

accurate (i.e., self-verifying) feedback, but also their success in eliciting such feedback represents the interpersonal "glue" that holds their relationships together. Within this framework, social relationships are maintained through transparency and mutual understanding rather than deceit and obfuscation, and it is allegiance to truth that enables people to enjoy healthy, prosperous relationships.

Domains of deception

doi:10.1017/S0140525X10002682

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Abstract: The von Hippel & Trivers theory of self-deception will gain added traction by identifying psychological design features that come into play in different domains of deception. These include the domains of mating, kinship, coalition formation, status hierarchy negotiation, parenting, friendship, and enmity. Exploring these domains will uncover psychological adaptations and sex-differentiated patterns of self-deception that are logically entailed by their theory.

The von Hippel & Trivers (VH&T) theory provides a powerful explanation of the several evolved functions of self-deception. Their theory provides a compelling account of the information processing mechanisms – such as dissociations between conscious and unconscious memories, biased information search, and automatic versus controlled processes – that plausibly explain how self-deception in general can be implemented. I suggest that a more comprehensive theory of self-deception will require identifying specific psychological design features relevant to different domains of deception. These domains will be defined, in large part, by predictable regions of social conflict, such as sexual conflict, intrasexual rivalry, parent-offspring conflict, and coalitional conflict.

Consider sexual conflict in the mating arena. It has been documented that men and women attempt to deceive members of the opposite sex in different ways and for different goals (Buss 2003; Haselton et al. 2005). Men, for example, sometimes deceive women about the depth of their feelings of emotional involvement for the goal of short-term sexual access. According to the VH&T theory of self-deception, men should self-deceive in this domain, truly believing that they feel more deeply about the woman than they actually do, prior to sexual consummation, in order to better carry out the deceptive strategy – a prediction yet to be tested.

Studies of personal ads that have checked self-reported qualities with objectively measured qualities find that men tend to deceive about their height and women about their age and weight. Men report that they are taller and women that they are younger and weigh less than objective verifications reveal. Do men really believe their deceptively reported stature? Do women really believe their deceptively reported youth and shaved pounds? And if so, do these self-deceptions better enable deception of opposite sex on these qualities? These are examples of sex-differentiated empirical predictions from the VH&T theory of self-deception that require empirical study. If verified, they would imply that men's and women's psychology of self-deception contain somewhat different content-specific design features.

Deception within families differs from the exaggeration of mating qualities in the service of mate attraction. Do children delude themselves about their hunger in order to better deceive their parents about their true level of need? Do they believe their lies of the physical pain inflicted by their siblings in order to better manipulate their parents? Do parents truly believe that they love all their children equally, when they clearly do

not, in order to deceive their children for the goal of minimizing costly sibling conflict? Do stepparents truly believe that they love their stepchildren as much as their genetically related progeny? These within-family domains of deception point to psychological design features that differ from those within the mating domain, and they require specification in any comprehensive theory of deception and self-deception.

Wrangham (1999) hypothesized that males in warfare coalitions deceive themselves about the probability of victory, particularly in battles – a positive illusion bias. His hypothesis is that this form of self-deception functions to increase the likelihood of successful bluffs. A complementary hypothesis, I suggest, is that leaders self-deceive about the likelihood of their success to better unify and motivate other males within their coalition, with the goal of increasing the likelihood of success in battle. These hypotheses point to psychological design features associated with coalitional conflict that differ from those that occur in the domains of sexual conflict or within-family conflict. They also suggest a specific psychology of deception and self-deception present in men, but absent in women – specifications required for any comprehensive theory of deception and self-deception.

Analogous arguments can be made in other domains, such as intrasexual rivalry conflict, tactics of hierarchy negotiation, equity negotiations with friends, and tactics to deter enemies. The VH&T theory of self-deception provides a compelling information-processing foundation from which a more comprehensive theory can be built. Exploring deception in domain-specific and sex-differentiated ways, with the recognition that different adaptive problems often require somewhat different information-processing solutions, opens avenues for discovering a rich array of psychological adaptations that accompany the functional implementation of specific forms of deception and self-deception.

Get thee to a laboratory

doi:10.1017/S0140525X10002530

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Abstract: von Hippel & Trivers's central assertion that people self-deceive to better deceive others carries so many implications that it must be taken to the laboratory to be tested, rather than promoted by more indirect argument. Although plausible, many psychological findings oppose it. There is also an evolutionary alternative: People better deceive not through self-deception, but rather by not caring about the truth.

In their thoughtful and stimulating essay, von Hippel & Trivers (VH&T) assert a number of intriguing proposals, none more thought-provoking than their central one that self-deception evolved in order to facilitate the deception of others.

My overall reaction to this central assertion is favorable. It is a well-formed hypothesis that readers easily grasp and that resonates with their intuition. The hypothesis, however, lacks one characteristic I wish it had more of – data. That is, the hypothesis is not completely new, having been forwarded, in some form or another, over that last quarter-century (Trivers 1985; 1991), and so it could profit now from direct data that potentially support it rather than from any additional weaving of indirect arguments and findings such as those the authors have spun here. It should be relatively easy to construct empirical studies to see if people engage in self-deception more eagerly when they must persuade another person of some proposition. Similarly, it should be easy to create experiments to see if people are more persuasive to others to the extent they have persuaded themselves of some untruth first.