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## Effects of a personal relationship between deceiver and lie-receiver on ratings of veracity and forgiveness

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In this study, we examined the effects of a personal relationship between a deceiver and lie-receiver on ratings of veracity and forgiveness. One hundred and twenty-two college students were asked to read three scenarios wherein a romantic partner or an acquaintance gave reasons for arriving late to an appointment. Then, the participants rated the degrees of veracity and forgiveness for each reason, which varied with the possibility of occurrence. The results revealed that the relationship between the deceiver and lie-receiver affected the raters' judgment regarding forgiveness, but it did not affect their judgment regarding veracity. Men were more tolerant to the failure of a romantic partner than an acquaintance, while women showed an equal tolerance toward the failure of a romantic partner and an acquaintance. This gender difference suggested that women tend to maintain more interpersonal relationships than men, regardless of how close the relationship.

**Key words:** deception, possibility of occurrence, personal relationship.

### Introduction

Generally, lying is unacceptable (Backbier, Hoogstraten, & Terwogt-Kouwenhoven, 1997) and is regarded as a violation of morals or social norms (Bok, 1978). People form negative impressions of a deceiver, and evoke a negative emotion when they discover deception (Pontari, Schlenker, & Christopher, 2002; McCornack & Levine, 1990). Despite these views, several studies have found that lying is a part of everyday life rather than a remarkable event (e.g. DePaulo, 2004; DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996; Murai, 2000). Probably, people try to avoid lying as much as possible, but sometimes they should tell a lie; for example, when they want to avoid hurting another person. In fact, people deceive others to maintain and avoid conflict in relationships (Buller & Burgoon, 1994). Thus, lying is not only a violation of morals, but also is a functional communication strategy. Lying as a "social lubricant" involves a social function to facilitate interpersonal communication (Saxe, 1991). People tell lies everyday because they regard lying as a means to an end.

Until recently, studies on deception have focused on the veracity of the deceptive message. Although many studies have investigated whether people believe there are different types of deception, only a few studies have examined the social functions of deception. However, both the veracity of deceptive messages and the social functions of deception must be investigated in order to grasp the general phenomenon of deception in psychology. With the exception of the study of

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Kikuchi, Sato, Abe, and Nihei (2007), no other studies have examined both veracity and social functions. Kikuchi et al. (2007) investigated the ratings of veracity and the social function of deceptive messages, but their study focused on deception motivated by self-interest in order to avoid punishment for the deceiver's failure. Participants rated the degrees of veracity and forgiveness for deception as the deceiver's reason varied with the possibility of occurrence. Consequently, participants rated deception with rare content as a message of low veracity and high forgiveness. On the other hand, they rated deception with common content as a message of high veracity and low forgiveness. These results confirmed that the veracity of the deceptive message and social function of deception do not go together when people tell lies that vary, depending on the possibility of occurrence.

In the study of Kikuchi et al. (2007), the relationship between the deceiver and lie-receiver was only as acquaintances. However, the strength of the relationship affects the frequency of lying, the things lied about, and the motive for lying (Knapp, 2006). Hence, it is plausible that the strength of the personal relationship between a deceiver and lie-receiver affects the veracity and forgiveness ratings of deception. Thus, this study examines the effects of personal relationship between the deceiver and lie-receiver on the ratings of veracity and forgiveness.

## Methods

### *Participants*

Participants were 122 college students (63 males and 59 females). 60 participants (mean age = 21.35,  $SD = 2.46$ ) were allocated to the close relationship condition, and 62 participants (mean age = 20.44,  $SD = 1.53$ ) to the distant relationship condition.

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire consisted of three scenarios and three questions. These scenarios were low stake situations where the deceiver provided a reason for arriving late to an appointment. The reason varied with the possibility of occurrence as follows: a low possibility of occurrence, middle possibility of occurrence, and high possibility of occurrence. However, the relationship between deceiver and lie-receiver in the scenarios differed. In the close relationship scenario, the deceiver was the romantic partner, while in the distant relationship condition the deceiver was just an acquaintance.

One manipulation check item asked the participants to rate the deceptive content in terms of the possibility of occurrence on an 11-point scale from 0 (rare) to 10 (common). Two dependent variables asked the participants to rate deception in terms of veracity on an 11-point scale from 0 (completely untruthful) to 10 (completely truthful) and in terms of forgiveness on an 11-point scale from 0 (completely unforgivable) to 10 (completely forgivable).

### *Procedure*

The participants were randomly allocated to the close relationship condition or the distant relationship condition. They were asked to read one of the three scenarios where the romantic partner or the acquaintance provided a reason for arriving late to an appointment. Then they rated the degrees of veracity and forgiveness for the reason, which varied with the possibility of

occurrence. Afterwards, they read the remaining two scenarios in their randomly allocated condition, and completed their tasks in the same manner. The presentation order of the three scenarios was counterbalanced across the participants.

## Results

### *Manipulation Check*

To test the manipulation check for each reason, we conducted a mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the possibility of occurrence rating as the dependent variable, using gender (male or female) and personal relationship (romantic partner or acquaintance) as the between-groups independent variables and the possibility of occurrence level (low, middle, and high) as the within-groups independent variable. The results revealed a significant main effect for the possibility of occurrence level,  $F(2, 236) = 244.31, p < .001$ . A *Post hoc* analysis using Bonferroni's method on the possibility of occurrence level also showed significant differences between the low level of possibility of occurrence ( $M = 1.62, SD = 1.78$ ), middle level one ( $M = 3.48, SD = 2.49$ ), and high level one ( $M = 6.35, SD = 2.34$ ),  $p < .01$ . This finding confirmed that the manipulation was successful. Other effects were not statistically significant,  $F_s < 1.13, p_s > .10$ .

### *Effects of Personal Relationship, Gender Difference, and Possibility of Occurrence on Veracity Ratings*

To test the veracity rating of each reason, we conducted a mixed-model ANOVA with the veracity ratings as the dependent variable using gender and personal relationship as the between-groups independent variables and the possibility of occurrence level as the within-groups independent variable. The results revealed a significant main effect for the possibility of occurrence level,  $F(2, 234) = 8.80, p < .001$ . A *Post hoc* analysis using Bonferroni's method on the possibility of occurrence level revealed that both the middle and high levels of possibility of occurrence were rated as truthful messages compared to the low level one,  $p_s < .05$  (Table 1). Other effects were not statistically significant,  $F_s < 2.12, p_s > .10$ .

**Table 1** Means and standard deviation of dependent variables for each possibility of occurrence level

Dependent variables	The possibility of occurrence level		
	Low	Middle	High
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Veracity	4.96(2.98) <sub>a</sub>	5.50(2.53) <sub>b</sub>	6.15(2.24) <sub>c</sub>
Forgiveness	7.10(2.63) <sub>a</sub>	6.19(2.23) <sub>b</sub>	6.01(2.40) <sub>b</sub>

*Note.* All dependent variables are on an 11 point scale from 0 to 10. Means in the same row with different subscripts differ significantly at  $p < .05$  using Bonferroni's multiple comparison.

*Effect of the Personal Relationship, the Gender Difference, and the Possibility of Occurrence on Forgiveness Ratings*

To test the ratings of forgiveness for the latecomer in the scenario, we conducted a mixed-model ANOVA with the forgiveness ratings as the dependent variable using gender and personal relationship as the between-groups independent variables and the possibility of occurrence level as the within-groups independent variable. The results revealed a significant main effect for the personal relationship,  $F(1, 118) = 5.24, p < .05$ . A romantic partner ( $M = 6.82, SD = 2.43$ ) was more forgivable than an acquaintance ( $M = 6.05, SD = 2.44$ ). The main effect for the possibility of occurrence level was also significant,  $F(2, 236) = 9.65, p < .001$ . A *Post hoc* analysis using Bonferroni's method for the possibility of occurrence level revealed that both the middle and high levels of possibility of occurrence were rated as unforgivable messages relative to the low level one,  $ps < .05$  (Table 1). Furthermore, the gender and personal relationship interaction was significant,  $F(1, 118) = 5.31, p < .05$ . The simple main effect of gender was marginally significant,  $F(1, 118) = 2.83, p < .10$ . In the distant relationship condition, women were more tolerant toward the failure of an acquaintance than men (Figure. 1). The simple main effect of personal relationship was significant,  $F(1, 118) = 10.87, p < .01$ . Men were more tolerant toward the failure of a romantic partner than an acquaintance (Figure. 1). Other effects were not statistically significant,  $F_s < 1.16, ps > .10$ .

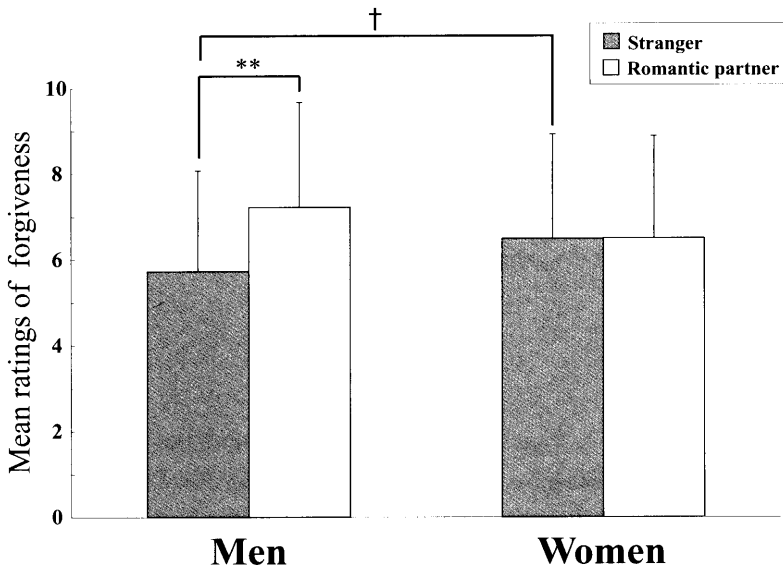


Figure 1. Effects of gender and interpersonal relationship on the rating of forgiveness.

Note. Bar graphs indicate the mean ratings of forgiveness with the standard deviation. Higher mean indicates a greater degree of forgiveness. † $p < .10$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

In this study, we examined the effects of the personal relationship between a deceiver and lie-receiver on the ratings of veracity and forgiveness. The participants rated deception with rare content as deceptive, but common content as truthful. These results are consistent with the study of Kikuchi et al. (2007). However, the personal relationship did not affect the veracity rating. Thus, it is feasible that the personal relationship between a deceiver and lie-receiver does not affect the rating of veracity when a deceiver uses deception that varies with possibility of occurrence.

The participants rated a romantic partner as more forgivable than an acquaintance. This result is consistent with the previous study. For example, McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, and Hight (1998) found that partners in close relationships are more willing to forgive one another. Moreover, participants rated deception with rare content as forgivable, but that with common content as unforgivable. This result is also consistent with the study of Kikuchi et al. (2007). Furthermore, gender and the personal relationship affected the ratings of forgiveness. Women tended to be more tolerant toward the failure of an acquaintance than men. Men were more tolerant toward the failure of a romantic partner than an acquaintance, while women showed about an equal tolerance for both. As noted by Gilligan (1982), women are more willing to maintain interpersonal relationships than men. Thus, it is feasible that women are tolerant to the failure of an acquaintance due to the motivation to maintain interpersonal relationships. Moreover, we did not set the gender of deceiver in the distant condition. Thus, it is possible that men assumed a male acquaintance as the deceiver, while women assumed a female acquaintance. Hence, in a future study we will examine the effect of gender between the deceiver and lie-receiver on deception in terms of the forgiveness ratings.

In conclusion, the present study revealed that the personal relationship between the deceiver and lie-receiver does not affect the judgment of the message veracity, but does affect the judgment of forgiveness.

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