



From belief to deceit: How expectancies about others' ethics shape deception in negotiations



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ABSTRACT

Expectancies play an important and understudied role in influencing a negotiator's decision to be deceptive. Studies 1a–1e investigated the sources of negotiators' expectancies, finding evidence of projection and pessimism; negotiators consistently overestimated the prevalence of people who share their views on deception and assumed a sizable share of others embrace deceptive tactics. This phenomenon generalized beyond American samples to Chinese students (Study 1d) and Turkish adults (Study 1e). Study 2 demonstrated that pessimistic expectancies about others' ethics positively predicted the degree to which negotiators were dishonest, above and beyond their own stated ethical views, and that it did so across both distributive and integrative negotiations. Study 3 provided evidence of a causal relationship between expectancies of others' ethical views and dishonest behavior by manipulating expectancies. Study 4 provided additional evidence of this causal relationship in a live, dyadic exchange where performance was incentive compatible. Negotiators' deceptive behavior was shaped by their pessimism about others' ethical standards. We consider the implications of these findings for preventing deception in negotiations.

1. Introduction

Opportunities for deception are common in negotiations (Bazerman, Curhan, Moore, & Valley, 2000; O'Connor & Carnevale, 1997). Parties often have incomplete information about one another's preferences and alternatives, leaving ample room to deceive and be deceived. With some frequency, negotiators actively present incorrect information (Lewicki, 1983) and passively welcome their counterparts to draw and act on incorrect inferences (Murnighan, 1991). And yet with some frequency, negotiators are candid and forthright even when doing so is costly. Given considerable variance in these important behaviors, a set of questions has attracted generations of scholars: Who lies in the course of bargaining—and when and why?

One group of answers to these questions revolves around the individual characteristics of negotiators, such as competitive orientation (Schweitzer, DeChurch, & Gibson, 2005), greed (Steinel & De Dreu, 2004), Machiavellianism (Fry, 1985; Huber & Neale, 1986), and envy (Moran & Schweitzer, 2008). Other groups of answers focus on motivational characteristics such as temptation (Tenbrunsel, 1998) and unmet goals (Schweitzer, Ordóñez, & Douma, 2004), situational characteristics such as mode of communication (Schweitzer, Brodt, &

Crosen, 2002; Valley, Moag, & Bazerman, 1998) and consequences of lying (Gaspar & Schweitzer, 2013), and relational characteristics like trust (Olekals, Kulik, & Chew, 2014) and expected length of the relationship between the parties (Boles, Brashear, Bellenger, & Barksdale Jr, 2000; Lewicki & Spencer, 1991). Although research has considered many factors, an important and understudied determinant may be people's expectancies about others. In the present paper, we argue that a negotiator's expectations about the readiness with which other people embrace deceptive negotiation tactics can play a potentially important role in her choice to deceive a negotiation partner.¹

Expectancies are anticipatory beliefs about how others do and will behave. A long tradition of work in psychology has cast expectancies as playing a central role in shaping behavior (Bandura, 1969, 1977; Mischel, 1968, 1973). The basic tenets of these theories state that people develop mental models of individuals, and people in general, based on learning and experience (Bandura, 1969). The expectancies about others' behavior that flow from these models, even if distorted or mistaken, guide how people behave in social interactions (Mischel, 1973; Bandura, 1977; for a review see Roese & Sherman, 2007). When an individual's expectancies about other people's behavior change, so does their behavior (Mischel, 1968). Expectancies can affect behavior

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¹ In keeping with previous scholars, we define deception as a deliberate attempt to mislead another party by presenting incorrect information (Bok, 1978; Lewicki, 1983) and/or by concealing or misrepresenting information upon which a partner relies when deciding to transact a deal (Shell, 1991).

beyond the impact of values and preferences; based on expectancies, people may act differently than their values alone would prescribe.

Research shows expectancies can play an important role in conflict and negotiation behavior. Expectancies about counterparts being cooperative or competitive shape cooperative versus competitive behavior (Kelley & Stahelski, 1970), choice of integrative versus distributive strategies (Weingart, Brett, Olekalns, & Smith, 2007), the giving and withholding of accurate and inaccurate information (Steinel & De Dreu, 2004), and self-reported willingness to engage in unethical tactics (Pierce, Kilduff, Galinsky, & Sivanathan, 2013). Negotiators' expectancies about how their counterparts will react to their behavior influences the form and extremity of their proposals (e.g., Ames, 2008; Ames & Mason, 2015). Likewise, recent work shows that expecting a counterpart to be gullible increases the likelihood that a negotiator will use a deceptive move (Kray, Kennedy, & Van Zant, 2014). Here, we build on and go beyond past research by testing whether perceptions of the prevalence of people who endorse deceptive negotiation tactics shape negotiators' behavior. We expected to find that negotiators who believe the endorsement of deceptive negotiation tactics is widespread are more likely to employ these tactics themselves. Before tracing a link between expectancies of others' ethics and deceptive behavior, though, we sought to identify the sources of such expectancies.

1.1. Sources of expectancies

We suspected that one source for expectancies would be projection. That is, negotiators' assumptions about others' attitudes will often reflect their own attitudes. Considerable research reveals that people overestimate the percentage of others who share their beliefs and values (Krueger, 2000; Robbins & Krueger, 2005; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). This “false consensus” effect bears out in negotiations as well: more prosocial negotiators expect their opponents to cooperate, whereas selfish negotiators expect their opponents to compete (van Kleef & De Dreu, 2002). Similar results have been found in the context of social dilemmas (e.g., Krueger & Acevedo, 2007). In the context of deception, we expected to find evidence consistent with projection—namely that people's own views on the appropriateness of using tactics intended to deceive a negotiation counterpart would be predictive of their estimates of others' views. In other words, people who think lying is appropriate in negotiations would estimate a greater share of others endorse lying as compared to estimates by those who see lying as wrong. This association between self-views and estimates of others' views would be consistent with a projective process whereby people's perceptions are anchored on themselves.

Projection could be the dominant or sole source of expectancies about others' views of deception. If so, our argument that these expectations about others play a role beyond one's own view would hold little meaning. If expectancies are simply an echo of one's own views on the appropriateness of deceiving in negotiations, they can hardly provide additional explanatory power in accounting for behavior. In contrast to this *predominant-projection* perspective, we believe there are other sources of expectancies at work, including widespread social beliefs that may depart from self-views. A negotiator's expectancies about what people are generally like—their model of the social world—likely shapes their approach to the interaction.

Here, we focus on expectancies negotiators have about how commonly other people *endorse deceptive negotiation tactics*. Given that self-interest is normative and prescribed in some cultures (Miller, 1999), people may assume there is widespread acceptance of deception as an appropriate means to maximize personal gain (Schwartz, 1986). Although evidence points to the contrary (e.g., Sears & Funk, 1990, 1991), both lay folk (Kohn, 1990; Wrightsman, 1991; Wuthnow, 1991) and social scientists (e.g., economists) presume material profit is the silent mover behind most human behavior (see also Miller & Ratner, 1996, 1998). It follows logically that people may, on balance, have pessimistic beliefs about others' willingness to deceive for personal gain. Central to

our argument, these pessimistic beliefs about others' ethics may predict the likelihood that they themselves deceive.

In sum, one possibility for expectancies about deception in negotiation is that projection predominates: People generally assume others have the same views they themselves do. If so, harnessing expectancies to predict deceptive behavior (beyond the influence of self-views) would be pointless. In contrast, we believe another force is often operating on these expectancies: pessimistic beliefs about others' ethicality. Expectancies may reflect varying degrees of projection as well as varying beliefs about others' endorsement of deceptive tactics that trend toward pessimism. We contend that measuring the variance in people's expectancies about how commonly others endorse deceptive tactics, above and beyond their own self-views of deceptive tactics, will improve our ability to predict and explain deceptive behavior.

1.2. Impact on deceptive behavior

The idea of pessimistic expectancies of others' ethical standards begetting deception is consistent with the idea of moral pragmatism, where people see honesty as less necessary when they doubt others' trustworthiness (Dees & Cramton, 1991). Indeed, honesty, even if it is a preferred strategy, might be seen as foolhardy in the face of inevitable or widespread deception. People often become more aggressive and unethical in competitive contexts because they believe the other party will do the same (Epley, Caruso, & Bazerman, 2006; Pierce et al., 2013).

Our prediction that deception increases with the perception of its widespread endorsement stands in contrast to *opportunistic deception*, a dynamic in which deception increases when a counterpart is perceived as benevolent and trustworthy (Olekalns & Smith, 2007). According to the opportunistic model, optimistic expectancies increase deception because benevolent and trustworthy counterparts are seen as less likely to catch an act of deception and less likely to punish deception harshly. Although some past evidence supports this alternative, and this force may often be at play in negotiations, we predict that on balance the view that deception is prevalent will *increase* the use of deception in negotiations.

Whereas the past portrait of a deceptive negotiator is often of a calculative schemer, our portrait highlights another species of deceptive negotiator: the paranoid pessimist. In all likelihood, both species of deceiver exist, and some individuals' deceptive behavior is driven by both of these motives.

1.3. Predictions and plan of study

Our studies test two main predictions, one concerning the sources of expectancies and the other concerning their impact. First, we test the idea that peoples' expectancies about how commonly others endorse the use of deception in negotiations reflect projection as well as pessimism. This prediction stands in contrast to a *predominant-projection* alternative and is a necessary result for our account to have meaning (i.e., if expectancies are simply projections of self-views, these expectancies offer no additional predictive power for behavior). Our second prediction is that variance in expectancies about others' endorsement of deceptive tactics will predict deceptive behavior (i.e., people who expect widespread endorsement will be more likely to deceive). This prediction stands in contrast to an opportunistic deception account whereby believing that others are honest and trustworthy positively predicts deceptive behavior.

We believe these ideas are worth testing because, if borne out, they can expand our understanding of the nature of deceptive behavior in social exchange. If expectations about the prevalence of people who endorse deceptive tactics account for some variance in a decision to deceive, it opens up the possibility for interventions that alter deception by challenging or changing negotiators' (potentially incorrect) beliefs about what is normative rather than by challenging or changing negotiators' values.

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