connection were present in the participants’ relationships. Furthermore, these findings may suggest that the presence of these tensions possibly presents an opportunity for people to use deceptive behavior in order to navigate the tensions. While there are many strategies for coping with the dialectical tensions in relationships (see Baxter, 1988), perhaps deception occasionally serves as a means to enact the coping process.

These findings also suggest that, as expected, romantic partners may use deception as a way to avoid threatening their own negative face needs in order to be free from constraints the relationship might impose. As Cole (2006) argues, romantic partners can be overly constrictive of one another, and thus, “deception is often the best way to deal with the constraints that intimacy creates” (p. 5).

**Self-presentation.** This theme accounted for 5.57% of participants’ responses regarding motives for using deception with their partners. This finding has clear implications that self-presentation continues to function in romantic relationships. Cupach and Metts (1994) argue that “part of the reason a couple defines itself as intimate is that the need to ‘perform,’ in Goffman’s

sense of performance, is considered unnecessary” (p. 2), but this finding contradicts their assertion. While the theme of self-presentation did not receive a large percentage of the frequencies for motivations of deception, self-presentation was still apparent in the participants’ responses regarding motives for deceiving their partners. In essence, responses showed that romantic partners may still present themselves in beneficial ways to their partners – even if romantic partners may enjoy some freedom from having to “perform.”

#### **RQ4: Themes of the Function(s) of Deception within Romantic Relationships**

Results found that participants’ responses reflect mixed feelings about the nature of deception’s function in the relationship; some viewed deception as functioning negatively (n = 9), others viewed some deception as functioning positively (n = 6), while others viewed deception functioning simultaneously in both positive and negative ways (n = 10). Moreover, participants discussed what issues are acceptable for the use of deception and those issues that are not acceptable for the use of deception (n = 23). Participants’ responses also featured the function of honesty in the relationship (n = 17), the relational maintenance functions of deception in romantic relationships (n = 63), the functions of perceived consequences of deception (n = 18), and the implications of examining personal use of deception (n = 14).

#### **Deception and honesty functioning in simultaneously positive and negative ways.**

While ethicists have provided a plentiful amount of work on the ethics of deception, “no fundamental theory has been embraced universally by any society or culture” that encompasses the complexities of deception as an ethical or unethical act (O’Hair & Cody, 1994, p. 200).

However, the findings of this study suggest that perhaps perceptions of the ethics of deception depend on the situation and the intentions of the deceiver. For example, participants even used similar words when explaining the positive and negative functions of deception. For the most

part, participants' responses reflect the idea that deception is permissible for "small issues," but deception should not be used for "big issues." For example, numerous participants reported that "small" acts of deception that prevent confrontation or protect the partner's feelings or the relationship are permissible because the intention is benevolent and deception functions in positive ways in these instances. When describing these types of "white lies," one participant even asked, "What's the harm done, really?" (Participant 59). However, participants often noted that "big issues" such as infidelity or issues that would dramatically affect the relationship should always be openly discussed between partners. For example, one participant described how "little issues" are permissible, but some issues should always be discussed. She said:

*Obviously I withheld some information, but that's not something that if he found out he would consider breaking up with me over. (Participant 28)*

She then explained that anything that has the potential to hurt or damage the relationship should always be discussed openly between partners – even if it has the possibility to result in inevitable damage to the relationship.

Conversely, some participants reported that deception is always bad or harmful because trust and honesty are such integral parts of romantic relationships. Clearly, these findings suggest that perceptions of deception reflect the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of deception, and romantic relationships in general.

**The relational maintenance functions of deception.** The relational maintenance functions of deception in romantic relationships reported by participants shared similar sentiments as the motives for using deception with romantic partners. The fact that reported functions align with reported motives is understandable considering those motives were why participants were reportedly deceiving in the first place. It is reasonable that participants'

reported motives for using deception in a particular instance would also be considered major functions of deception in general in the relationship. Participants reported the following major relational maintenance functions of deception: keeping peace, avoiding hurt feelings, meeting personal goals, entertaining, maintaining independence, maintaining privacy, and avoiding unwanted situations.

These findings closely align with Saxc's (1991) argument: "An individual obsessed with being totally honest might, in fact, become a social isolate" and "complete honesty could make relationships tedious, if not conflict laden" (p. 414). Findings from this research strongly suggest that this is the primary function of deception in relationships; it allows relationships to run smoothly while protecting the self, the partner, and the relationship as a whole. Similarly to Cole's (2006) argument, some participants reported that deception can even be considered necessary in order to maintain relationship harmony and relational satisfaction. For example, while describing one of his deceptive acts in his romantic relationship, one participant reported how he would feel if their roles were reversed and he were at the receiving end of honesty. He noted:

*...and I just needed to be alone. If I would've said I just didn't want to hangout with her she would've been Really mad - if she told me I'd just annoy her I guess I'd get mad too.*

(Participant 38)

The participant did not elaborate, but his response begs the question: does this mean he would rather be deceived in that circumstance than confronted with the truth? After all, sometimes the truth can be a bitter pill to swallow.

**The extent to which deception functions in the relationship.** With this theme, participants' responses also reflected mixed perceptions about the function of deception. Some

believe it is a naturally occurring phenomenon in romantic relationships while others report they never use deception with their romantic partners and it does not function in their relationship. However, although perceptions varied, numerous participants reported that their relationships were strong or in great condition regardless of deceptive acts that occurred. These responses imply that perhaps deception can function in beneficial ways for romantic relationships, at least when used with the right intentions and under the right circumstances.

**Functions of perceived consequences of deception.** Once more, this theme reflected varied responses regarding how perceived consequences of deception function in the relationship. Although studies have discussed the sometimes extreme negative consequences following the discovery of deception (e.g., Buller & Aune, 1987; Burgoon, Buller, Dillman, & Walther, 1995; McCornack & Levine, 1990), participants' responses mostly focused on the consequences of undiscovered deception. This is important to note because, as one participant explained, even if deception is used with good intentions regarding a "small issue," once discovered it becomes a "big deal" because it ultimately damages trust and therefore, the relationship (Participant 14).

Regardless, participants' responses noted how undetected deception can have positive and negative functions in the relationship. Participants' reports of negative consequences from using deception included hindering communication, weakening the relationship, and even "getting my heart broken by lies" (Participant 57). Clearly, the use of deception does indeed have negative consequences, and those perceived consequences affect how deception functions in the relationship.

Conversely, others reported that deception functions to maintain, strengthen, and better the relationship in the long run. These findings suggest that although complex, deception can function in both positive and negative ways within romantic relationships.

**What was learned from examining personal use of deception.** Fourteen participants' responses mentioned the implications of examining one's own use of deception within a romantic relationship. For the most part, these participants responded positively to examining their own use of deception, and many reported that they will try to be more open and honest with their romantic partners as a result. These findings suggest that perhaps simply examining our own use of deception within romantic relationships can have potentially positive outcomes for our communication within our relationships. As one participant noted, after mentioning how the study was helpful in identifying the use of deception in his relationship, "I only see positive outcomes for that!" (Participant 23). Moreover, numerous participants noted how their use of deception either occurred more or less than they thought it would. These findings imply that people may have inaccurate perceptions of their use of deception with their romantic partners; perhaps by truly examining the use of deception, one can evaluate whether deception functions in positive or negative ways within the relationship and adjust behavior accordingly.

### **Strengths of Study**

Although there were limitations to this study, there were several strengths. First, a pilot study refined the initial meeting and participant instructions in order to make the purpose and procedures of the study clearer to participants. Moreover, the pilot study with follow-up interviews discussing the methods helped to ensure that diary methods were appropriate for answering the research questions and gathering information about the use of deception as it

occurred. Additionally, participants in the pilot study suggested that their entries reflected typical communication patterns within their relationship.

In addition, Bolger, Davis, and Rafaeli (2003) recommend the following to avoid common limitations to diary methods: 1) provide intense training sessions for participants regarding how they should complete diary entries, 2) provide pre-established definitions or categories for participants' entries in order to prevent any ambiguity that might cause "participants to omit relevant exemplars" (p. 591). These recommendations were followed in this study to ensure the methods were as strong as possible. Participants had multiple opportunities to ask questions during the initial meeting where preexisting typologies were defined, examples were given, and instructions were clearly presented.

Moreover, using a diary method enabled participants to record the occurrence and motives for using deception as they occurred (or shortly after) in order to prevent any weaknesses from data collected by means of participant recall. In addition, the participants' responses during the five supplemental interviews suggest that this topic may be difficult for participants to articulate their perceptions of deception on demand. Answering RQ4 in the diary enabled participants to reflect on their perceptions before responding, and it may have been easier and more comfortable for them to do this when not face-to-face with the researcher (as they would be in interviews).

### **Limitations of Study**

Although diary methods can be very useful in collecting event-centered data, there are several limitations to this method. First, some participants may have forgotten to make entries at times, or they may not have been aware of some instances of deception that occurred. Since romantic partners may deceive each other with little effort or planning (Cole, 2006; Lippard,

1988; McCornack, 1997), it may have been difficult for participants to be aware of every act of deception that occurred. Additionally, although the categories of deception utilized for the study were listed in the participant consent form, the categories were not listed in the diaries so participants may not have been able to label or recall the categories correctly.

Moreover, some participants' dates on their diary entries show they may have stopped completing entries shortly after the start of the seven-day diary period. One participant recorded an entry on the first day but no others, and three participants' entries stop on day three. This could either mean that deception did not occur on the subsequent days, or the participant simply stopped completing entries.

Furthermore, the act of recording diary entries could have affected participant behavior during the seven-day diary period of the study. For example, two participants reported that they were trying to be honest during the study. One participant only did this for one day, but the other participant noted, "in the back of my head I was always thinking about it and making sure I was being fully truthful with my boyfriend" (Participant 31). This obviously affects the results of the study. Similarly, participants may have been leery regarding being honest about their deception, which could be considered a social desirability effect.

Another limitation of the study is that the sample consisted of 78% women and 83% Caucasian individuals. A more diverse sample might have contributed to a richer understanding of deception in romantic relationships. Since the study was voluntary, perhaps more women volunteered to participate since women are more likely willing to discuss their relationships (see reviews by Cutrona, 1996; Reis, 1998; Winstead, 1986).

Finally, nine responses of deceptive use included in the study were related to the actual completion of, or participation in, the study. Moreover, 35 participants utilized the adhesive tabs

in order to keep their diaries more secure. In one returned diary, pages that the participant had written on were ripped out and reattached with the adhesive tabs. Although participants may have simply been following directions to use the tabs to ensure confidentiality, this could also imply that privacy may have been a large concern for some of them. Thus, a possible concern for privacy may have limited the extent or fullness of the diary entries.

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendations for researchers.** The complex nature of the findings strongly suggest that continued research is necessary to gain a clearer understanding of deception in romantic relationships. Future studies on this topic should include quantitative measures along with qualitative measures to possibly assess how the use of deception affects perceptions of satisfaction in the relationship, how self-monitoring functions in terms of deception within romantic relationships, and how one's propensity to deception in general functions within romantic relationships.

Moreover, researchers should examine the implications of Interpersonal Deception Theory (Buller & Burgoon, 1996) within romantic relationships, especially regarding context. As one participant perceptively noted, deception use may vary for each person depending on the particular romantic relationship. In essence, researchers should examine what specific factors of relationships or personality make deception more or less prevalent.

Finally, future studies might address potential harm caused by the use of deception in romantic relationships. As previously mentioned, numerous studies have been conducted on the consequences of discovered deception, but perhaps researchers could examine the potential harm of undetected deception.

**Practical implications of research.** Although honesty and trust are undoubtedly hallmarks of an intimate relationship, it would be unwise to advise people to be completely, brutally honest in every possible situation. For example, Anderson et al. (1990) state:

An early literature overstated the importance of complete candor in relationships, and we do not intend to resurrect that error. Though we acknowledge the need for self-disclosure in order to progress to deeper states of intimacy (Altman & Taylor, 1973), we also recognize, as have many before us (e.g., Bochner, 1982; Parks, 1982), the impracticality, impossibility, and undesirability of total disclosure. (p. 379)

This research clearly points in the same direction. As previously mentioned, being completely honest all the time could result in someone becoming a “social isolate” (Saxc, 1991) or causing unnecessary hurt for others. Also, as previously noted, Jacobs’ (2009) experiment with brutal honest was “probably the worst month of [his] life” (p. xii) because of the conflicts, embarrassment, and hurt feelings it caused. However, one must consider the implications of intimacy and satisfaction a more honest relationship might provide.

As previously mentioned, there are numerous possible benefits to examining one’s own use of deception with his/her romantic partner. Also, as noted, one participant mentioned how deception use may vary for each person depending on the particular romantic relationship. Perhaps that is the key to facilitating open communication about deception. Numerous participants mentioned how they do not talk about deception with their romantic partners. If couples are not discussing deception, how can they increase their understanding of how deception functions in their relationship? Based off participants’ responses, it seems as if having an honest discussion about deception in the romantic relationship might be extremely beneficial. If approached with caution and care, romantic partners could discuss which issues they want to

be informed about or which issues are “ok” to withhold. Since perceptions on deception and honesty vary so greatly, it could be beneficial to the relationship to establish to what degree and what issues each partner values privacy or disclosure. For example, Participant 28 described how dancing with members of the opposite sex is not an issue for her relationship, and they both agreed it is not an issue that needs to be discussed or mentioned. However, she mentioned one of the couples she knows does believe that they need to tell each other every time they spend time with an opposite-sex other. Thus, perhaps couples should seek to better understand each partner’s expectations concerning deception and honesty through open communication.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine deception in romantic relationships by investigating the extent to which deception is used, common topics of deceptive messages, common motives for deception, and perceived functions of deception in romantic relationships. The research fulfilled these goals by utilizing qualitative methodologies to discover participants’ perceptions of deception within their romantic relationships as these acts occurred. These findings also added to the understanding of previous research on deception and multiple theoretical perspectives. Additionally, this research exemplifies the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of deception in romantic relationships. With further study, it is possible to increase the current understanding of deception in romantic relationships, and thus possibly improve how romantic couples navigate the complexities of trust, honesty, and deception within their relationship.

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## Appendix A

### Participant Consent Form

**Approved by the Human Subjects Committee University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus (HSCL). Approval expires one year from 12/3/2009. HSCL #18366**

#### Communication Patterns in Romantic Relationships

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##### INTRODUCTION

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

##### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to explore the extent to which couples in long-term, committed relationships use the speech patterns of withholding information, exaggerating information, avoiding information, or lying. The purpose is also to explore how the use of these speech patterns varies within romantic relationships and how these speech patterns play a role in relational functioning and intimacy. Finally, this research aims to find if there are common topics romantic dyads often use in these speech patterns. Finding these answers will help researchers more clearly understand these speech behaviors within long-term, romantic relationships.

##### PROCEDURES

During the initial meeting, you will be given a packet containing a consent form; a diary; adhesive tabs so the diary can be sealed after entries are completed in order to enhance confidentiality; a Communication Patterns in Romantic Relationships Questionnaire; and referral service information where participants can seek counseling if warranted. Please remember that the study is confidential and voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time.

During the first phase of the study, you will complete the Communication Patterns in Romantic Relationships Questionnaire. This questionnaire will probably take no more than 30 minutes to complete. You will also complete diary entries for the course of seven days. During this period, you should record in the diary the date and time that any of the following speech patterns are used with your romantic partner: withholding information, exaggerating information, avoiding information, or lying. Please also record what topic the speech pattern was regarding; where the speech pattern took place; and why you chose to use this speech pattern at that point in time. The diary pages have been labeled for you to help you with the recording process.

Please complete the diary independently. You will also be given numerous adhesive tabs so the diary can be sealed after entries are completed in order to enhance confidentiality. You are also encouraged to add any additional thoughts, attitudes, or impressions regarding your entries. Finally,

please record in your diary regularly and make honest entries. Daily diary completion will probably take no more than 30 minutes each day.

Shortly after completion of the diary, please return the completed questionnaire and diary in the sealed packet the researcher provided you either to the researcher directly in Bailey Hall Room 1 or to the researcher's mailbox in Bailey Hall Room 102. All participant material and information pertaining to this study, including the diary, will be kept securely in a locked location by the researcher.

As soon as possible after the return of the packet, you may be contacted for a follow-up interview where the researcher will ask you questions related to your diary entries, your reactions to recording the entries, your use of these speech patterns, and any outcomes from the speech patterns used. You will also be asked to provide information about your relationship in as much detail as you wish. The interview should take no more than one hour.

## RISKS

Participants will be asked to complete a diary for seven days, as well as a follow-up interview. There are no right or wrong answers in the study. Participants' information for this project is potentially sensitive and participants may feel uncomfortable with some of the questions. Additionally, when the diary is not in the researcher's possession there is opportunity for a third party to view its contents.

## BENEFITS

There is no direct benefit to individual participants, other than the knowledge that they have contributed to the understanding of deceptive speech patterns. You will however receive research or extra credit for participating in this study.

## PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any way with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. The researcher will use participant codes instead of your name on the diary, and the key for the codes will be kept securely by the researcher in a locked location. All participant material and information pertaining to this study, including the diary, will be kept securely in a locked location by the researcher. Upon the project's conclusion, all participant information, including the diary, will be destroyed. The researcher will not share information about you unless required by law or unless you give written permission.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

## REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

## CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending

your written request to: Jennifer Guthrie, The University of Kansas, Communication Studies, Bailey Hall, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd. Room 102, Lawrence, KS 66045. If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher listed at the end of this consent form.

#### PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, or email [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu).

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

_____	_____
Type/Print Participant's Name	Date
_____	
Participant's Signature	

#### Researcher Contact Information

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## **Appendix B**

### **Referral Services**

#### **LOCAL SERVICES**

In case you have questions or issues about these topics that you would like to discuss, we have provided contact information for campus and community organizations that provide counseling.

Counseling services:

- KU Psychological Clinic, 340 Fraser Hall, (785) 864-4121. Small fee per session.
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Watkins Health Center, (785) 864-2277. Small fee per session.
- Headquarters Counseling Center, available 24/7, free of charge, for any concern: (785) 841-2345.

## Appendix C

### Demographic Questionnaire

#### Communication Patterns in Romantic Relationships Questionnaire

*Instructions:* For items 1-8, please provide as much of the following information as possible regarding yourself.

1. What is your sex?  Male  Female
2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?  
 Freshman  Sophomore  Junior  Senior  Graduate
5. How long have you and your partner been in a relationship? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you and your partner live together?  If so, for how long? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How would you describe your relationship status with your partner?  
 Casually Dating  Seriously Dating  Engaged  Married
8. Would you say that you are committed to the relationship?  
 Yes  No

## Appendix D

### Images of Example Diary

Image 1: Diary

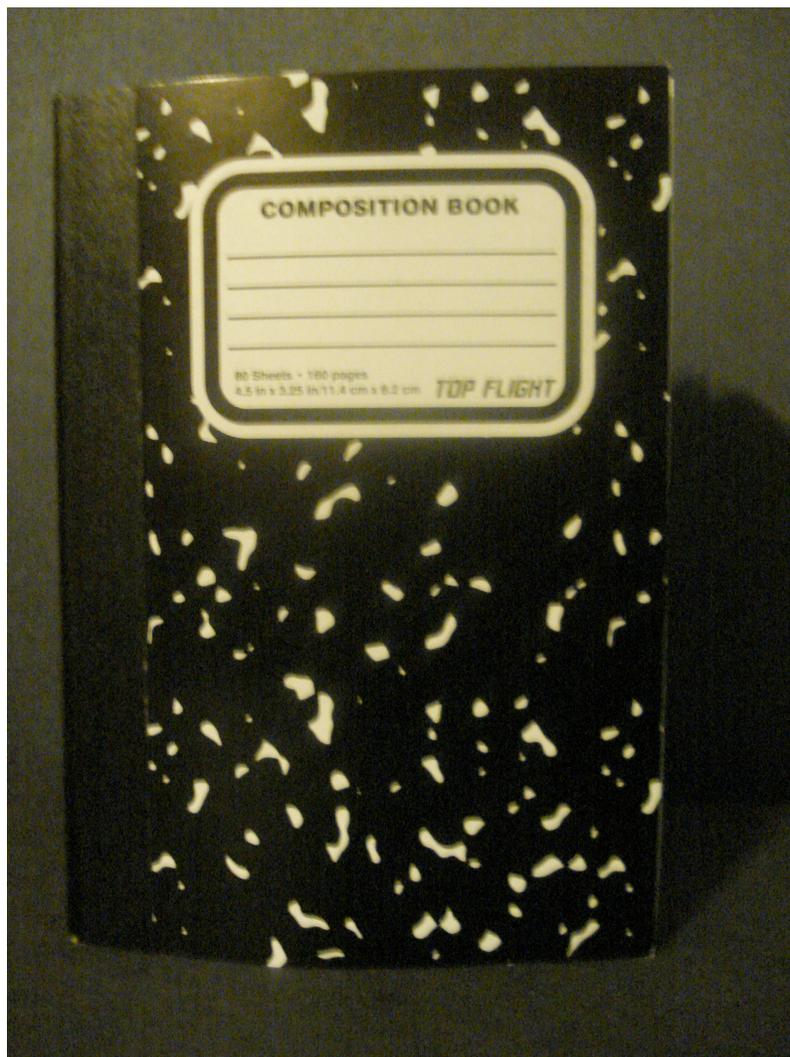


Image 2: Page 1

Entry Template

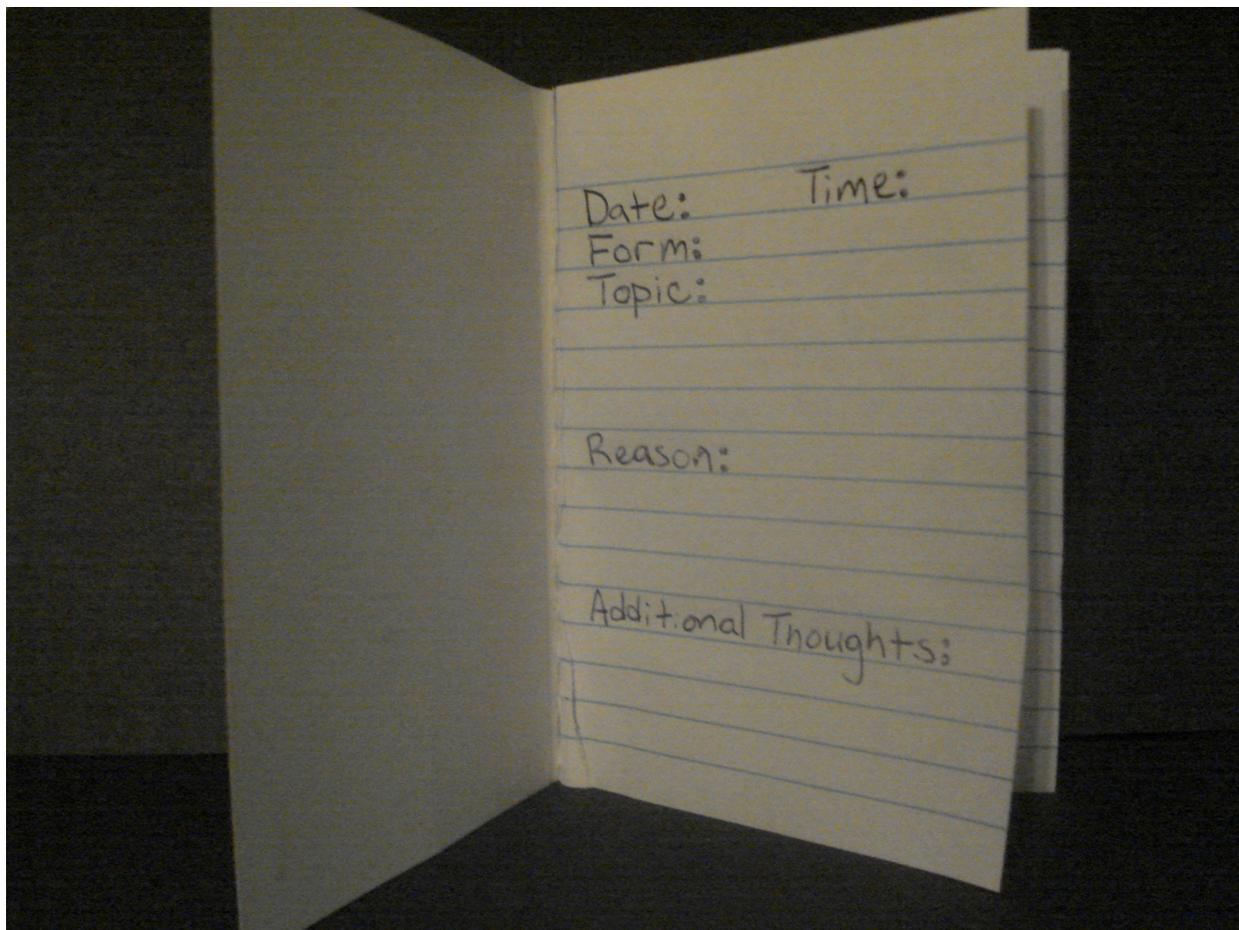
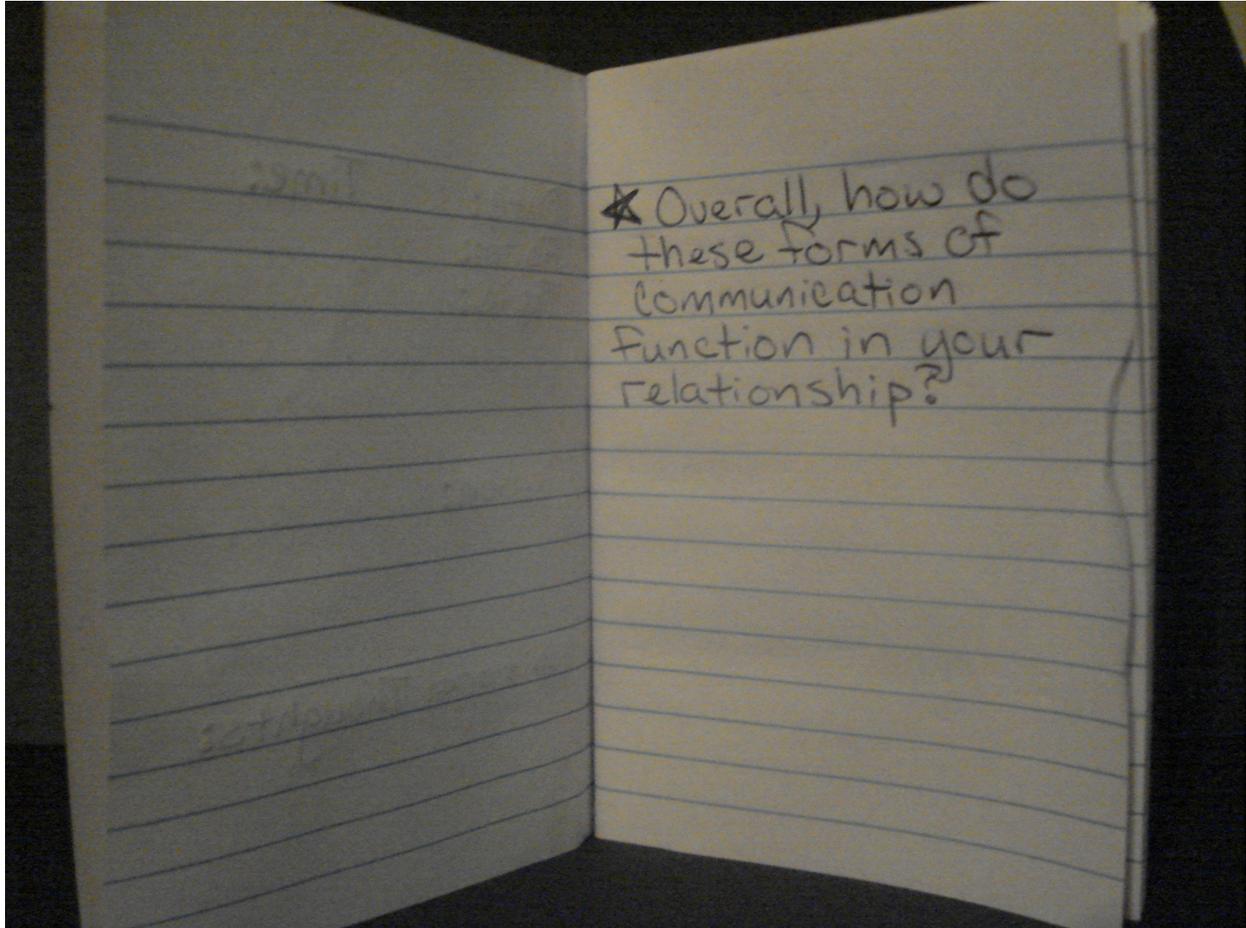


Image 3: Page 2

Question for Open-Ended Answer



## Appendix E

### Frequencies of Deception Use – RQ1

Diary Number	Lies	Half-Truths	Diversions Responses	Exaggerations	Secrets	Weekly Total
1	3	1	0	0	0	4
2	6	1	0	0	0	7
3	1	2	0	0	0	3
4	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	0	2	1	2	0	5
6	2	0	1	1	0	4
7	9	1	0	1	0	11
8	1	2	0	1	0	4
9	4	1	0	1	0	6
10	1	3	1	1	1	7
11	2	2	0	1	0	5
12	0	1	1	1	0	3
13	0	3	0	0	0	3
14	2	0	0	2	0	4
15	4	0	2	1	1	8
16	3	1	0	0	0	4
17	2	2	0	1	0	5
18	1	1	0	1	2	5
19	3	1	2	2	0	8
20	2	1	1	2	0	6
22	2	0	3	0	0	5
23	1	2	1	2	0	6
24	0	0	0	1	5	6
25	4	1	0	0	1	6

<b>Diary Number</b>	<b>Lies</b>	<b>Half-Truths</b>	<b>Diversionary Responses</b>	<b>Exaggerations</b>	<b>Secrets</b>	<b>Weekly Total</b>
26	6	0	0	0	0	6
27	0	0	2	0	0	2
28	0	0	0	0	2	2
29	1	0	0	1	0	2
30	1	2	0	1	0	4
31	1	0	1	1	0	3
32	0	0	1	0	0	1
33	3	1	0	3	0	7
34	2	1	0	0	0	3
35	2	0	0	2	1	5
36	3	0	1	2	1	7
37	3	0	2	0	0	5
38	5	0	0	1	0	6
39	3	0	0	3	0	6
40	5	1	1	1	0	8
41	5	1	0	0	1	7
42	3	3	0	1	1	8
43	1	0	0	0	0	1
44	2	1	0	1	0	4
45	4	1	2	0	0	7
46	1	0	0	3	0	4
47	2	1	0	0	0	3
48	1	1	1	0	0	3
49	2	1	2	0	2	7
50	0	0	0	3	1	4
51	2	0	1	1	0	4
52	3	1	0	0	1	5

<b>Diary Number</b>	<b>Lies</b>	<b>Half-Truths</b>	<b>Diversionary Responses</b>	<b>Exaggerations</b>	<b>Secrets</b>	<b>Weekly Total</b>
<b>53</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>54</b>	4	0	0	0	0	6
<b>55</b>	2	1	1	2	0	6
<b>56</b>	1	1	0	0	0	2
<b>57</b>	2	2	2	4	1	11
<b>58</b>	0	1	0	2	1	4
<b>59</b>	4	0	1	1	1	7
<b>60</b>	2	0	0	1	0	3
<b>61</b>	1	1	0	0	0	2
<b>63</b>	4	0	0	1	1	6
<b>64</b>	3	0	0	0	0	3
<b>65</b>	4	2	1	0	1	8
<b>66</b>	4	2	0	3	0	9
<b>67</b>	1	2	1	1	0	5
<b>68</b>	1	1	1	1	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>325</b>

## Appendix F

### Reported Topics of Deceptive Act (Sorted by Frequency) – RQ2

Topics	Frequency
<b>future plans</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>how really feel</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>what did</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>what doing</b>	<b>23</b>
amount of work to do	12
what happened	11
the current study	9
what really want	8
how day went	7
partner's appearance	7
who with	7
who with - opposite sex	6
where are	5
performance in school	4
what need to do	4
who talking with (ex)	4
who texting - opposite sex	4
abilities	3
amount something cost	3
attractiveness of other person (opposite sex)	3
how bad a situation was	3
money	3
mutual friend	3
surprise	3
who with - ex	3
why didn't respond to text	3
amount of people	2
difficulty of a task	2
ex	2
not clear	2
reason for doing something	2
reason for saying something	2
ride	2
roommates	2
what really want to do	2
who in contact with	2
who talking to - opposite sex	2

Topics	Frequency
who texting - (ex)	2
why missed call	2
amount of alcohol consumed	1
amount of alcohol will drink	1
amount of items to bring to partner	1
amount of pain felt	1
amount of time event will take	1
amount of time took to do something	1
argument with other	1
attractiveness of other people	1
compliment from person of opposite sex	1
death - avoiding topic	1
details of conversation with ex	1
Facebook use	1
forgetting something partner asked for	1
gift	1
how intoxicated really were	1
how night went	1
how paid for gift	1
how partner acted night before	1
how sick really are	1
how slept	1
hunger	1
needing to use car so partner can't	1
other's behavior	1
partner's relationship with ex	1
pregnancy scare	1
previous argument	1
reaction to something partner said	1
relations at previous residence	1
relationship with ex	1
sex	1
snooping on partner's Facebook page	1
state of relationship	1
story about friend	1
wardrobe	1
what ate	1
what is happening	1
what said about partner	1
what time went to sleep	1
what was previously said	1
what's going on at work	1
when got home	1

<b>Topics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
when went to sleep	1
where going	1
who with - date with opposite sex	1
why accepted job offer	1
why called ex	1
why didn't respond to calls and texts	1
why doing something	1
why home late	1
why not talking	1
why not talking as much	1
why not texting as much	1
why running late	1
why wouldn't do something	1
wishing the other was there	1
work	1

## Appendix G

### Frequencies of Reported Motives – RQ3

Table 1

*Number of Participants Whose Responses Contributed to Themes and Categories*

*Reasons (Motives) for Using Deception in Romantic Relationships*

---

<b><u>Theme and Categories</u></b>	<b><u>N</u></b>	<b><u>% of 359</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Participants</u></b>
<b><i>Avoiding an Unwanted Response</i></b>	<b>88</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>53</b>
Avoiding confrontation	61	16.99	33
Avoiding suspicion	21	5.84	15
Avoiding negativity	3	.84	2
Avoiding an awkward situation	3	.84	3
<b><i>Self-Serving</i></b>	<b>68</b>	<b>18.94</b>	<b>59</b>
Serving one's own interests	31	8.64	23
Ensuring a desired outcome	14	3.9	13
Coercion	14	3.9	14
Avoiding an unwanted activity	9	2.51	9
<b><i>Protecting the Partner's Feelings</i></b>	<b>44</b>	<b>12.26</b>	<b>29</b>
<b><i>Need for Independence</i></b>	<b>39</b>	<b>10.86</b>	<b>28</b>
Need for space	32	8.91	23
Need for privacy	7	1.95	5

Table 1 (Continued)

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<b><u>Theme and Categories</u></b>	<b><u>N</u></b>	<b><u>% of 359</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Participants</u></b>
<b><i>Eliciting an Emotional Response</i></b>	<b>21</b>	<b>5.85</b>	<b>18</b>
Eliciting guilt	5	1.39	3
Eliciting sympathy	5	1.39	5
Eliciting jealousy	3	.84	3
Eliciting gratitude	3	.84	3
Eliciting a reciprocal emotional response	3	.84	2
Eliciting encouragement	1	.29	1
Eliciting respect	1	.29	1
<b><i>Self-Presentation</i></b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5.57</b>	<b>18</b>
<b><i>Unknown</i></b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b><i>Complying with the Partner's Wishes</i></b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3.06</b>	<b>10</b>
<b><i>Maintaining Previous Deceptive Acts</i></b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1.95</b>	<b>7</b>
Concealing a former act of deception	4	1.11	4
Continuing a former act of deception	3	.84	3
<b><i>Surprising</i></b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Perceptions of Partner's Lack of Interest</i></b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.56</b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>Retaliation</i></b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.56</b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>Other</i></b>	<b>37</b>	<b>10.31</b>	<b>21</b>

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## Appendix H

### Complete Participant Responses to RQ4

Diary #	Answer
1	x = No Response
2	Overall, these forms of communication function on almost a daily basis. Personally, I don't always lie to him because I don't want to have to talk to him, but also so that I don't hurt his feelings and such.
3	These forms of communication in my relationship are not good. I shouldn't be using them. Yet thinking about my past relationships, I have used them there, too. I need to find some way to not use these.
4	I feel like I wasn't much help to this study. In the past there would have been much more to write about. Now I'm not saying that I never use any type of deceiving comm, because I do. But with our lifestyle we don't have a lot of things to deceive about (if that even makes sense). Plus, because honesty is so important to me in my relationships, I try not to use these form of communication - At least when it comes to the bigger things...No one's perfect - You just caught us in a very honestly boring week! Also, I feel that it can be very harmful to a relationship if the people in it use forms of deceiving communication frequently.
5	x
6	these forms in my relationship functioned more than I thought it would. I never used to think about it in that way until I realized I was doing it. Pretty much I have a good relationship I can see myself marrying and being with [partner] my whole life. When these forms do take place they weaken our relationship because it always causes problems. But these forms has also made us a strong couple. I learned to not do these forms and to just tell [partner] the truth. Trust him as a person. In conclusion, I really liked this study. I've never written anything down before. It helps with my feelings - also helped me come up with ideas on how to make our relationship stronger.

7	Overall, I feel like I lie in my relationship for a few reasons. One to surprise her. Two to stop arguing or not to start an argument. Three not to hurt her feelings, I know that I shouldn't lie to her but I'm not perfect and I mess up sometimes.
8	These forms of communication function in my relationship to shield feelings of hurt if I actually told the truth.
9	they serve as a time for me to make him happy and lie about my true thoughts
10	These forms are in my relationship. I don't lie very often, But, I withhold quite a bit because some things are just so insignificant. Also, if I know he will make a bigger deal than what really happened I don't want confrontation. I do try avoiding it sometimes.
11	I'm an awful liar & most the time he knows when I try! I hate doing it anyway & would never do it over big issues! Most the time its just exaggeration!
12	These forms of communication in our relationship is evident on certain varying topics. I've noticed that he tends to use these communication patterns more than I do. I can recognize this because we know each other so well. I think that the main reason we use these tactics is to get the attention of the other person. Sometimes in our relationship we feel like we can't get the other's attention so we use exaggerating or withholding information. At times I feel like this gives the other person a victory when they are feeling left out. It is interesting to me that I know these communication patterns and I can differentiate healthy and unhealthy communication but that does not stop me from using unhealthy patterns.
13	Overall, I think sometimes it's not necessary to tell the truth. Because I love my boyfriend, I don't want him to become suspicious.
14	Interview
15	Overall: These forms of communication help to not hurt each others feelings, get what I want or help me feel less smothered. I noticed only a few that were truly harmful lies & those should eliminated white lies seem to helpful in day to day life.

16	<p>These forms of communication function in our relationship because of jealousy and fear of being lied to -&gt; which makes for more deceit because I'm sometimes afraid to tell the whole truth because I'll be in what he calls "the dog house." (Haha...)</p> <p>I don't like to fight but I am very outgoing and opinionated plus I haven't been in any kind of relationship since high school. Because of these things, I'm not used to answering to someone about how much I party or dealing with him being upset about me having guy friends. Since he gets mad at me about those things it wears on me and makes me wonder what his relationships with other girls are like if he's worried about mine and other guys. I'm very happy with our relationship. I think we need to work on jealousy and boundaries though. I'm guilty of crossing some lines too. I don't want to lie to him - OR be lied to!</p>
17	<p>I think these forms of communication function well in our relationship. We don't lie to each other to hurt anyone. We do it because we care. We tell little lies to protect each other. We have a great relationship.</p>
18	<p>I was actually surprised. I didn't use it as much with him as I thought I did. I did catch myself doing it with my friends a lot more. But in my relationship with him I think I use it to avoid conflict, possible conflict, or stress. I've always avoided conflict.</p>
19	x
20	<p>Overall, I feel these forms of communication function in both positive and negative ways in my relationship. I say positive because many times they serve as a means to avoid fighting over small or insignificant topics within our daily lives. It is important to note that if there is anything that does merit a serious or engaging conversation about our relationship, I do not use any of these forms. I talk directly about our issue, even though the truth may be difficult to deal with. On the otherhand, I feel that these forms of communication are at times a bother to have to use. There are times when I wished I didn't have to use them in order for my relationship to remain strong. It is during those times that I stop using these forms, and address our issue directly. Realistically, I don't see myself not using at least one of these forms for the rest of my life. There will always be conversations that are probably better off left unsaid.</p>
21	x

22	<p>1) Overall: we both tend to avoid things like this just to prevent fighting, when really it will end up being that. 2) Overall: Sometimes we will say things because we know it will make the other person happier. 3) Overall: we are very honest with each other normally. This isn't something I usually worry about. 4) Overall: we try and avoid things we know will hurt the other person.</p>
23	<p>These forms of communication play a minimal role in our relationship. I believe that we both utilize them in a way that doesn't hurt or offend the other. I don't believe that either of us would lie or withhold information in an emergency. Note: This was really helpful for me to identify the deception that both of us are introducing into our relationship. I only see positive outcomes for that!</p>
24	<p>The form of withholding helped me to maintain my relationship because the topic I withhold only causes tension and arguments with my boyfriend if brought up. I exaggerate to get more attention from my boyfriend because I am an attention hog.</p>
25	x
26	<p>These forms help to maintain my relationship so people don't get hurt.</p>
27	<p>Overall, my boyfriend and I have a very strong relationship. My only rationale for avoiding certain issues is to avoid a pointless fight. The issues I avoid are minimal and not worth an argument.</p>
28	Interview
29	<p>I do not think we use a lot of deception in our relationship. We rarely argue (especially about small things) and we really have a strong bond.</p>
30	<p>They serve to maintain the relationship by allowing deception to be used in a harmless manner to avoid small conflict.</p>

31	<p>I would NEVER (underlined 3) lie to him. Ever. Even if it would upset him, it'd be better outright and immediately than later. I feel guilty when I avoid a subject, though. I usually don't, that situation Friday was one of the [rare and random] occurrences, though. Overview: Even though I only wrote in my booklet twice, I really enjoyed participating in this study because in the back of my head I was always thinking about it and making sure I was being fully truthful with my [partner]. We have a really strong relationship and I can honestly say that these 2 experiences I noted were the only 2 occurrences of "betrayal" or "lying" I committed.</p>
32	<p>We are extremely honest and trust each other and tell each other everything so it is very rare to have lying, secrets, or anything from each other.</p>
33	<p>From this, I think that these stupid petty lies aren't really adding to my relationship and they're not really taking anything away from it either -&gt; it just seems like pointless things I've been telling him when he wouldn't care if I told him what really happened.</p>
34	<p>I do not think that lies are the best form to use or any of the forms discussed are good for a relationship but if you think about it, if you were completely honest all the time about everything then you wouldn't have a relationship because no one would want to put up with it. I'm not saying lies are good, but sometimes they may help a situation. After doing this experiment it made me want to be more open and honest with my partner, not that we were full of lies before, but I want to share more instead of withhold from him. I wouldn't say these forms run our relationship, but they are a part of it. Everyone has them in every relationship whether it is romantic partner to family members, it is just human nature to use the forms to avoid conflict, but sometimes it is better to just bite the bullet and tell the truth and go from there. I have enjoyed the opportunity to do this to see things I wasn't really aware of.</p>

35	<p>Overall, these forms of communication are used in our relationship to simply avoid an unnessecary fight. My boyfriend and I met this year and are from different states, therefore we have ex's in our past that we both get uneasy about. So when my ex-bf texts me, I try to avoid telling my boyfriend to avoid him getting mad. I don't lie to him to make him mad or to be a bad girlfriend but rather to protect the relationship we have now.</p>
36	<p>Since my relationship is fairly new (5 months) we pretty much tell each other everything. I may exaggerate but he thinks it's funny. Our relationship is pretty playful still. 2) I think any normal relationship has its "secrets." Most of mine I use to either protect or amuse my partner. I am hardly at my apartment anymore, it seems the longer were together the more blunt we have become. The important things in my life I share with him. If he loves me like he says he does he will accept me and vice versa. This study has only made me more curious on what he maybe hiding or keeping from me.</p>
37	<p>I feel like the only time I ever use these forms such as avoidance or lying to better the relationship in the long run and avoid the little fights that aren't worth it. I may use exaggerated info more when telling a story to keep him more interested or make him laugh more. Whenever using these forms I think more for the better of the relationship as a whole and to avoid the stupid things that may tear a relationship apart. I try to use these forms as little as possible but in some situations it will/can make things better in the future and at that time.</p>
38	<p>Communication shows that we act in a way to do whats best for ourselves while still thinking of our loved ones. If people were really honest all the time <u>no</u> one would really be happy.</p>
39	x
40	<p>They aren't the best forms of communication because I would like to feel comfortable enough with Andy to not have to tell little white lies.</p>

41	I realized that with this relationship I do not lie b/c I am scared he will get mad or upset it is more story telling & exaggeration But if I do he knows when I am lying by my Face. Because I start to smile or laugh whe in uncomfertable situations.
42	1) Most of the time we are fine & are open & honest with each other. I get nervous sometimes expressing news that I am sad about. We don't go through this daily. We have a strong open relationship & yes when we come across these patterns we work them out. 2) Everything that I have written in this journal thus far are part of a relationship & how they operate. My relationship has still been strong. 3) All of these forms of communication function in my relationship. As strong as it really is we have our flaws & I really could see & emphasize them this past week. We communicate very well seeing each other daily but I can tell my boyfriend is the one to open up to me more & discuss matters & share things with me that are personal. In time I will do that more. Some days you are in the mood to share more with your boyfriend. It is just all part of the growing experience.
43	Relationship very good, small lies to keep smooth, not cover up something negative.
44	These deceptive forms of communication function as a "way to get out of having to do something". I feel like I would lie because I felt bad about not being able to hang out with him. Overall, it was basically to make me feel better about making an excuse.
45	1) This form of communication was helpful. My friend got to vent & instead of seeing my boyfriend, he did homework and saw me later. 2) This caused some problems and a little fight later but now he knows how I feel.
46	These forms of communication function in my relationship day to day by still allowing each of us to be individuals. We each have our own lives and different friends. (Skip line) I love Randy more than anything and honestly don't lie or withhold information from him intentionally. (Skip line) This excercise almost makes me sad about my relationship b/c I hope not to lie to Randy. (Skip line) Very interesting though!
47	~ These forms are a major part of relationships. ~ Allow the relationship to be good or bad depending on how you use These forms.

48	They protect your partner from getting hurt. They protect you from getting in trouble and occasionally they can make you look better.
49	In my relationship, my over-use of avoidance techniques definitely hinder communication between my partner and me. I know avoidance isn't the best communication technique, but it's all I've ever know. I would avoid conflict w/ my dad & this has translated to my romantic relationships.
50	The exaggeration usually is not much of a factor as much as the withholding is. I'm really afraid to completely put myself out there I don't feel that I could truly say what I'm feeling, sad, happy, mad. So the withholding overall is the biggest one that I use. Mostly in the example used before. [Example reason: ...he feels he can confide in me and that I listen and let him vent. That's why I do exaggerate so he can feel comfortable enough to do so.]
51	These forms of communication always seem to arise when I feel vulnerable. I use these deceptive techniques to induce feelings of jealous or guilt in my boyfriend. For some reason I think that inducing these feelings will increase his awareness & overall caring about me...doesn't really make sense
52	Mostly to avoid hurting feelings. Im as honest as I can be at all times but white lies are safer sometimes in order to protect her feelings.
53	I honestly do not lie or even "hide" things from my boyfriend whatsoever...I have been in a relationship where I have not always been completely honest, and feel as though if you truly care about someone there is no need for any type of deception whatsoever.
54	I do not lie just to lie, I only use deception when I do not want to hurt him. I try to be more honest about all of my actions now.
55	Interview

56	I think they make things go smoothly. If we told each other <u>everything</u> we probably would fight a lot. Although we are a team we are both different people w/ different lives, sometime the lives have to be a little bit private.
57	I have a rough past of getting my heart broken by lies. She has a rough past of having poor judgement, believing anything a guy tells her, and finding herself greatly deceived in retrospect. I believe I use these forms of deceit to make her feel guilty. Maybe this is my way of keeping the part of her that makes bad decisions subdued, or maybe it's my way of retaliating against people who hurt me. I know I've put her through a lot of tears. I make her feel awful about something but then I switch gears and try to build her back up, to perhaps create more of a dependence on myself for her. My past endeavors have left me with a very poor image of myself & some very low self-esteem. Having her feel guilty about doing something wrong to me makes that feel a little better. It's a horrible cycle but she's a very strong person. I love her dearly & have every intention to spend every waking moment of my life with her. I just wish I could find a way to not have to make her feel bad by being able to be more open to her about my feelings. It's just hard to admit your feelings have been hurt, because the action may recipricate.
58	I think for the most part me and my romantic partner are pretty open with one another. There's definitely no lying and when it comes to these forms, it is just the little things that we withhold, exaggerate, or avoid.
59	x
60	These types of communication seem to play a role of deferment in our relationship. It seems like we deceive each other mainly to avoid unwanted conversation. However, on the grand scale - I don't believe deceit plays but a majorly miniscule role in our relationship.
61	The smaller things, such as little white lies function very well. It is the larger lies that are not functioning in our relationship. I mean we should know everything about one another if we are getting married.

62	<p>This type of communication has a key role in our relationship. Good &amp; bad. I like to plan surprises for my boyfriend, which makes me have to lie a little to pull it off. I tend to lie when I'm upset too, when I don't want to concern him. He tries to do the same but he shows all of his emotions. When he asks me how I'm doing &amp; he know that not having a good time at all, I tend to fake a smile so he has some reassurance that I'll be happy, even though he knows it's a fake smile &amp; waits for me to cave. We both like to exaggerate stories but we do that when we are upset w/ each other or when we need a good laugh. I withhold info only to make him feel more comfortable. I tell him everything except for when I do poorly in school so I don't worry him. When he's at his finest he sometimes surprises me &amp; will admit that he lied a few times as well. Overall, think we all are human &amp; use these tricks to only make the relationship a healthy &amp; happy one. Even if it's at a price.</p>
63	<p>I never realized how much this is prevalant in our relationship. Some things are small, but others are more serious. Maybe we have gone out long enough and I'm just tired of it. I don't really know but I lie to get out of certain situations especially when I was busy.</p>
64	<p>In relationships I feel that lying helps couples not fight about things that will blow over in a matter of minutes. These forms of lies help keep peace for pointless battles. That is what I use in my relationship. I know that my boyfriend has done the same thing.</p>
65	x
66	<p>From doing this study, it seems to me that I am pretty honest with my boyfriend. Every now and then I lye to him or don't tell him everything, but it's not very much. WE are a pretty honest couple. I am a very bad lyer. I feel bad about the smallest things so I would never lye about something huge to him. It's hard for me to keep secrets from him, too. When I buy Christmas presents, I just want to tell the person what it is because I'm a bad secret keeper.</p>
67	<p>I think these forms are in a couple's everyday routine. It's only normal to leave out information that will only bother our partner. Unless it is cheating, I don't think it is <u>always</u> bad to withhold, lie, or avoid topics in our relationship.</p>

68

Overall, I think these forms of communication are somewhat ["somewhat" added in later. A drawn arrow pointed at the word, which was in smaller font and written above the other words] useful in everyday life. The lying is absolutely not necessary and I felt bad about it, but exaggeration was fun and silly and he knew I was exaggerating so it wasn't a big deal. Avoiding information just made me feel weird and I ended up telling him anyway. Withholding info doesn't work either because, in the end, the issue needs to be resolved. By not talking about it, the issue gets worse. I think it would work out way better if we either got it all out right then or agreed to wait a while to think about it and then talk about it. These forms are useful because, especially by looking at them closely, the couple can learn from it. I found myself asking, "Why did I not want to tell him?" And it actually helped me to see what was really bothering me. I probably would have exaggerated a lot more this week if I hadn't been thinking about it. Being completely (or almost completely) honest was really good for me. I wonder what his book would look like if he did it too...