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**The Gift of Flattery:
A Social and Biological Analysis of Deceptive Practices
By
Judith L. Sparks, B.A. (Hons.)**

**A thesis submitted to
The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

**Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
April 11, 2001
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Analysis of Deceptive Practices**

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the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Charles Laughlin, Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University
April 24, 2001

Abstract

New discoveries about how the brain works, as well as an increased awareness of genetic contributions to behaviour, are transforming how culture is viewed. For anthropologists, these advances provide an opportunity for the unification of knowledge that will enhance the understanding of human social exchange, among other things. This paper explores how deceptive practices such as flattery actually have a biological basis that plays a part in how they are socially expressed. Flattery operates as a manipulative gift requiring impression management and reciprocity to be successful. Understanding the evolutionary components to the maintenance and persistence of deceptive practices offers a comprehensive understanding of who is most likely to deceive, why, and under what circumstances they are most likely to do so. Deception is a ubiquitous element of social exchange across all cultures and flattery, when done discreetly, is a particularly effective strategy for social advancement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Standing in line at the bank recently, I observed a situation unfold between the female teller and a male customer. The customer said he was withdrawing a large amount of money to send his wife on a trip to Europe, to visit a friend. The teller asked why he was not planning to accompany her. He replied she would have a better chance to visit with her friend if she did not have to worry about keeping him entertained. This seemed like a thoughtful gesture, and the teller noted as much. Everything seemed to be going fine when suddenly, the mood changed. The customer responded to the teller's suggestion he was a very nice man by complimenting her on how nice she was. Her expression changed completely and the conversation came to a rapid conclusion. What went wrong?

I was next in line. The teller motioned for me to approach the wicket saying: "C'mon, butter me up." This remark was made in response to the male customer's comment the teller knew I overheard. His attempt at flattery clearly failed; her comment to me suggested she saw through his feeble effort. His comment was perceived as inappropriate and thus his motive became suspect. Perhaps he thought that by flattering her she would like him more. It is seldom that simple.

In any situation, there are a number of factors at work. How the situation unfolds will be affected by its purpose. Exchanges and how well they are performed will influence the outcome. Social life depends on the formation of complex coalitions that rely on sophisticated manipulation of social knowledge and this ability is governed, in part, by brain structure (Dunbar, 1996: 64). Living in relatively stable groups of individuals requires give-and-take, an ability to remember who is reliable and an

investment of time and effort in maintaining these relationships. Many factors influence the amount of time invested, but one of the primary factors is whether or not there is a measure of reciprocation. Flattery, on the surface, appears to offer some kind of exchange with its target, but it is a gift that comes with strings attached.

Flattery is a subset of reciprocal altruism. It is part of an implicit exchange, a gift that hints at the expectation of something in return (Stengel, 2000: 20). The bank teller's negative response to the customer's flattery probably stemmed from an unwillingness to be saddled with any of his possible expectations. Flattery is one way interpersonal attraction is initiated and developed, but it can also be seen as manipulative. Cultural rules establish how individuals ought to act in various situations. When those norms are violated, sanctions may be imposed. If done discreetly, flattery is understood to demonstrate sociability and perceptiveness about the attributes of others.

Flattery is useful for individual advancement in a variety of social situations: it represents a strategy for optimizing the benefits received from interpersonal contact. Individuals respond to acts of apparent altruism or selflessness with feelings of friendship that are reciprocated (Trivers, 1971: 52). Although generosity from a non-friend may be taken as an overture to friendship, how the overture is perceived depends on the circumstance. For the bank teller, being 'hit-on' by the customer was inappropriate in the situation. Flattery, like other types of deception, works best when undetected.

Flattery offers a means for getting away with seeming nice without actually being nice. Some deception is generally implied, but as Stengel (2000: 240) notes the degree may vary and it is not always bad or even necessarily conscious. Flattery is "a kind of manipulation of reality that uses the enhancement of another for our own self-advantage"

(Stengel, 2000: 15). As Mehrabian (1970) notes, a human's ability to modify his or her actions to influence that of others is perhaps one of life's most important tools both in public and in private. Living in a social group demands a measure of resourcefulness that includes the ability to deceive. Although variations in deceptive practices exist, we are all subjected, in varying degrees, to the consequences of deception.

This paper examines the role of deception, in particular flattery, in social life. Examining it from both a social and biological perspective offers insight into how evolutionary forces have shaped genetic influences on behavior and the implications of this for culture. In order to understand the relations among and between groups it is important to consider the motivations that may be at work in situations. Historically, sacred and secular moral codes have prohibited deceptive practices. Hurka (1994: 85) suggests the conflict we experience between right and wrong is eternal because morality involves a sacrifice of individual interest for that of others. I will argue that understanding the existence of deceptive practice goes beyond simply a cultural view of morality.

Culture and genetics are interdependent. As Barkow (1989: 41) notes, "culturally patterned behaviour is not something that is separate from our genetic evolution: it is the expression of that evolution, the expression of our genes, as mediated through evolved psychological mechanisms." Complex social relations depend on social intelligence, which is part genetic and part cultural. Barash (1977: 8) suggests behaviour, even complex social behaviour, has evolved and is adaptive. We are, however, the products of a process of evolution that took place in a succession of environments which in many ways bear little resemblance to the environments we live in today (Cronk, 1999: xiii).

Increases in population, for example, mean we must deal with greater numbers of people that we know only slightly or not at all. Deception plays an important role in helping individuals adjust to changes that have occurred.

Deception, although widely maligned, is an important element of social contact. It provides individuals with a way of extricating themselves from awkward situations and helps facilitate the strengthening of social bonds vital to group life. In its most troublesome guises, it can lead to mistrust and damage to one's reputation. There is concern widespread deception is an indication of a reduction in manners and trust, which represents a decline in integrity that is potentially threatening to society (Scott, 1993: 41). Understanding the role of deception in human contacts sheds some new light on these concerns. Recognizing why individuals deceive, and under what circumstances they are most likely to so, has many potential benefits.

Understanding the contribution of evolutionary components (see Barkow, 1982; Durham 1982; Chagnon, 1982) to the maintenance and persistence of deceptive practices as forms of social exchange offers a more comprehensive understanding of who is most likely to deceive, why, and under what circumstances they are most likely to do so. This would be valuable information to have before entering the field. The challenge of discerning between honesty and dishonesty can be critical to the validity of social science data.¹ Yet, depending on the motivation of the individuals involved, this may be easier said than done. Deception appears to be a ubiquitous element of human contact across all

¹ Margaret Mead's experience in Samoa is a classic example of deception in anthropology. See also Myrdene Anderson (1986). Anderson describes the Saami of Norway, a group she worked and lived with for six years, as a culture of liars. Unfortunately for the Saami she fails to take into consideration broader social issues such as conflicts between the Saami minority and their surrounding Norwegian neighbours that likely temporarily increased levels of deception due to stresses related to their situation (Sparks, 1999).

cultures (Scott, 1993: 3; Barkow, 1989: 63), and is important to study because of deception's widespread use and the potential consequences of that use for individuals that is both negative and positive.

The individual has a central role in the transmission of culture, which in turn serves as the context for social contact. Social contact, according to Goffman (1959: 15), is the mutual influence that occurs between individuals when they are in each other's immediate physical presence. Through this social contact they are enmeshed in a larger social order exemplified by the situation. A situation has a broader context than the two individuals directly considered in social contact and for that reason is the preferred object of analysis for this paper.

A situation encompasses a broad context including any and all individuals who are co-present. Situations begin when two, or more, co-presents engage in mutual surveillance and lapse when the second-last person has left (Goffman, 1963: 18). A dyad, then, is a minimum requirement but additional individuals may be physically present or, as is the case with gossip, only perceptually present. Whereas an interaction focuses on the two main actors, a situation broadens the perspective to encompass the bystanders who may also influence the behaviour.

In the case of the bank, for instance, I was a bystander. The bank teller made eye contact with me throughout her dialogue with the customer. I was peripherally involved with what was going on, and even after the customer departed the situation continued to unfold. Despite the fact he had physically left the bank, he was still socially present as the bank teller and I talked about what had transpired. It appeared he had been attempting to create some kind of affiliation with the teller, but ran into difficulty because

he did not adhere to the appropriate role requirements (Goffman, 1961: 93). Role requirements specify the typical response expected for a bank customer, for example, and adhering to them demonstrates social intelligence. Building-up and maintaining networks of affiliations relies on social intelligence for guidance. .

Transmission of social information, such as gossip, occurs in networks formed by sets of dyads and triads; larger groups are composed of ensembles of dyads and triads (Pollard, 2000: 1). The individual's position within the network "reinforces and is reinforced by that individual's cognitive and communicative dispositions" (Philipsen and Albrecht, 1997: 8). How they perceive and define their situation determines how they will act, and this may vary somewhat depending on gender. Sharing of information may take place on multiple levels, but there is interplay between the levels; individual and societal levels mutually affect one another (Knapp et al, 1987: 390-1). Conveying a preferred image across all levels generally requires some measure of impression management. Although culture influences the type of image we may wish to cultivate, there are also biological factors at work that affect social exchange.

Consilience is an effective approach to understanding what is occurring in social situations. Consilience is a perspective. It proposes a unification of knowledge among disciplines and thus offers researchers an opportunity to more fully understand the subject matter. I believe the addition of a biological perspective will enhance anthropological analyses. Geertz (1973: 16) contends the significance of an ethnographic account rests on the degree to which anthropologists are able to clarify what is occurring in a given situation. More fully understanding how and why certain practices occur can, to

paraphrase Geertz, thicken our descriptions. Consilience allows the real relationship between behaviour and culture to be more clearly understood.

Pinker (2000: 91) suggests consilience is a trend that will accelerate; we should expect to see the natural sciences and the social sciences more closely connected which will allow for a greater understanding of human nature. Social scientists study human behaviour, society, and culture. It seems logical to make use of any available information from the natural sciences that will inform any analyses and conclusions derived from these studies. In this paper I will draw on the study of biology to more fully understand the social practice of deception.

For social scientists, considering biological aspects contributing to how humans act can enhance the study of culture. Brain structure and neural processes, fine-tuned over millennia, influence how culture is perceived and expressed. This paper offers a biological analysis of deceptive behaviour and seeks to demonstrate that flattery, in particular, can be a successful strategy in any social exchange provided it is done effectively.

In Chapter 2, I will take an initial look at the practice of deception. I suggest there are three main types of deception that can be achieved in a variety of ways. Underlying intent is the distinguishing factor between types. Brain structure is also a consideration. An ability to deceive well depends upon social intelligence that requires management of many social relationships and innovative problem solving. Brain size and development play a key role in this ability. Chapter 3 focuses on gossip and flattery as deceptive practices and seeks to demonstrate that despite the, often, negative view taken of them they perform an important role in social situations. Chapter 4 offers a

discussion on the social implications of deceptive practices. A tripartite approach, including Goffman's work on impression management, Triver's seminal piece on reciprocal altruism, and Mauss' look at the part that gifts play in situations, forms the basis of the theoretical section. Chapter 5 examines some studies conducted on aspects of lying and flattery and explores the findings which confirm that flattery, when undetected, is an effective tool for gathering social rewards.

CHAPTER 2: Half Truths, No Truths and Miscellaneous Deceptions

Deception, as Beahrs (1996: 5) notes, plays a considerable role in the furthering of individual self-interest at the expense of others. It is also important in developing and maintaining the social cooperation upon which all societies depend. In the long run, deception is often necessary simply to negotiate the potential social land mines that exist in everyday life, for example, shaking hands with an adversary offers a reassuring denial of hostile intent and a failure to do so would be viewed as a flagrant social violation. In this chapter I will discuss different types of deception and how the human brain is structured to deal with the complexities of social life. Deceptive behaviours can help to bond individuals with conflicting interests, but they can also undermine trust, which is essentially the glue holding personal relationships, communities, and societies together.

Trust can be defined as “the socially learned and socially confirmed expectations that people have of each other, of the organizations and institutions in which they live, and of the natural and moral social orders that set the fundamental understandings of their lives. The most general expectations are for the persistence and fulfillment of the natural and moral social orders” (Barber, 1983: 164). All definitions of trust imply expectations of some kind, and Barber (1983: 9) suggests all social contact is an endless process of acting on expectations that consist of cognitive, emotional and moral elements. Deception relies on a background of trust, and general honesty, in order to succeed.

Deception can be a characteristic of social exchanges. It is a stratagem that can be manifested in a variety of ways. Lying is the most frequent method of deception, but it can also occur in the transmission of gossip and flattery, for example; sharing false information about another, or giving false praise. Although the distinction “between truth

and falsity hinges on issues of ontology and epistemology, truthfulness and deception belong to the moral domain of intention" (Barnes, 1994: 10). The defining characteristic of the deceptive presentation is that it is *purposive*² in its design and is intended to convey a false impression is generally achieved through the fabrication of some aspect of the exchange.

Considerable thought has been given to lying from a variety of perspectives. Simmel argues lies, under modern conditions, have become more devastating than they once were (Wolff, 1950). We rely heavily on others to be honest and base many of our decisions on the premise that they are honest. Goffman (1986) explores fabrications, and breaks them down into various categories relating to their impact on social relations. He finds the context in which they are told plays an important part in how they are ultimately judged. Someone bluffing in a card game is viewed quite differently than someone who lies to hurt others. Scott (1996) examines different types of lies and how they come into practice in various types of relationships. She views lying as primarily a moral choice. Zagorin (1996) offers an historical perspective on the practice of lying. Unlike Scott, Zagorin seems to recognize there are situations where one may have little choice about whether to lie or not.

Grover (1993a; 1993b) examines how role conflict can be resolved through deception. Ruane, Cerulo, and Gerson (1994), and Grover and Hui (1994) deal with the implications and consequences of deception in the workplace. Perceived integrity is an integral element of long-term success. Kashy and DePaulo (1996) conducted a study

² The word 'purposive' implies there is specific intent involved on the part of the deceiver. Although misunderstandings are possible in any exchange they can often be unintentional and are therefore irrelevant to this discussion. Additionally, self-deception, wherein an individual is convinced of the veracity of their statement even though it may be false is likewise extraneous to this discussion.

focusing on the lying habits of undergraduate students. Individuals deemed to be less highly socialized engaged in more self-serving lies. Feeley (1996) investigated individual's motivation to lie in experimental lie detection. Questions have been posed about how to conduct experimental research into lying and Feely concluded a method that employs sanctioned lies is useful in examining interpersonal deception. Lewis and Saarni (1993), Ford (1996), and Barnes (1994) take a psychological approach to the study of lying, which is useful in attempting to understand the underlying emotions influencing overt behaviours.

Ekman (1992) deals with a wide range of practical information about lying and lie detection, and considers many of the ethical implications surrounding lies in the public and private realms. He defines lying as the situation where one person intends to mislead another, doing so deliberately, without prior notification of this intent and without having been explicitly asked to do so by the target (Ekman, 1992: 28). When defining lying he notes it is not just the liar that must be considered, but the liar's target as well for it is an interdependent process. The lie can only be successful if the target is taken-in by it.

There are certain situations where individuals may knowingly agree to be misled, such as when they watch an actor in a play. When false information is presented as what the target believes to be the truth, however, they are being lied to. In all cases of lying, misleading the victim is deliberate, that is, the liar intends to misinform the victim. "The lie may or may not be justified, in the opinion of the liar or the community. The liar may be a good or bad person, liked or disliked. But the person who lies could choose to lie or to be truthful, and knows the difference between the two" (Ekman, 1992: 26-27). Although intent is central to how lying is perceived the underlying motivation on the part

of the deceiver must also be taken into account. If, for example, I tell someone their new haircut looks good even though it does not and my underlying motive is to spare their feelings, then it is generally permissible. If, on the other hand, I tell them their outfit looks great even though I do not believe it does with the hope they will go out in public and embarrass themselves, then my motive is selfish and therefore reproachable.

Goffman (1986) argues there are two main kinds of deceptions: benign and exploitive. Benign fabrications may be justified. They are in the interest of the target, or if not exactly in their interest, then at least not against their interest (Goffman, 1986: 87). At times, people may choose to give an acceptable excuse or comment, rather than tell a truth that might be hurtful or disruptive. This is commonly known as telling a 'white' lie. These are often used to avoid, or ease, awkward situations and are, generally, considered to be innocuous. The person telling the white lie is motivated by a desire to spare the feelings of the target, but this strategy, in my opinion, can also be self-serving.

Benign lies, or lies created ostensibly to protect others, often protect the person telling them from having to deal with a potentially unpleasant situation. These lies may serve to delay a confrontation at an emotional time for the target but if discovered they may lead to a sense of betrayal that, if repeated, may undermine the level of trust in the relationship. Can you decide for others what they should or should not know? Although the benign fabricator may claim to have the best interest of the target at heart it may also be true they do not wish to deal with the consequences of sharing unpleasant information, as few people like to be the bearer of bad news. Benign deceptions, however, may also be employed to allow an individual to avoid embarrassment. By allowing them an

opportunity to 'save face,'³ as Goffman (1959: 231) explains, we help avoid creating a scene, which is our duty as members of the audience.

Early in life we learn that being seen in a favourable light has its rewards and this view undoubtedly persists throughout our lives. The desire to be accepted and feel like part of the group inspires us to present our best face, and where necessary to embellish the truth. "When an individual appears before others, he knowingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part" (Goffman, 1959: 242). When something occurs which is contrary to his or her fostered impression, there are significant consequences. Social contact may be uncomfortably interrupted. As part of a group, whether it is a couple, family or profession, your loss of face impacts on others. Although the chance of disruption may vary with the situation, when it comes to more strategic, or ruthlessly self-promoting, deception the consequences become more serious for all involved.

Exploitive fabrications employ strategies designed to further the self-interest of the deceiver and they are clearly inimical to the interests of the target (Goffman, 1986: 103). Unlike benign fabrications, exploitive fabrications can result in legal action, in some cases, and in serious damage to one's reputation. It is generally easiest to lie to people with whom we do not have intimate bonds; often the chances of being caught are somewhat limited, so it may seem like a worthwhile risk. In personal relationships the risk of being discovered in a lie may be greater, and the consequences of that discovery

³ The term "face" is defined as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" and a "line" is a pattern of verbal and silent acts through which the individual expresses their view of the situation (Goffman, 1967:5). A person may be said to *have*, or *be in*, or *maintain* face when the line he takes presents an image of him that is internally consistent, and that is supported by judgements and evidence conveyed by other participants (6). How well people know us will determine their ability to make an assessment of whether our behaviour, at any given time, is consistent with how we might normally be expected to behave.

more dramatic. Nonetheless, in both situations the results of being labeled a liar can be injurious to one's reputation and this can have implications for one's future opportunities in life. From a cost-benefit perspective, it would seem lying could be a hazardous endeavour so it must be done cautiously. Certain types of lies present less risk than other kinds.

The classifications of benign and exploitive fabrications inadequately encompass the position flattery holds in social situations. I suggest it be placed in a third category combining aspects of the other two: strategic deceptions. This category, which includes flattery, may benefit others, while at the same time furthering the self-interest of the perpetrator. Flattery often results in a mutually rewarding exchange and any repercussions for the flatterer are usually not serious due to its subjective nature. The stakes are lower in flattery than in exploitive deceptions. If challenged we can claim that we were just trying to be nice thereby defending our comments, so serious damage to one's reputation is unlikely. Nonetheless, flattery must be done discreetly.

There are a number of potential approaches to flattery requiring different levels of deception. According to Scott (1996: 16), an overt or outright deception is the least common type of lie. What seems to be the most common form entails the use of half-truths, lies containing some but not all of the true information. Telling half-truths can be an effective approach for flattery. Other types of lies can be achieved through the use of omissions, or concealments, intended to mislead the target.

Given a choice, most liars usually prefer to conceal information, rather than having to falsify. Concealing is generally considered to be easier than falsifying as it does not require the fabrication of any details potentially difficult to recall if you are

challenged. Concealment is passive and therefore much easier to disguise even though the consequences may be just as damaging for the target. Goffman (1967: 30) contends that hinted communication is deniable, so people may choose to imply things rather than come right out and say them.

When it comes to flattery, a strategic deception, an individual may focus on a trait or quality the target actually possesses and then embellish upon it, while neglecting to mention any negative attributes that might be relevant. Whereas, a total fabrication of characteristics might result in suspicion about the underlying motives of the flatterer, elaborating on existing attributes is less likely to be questioned. Slight exaggerations of information, and slight understatements are the least subject to constraint.

Although some lies must be told verbally, they can also be achieved silently. The use of gestures and nods permit lies of omission to be committed in this way. One simply neglects to convey vital information. When questioned directly, for example, shrugging one's shoulders suggests you do not know the answer. In some situations, even silence can be interpreted as agreement, which may serve to mislead. In information conveyance networks, lies can be transmitted in a number of ways conferring an advantage to the individual. Consequently, being able to detect them can also be advantageous. To this end we use our senses to scan the environment and other individuals for cues to deception.

Facial expressions are considered the most reliable indicators of deception. Several facial expressions are universally associated with particular sentiments, such as smiling when you are happy, but cultural factors also influence the triggers on expression of sentiments (McNeill, 1998: 240). Display rules, which regulate when to show or not

to show an expression, play an important part in any situation and can help ease moments of uncertainty. Goffman (1964: 135) outlines how cultural rules establish the way individuals are to conduct themselves and how these rules for commingling, when adhered to, socially organize the behaviour of those in the situation. At times, the observation of display rules may require us to effect deceptive facial expressions in keeping with what is deemed culturally appropriate for the situation. In any situation, however, an actor's strategy is dependent upon, and constrained by, the strategies of others (Garbett, 1970: 224).

Gender variations play a part in deceptive strategies. Men and women tend to lie about different things and for different reasons. Differences in socialization play a role, but there are also fundamental biological elements contributing to these variations (Watson, 1995: 178). From a Darwinian evolutionary perspective men and women have distinct reproductive strategies influencing how they relate to one another. For men, status perception is central; competition among males is engaged in on many levels. For women, lies are often benign in nature; they are often employed to promote affiliations with others. When it comes to mate selection, however, women also engage in strategic deceptions designed to attract the best possible mate.

During the dating phase, relationships between men and women are often prone to extensive lying. In dating situations, people may exaggerate the truth to 'show off,' or try to impress others; they may actually go to great lengths to avoid admitting the truth. Individuals commonly lie to avoid becoming overly involved, or they may 'stretch' the truth believing it will enhance a relationship. In later stages of the relationship, men in particular may lie to avoid intimacy (Scott, 1996: 102).

Simmel suggests some concealment is crucial in even the most intimate relationships (Wolff, 1950: 315). We camouflage our thoughts and emotions and learn to accommodate social expectations of all kinds. We may be adhering to cultural display rules, or at times a desire for privacy may be paramount. Privacy may be defined as control of information about oneself (McNeill, 1998: 241). An attempt to maintain a level of privacy can be seen as impression management, and at times it may require some measure of deception to be maintained.

Our everyday existence centres on contact with other people. How we perceive the individual or the situation will determine our response to them and theirs to us. If it is someone we do not like, we may feel compelled to make up some excuse that allows us to quickly remove ourselves from the situation. This, however, is not always possible. We may be forced to deal with a boss, colleague or family member we do not like, for example, in a culturally proscribed manner: deference to the boss, or respect for a parent. Additionally, they may stand between us and some desired outcome, or reward, which increases the likelihood of deception occurring in all of its many guises. Competitive situations result in winners and losers. Winning is certainly preferable, but it is only one reason for lying.

The most basic reason individuals lie is self-protection; it can be used as a defense mechanism designed to protect them, or another of their choosing. Children, for example, frequently lie to adults to avoid punishment for wrongdoing; adults often lie to children and justify it by claiming they are doing it for the child's own good. People lie to cover up misdeeds, mask sentiments, or repress them in some way; they may also be attempting to claim a desired identity. They lie to maintain a sense of privacy, to gain

power and control, and to deny a source of conflict or unpleasantness. Individuals are most likely to lie if they are under stress, attack or at risk in some way (Scott, 1996: 20). In addition, it is easiest to lie to people with whom we do not have intimate bonds. When there is little, or no, trust involved we do not feel the same level of remorse, generally, as we would if we lied to someone we knew well.

Although 'white lies' may be considered manipulative, they generally are not. Among friends, lies often tend to be of the 'white' or benign variety. To be caught telling more serious lies would threaten the friendship. People do not, as a rule, choose to be friends with people they perceive they cannot trust. The breaking of commitments in friendships is serious because it indicates a lack of dependability. This contravenes expectations in any relationship that relies on reciprocity such as friendship.

Scott (1996: 81) asserts that perhaps the most damaging lies involving friends are those arising over money. Friends, however, are more likely than others to forgive our transgressions (Scott, 1996: 79). We tend to invest considerable time and effort into close friendships, and we often depend upon those people for support in times of difficulty. It often requires a serious breach of trust, or repeated problems, for us to sever our relationships with those we consider as good friends.

Good friends notwithstanding, many people have a relativistic ethic whereby it is acceptable for them to lie to certain groups of people or to lie under certain circumstances. Lying to your teenager, for example, about things you did when you were young may seem necessary when you are trying to convince them not to make the same mistakes. At times, lying to someone may seem like the lesser of two evils if the truth will be hurtful. In order to maintain a sense of internal homeostasis, we justify to

ourselves what we have done (Scott, 1996: 33). For women, the most common reason for lying is to spare someone's feelings, or to make them feel better. For men and women, most other reasons revolve around gaining some kind of advantage such as making oneself look good in the eyes of others.

Revenge or jealousy can also motivate people to lie (Scott, 1996: 20). These types of lies can have potentially disastrous results as they often occur in close, personal relationships. Relationships with relatives can be quite different from others because of blood or marriage connections; you are bound to them whether you like it or not. Lies amongst relatives can create extremely intense situations because they are often fueled by long histories of blame, or competition for family attention. The most intense lies arise among relatives over money, or when someone dies and property must be divided. It often brings out the very worst side of people. People in these situations often know you very well. They know your vulnerabilities and may choose to capitalize on them leading to a tremendous sense of betrayal.

Often for lies to be believed they must be innovative...

It's All In Your Mind: Neocortex and Group Size

Human beings have a fascination with the complexities of the social world and the human mind has adapted over time to deal with these intricacies. We are especially suited to dealing with social problems and this ability has been selected for, from an evolutionary perspective, through the process of natural selection (Dunbar, 1995). Increases in the size of the neocortex have afforded humans, as well as other apes and some monkeys, enhanced cognitive abilities that contribute to an active social life.

Larger-than-average relative brain size correlates positively with the size of the social groups formed by the various species with optimum size for humans being about 150 members (Aiello and Dunbar, 1993: 189; Dunbar, 1995: 126). The maintenance and stability of these groups depends on social grooming which is unique among the primates. Grooming is used to curry favour. It can be done physically or, in the case of humans, verbally. It serves to strengthen bonds between individuals.

An awareness of the feelings and needs of others is essential for the development of meaningful relationships. The ability to interpret facial expressions of emotion, for example, allows you to gauge your approach, or response, in a given situation and this helps facilitate coalitions and alliances vital to survival and successful reproduction. Primate coalitions are much more complex than the kinds of coalitions found in other groups of animals because they are often set up months, or even years, ahead in anticipation of future need (Dunbar, 1995: 118). They rely on detailed social knowledge of not only the likely competitors in a social group, but also the available allies. The development of a more complex social structure relied on social intelligence to facilitate the relationships between individuals upon which our primate ancestors' evolutionary success depended.

An ability to deceive well depends in large measure upon social intelligence. It requires that you understand others well enough to be able to predict correctly how they will respond to the false information that you offer, and this ability correlates with the relative size of the neocortex. As mentioned, there is a relationship between the relative size of the neocortex and the size of the social group in primates, and this is significant because an increase in the group size demands an increased ability to understand and

remember numerous relationships. Cole (1998: 188) concurs, arguing large groups are unstable unless the individual relationships within the groups are serviced regularly. Large complex groups need large complex brains in order to manage their social worlds.

Dunbar (1995: 119) argues the social world of the average monkey or ape differs in two significant ways from other mammals or birds: first, they form alliances against each other and, secondly, they engage in tactical, or strategic deception. As advances in the study of genetics reveal an ever more complex relationship between genes and behavior, many activities once held to be culturally motivated are now being seen as having a biological basis moderated by culture. This challenges some long-held views in anthropology, in particular, how we define culture, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

There is evidence to suggest that cultural influences have an impact on levels of deception but it seems highly unlikely that a single gene will ever be found to be responsible for deception. As McNerney (2000; c.f. McNerney, 1999) notes, behaviours are complex traits involving multiple genes. This complicates the search for genetic contributions. Research into genes and behaviour depends on studies of families and populations looking at who expresses particular traits. Twin studies (c.f. Segal, 1999; Wright, 1998) have explored the heritability of numerous traits with notable results, although there is debate about the significance of the findings. Presumably as the field of genetics advances some of the concerns will be assuaged.

Despite the fact that it is not possible to point to a locus for deception, there is still considerable evidence to suggest a genetic component to deceptive practices. McNeill

(1998: 245) declares that lying is genetic, although he, unfortunately, does not provide a reference for the study he mentions. Barkow (1989), however, is more thorough. He contends that the manipulation of the behaviour of others is in our fitness interests and has been selected for through evolution (Barkow, 1989: 65). He points out that adult human beings are likely unequaled in the degree to which our inclusive fitness depends upon our ability to influence the actions of those around us. "How others perceive and evaluate us, our reputations, our images, the gossip around us, all these are the real determinants of whether we receive aid when we need it, of the quality and quantity of our sexual and parental partners, and of the future of our children" (Barkow, 1989: 98). The more complex the system of social relations becomes the more we are forced to rely on trust, which leaves us increasingly vulnerable to deception.

CHAPTER 3: A Lie By Any Other Name: Deceptive Gossip and Flattery

Humans are social beings whose world is preoccupied with the interests and minutiae of everyday social life (Dunbar, 1996: 4). “Our much vaunted capacity for language seems to be mainly used for exchanging information on social matters; we seem to be obsessed with gossiping about one another” (6-7). Gossip, typically, takes place between individuals already established in some kind of relationship. “Two kinds of social relationships are involved in any gossip event: those between the gossipers and their subject and those between the gossipers themselves. Gossip is both talk about and talk with others” (Brenneis, 1992: 152). It is argued that gossip, though appearing moralistic, is actually a device strategically used by individuals to advance their own interest (151). This chapter will explore the connections between gossip and flattery and the part they play in social exchange.

Flattery and gossip are information exchange activities that are performance based. Whereas, gossip tends to be a more casual form of conversation, flattery is typically more formal. Flattery often occurs with people with whom we would like to be better acquainted, and from whom we desire some kind of benefit or reward. Both gossip and flattery, however, deal with a person’s good name and relate to alliances established and maintained through on-going contact. Both can be applied in the pursuance of personal or partisan ends (Abrahams, 1970: 290).

Pinker (1997: 540) suggests gossip is a popular pastime in all human societies because knowledge is empowering. “Knowing who needs a favor and who is in a position to offer one, who is trustworthy and who is a liar, who is available (or soon to become available) and who is under the protection of a jealous spouse or family—all give

obvious strategic advantages in the games of life. That is especially true when the information is not yet widely known and one can be the first to exploit an opportunity, the social equivalent of insider trading" (Pinker, 1997: 540). Gossip, as a form of casual conversation, is important in the maintenance and modification of our social identities for it serves to help create, and reflect, our social worlds (Slade, 1997: 43).

McFarlane (1977: 95) defines gossip as a morally derogatory conversation about the social activities of other people. The minimum prerequisite is that the other person or persons being discussed are not present. Gossip tends to circulate in the bounds of a small, intimate group (Turner & Killian, 1987: 52). This definition, however, may be too narrow in scope to fully encompass all that gossip entails. Expanding the definition of gossip to include a broader understanding of how and why it is utilized will underscore its importance in social situations.

Leach (1997: 307) argues that defining gossip can be challenging because it can mean many things to many people, and depending on the context, it can mean different things to the same person. She contends that "at its extreme, however, it is easy to think of all gossip as petty, ill-willed, too often unfounded; as either trivial and thus demeaning to those whose lives it rakes over; or as outright malicious. Indeed, dictionary definitions reinforce the view of gossip at its worst as destructive or, at best, trivial" (Leach, 1997: 307). These definitions are problematic as they often serve to perpetuate stereotypes limiting how gossip is perceived.

Gossip is generally viewed with disdain (Leach, 1997: 308). It is often regarded as a form of contact most frequent among women (Slade, 1997: 50); the image of the female gossip peeping out windows to gather information about others is a popular one.

Malicious gossip is relatively rare, and Leach (1997: 311) suggests the paranoia surrounding gossip is related to the authorial control it presents. The control of words can provide the key to community status and personal power (Abrahams, 1970: 292). With gossip, "we can never know quite where it goes, whom it reaches, how it changes, how and by whom it is understood" (Leach, 1997: 311). Anthropologists observe gossip, while appearing moralistic, is actually a device strategically used by individuals or groups to advance their own interests (Brenneis, 1992: 151). In any social hierarchy discussing the failings of another member of the group can, for example, make the individual sharing the information seem more moral. Exhibiting the appropriate amount of disdain implies to the others present that you would never make the same mistake. Deceptive gossip can also be used as a stratagem to confuse, or divert, attention away from sensitive issues.

Gossip as a technique of information exchange can scramble personal data. It may also be a way for individuals to vent. People use this technique in defense of their own good name, and to malign or preserve the good name of others (Wilson, 1974: 101). Doing fieldwork that focuses on areas affecting reputation, such as Colson did with the Makah of Neah Bay (c.f. Wilson, 1974), for example, demands special consideration. Researchers need to be aware that their relationships with informants may be affected because the informants may endeavour to protect their privacy. Kinship information, for example, aiming to place individuals within a social hierarchy is likely to be contested. Indeed, any relationship may be subject to a withholding of information making an individual look bad in the eyes of others, and very often this is exactly the information others would like to have access to.

Gossip is effective because social reputation is at stake. The same is also true of flattery. Both verbal forms are purposeful and subject to 'rules' concerning how they are to be accomplished. Rules, for example, about how one is to gossip, with whom and about whom one can or cannot gossip, vary from culture to culture. As Goldschmidt (1972: 60) notes, it is important to understand what relevant role relationships exist in a social situation and what the normative expectations are for behaviour in that situation, as well as the cultural meaning it may suggest.

Slade (1997: 50) maintains gossip provides a way of building up and establishing shared attitudes and values; ways of exploring similarities and likenesses and I suggest flattery is very similar. Flattery and gossip can be used strategically to advance individual self-interest through deceptive means, and this makes them potentially disruptive to social relations. Flattery, because it involves abundant praise, is often more subject to scrutiny than gossip. An insincere performance or one deemed excessive by the target or bystanders, may result in a negative reaction to the flatterer. Their goal of establishing a relationship, or securing some kind of benefit will go unrealized, and their reputation may be tarnished so there is considerable pressure to effect a good performance.

Flattery

Flattery refers to a division of strategic deceptions purposively *designed* to influence a target person for some kind of gain or advantage. Part of a broader category of ingratiation, flattery is concerned with highlighting the attractiveness of one's personal qualities in pursuit of a desired end (Jones, 1964: 11). Flattery is considered to be illicit

because it falls outside an implicit contract underlying any social situation. Jones (1964: 4) notes there are common expectations in any given situation requiring each member to honour the accepted standard of conduct. Normative claims by participants are intended to ensure the development of a common definition of the situation supporting each participant. Flattery, however, operates in a subversive way by appearing to respect this contractual bargain while actually exploiting it for the benefit of the perpetrator.

Jones' (1964) work on ingratiation and flattery is the seminal text on the subject. Stengel (2000) sees flattery as a generally harmless epidemic in Western culture. Harrison et al (1998) examined ingratiation as a construct in organizational behaviour research and found there can be problems with how it is operationalized. Caudron (1997) discusses the prevalence of ingratiation in corporate settings and finds it is a successful strategy for advancement. Eastman (1994) found that how behaviours such as ingratiation are viewed by a supervisor influences employee outcomes.

Hall and Valde (1995) explore "brown-nosing" as a speech act and find it has definite negative cultural meanings in America. Kipnis and Vanderveer (1971) have looked at the role of ingratiation and flattery and found that when it is done effectively it can be a useful strategy for personal advancement. There is a common view it involves manipulative intent and deceitful execution (Jones, 1964: 3). Like gossip, it is often widely maligned. Stengel (2000: 275) notes there are an extraordinary number of synonyms, slang terms, and colloquialisms, for flattery. Most of these terms would be considered unflattering.

Both ingratiation and flattery are mildly pejorative in everyday usage. The general perceptions of a 'brownnoser' or a 'suck-up' has negative implications and is, thus, to be

avoided whenever possible. These words evoke connotations of dissimulation and deceit in social activities, especially self-presentation (Jones, 1964: 1). Flattery generally requires the falsification of information or, minimally, exaggeration of the truth. The use of over-generous praise is synonymous with flattery. It is strategic praise with purpose; driven by self interest its success depends on an effective performance.

Flattery relies on manipulation and uses the enhancement of another for self-advantage. It can even be genuine praise, but there is an underlying strategic intent and lack of sincerity. Flattery tends to be active deception, although that is not always the case. Flattery of omission, as lies of omission, occurs when someone fails to mention obvious faults, or chooses to overlook some public failure. By choosing to say nothing the flatterer suggests what happened was of little consequence to them, or was beneath notice. The reason for choosing to focus on positive traits, rather than negative, or overlooking certain aspects completely, would be to increase the appeal of the actor to the target and create some kind of reciprocal obligation.

Stengel (2000: 15) contends there are situations where flattery is mandatory. He notes the bride is always beautiful, few speak ill of the dead and babies must be complimented to the mother. The bride may not be attractive, the dead may have been annoying, and the baby may look like E.T., but to say nothing in such situations may be seen as rude. Seemingly benign lies also work to the flatterers' advantage in these situations for they demonstrate an apparent kindness. Although people tend not to overly question what they want to hear, you still must make the compliment plausible, and its success depends on disguising any motive other than sincerity.

The motive behind flattery is self-serving and Hall and Valde (1995: 404) identify two distinct forms of "brown-nosing." They conducted a study to explore cultural understanding of flattery as a speech act and through a variety of methods collected data suggesting social actors attribute two different labels to this practice: pitiful and reprehensible. Although both approaches are strategic deceptions, the motivation behind the pitiful brown-nosing is seen as being less grounded in the individual; it stems more from the requirements of the situation and is, therefore not judged as harshly. As in the apparent need to compliment a bride or a baby, or say something nice about the deceased, the flatterer, in pitiful brown-nosing, is motivated beyond strictly promoting themselves.

Reprehensible brown-nosing, on the other hand, is viewed as having no justifiable elements at all: the motivation behind it is completely selfish. In Hall and Valde's (1995: 404) study, individuals engaging in this behaviour were commonly described as "on an 'ego trip,' 'self-centered,' 'prideful,' and as someone who 'doesn't care about other people.'" After describing a display of brown-nosing one person noted, 'All he did was embarrass himself and make himself look stupid.' " These comments illustrate the contempt bystanders have for those perceived to be manipulative. This may have a long-term impact on their reputation. In a business context this reaction may be intensified because co-workers are in a competitive situation for potential advancement. Overt self-promotion may signal the individual is not a team player and this can be disruptive to organizational goals. Both pitiful and reprehensible brown-nosing undermine trust among individuals, so discretion is necessary for them to succeed.

For maximum effect compliments and praise should be administered judiciously. The flatterer must not appease the target person too quickly. The immediate goal is to

influence the target person's decision-making. By the introduction of nonessential considerations, such as whether they like you, the flatterer is able to favourably bias the responses of the target person and neutralize any negative responses or outcomes (Jones, 1964: 10). Establishing a friendship may be the ultimate goal because any obligation with this connection tends to be more stable and secure than an obligation based on a temporary association (Jones, 1964: 7).

A physician recently informed me of the problems she has with drug company representatives who attempt to establish relationships with her. As a prominent urologist she is frequently visited by sales representatives who offer her free samples of the drugs they are trying to promote. They attempt to ingratiate themselves to her by suggesting she is an "opinion leader" in her field. Her endorsement of their product could be lucrative, and they both know this all too well. In an effort to secure her support, the sales people offer her paid speaking engagements at conferences. Such engagements represent an opportunity for her to potentially raise her profile in the medical community, and perhaps beyond.

What happens if she accepts? This physician feels strongly that there are major ethical problems with this approach to doing business. She is in a position of public trust. Even if she were to believe a specific drug was one she could endorse, accepting anything from the drug company could be used to discredit her. She sees through the company's strategy and refuses to deal with them.

Other occupations have to deal with similar types of situations. In academia professors must deal with publishing company representatives. Celebrities are often approached to endorse a product for payment. They may have little or no prior

knowledge of the product they are being asked to endorse. If the product turns out to be inferior or substandard their reputation may be tarnished as a result.

Wilson (1974: 100) suggests a good name is the “most vital social possession of any given group of people as well as being its most vulnerable commodity. Each individual’s good name is defined by others according to shared and commonly-sanctioned criteria of interest, hence each individual is given integrity as a person while the sharing of criteria of interest defines a social group, particularly against outsiders.” The need for sociability, as Dunbar (1996: 18) notes, can be traced to primate development of group living as a mutual defense against predation.

As social animals, we hover in a continuous balance between two forces: the centripetal or unifying forces, which are driven by a fear of predation and produce the need for sociability; and centrifugal forces, created by overcrowding, that emphasize the appeal of a solitary existence (Dunbar, 1996: 19). Although the fear of predation may no longer be the driving force behind group unity in humans to the same degree, other benefits of living in a group still remain. Moreover, ever-increasing levels of human population make contact increasingly unavoidable.

Complex social relationships demand a great deal of effort from those involved. Bonds of reciprocity between unrelated neighbours in a group depend on the ability to keep track of those who have repaid, or fail to repay, a favour (Ridley, 1996: 69). Dunbar, as discussed, suggests brain size plays an important role in this ability and appears to be a determining factor in the size of group an individual inhabits. Among social animals the larger the group in which an individual lives, the bigger its neocortex is

relative to the rest of its brain. Keeping track of many social relationships, which is an imperative in a complex society, requires a big brain.

The maximum manageable group size for humans is about 150 people (Aiello and Dunbar, 1993: 189; Dunbar, 1995: 126). Maintaining this many relationships requires a selection process that continues across time as individuals enter and leave our lives. As needs change, some decisions must be made regarding membership in the group. Reputation is an important consideration, for it plays a vital part in reciprocity and, thus, affects our choice of associates.

When we pick and choose our associates, we can select those that we remember cooperated with us in the past, but we can also choose those whom others have told us can be trusted. We also tend to be drawn to those who signal in some way that they will co-operate (Ridley, 1996: 70). Their willingness to engage in gossip with us, or their use of flattery, may be interpreted as a desire to be part of our group. If we do not know them well, or they are part of another group to which we desire to gain access, we may use flattery to help establish some kind of connection that we can then transform into a new alliance.

Slade (1997: 60) suggests, that in group situations, "if any member does not join in the gossip, their reticence can be seen as not wanting to share confidentialities. If they continue to do so over time, they can marginalize themselves. Gossip, therefore, becomes a 'duty of membership of the group.' " Trusting those with whom you share gossip is important because your own reputation is potentially at stake when you share personal information about another. If the individual discussed becomes aware of your

discussion about them there may be hard feelings. The stereotypical image of the malicious gossip may be invoked in association with your good name.

With flattery, however, gossiping with a third party about the person that you wish to flatter may be an effective way of achieving your goal. The third party will then, hopefully, pass on the flattery to the intended target and its impact will be that much greater because it seems less contrived. In talking with the physician I mentioned earlier, we discovered we shared a mutual acquaintance, also a physician. The urologist made a number of favourable remarks about our mutual friend, which I shared with him the next time I saw him. This demonstrates that any time a group engages in gossip about an absent individual there is a chance this information will be repeated to the subject.

Caudron (1997: 41) offers a business example of gossiping with a third party for effective flattery. She considers how you might try to influence a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) if you were a senior manager. You could, for example, compliment the CEO on his, or her, business savvy, leadership style, or mode of dress. S/he might take the compliment at face value, and that would be the end of it; or you could tell another influential person about your opinions and hope they relay your compliment. Having someone else convey the compliment on your behalf makes your ulterior motive less obvious. The compliment may appear more genuine when it comes through another person, but they may also have their own motives for passing the information along.

Conveying second-hand news can also have a positive benefit for the third party passing the information along. Relating flattering information can be doubly flattering for the recipient. First, that the remark was made, and secondly, that the person who was told the information chose to direct it towards them. There is a certain amount of control

inherent in holding this kind of information and, although it may seem like a magnanimous gesture, or a gift, to pass it along there may be other motives associated with this action. Appearing to be well connected into a broader social network can effectively raise one's social status, and this is valuable for as Stengel (2000: 39) explains status hierarchies are prevalent in both nature, and human societies of all kinds.

Where status hierarchies prevail, flattery is often evident, for flattery is a technique aimed at raising an individual's status (Stengel, 2000: 39). Generally speaking, we like people who are nice to us and we are nice to people we like. Flattery represents a strategy for maximizing personal relationships and Jones (1964: 24) suggests three major classes of ingratiation tactics are employed to facilitate the desired outcome. These are other-enhancement, opinion conformity and self-presentation. Other-enhancement is the approach that comes closest to the widely held understanding of flattery in its everyday usage.

Other-enhancement involves the expression of directly enhancing, evaluative statements (Jones, 1964: 24-25). The effectiveness of other-enhancement seems to derive from the premise that we tend to like those who seem to like us. It is designed to convey the impression that the flatterer thinks highly of their target and they typically find ways to emphasize positive qualities while ignoring, or downplaying any negative attributes. Regardless of how the flatterer may really feel about their target, they must present their enhancing comments in a way that assures or promotes their credibility (Jones, 1964: 26).

Whereas other-enhancement is achieved by taking advantage of responses generated to expressions of liking, opinion conformity takes a slightly different approach. Jones (1964: 35) reports on a number of studies suggesting individuals tend to like others

whose values and beliefs appear to be similar to their own. "The tactic of opinion conformity ranges from simple agreement with expressed opinions, through more elaborate attempts to articulate the position presumed to be held by the other, to the most complex forms of behavior imitation and identification" (Jones, 1964: 35). This approach requires varying degrees of effort depending on how far the stratagem is to be developed. Simple agreement with verbal statements is relatively easy, but finding out how someone truly feels on an issue may be a complex undertaking. Maintaining views that may be contradictory to how you really feel can be costly, especially if they must be maintained over a long period of time and require adjustment in related opinions. Due to the potential risk that others might inform the target of contrary views, it may become necessary to maintain false views even with those who are only peripherally related to the target. Additionally, there is a risk to being viewed as too eager to agree with someone else. It may suggest you have no opinions of your own.

In a business situation, for example, being too quick to agree with the boss may backfire. They may interpret your consistent agreement as weakness. Instead, as Caudron (1997: 45) explains, providing some initial resistance to new ideas may allow for discussion resulting in your appearing to be a more careful and reasoned thinker when you finally agree. Successful conformity depends on knowing the audience and determining what is expected in any given situation. If imitation is seen as the most sincere form of flattery, a common aphorism, it may well be because maintaining the pretense can demand so much of the flatterer.

Conformity, as a flattering strategy, refers to a homogeneity of spoken ideas, but self-presentation, as the name suggests, focuses on the image an individual presents to

their target. An individual may present themselves in such a way as to promote their own positive qualities, proffer gifts of some kind, or they may choose to emulate their target and by so doing enhance, by implication, the merits of their target (Jones, 1964: 41). Additionally, through a controlled self-presentation an individual can present an image that implies they occupy a desirable social status. If the presentation is effective the resulting outcome may be that the target of this strategy will view the presenter as more intrinsically valuable and therefore they will garner greater respect and admiration than they otherwise would have. The axiom that nothing sells like success applies.

Successful self-presentation must be done with care and can be attempted in different ways, depending on the individual and the circumstances. Exaggerating strengths and minimizing weaknesses is, perhaps, the most obvious approach, but as Jones (1964: 42) notes, anyone who attempts to enhance themselves in competition with, or at the expense of, another is unlikely to elicit attraction or preferred treatment for their efforts. This approach can be particularly reprehensible. Appearing to compete too directly with the target, for instance, would preclude any possible benefits. Another approach would be to employ self-deprecation or humility.

Appealing to a target for some kind of assistance, or advice, places them in the position of being benevolent. Requests of this kind commonly signify admiration or respect for the potential advisor and play directly on the vanity of the recipient (Jones, 1964: 42). These also suggest a level of trust and imply a desire for the relationship to strengthen. Knowing whether to self-enhance or self-deprecate relies, however, on knowledge about the target, and also depends on individual strengths and weaknesses. Saying only good things about oneself smacks of conceit and exaggeration, particularly if

those traits are real and are common knowledge. Excessive self-denigration, on the other hand, often makes others uncomfortable when done to extreme. It leaves others uncertain of what to say beyond platitudes intended to offer some measure of reassurance. Establishing credibility depends on subtlety.

Credibility is ultimately affected by the plausibility of the statement. Even if the performance seems sincere it will be unsuccessful if the compliments are clearly unwarranted or seem too outlandish. Levels of self-esteem will also affect the view taken of flattery. Individuals with low levels of self-esteem may be more suspicious of comments made than are those with higher levels of self-esteem for they are more inclined to believe that the comments are warranted (Stengel, 2000: 225). "The more highly the recipient thinks of himself, the less he needs support from others, and the more justified and matter of course their compliments become" (Jones, 1964: 27). In a status hierarchy, those who hold more highly socially valued positions are afforded greater significance. Individuals lower on the social ladder often attempt to ingratiate themselves in an upward direction. Downward flattery, however, can be equally important.

In many social groups those in positions of authority rely on the support of others to maintain those positions and downward flattery may be helpful in affirming these relationships. Effective leaders recognize their success, to some degree, depends on the support of others. Stengel (2000: 238) proposes that downward and lateral ingratiations are actually more pragmatic than upward ingratiation, for the simple reason that downward ingratiation produces the greatest affection amongst those involved. In business, for example, Caudron (1997: 45) notes good leaders acquire followers by being willing to get involved at all levels of the organization. Accessibility to subordinates

helps to build loyalty, as does apparent honesty and integrity. Trust in this situation, as with other forms of deception is vital to the success of the strategy. Just as with upward flattery, the downward process also requires subtlety.

Flattery administered democratically is less likely to raise suspicions, although gender does influence how it will be received. Women, typically, take positive comments at face value and are, therefore, less likely to view flattery negatively regardless of whether it is directed at them, or someone else (Caudron, 1997: 48). Men have a somewhat different response. Men are both more influenced by ingratiation when it is directed at them, and more critical of it when they perceive it as observers (Stengel, 2000: 238). The responses of the females and males I would suggest, however, likely vary depending on the situation. In a dating situation, as discussed in Chapter 2, women would likely be more suspicious of the motives of a flatterer. As Jones (1964: 45) argues, in any situation, the primary problem faced by the ingratiation is to convince their target that their communications are not “unduly shaped by pragmatic considerations and are congruent with the ingratiation’s private convictions.” Tailoring the message to suit the circumstances is essential.

Other-enhancement, conformity, and self-presentation are all strategies for flattery. These are based on selfish motives and can be seen as reprehensible and pitiful. These are artificial actions intended to elicit some sort of reward from the target individual. Typically, they are used in some kind of competitive situation. There are social consequences associated with this behaviour, but its prevalence suggests that flattery is a successful strategy when done cautiously. Stengel (2000: 46) argues flattery,

or something like it, is biological and he asserts that flattery may well cause a biochemical reaction in the brain that is very pleasant. Barkow (1989), Dunbar (1995), and McNeill (1998), among others, have all asserted that deception has a biological component, so it follows, that flattery, as a deceptive practice, would also have a biological element.

CHAPTER 4: In Theory

According to Goldschmidt (1972: 59), the nature of interpersonal social contact is what anthropology is meant to explain. In order to come to any meaningful understandings, however, it is essential to understand what relevant role relationships exist among those involved and what the standard is for appropriate behaviour. Also, it is necessary to establish why, from an evolutionary perspective, certain actions may prevail as this may serve to inform the cultural understanding of the encounter itself. By taking an in-depth look at the strategic side of social situations and how deception, and more specifically flattery, is practiced, the implications for social relations become more evident.

The current view of culture needs to be examined. Including behaviour in the definition of culture has been a long-standing tradition; however, this may limit how it is analyzed. Cronk (1999) takes a detailed look at how the concept of culture has been defined since it was first constructed by Edward Burnett Tylor in 1871 and notes little has changed in the last century or so. As recently as 1998 (see Cronk, 1999: 132-3) culture was still being defined in much the same and in some cases the exact same way as Tylor had originated. The inclusion of behavior as an element of culture is fairly standard yet advances being made in genetics suggest this approach is becoming outdated. Cronk (1999) comes to a similar conclusion.

Cronk (1999) contends behavior should not be included in definitions of culture and he notes "the gap between culture and behavior is made obvious by an examination of the many discrepancies that exist between what people say and what they actually do. Separating behavior from the concept of culture allows us to avoid the circularity of

explanations of culture in terms of itself and the illusion that all behavior is cultural” (Cronk, 1999: xi). Looking at behavior in evolutionary terms offers some useful insights into the circumstances under which certain characteristics would have been selected for and the potential implications of rapid environmental changes for these traits.

Genes, as Barkow (1989: 26) notes, influence the *probability* of occurrence of a behavioural character, which means it is possible to move away from “the outmoded idea that ‘genetic’ implies ‘immutable’ or inevitable.” From an evolutionary perspective it may have been in the fitness interests of many organisms to influence and manipulate the behaviour of others. Deceiving another, for example, about the existence of a hidden food cache which can later be accessed for exclusive consumption may be a useful ability when resources are scarce. It may mean you survive long enough to reproduce. Getting caught hoarding too many times may result in the individual being expelled from the group, which could have disastrous consequences for the individual. Like the boy who cried ‘wolf’ one too many times, once you are caught deceiving you are discredited. A better strategy would be to share most of the time in the hope that others would also share with you and deceive only occasionally, thereby avoiding suspicion for misdeeds.

Living in social groups exerts pressures on individuals to reconcile their personal needs with those of the larger group. Deception can be a useful tactic for getting what you want or avoiding ruptured social relationships, but it can also cause them and as Barkow (1989: 64) notes, most of the time truth, rather than deceit has been in our fitness interests. As discussed in Chapter 2 trust is a vital element of social life and successful deception relies on trust. Many relationships may withstand benign deceptions; they are, after all, generally intended to benefit their target. Some relationships, at least initially,

may tolerate strategic deceptions, but I suggest that few can weather exploitive deceptions, particularly close personal relationships. If they do, it often requires a period of time to rebuild the damaged trust and even then it may never be completely reinstated. Cues of honesty will reinforce our willingness to trust, but past actions may have a bearing on how we will be treated in the future.

Underlying motives in any situation will have an impact on the actions of individuals and some social theories have attempted to explain how this might occur. Social Action Theory is one such attempt that explores how norms are manipulated. According to Social Action Theory (SAT) people deceive to promote their own goals, and sometimes for malicious reasons (Barrett, 1996). As a result, social life can be messy and disjointed. "People say one thing but do another; and rather than adhering perfectly to the rules of society, they bend, twist, and ignore these rules as self-interest dictates" (Barrett, 1996: 100). Social Action Theory acknowledges that society is constantly changing. It also proposes that norms are ambiguous, and sometimes even contradictory (99). Normative and pragmatic rules are central in this theory.

Normative rules are general guides to conduct that make up the public, formal, or ideal rules of society. Pragmatic rules are deviations from the ideal rules in that they consist of the tactics and stratagems people employ in order to effectively achieve their goals (Barrett, 1996: 100). According to SAT there is always a gap between the normative order as an ideal, and the actual behaviour of individuals. This means individuals must look beyond the rules or norms for an explanation of behaviour. Due to constant competition for scarce goods and rewards, individuals are constantly required to

make choices about how to act (99). When normative rules are inadequate for dealing with social situations, pragmatic rules are likely to increase.

The Social Action Theory focuses on the “individual as a self-interested manipulator and innovator whose actions continually modify the normative and institutional framework of society” (Barrett, 1996: 99). There is no simple, direct relationship between the normative order and actual behaviour and SAT proposes that failure to consider the degree to which individuals manipulate the world around them underestimates the effects of self-interest and personal choice in decision making. The emphasis in this approach is on agency with little concern given to structure and this is problematic.

With Social Action Theory, the focus is on reciprocity, exchange and transaction (Barrett, 1996: 99). With reciprocity there is an expectation, for example, that we all may lie to each other at various times. Where there may be cause for concern with this theory however, would be in a situation that Bateson (1972: 68-69) refers to as complementary schismogenesis. If individual ‘A,’ for example, habitually lies to individual ‘B,’ with the lies escalating and intensifying and ‘B’ still refuses to acknowledge them, this situation, over time, could be described as schismogenesis. This process, unless it is restrained, leads to a progressive unilateral distortion of the personalities of both individuals. This leads to mutual hostility between them and ends in the breakdown of the relationship (68).

Humans and other social animals would not survive for too long if schismogenesis occurred unchecked. Although individuals do engage in destructive activities there is generally a precarious balance that is maintained. Individuals know

their survival depends on group survival so they have a vested interest in its continuation. This is not to say that individual members do not test the limits of what they can personally get away with. Maximizing personal self-interest, however, may only be possible insofar as one's reputation remains untarnished. Stigmatization can impede individual ability to achieve a desired end.

A stigma is a degradation of an individual's social identity (Goffman, 1963: 2). It serves as a mechanism of social control. A stigma is perceived as a blemish of character. Once applied for the infraction of lying, for example, it may be extended to devalue other aspects of the person's character (7). While Goffman (1963: 6-7) acknowledges that not all people choose to accept or to be affected by this stigma, people socialized to the same set of values tend to have similar perceptions of situations. Therefore, the label of liar in Western culture might engender feelings of shame, although there are ways to escape this classification.

Other groups have different consequences for deceptive practices. The Chinese culture, for example, encourages "embroidered fiction" whereas North Americans generally claim to hold normative expectations of honesty (Goffman 1967: 29; Scott, 1996: xiii). The fear of becoming caught will likely be measured against any possible benefits that one might accrue. Fear of becoming the subject of gossip works as a social control to keep individuals in line.

Impression Management

Watching the actions and reactions of others in social situations provides cues that suggest an appropriate course of action. Goffman (1959) offers a performance-based

analysis of situations highlighting individual, and team, strategies towards exchange. According to Goffman (1959: 252) the notion that we make a presentation of ourselves to others is hardly novel. He maintains what ought to be stressed is that the very structure of the self can be seen in terms of how we arrange for such performances. Face-to-face contact, in social situations, is at the centre of human social life.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach is concerned with the structure of social situations. Employing a theatrical analogy, Goffman (1959) develops a framework for understanding a 'performance.' A performance can be defined as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman, 1959: 15). The better someone is at false performance, the more potentially threatening they may be to others (59).

The dramaturgical perspective is useful in understanding *how* flattering performances are constructed. As Goffman (1959: 6) asserts, individuals will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing themselves in a given way for the sole purpose of fostering the kind of impression that is likely to evoke a desired response from their audience. Goffman (1959:107) distinguishes between front stage performances, intended to uphold normative expectations for the situation, and back stage performances, where fostered impressions are often contradicted (112). Back stage performances, such as flattery, should be kept hidden from the front stage audience. Though the individual may or may not be aware, on a conscious level, of what they are doing, the underlying motivation is generally to present oneself in a favourable light.

As discussed in Chapter 3, flattery can be achieved through a variety of methods, but the key to its success depends on the plausibility of the presentation. Whereas it is

easier to succeed in deceiving people we do not know, the need for most people to maintain “face” keeps them in line to some degree. This may explain why schismogenesis is not rampant. There are, however, a number of factors that will influence individual success at deception, including what is at stake. How well people know us will help determine their ability to make an assessment of whether our behaviour, at any given time, is consistent with how we might normally be expected to behave. There is a great deal of social pressure to maintain a face indicating all is well.

In some situations, the motivation to lie can be extremely powerful, whether it is for personal gain or self-protection. We may lie when we feel insecure, scared, or when we are trying to escape the consequences of our actions. Lies are serious because they break bonds of trust, can sever relationships and can lead, in some situations, to litigation. Yet, as Goffman (1959: 13) argues, we have social expectations of fair treatment. An individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies that s/he has certain characteristics should, in fact, be what they claim to be, although when it comes to performing certain roles, there is potential for conflict.

Goffman (1959: 16) defines a social role as the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status. When the individual appears before others, a performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited norms of the culture (Goffman, 1959: 15, 35). At times, however, there is a discrepancy between the typical or expected response of someone in a particular position and the actual response they give (Goffman, 1961: 93). At any given time we may perform a number of different roles like father, mother, employee and spouse so there is bound to be some conflict.

Managing our various interests successfully requires social adeptness, and those most skilled in this area stand to reap the greatest rewards.

When performing a role the individual must ensure the impressions conveyed to others in the situation are in keeping with role-appropriate personal qualities attributed to them (Goffman, 1961: 87). For example, a bank teller is supposed to be friendly, discreet, and mathematically inclined, while the bank customer should have financial goals, and be prepared to deal quickly and efficiently with the teller as other people are usually waiting in line. Participation in face-to-face behaviour, such as that between a bank teller and a customer, requires the participants to keep command of themselves, both as individuals capable of executing physical movements and as ones capable of receiving and transmitting information (Goffman, 1961: 105). In any situation like this, there is also a distinction to be made between the qualifications required for permission to attempt a role and attributes required for performing that role suitably once it has been acquired (Goffman, 1961: 106). Having an account with a particular banking institution does not ensure you act in the most appropriate manner with the teller.

In the case of the bank customer, failing to embrace the typical role of customer, inadvertently or not, constitutes a wedge between the individual and his role. This is what Goffman (1961: 108) calls role distance: any “effectively” expressed marked separateness between the individual and their commonly accepted role. He suggests the term role distance is not meant to encompass all behaviour that does not directly contribute to the task core of a given role. Talking about the weather, for example, although not directly related to the task of banking, would still be acceptable. What are targeted are those behaviours that are seen by someone present as relevant to assessing

the actor's attachment to his, or her, particular role. These are indicators of whether the actor has some measure of disaffection from, and resistance against, the role they are performing.

In the example of the bank customer, I would suggest he was not wholly satisfied with the role of customer. His familiarity with the bank teller suggested he saw himself as being, or becoming, something more than just a typical customer. His use of flattery however, was sufficiently ambiguous so as not to cause an overly uncomfortable situation for all concerned. Automatic and/or indiscriminate flattery is relatively innocuous. It is a low-cost behaviour for the flatterer and is consequently less effective (Jones, 1961: 6). Although the public sphere may have more latitude in terms of what is acceptable behaviour, in the private sphere deception tends to be more taboo (Scott, 1996: 79). In both spheres, however, if we are caught in a lie, we may lose face. This has an impact on individual ability to make advances within a social hierarchy.

Although the desire for upward social mobility is a strong motivator, it can be risky to attempt to acquire status to which you are not seen to be entitled. Upward mobility requires the presentation of proper performances, and the use of flattery can help facilitate this process. "When an individual appears before others, he knowingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part" (Goffman, 1959: 242). When something occurs that is contrary to his or her fostered impression there are often significant consequences. Social contact may be uncomfortably interrupted. Goffman's observations support Jones' contention that ingratiation must be done effectively to be successful.

Goffman's insight into the exchange process is significant. His observations of how people act in situations are based on many years of study and are extremely detailed and thorough. He recognizes individuals are often under pressure to effect the appropriate performance for the situation and that there are social risks inherent in any performance. Yet, despite the risks, exchanges continue as individuals maneuver for position in the social hierarchy. Reciprocity in social exchanges confers social advantages and these benefits contribute to the formation of alliances that have a long-standing evolutionary history.

Reciprocity

Knapp et al (1987: 408) contend that public standards for evaluating behaviour are always in the process of change and tend to reflect the climate of the times. Although this may be true of some aspects of social life, I do not believe this applies to deceptive behaviours in the same way. This is where a distinction must be made between culturally specific behaviours, those we are socialized into that vary cross-culturally (ie.local responses to environment), and those having a genetic basis. The expression of genetically based behaviours may be culturally modified but they are universally present in humans. With genetically based behaviours there may also be evidence of the same, or at least highly similar behaviour in non-human species and this behaviour can be seen as contributing to survival and breeding success.

Chimpanzees provide some insight into human behaviour in this regard. As the closest animal relatives to humans, chimpanzees share similarities in appearance, psychology, and cognition as well as social organization (de Waal et al, 2000: 80).

Extensive research conducted with chimpanzees by de Waal (1998: 62 [1982]) demonstrates they are capable of deception. He gives one example of a chimp that discovered a cache of hidden grapefruit none of the other chimps in the group were aware of. The chimp in question, Dandy, appeared to pass over the hiding place without stopping or slowing down or showing any interest suggesting he was aware of their presence. A number of hours passed, and as the other apes slept in the afternoon sun Dandy made a beeline for the grapefruit. Without hesitation he dug them up and consumed them all himself. de Waal (1998: 62 [1982]) suggests that if Dandy had not kept the location of the grapefruit a secret, he would likely have lost them to the other chimpanzees.

Stengel (2000: 31) also confirms that chimps, like humans, are social animals that live in groups, and like humans they form social hierarchies. There is a discernible pecking order with the dominant, or alpha, male as the leader. Chimps that may be seeking to topple the existing order may adopt the strategy of showing deference to the alpha male, in what could be viewed as flattery of the unsuspecting victim. "They will hide hostile intentions behind a friendly face until an adversary has come within reach" (de Waal et al, 2000: 80). This requires emotional control and signifies intent, even though it is non-verbal.

Although the lack of spoken language may preclude the bestowal of verbal compliments, Stengel (2000: 37) argues that

the bowing, the grooming, the coalitions formed by the less powerful with the more powerful, the favors performed, all mirror the same quid pro quo dynamic that forms the basis of one kind of human flattery, the strategic kind. From an anthropological perspective, the obeisance before the alpha male is no different than courtiers bowing before Louis XIV, nobles kissing the feet of the pharaoh. (de Waal writes of a "hollow" greeting between a

deposed alpha male and his successor that could be a description of George Bush's frosty greeting of Bill Clinton at the latter's inauguration in 1993).

Social exchange behaviour is not only universal across all human cultures, but it is also highly complex, which suggests that it is an ancient and central part of human social life (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992: 164).

Social exchanges are also readily apparent among chimpanzees who, like humans, employ reciprocity, strategic intelligence and triadic⁴ awareness in the pursuit of social benefits (de Waal, 1998: 5). This reality implies that some cognitive adaptations to social exchange were likely displayed in the hominid lineage at least as far back as the common ancestors we share with chimpanzees (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992: 164). Additionally, the existence of reciprocation among more distantly related primates such as baboons and macaques further supports the view that situations involving social exchange, of which deceptive practices play a part, have formed a long-standing selection pressure on hominids (164).

Reciprocal altruism is a model that is useful in understanding social exchange and helps to explain why it occurs. This perspective posits that during the Pleistocene period, and likely before, a hominid species would have met the pre-conditions for the evolution of reciprocal altruism: long lifespan; low dispersal rate; life in small, interdependent, stable, social groups; and significant parental investment (Trivers, 1971: 45). There is no direct evidence regarding the degree of reciprocal altruism practiced during the course of human evolution, nor its current genetic basis. As Trivers (1971: 48) notes, however, given the universal and nearly daily practice of reciprocal altruism among humans today,

⁴ Triadic awareness refers to the ability to recognize that other individuals may have formed an alliance with one another, for example A and B. If individual C attempts to challenge A, he or she recognizes that B may come to the aid of A, so C needs to be aware of who is allied with whom.

it is reasonable to assume it has played a central role in recent human evolution. He also contends the underlying emotional dispositions affecting altruistic behaviour have important genetic components.

Trivers (1971: 45) asserts that reciprocal altruism in the human species exists in all known cultures and he proposes five main categories of altruistic behavior: 1) helping in times of danger; 2) sharing of food; 3) helping the sick, injured, children, and elderly; 4) sharing of implements; and 5) sharing of knowledge. Each of these categories represent an important aspect of daily life and long-term survival of the individual and the group may hinge on assistance being provided in times of need. This model offers a number of predictions for conditions under which people would be most likely to offer aid selflessly, or to 'cheat,' and where it would be adaptive, in an evolutionary sense, to do so.

According to Trivers (1971: 35) each individual human possesses altruistic and cheating tendencies, the expression of which is determined by the local social and ecological environment. Altruistic behaviour is conduct benefitting another organism, not closely related, that is seemingly detrimental to the organism performing the behaviour. As a minimum, it may be performed at a small cost to the giver and offer a greater benefit to the taker. Putting your own life at risk to save an unrelated other is perceived as altruistic whereas attempting to save the life of a relative, with whom you share common genes, is seen as contributing to the survival of your own genes invested in the relative. Helping an unrelated other might not seem like a reasonable risk, particularly if future contact is unlikely, but there are situations where it would be a

worthwhile investment. Giving less than you get maximizes your return on any exchange you make.

Reciprocating, but in a less than equitable fashion is seen as subtle cheating. Failing to reciprocate at all is gross cheating (Trivers, 1971: 46). Natural selection favours prompt discrimination against the gross cheater, but a subtle cheater is harder to detect. In some instances as long as any benefits are received in a relationship the other individual may choose to continue it despite the fact it is balanced in favour of the cheater. Reputation is enhanced for those viewed as generous so, even if there is no apparent reason for someone to be altruistic, there may be gains in social standing achieved that are not readily apparent, but accrue over time.

The benefits of reciprocity to the individual are often direct and the more reciprocal relationships you are able to manage, the more you are able to capitalize on them. Managing in the range of about 150 relationships is possible based on the development of the human neocortex but time is limited so management of those relationships must be as efficient as possible. Gossip with and about others is one way to keep track of what is going on in the group. Third-party flattery reaching its target can also maintain a level of contact even though you may not see all the group members regularly.

When one repeatedly interacts with the same individuals, altruistic acts are a good choice because of the likelihood of reciprocity. Interdependence among members of a species will tend to keep individuals in close proximity thereby increasing the chance they will encounter altruistic situations together. A number of studies demonstrate that more altruistic behaviour is directed towards friends than towards neutral individuals

(Trivers, 1971: 48). What is also of significance is that the relationship between altruism and liking is mutually enhancing. Individuals are more altruistic towards people they like and they tend to like those who are most altruistic.

These findings on altruism support Jones' (1964: 26) observations about flattery which recognize that the tactic of other-enhancement is firmly entrenched in the psychology of interpersonal attraction. Flattery increases liking, as Stengel (2000: 20) notes, and flattery is a subset of reciprocal altruism. In exchange for receiving flattery, the other person may offer friendship. This exchange allows individuals to optimize their personal relationships which has immediate and long-term benefits. Every interpersonal encounter involves opportunities for social rewards and punishments and ingratiation offers a primary tactic for obtaining the rewards and avoiding the punishments (Jones, 1964: 115). The more desperate we are, however, the more transparent our goals are going to be.

The ability to detect insincere offerings means you can avoid being taken in by a strategic ploy. Flattery offers an unfair advantage because the ingratiator reaps a reward or benefit with minimal personal cost. Stengel (2000) contends that while reciprocal altruism is indirectly selfish, flattery is explicitly so. It is also an indirect form of competition. Flattery assists individuals in overcoming real or imagined handicaps and drawbacks both natural and social. In any social exchange there is a tension created by the desire to advance one's selfish interests and the risk of being exposed. This is where impression management plays a key role. In situations where individuals meet repeatedly, the ability to remember each other's past actions means that consequences can be imposed on those breaching social contracts.

There is evidence to suggest that human brains are hardwired to detect those who cheat on social contracts. Cosmides and Tooby (1992: 183) note that humans are poor at solving some logical reasoning tasks. When the tasks are reformulated into social terms that involve detecting someone who breaks a socially agreed-upon rule, however, most people can solve the problem quite easily. Cosmides and Tooby (1992) argue that we have a cheat detection module in our brains specifically designed to detect those who default on social contracts. As a consequence of living in social groups and engaging in social contacts for millions, and probably tens of millions, of years, our primate ancestors would have needed to construct a “social map” of the individuals, relationships, motives, emotions, and intentions that formed their social world (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992: 163). The ability to detect violators of social contracts, or cheaters, has an impact on subsequent social exchange. The senses provide surveillance mechanisms that enable individuals to know what is happening in their surrounding environment and provide cues as to the appropriate course of action.

Sensory input is vital to the formation and maintenance of social relationships. Dunbar (1999: 206) asserts that in establishing prospective relationships we appear to rely heavily on proximate cues of honesty based mainly on facial expressions. He notes that “among the features we appear to rely on are shiftiness, the willingness to maintain eye contact, the warmth and naturalness of smiling, and so on. Direct face-to-face contact thus seems especially important to us: we may even ask someone to ‘look at me’ when we want to discuss some especially sensitive matter” (Dunbar, 1999: 206-207). The brain then processes the sensory information that individuals gather in these situations. Sensory information travels through the amygdaloid and onto the neocortex

where enculturation and socialization impose a “spin” (Pollard, 2000: 2). Awareness of social expectations is one part of the “spin.” How you choose to act on those expectations is another.

Feedback from other individuals will likely play a role in any decisions on how to act in social situations. Dunbar (1995: 128) proposes that in order to engage in the types of complex social deceptions primates seem to specialize in, we need to be able to conceive of how another individual is likely to respond when we behave in a particular manner. Many animals can assess the moods and emotions of others and respond appropriately. For example, a dog may be able to recognize aggression in another and avoid antagonizing the other animal any further. Successful tactical deceptions, however, require more sophistication than simply recognizing anger, for example. Imagining why another individual is angry requires an ability to think reflexively about beliefs and desires.

The ability to think reflexively in this situation is what Dennett (1996: 27) refers to as taking an ‘intentional stance.’ It entails attributing beliefs, wants, desires, and other similar qualities to another individual; or, in other words, being able to empathize. Adopting the perspective of another individual, if only briefly, would have many beneficial effects on attitudes and behaviours and could play a role in strengthening and maintaining group relations. Benign deceptions are one possible outcome of empathy because they are motivated by the desire to spare the feelings of another. Deciphering how someone else is feeling also means they can be more easily manipulated for less altruistic goals like those found in strategic and exploitive deceptions. For humans, not having the ability to empathize has serious implications for a competent social life.

Studies of autistic children have demonstrated they are, generally, unable to put themselves in someone else's place which impedes their capacity to interact effectively in social situations (Dunbar, 1995: 129). An inability to engage in imaginary play is another important psychological attribute that is affected by this developmental disorder. This lack of imagination means that people with autism cannot deliberately deceive (Dunbar, 1995: 129). Engaging in pretend play and being able to lie are closely related abilities that both appear at about the same time during normal child development. These skills are manifested rather suddenly at about four years of age (Dunbar, 1995: 130).

Children younger than about four years of age are unable to discern other people's beliefs from their own. Beyond four years old they can make this distinction and this ability is referred to as acquiring a 'theory of mind' (ToM) (Baron-Cohen, 1994). Children who have developed a ToM are able to generate beliefs about other people's states of mind and are able to believe that someone else can hold something to be true that they know to be false. Dunbar (1995:131) suggests

All human beings who develop normally develop a theory of mind, and this is independent of cultural background. Cultural relativists, especially among social anthropologists, have repeatedly claimed that the way people view the world is influenced by the society or culture that they grow up in. However, it now seems that this is at best only partly true.

According to recent studies (see Flavell et al, 1983 and Gardner et al, 1988), children from China and Japan as well as Baka pygmy children from the Cameroon, all acquire ToM at approximately the same age as European and American children. This suggests that regardless of the nuances that culture imparts, the brain is structured in a common way and is especially sensitive to social phenomena (Dunbar, 1995: 131). Biogenetic structuralism offers additional insight into this process.

Biogenetic structuralism is a complex theory that “permits examination of structural-functional relationships in the central nervous system as they correlate with structuring capabilities evident in behavior” (Laughlin and d’Aquila, 1974: 14). For the purposes of this discussion the focus will be on the concept of neurognostic models which offer an explanation of how inherited models of reality are based on specific neuro-anatomical structures (103). These structures, once activated, establish how the organism will relate to their environment both cognitively and behaviourally (Laughlin and d’Aquila, 1974: 112). I would argue that acquiring a theory of mind, as represented by Baron-Cohen (1994) fits this model.

A neurognostic model, as Laughlin et al (1990: 57) explain, is composed of an interconnected network of neural pathways and attendant cell structures that exist within a field of neural processes. Perceptual discrimination, motor activity, and conceptual and symbolic differentiation and association are all channeled through these networks which also determine both the type and the complexity of cognition of which the individual or the species is capable (61). “Neurognosis determines to a large extent what can be learned, when it can be learned, in what form it can be learned, and how fast and how much of it can be learned” (61). There are two main components that influence neurognosis: preparedness and sensitivity.

Preparedness is the level to which neural models are at peak readiness for adaptive contact with the environment at a given point in the process of learning (Laughlin et al, 1990: 65). Sensitivity refers to the view that there are certain periods in the lifecycle of an organism when they are most likely to be receptive to particular stimuli. This is not to suggest that learning cannot occur outside of these sensitive

periods, only that the likelihood of learning, or the ease with which one might learn is enhanced during these times. The studies by Flavell et al (1983) and Gardner et al (1988) suggest that theory of mind has a developmental component with preparedness being reached at about four years of age in the average child. Flavell et al (1983: 465) consider that this degree of cross-cultural similarity is usually associated with biologically constrained, maturation-based developments and neurogenesis, I would argue, supports their view. Without preparedness and the necessary brain development, theory of mind does not occur.

Although research into autism is ongoing, there is now quite convincing evidence that genetically regulated disturbances in brain development play a significant role in this disorder (Ciaranello, 2000: 1). Recent autopsy studies conducted at Harvard have shown that in particular parts of the brains of autistic individuals there are nerve cells which appear to be immature that have not migrated to their proper destinations in the brain. Ciaranello (2000: 2) suggests that this situation is an indication there may be a defect in the normal developmental migration of these neurons. The cells do not reach their intended destinations and are consequently unable to establish their normal functions.

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to establish a causal link between this impairment and the absence of a theory of mind in autistic individuals I would argue, based on the information presented, that the genesis of many social behaviours, including deception, are found in the brain, and have a long evolutionary history. In the absence of the necessary structures in the brain, social exchange is impeded, often dramatically, although cultural rules may offer guidelines that provide the benefit of collective experience.

A teacher named Sandy, who works with autistic students, informed me that despite the difficulty autistic individuals have in assessing the feelings of others, many can still learn what is expected in certain situations and respond accordingly. For example, one of Sandy's students, Jessie, learned that when being introduced to someone's new baby it was appropriate to comment on how cute the baby was. Jessie, through rote learning, was able to offer suitable remarks even though she did not feel any emotional compulsion to do so; this action allowed her to perform as a more competent social being. In essence, she was able to offer the gift of flattery that is important to social relations of all types.

The Gift

Both impression management and reciprocity are put into action in the giving of gifts. The idea of the gift economy, of which flattery is a part, operates on symbolic, interpersonal, and economic levels (Douglas, 1990: xiv). There is a long tradition in anthropology of studies related to gift giving. Mauss' theory of the gift, for example, is a theory of human solidarity (Douglas, 1990: x), and as Mauss (1990: 74) notes, the giving of gifts contributes to a hierarchy being established. Although Mauss' (1990: 3) focus is primarily on archaic and so-called "primitive" societies, his work also applies to contemporary societies as well. Gifts then, like today, were never free and pure for there is always an obligation to reciprocate.

In business situations in North America, gift giving plays an important role. Brain (1990: 293) contends that most people, despite the influence of standard economic factors such as price, supply, and demand, resort to the reciprocal motive for exchange of

friendship and personal obligation. He suggests that when business people take each other out for meals, send holiday cards and gifts, or go golfing or to a hockey game, they are following the reciprocal exchange strategies typical of less technologically advanced, or more traditional, societies such as Australian aborigines and Trobriand islanders.

The interplay of social and economic motives is quite evident in the elaborate trading system, the *kula*, practiced by the Trobriand islanders. During extensive fieldwork, Malinowski described how groups of men, from a number of islands, engaged in economic and ceremonial exchanges that involved the circulation of valued items that made their way through a network of partners. Although *kula* partners utilize the exchange to maximize their profits and increase their status, they also establish friendships and employ reciprocity, generosity, and honour, in the pursuit and maintenance of those friendships (Brain, 1990: 296). The creation of social ties and amity through the presentation of gifts cements relationships on the basis of mutual obligation.

Capitalist societies operate on essentially the same principles as the Trobriand islanders when it comes to gift exchange. Brain (1990: 296) suggests that at Christmastime, presents of equal value move back and forth between people of equal status. He also notes that statistics demonstrate that the proportion of gifts circulating in British society, for example, is roughly the same as the proportion of noncommercial goods circulating in simpler societies. Reciprocity expressed in the giving and receiving of gifts is important in all societies; not offering a gift of equal or greater value to someone who has given you a gift can have a negative impact on the relationship.

Reciprocity helps to build social networks and forms, in economic terms, what is referred to as social capital. Putnam (2000: 19) conceives of social capital as being established through the social networks of individuals. There are norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness arising from these networks and he suggests that a society of many decent but unconnected individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. The concept of social capital is much like the idea of civic virtue. Where it differs is in the emphasis it places on the power that is potentially achieved by the individual who is embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations (Putnam, 2000: 19).

Putnam (2000: 19) notes that various individuals have independently invented the term social capital, at least six times that he knows of throughout the twentieth century. Each time it was re-introduced it was intended to call attention to the ways in which life can be enhanced by social ties. The social capital theory focuses on the view that social networks have value in economic terms. In this theory the underlying tenet of reciprocity is evident in gift giving which represents a way of building social capital, and it clearly has applications in many situations.

In addition to formal business circumstances, there are many other situations that are impacted by gift giving of some type. When my children were in elementary school, for example, Christmas and year-end were times that seemed to require the presentation of a gift. Despite the fact the teachers were paid, in part, by my tax dollars, I still felt it necessary to conform to this practice. The teacher did not request, or promote, the giving of these gifts, but many parents felt an obligation to acknowledge the teacher during a period traditionally associated with gift-giving. Recognizing the teacher's efforts in the

classroom, in a tangible way, addresses a 'debt' created throughout the term, either real or imagined.

Most adults recognize that showing appreciation for someone's efforts on your behalf, or in this case your child's, will likely result in a continuation of a high level of service and so the giving of the gift seems like a good investment. When one parent gives a gift the others feel they must follow suit. I am not aware of any studies on the giving of gifts in this situation, but it is not unusual. When someone does a favour, or goes out of their way to help you, it is not uncommon to offer a gift as thanks. The giver of the gift perceives they have addressed a debt, and the receiver believes their efforts are appreciated. This need for reciprocity extends to other types of situations as well.

Any kind of situation where a service is provided often requires some kind of reciprocity. Good service in a restaurant, for example, usually results in a tip, or gratuity, being given; the paperboy, the hairdresser, the pizza delivery person, generally speaking, all warrant some kind of remuneration for good service. Some establishments even go so far as to include a gratuity on your bill making an, at times unwarranted, assumption that you have been happy with the level of service. Many people even find themselves including a tip when the service was less than stellar because it has come to be expected in Western culture. No one wants to be seen as being cheap.

If we frequent the same establishments on a regular basis, leaving a tip is a good strategy. If we are particularly generous, and it is not too long between visits, chances are we will be remembered and the promise of an equally generous tip will ensure prompt service. There is an exchange taking place where there is an expectation that both sides benefit from the arrangement, so it continues. If, on the other hand, you will not return to

a particular establishment or be likely to require the services of a particular individual in the future there are fewer constraints against cheating on the implicit contract. Individuals who cheat in this way are known as free-riders.

Free-riders are those individuals who take the benefits that derive from social contracts while allowing everyone else to pay the cost (Dunbar, 1999: 194). As discussed, our brains are hardwired to detect these kinds of social cheats, but size and dispersion of populations will have an impact on their ability to avoid detection. Withholding gossip about a possible free-rider may be seen as a strategic, or even exploitive deception. Sharing gossip about a free-rider may save the target from being taken-in by them and this will have positive benefits for the individual who shares. Sharing gossip of this nature is a kind of gift that subsequently warrants reciprocity. The receiver of the information may return the gift at a later date, or they may share the details of the help they received in the form of flattery about the individual that is presented to a wider audience.

Gifts, generally, are given in the context of public situations. Cued to public esteem and the distribution of honour, gifts are often quite visible and are, consequently, often more subject to public scrutiny and judgements of fairness than other exchanges (Douglas, 1990: xiv). This scrutiny is evident with flattery, as discussed, and bystanders are more likely to view it with disdain. They may perceive the flatterer will now be entitled to some kind of benefit they are not, and there is truth in that perception. As Mauss (1990: 3) observes, exchanges and contracts take place in the form of presents, which appear to be voluntary, but which are, in reality, given and reciprocated

obligatorily. Maintaining face requires honouring commitments, real and implied, that are associated with the giving of gifts.

The presentation of gifts in some cultures is an important element of hospitality. In Hungary, for example, lavishing gifts on your host is expected. The host, in return, is responsible to ensure all the guest's needs are provided, including paying for the guests' expenses. The guest is then expected to reciprocate and pick-up the tab when they are the host. This can get expensive, yet it is considered an honour to be the host even if you cannot afford to be. Similar practices occur in Russia. This situation can lead to confusion when dealing with other cultures engaging in somewhat different practices.

In North America many couples take a more individualistic approach and go 'dutch' when they go out for dinner, for example. Each couple assumes they will pay for their own meal so they feel comfortable in ordering whatever they want. While dining with a couple that had recently immigrated to Canada, I experienced the cultural difference firsthand. I assumed I would be paying for my own meal, but when the bill arrived the Russian couple insisted on paying. We went out for several subsequent meals, and the same scene kept repeating itself when the bill would arrive. We finally discovered that because they had invited us out, they viewed it as their responsibility to pay as the supposed 'host.' It was our responsibility to reciprocate in a comparable fashion or risk being seen as free-riders which would have resulted in a loss of face for us.

To refuse acceptance of a gift suggests a fear of the obligation of reciprocity (Mauss, 1990: 41). This can have negative consequences for the individual that refuses. If the intent of the giver, however, is to obligate the receiver beyond what is normally

expected in any reciprocal arrangement, then it may be necessary to refuse these gifts. In Canada, the Department of National Defence, for example, has implemented policies dealing specifically with the acceptance of gifts and hospitality. The acceptance of anything more than a nominal gift is viewed as potentially placing, or being perceived as placing, the recipient in a position of obligation toward the donor. There is a recognition that the presentation of gifts could place the recipient in a compromising position when it comes to the disbursement of contracts, for instance. Refusing to accept gifts is viewed as necessary to maintain the perception of fairness in business practices within the Canadian military. Large-scale operations may require stringent measures to streamline an otherwise unwieldy process, but presumably once the contracts are won, the process of developing business relationships can begin. As Brain (1990: 293) notes, amity is essential to all economic, or public, relations as well as private ones.

Social exchange, on all levels, is facilitated by amity. To this end, individuals engage in various forms of impression management designed to maximize the quality and quantity of relationships within their social network. False performances, evident in the use of flattery, for example, have a long evolutionary tradition not only in humans but in other primates as well. Deceptive traits confer certain social advantages to the individual. They can help facilitate advancement in a hierarchical system, but they must be practiced cautiously for human brains are designed to discern who is trustworthy and who is endeavouring to break socially agreed-upon rules. The development of empathy plays a key role in the ability to deceive.

Suggesting that individuals have a genetic pre-disposition towards deception, however, does not mean choice is removed from the equation. Social Darwinism has

historically been invoked to justify everything from nationalism to war and poverty (Eakin, 2001: 2). The Eugenics movement justified all sorts of atrocities based on heredity of certain traits. Genes are now recognized as influencing the *probability* traits will be expressed, but it is not inevitable. Individuals can and do make choices about how to act. They are most likely to deceive if they are under some kind of duress and failure to recognize this fact can affect the reliability of social research, among other things.

Cultural expectations for normative responses influence levels of deception, and if studies done with chimpanzees housed in crowded conditions prove to apply to humans, population density may also be a factor (de Waal et al, 2000). Efforts to maintain peace and order require emotional restraint that results in suppression of responses in some situations. de Waal et al (2000: 80) found that the inhibition of natural responses is not without health costs to the chimps, as long-term levels of stress affects the immune system and ultimately overall health and longevity. Stress is known to cause health problems in humans. What part, if any, engaging in deceptive practices plays in the stress levels of humans could be a subject for future research. Lie detector tests certainly demonstrate that physiological changes can occur when people deceive. Whatever the physical costs may be, however, flattery and other deceptive practices have been shown in a number of studies to be effective strategies for achieving individual, social and cultural ends.

CHAPTER 5: Truth or Consequences

Cronk (1999: 93) argues culture is “the stuff in which we wrap ourselves to make ourselves more acceptable, presentable, influential, and attractive to others.” Social life, as a result, often emerges as a contest or struggle between individuals with competing goals, and deceptive practices, such as flattery, offer an opportunity to manipulate the situation to meet a variety of ends. Understanding the basis of these practices and the situations where each are likely to be deployed offers insight into an important element of social life. A number of studies have been conducted in an attempt to better understand deceptive practices and this chapter will explore aspects of lying and flattery and their potential consequences. This chapter offers a discussion of the implications of the findings of some of these studies.

An inability to make eye contact or maintain appropriate eye contact, for example, is often cited as evidence for deceptive behaviour. Similarly, apparent nervousness evinced by a verbal stammer, or excessive gesticulation, are common-sense hints of possible deceptive intent. The fact of the matter, however, may not be so clear-cut.

We tend to remember those who cheat on social exchanges, but catching them in the act is not so easy. Research by Ekman, et al (1974; 1991; 1992; 1996) reveals that few people can detect deception at a rate higher than might be expected by chance alone: perception and detection of lies are poorly developed skills (Ekman, 1996: 801). This conclusion extends to ostensible experts, who, for the most part, are no better than non-experts at detecting from demeanor who may be lying.

The desire for most individuals to expose a lie varies according to what is at stake in the situation. As discussed in Chapter 2, reactions to lies vary depending on the

underlying motivation and intent of the liar. Benign deceptions can actually be appreciated as they are intended to ease awkward social moments, whereas exploitive lies are typically viewed as self-serving and therefore unacceptable by any standards. Strategic deceptions like flattery fall somewhere in the middle inhabiting a grey area that is judged in a more subjective manner.

When designing studies aimed at identifying deception, the underlying motives of both the liar and the target must be considered. Ekman and others usually draw samples of students with little or nothing to gain or lose by their participation. The lack of consequences may affect motivation levels for both deception and detection. In real life, however, there are winners and losers, and consequences.

To control for this and similar possibilities, Ekman (1996) has drawn samples of experts to approximate conditions with consequences. His sampling has been extended to law enforcement workers, customs officials, trial court judges, lawyers, forensic psychiatrists and others concerned with deception on a daily basis. Despite efforts to include those for whom deception and detection are important, even vital, the results of these studies do not differ significantly from what might be expected by chance alone (Ekman, 1996: 806). In other words, experts were no more or less able to detect deception than anyone else.

Findings reported in studies sampling experts in the detection of deception suggest some noteworthy considerations. As participants in experiments, the experts were passive, solo observers. In the field they were active, able to ask questions and respond to subtle clues, such as nervous posturing or a cracking voice; they also worked in pairs, with one assuming the role of proactive interrogator while the other gauged

silent and verbal responses. The implication is that the breadth and depth of possible deception-related cues may be too complex for an individual to routinely manage; especially if they are unable to actively participate.

The influence of the experimental deceiver is another consideration. In real-world situations, that stakes and consequences are meaningful: property, lifestyle or well-being may be at stake and second chances are rare. An experiment is less onerous.

When the stakes and consequences are high, emotions related to deception, such as fear, guilt or excitement, are more likely to be aroused and available to reveal the lie. "It is not just the leakage of these strong emotions which provide behavioral clues to deceit," writes Ekman (1996: 804), "but these strong emotions also may disrupt the liar's cognitive processing and result in evasive, implausible, and stumbling accounts." Try as they may, it is unlikely a researcher can evoke the breadth and depth of emotional intensity characteristic of a high-stakes situation in a laboratory.

The existence of any prior relationship with the subject emerges as a consideration in these studies. Certainly, there are numerous situations in which we deal with strangers where we have no notion of "usual" behavior; that is, no baseline against which to gauge the behaviour of another. As a result, studies that deal with people who do not know each other are useful for understanding deception and its detection.

When we are familiar with someone's usual behaviour it is presumed we should be more adept at determining what is suspicious or unusual behaviour. Consequently, we should be more able to decide whether we are being deceived. In these circumstances, however, other elements may come into play.

Familiarity, as Ekman (1996: 806) notes, does not always benefit lie detection. We tend to invest a great deal in our friendships and work relationships and the desire to maintain them may prompt us to overlook potentially disruptive actions. The trust inherent in these relationships contributes to the possibility we may be misled. The wariness we may exhibit toward strangers is reduced in close relationships, and the benefit of the doubt is often given to someone we like. Excessive confidence in our ability to detect deception, when we assume we know someone very well, may also complicate matters. Moreover, we are primarily suspicious of those who have given us some prior reason to question their intent.

What does this mean for our ability to detect deception? If supposed experts are not any better at detecting deception than the rest of us, what are our options? Are we left to take our chances and find out, after the fact, if our trust was well placed or not? In other words, can we learn to read leakage clues more accurately? The answer appears to be yes, with practice and lots of it.

Ekman (1996: 807) videotaped the facial activity, including movements, voice and speech patterns, of a number of subjects. Trained participants analyzed the tapes for deceptive practices in either slow motion or real time, and were able to correctly classify liars or truth-tellers in more than four-of-five instances. Although the real time aspect lends credibility to the findings, the fact the tapes could be re-viewed by the participants raises questions about generalizability: most of us get only one chance to decide what is happening.

If high stakes lies are potentially disruptive, why are we not better at discovering them? Ekman (1996: 808) postulates we are not prepared by evolutionary history to be

either very good lie catchers or lie perpetrators. He maintains our ancestral environment was one that offered only limited opportunities for successful deception -- the costs of being caught in a lie were very high. In small groups, such as those hunter-gatherers likely inhabited, limited privacy ensured the likelihood of deceptions being exposed. Individuals knew and saw everyone regularly thus it was difficult to escape the scrutiny of others and deceptions would be short-lived.

As an aside, Ekman (1996:810) focuses on intra-group lies, and acknowledges inter-group lies would likely have different costs and outcomes. In fact, inter-group lies would not necessarily be considered wrong and, perhaps, even appropriate in some situations. Intra-group lies, however, would always be accompanied by a degree of disrepute.

Cheney and Seyfarth (1990) come to similar conclusions based in research on animal deception, and suggest an important constraint against lying stems from the social structure of a species. "Animals that live in stable social groups," argue Cheney and Seyfarth (1990: 189), "face special problems in any attempt at deceptive communication. ...deceptive signals will probably have to be more subtle and occur at lower frequencies if they are to go undetected. Equally important, if animals live in social groups in which some degree of cooperation is essential for survival, the need for cooperation can reduce the rate at which unreliable signals are given." The question of how stability is achieved and maintained, beyond overt or apparent cooperation, needs to be explored further.

Stability in a social group does not require equality among the members. Although there is likely to be a degree of mutual dependence, there is also a dominance hierarchy, which is subject to negotiation. A diversity of talents, both physical and

mental, necessitates compromise and consent for the exchange of skills and information that ensure survival. Gaining a reputation as someone that reciprocates, or returns favours is advantageous. Returning less than what was received, or cheating on the exchange could also be personally advantageous, but you must give enough to maintain the relationship and avoid being perceived as one who does not repay debt.

As Cialdini (2001: 76) notes, all societies subscribe to a norm obligating individuals to repay, in kind, what they have received and this leaves individuals open to social influence. Although social influence operates similarly across cultures, Cialdini (2001: 81) contends how that influence is expressed varies. A survey, administered among employees of Citibank, a multinational financial corporation, in the USA, China, Spain and Germany, revealed a general willingness to comply voluntarily with a request from co-workers for assistance, but for different reasons. In the USA, for example, employees based their decision to comply on whether they owed the requester a favour, whereas Chinese employees were more concerned about loyalty to those within their group: if the requester was connected with someone of higher status in group, compliance was most likely. In Spain, requests were dealt with on the basis of liking and friendship and status was of less importance, especially in comparison to Chinese employees: Spanish workers were willing to help on the basis of friendship norms that promoted loyalty to friends regardless of position or status. German employees were motivated by a desire to comply with the rules of the organization. Their decision to help or not was based on how the official regulations and categories of the company specified they should act. If the request appeared to be part of their job description, for example, they

expressed a stronger obligation to help. The Germans appear to be the most pragmatic in their approach to requests for assistance.

A sense of obligation is readily evident in responses across cultural and social categories, but the basis for fulfilling the obligation varies. Even the Germans, who appear to be merely fulfilling a basic job requirement, are engaged in indirect reciprocity (Cronk, 1999: 97). Indirect reciprocity involves an audience who are able to observe an individual doing something for another who seems totally incapable of returning the favour. The individual performing the favour may gain a reputation as an especially helpful person willing to assist those in need. As discussed in Chapter 4, these actions can lead to an increase in social standing.

Social standing influences individual appeal to others. Those who are in positions of authority, or who are of high status within a group, are often the targets of flattery. A number of studies (Kipnis & Vanderveer, 1971; Eastman, 1994; Deluga & Perry, 1994; Gordon, 1996) have focused on the relationships between various ingratiation tactics and the judgements and evaluations of targets and bystanders. Due to the critical role of impression management in everyday social situations, flattery is often employed to enhance interpersonal attraction and liking. In the workplace, this can translate into greater rewards. Flattery, as a strategic deception, often results in a mutually rewarding exchange.

Kipnis and Vanderveer (1971: 280) investigated how the workplace behaviour of subordinates influenced use of rewarding powers, namely, pay raises and promotions, by a leader. Among other analyses, they compared three categories of workers: typical, ingratiation (a typical worker who used flattery) and superior, on the basis of how each

was perceived by the leader or boss. The findings revealed both the ingratiation and the superior worker were given significantly higher performance evaluations than the typical worker (Kipnis & Vanderveer, 1971: 284). It is noteworthy that the performance evaluation scores of the ingratiation and the superior worker were not statistically different. This suggests flattery, the tool of the ingratiation, was a successful strategy for achieving a good performance evaluation. Suggesting the boss was doing a good job, or offering to take on a greater workload as a supportive gesture were some of the tactics employed by the ingratiation.

Kipnis and Vanderveer (1971) support the notion that the ingratiation receives more of the available rewards than does an equally competent non-ingratiation. More important, perhaps, is the finding that the ingratiation was recommended for promotion to the position of supervisor more frequently than was the superior worker. In this study, objective information on the output of each worker was available to the decision-makers. Kipnis and Vanderveer (1971: 286) suggest that where task performance is less readily measured in absolute terms, the ingratiation might be even more successful in earning extra rewards.

Eastman (1994) focused on ingratiation and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and drew similar conclusions. Eastman (1994: 1379) describes OCB as individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal system for rewards, which tends to promote the effective operation of the organization. He found ingratiation and OCB to be so closely related that it is often difficult to differentiate between the two.

Although employees labeled good citizens received more rewards than those labeled ingratators, managers were not always able to distinguish between the two approaches. Some managers were biased toward viewing some behaviours as ingratiation, while others were inclined to see them as organizational citizenship behaviour (Eastman, 1994: 1389). How the behaviour was attributed determined the outcome: supervisors responded positively to behaviours deemed as attempts at good citizenship, while they reacted negatively to behaviours labeled as ingratating (1390). Eastman (1994: 1390) cautions that individuals need to be aware of how their actions are perceived. Ironically, good citizens who are labeled ingratators by their supervisors may find themselves in an "out-group" and consequently be denied rewards.

Unfortunately for some, equal rewards cannot be given to all. Only one position, for example, may be available and the candidate the supervisor deems most worthy will be assigned to fill it. Deluga and Perry (1994: 67), in an attempt to explain how and why this might occur, used the leader-member exchange theory. This is an interactionist approach to leadership, which encourages supervisors and subordinates to form social exchange relationships. These relationships vary according to the limited time and energy a supervisor has to devote to subordinate concerns. Subordinate ingratiation is one way to develop and enhance interpersonal attraction, which can lead to higher quality exchanges (Deluga & Perry, 1994: 68).

Higher quality supervisor-subordinate exchanges are beneficial to both supervisors and subordinates. Such exchanges typically involve close working relationships characterized by trust, support and interpersonal attraction resulting in a sense of loyalty to one another and, thus, mutual influence (Deluga & Perry, 1994: 67).

Higher quality exchange subordinates form an “in-group,” which tends to receive special benefits and opportunities ostensibly unavailable to other workers. Special benefits include, for example, favourable performance appraisals and promotions. In return, their appreciation is expressed through loyalty, commitment and hard work in keeping with the expectations of the supervisor.

To gain or maintain “in-group” status, a subordinate may use ingratiation techniques such as other-enhancement or opinion conformity. As Jones (1964) suggests, liking tends to be reciprocated; thus, presenting oneself as interpersonally attractive allows one to reap the rewards available to “in-group” members. Excessive conformity, however, can lead to unwarranted agreement, which may not be in the best interest of the supervisor or the organization.

To the casual observer, this may seem to be flummery. It is not. It is a strategy which has driven biological, cultural and social evolution. Jones and Wortman (c.f. Gordon, 1996: 55) argue everyone—somehow, someway—enacts ingratiating behaviours that are largely a result of automatic, not controlled, processing. Individuals respond to contextual or situated cues in the social environment, which the human brain is designed to detect. With the addition of the socialization process, through which ingratiation becomes a reaction tendency, particularly if it has met with success in past attempts, most individuals become quite adept at managing social situations.

At this point, a conundrum of deception seems to have emerged. Deception in the form of lying, at best, has short-term benefits. Deception in the form of ingratiation seems accompanied by long-term cultural and social advantage.

Consider William Jefferson Clinton, former President of the United States. Stengel (2000: 242) deploys Clinton to assess the full effectiveness of ingratiation techniques. He labels Clinton, the Oval Office Eddie Haskell, the perennial “suck-up” on the 1950’s situation comedy, “Leave it to Beaver.” Haskell was convinced he knew how to play the adults to his benefit. His ploys were thinly veiled and his motives transparent.

Clinton is obviously more adept at ingratiation than Eddie Haskell. The point, however, is the strategy works. Clinton left office high in the public opinion polls, despite of a string of highly publicized personal scandals.

Although politics may be held to a different standard, Stengel (2000: 48) argues that individuals should not feel guilty if they use flattery to get what they want: Bill Clinton does not. A right to flatter has an exploitive connotation and, considering reciprocity is the basis for social exchange, flatterers runs the risk of being labeled a free-rider or worse, especially if the ingratiation is taken to excess. Still, it is an effective strategy.

Enacted with aplomb, flattery is a successful strategy for increased liking. In the workplace, as the literature suggests, flattery can result in disproportionate rewards and benefits accruing to the flatterer. This can have a negative impact on bystanders or coworkers; those in positions of authority need to be conscious of the impact of their decisions.

A supportive network of kin and friends helps create strong feelings of shared identity and common purpose (Cronk, 1999: 130); this has been central to the development of culture and social life as we know it. Changes in technology and increases in population, however, are forcing humans to adapt to an environment very

different from the one in which we evolved. Clearly, it is difficult for individuals, even supposed experts, to detect deception and this leaves us susceptible to the ploys of free-riders. This has negative implications for social stability.

Flattery, when done effectively, seems to promote cohesiveness. Unlike other types of deception that are exclusively self-serving, the aim of flattery is to build relationships but we must be cautious about how we justify this practice. Research has demonstrated that even undiscovered deceptions can bring about negative consequences (Sagarin et al, 1998: 1167). When one member of a dyad lies to the other “the liar may begin to perceive the recipient of the lie as less honest as a result of the liar’s own deception” (1167). An individual, for example, who is excessively ingratulatory may denigrate the character of the target in order to justify their actions. Awareness of the biological underpinnings for the motive to reciprocate may enable us to resist some of the negative aspects of ingratiation.

Although the benefits of ingratiation in a business setting are well documented, there is little information about flattery in more quotidian situations, such as among friends and acquaintances. Do the same principles apply? As Dunbar (1999: 205) notes, humans are highly selective in choosing the individuals that they form long-term relationships with and, in particular, those we make long-term investment commitments to. Future research should consider the extent to which flattery helps establish and maintain these types of relationships.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The underlying intent in any deceptive practice will influence how it is perceived. There are three classifications of deception: benign, strategic, and exploitive, and they depend on a background of trust in order to succeed. Generally speaking, human minds are designed to keep track of social cheats (Cosmides and Tooby, 1992) but we are often reluctant to challenge those perceived as cheats because, as Goffman (1959) suggests, it is our duty in most social situations to avoid creating a scene. Also, because deceptive information can be transmitted in a number of ways, it is not that easy to detect.

Inasmuch as deceptive practices may seem to be inconsistent with successful social adaptation strategies, and they certainly can be, benign and strategic deceptions often contribute to the maintenance and stability of groups. An awareness of the feelings and needs of others is vital to the development of meaningful relationships, and the formation of alliances hinges on the ability to empathize. This ability is achieved as part of normal brain development and is referred to as acquiring a theory of mind (Baron-Cohen, 1994).

The absence of necessary structures in the brain impedes social exchange. Research into autism has demonstrated that genetically regulated disturbances in brain development play a major role in this disorder (Ciaranello, 2000: 1). Individuals affected by autism have difficulty with many aspects of social exchange, including an inability to deceive (Dunbar, 1995: 130). Studies by Flavell et al (1983) and Gardner et al (1988) confirm that theory of mind, a neurognostic model (Laughlin et al, 1990), has a developmental component expressed in most children over the age of four. Behaviour, even complex social behaviour, has evolved and is adaptive (Barash, 1977; Barkow

1989), so actions traditionally viewed as cultural in origin must be reexamined to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of their significance.

The principal concern of this paper is the biological underpinnings of a socially expressed phenomenon: flattery. Classified as a strategic deceptive practice, flattery is employed on a regular basis by individuals concerned with impression management. Flattery can be very effective in increasing liking and can lead to advantages for the flatterer. As a gift flattery demands reciprocity, which is something the human mind is designed to keep track of. The genesis of numerous social behaviours is centered in the brain, and they have a long evolutionary history. Although cultural rules can provide guidelines for how to act in various situations, the ability to think reflexively is essential to the effective negotiation and management of social contact. Those who are effective at dealing with others are perceived to be socially competent. This offers a multitude of rewards, both social and economic.

Social life plays out in situations populated by co-presents. They are governed by role requirements. Adhering to the appropriate role requirement demonstrates social intelligence that is essential for building-up and maintaining networks of affiliations. Normative expression of situational role requirements may vary somewhat cross-culturally. These may also necessitate some measure of impression management that requires an effective performance in order to succeed.

The ethnographic account of the situation in the bank demonstrates the social demands for effecting an appropriate performance in a given situation. As Goldschmidt (1972: 61) suggests, the ethnography of encounters is intended to explore how individuals communicate and why they do so, and by examining the behaviour

surrounding an event we gain insight into our understanding of the situation. Simmel, with prophetic insight, asserted that truthfulness and lies are of the most far-reaching significance among humans and he suggested that our modern life is based, to a more significant degree than is generally recognized, upon faith in the honesty of others (Wolff, 1950: 312-313). We rely on others to keep their word, and to accurately represent themselves in any given situation. As has been discussed throughout this paper, however, this does not always occur.

Everyone continuously shares and receives information and they must simultaneously evaluate both the effect of the information presented and the veracity of the information received. This is not an easy process. Everyday social lies cover up real sentiments and opinions. They help create a better image or appearance providing a way to avoid unpleasant or undesirable contacts. Covering up misdeeds, masking emotions, or repressing them in some way, however, all have costs to the individual and the group, as well as potential benefits. As much as we may justify and explain our own lies, we feel bothered or disturbed when others lie to us. Integrity in social relations is of such vital significance that the brains of most humans are designed to keep track of those who renege on their social obligations.

There is a strong connection between social and biological phenomena. As Damasio (1994: 124) notes, although culture and civilization originate in the actions of biological individuals, these actions are, nonetheless, generated in collectives of individuals interacting in specific environments. Natural selection, however, only permits the evolution of certain strategies that prove successful over time (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992: 170) and depending on local conditions, among other things, traits may or

may not be expressed by individuals. Social animals, such as human beings, rely on an essential rule of conduct that offers an evolutionary advantage and has influenced long-term survival: the code of reciprocity (Cialdini, 2001: 76).

As discussed, there is no direct evidence concerning the degree of reciprocity practiced during human evolution or its current genetic basis. Given the universal and regular practice of reciprocal altruism today, however, it has in all probability been an important aspect in recent human evolution and the underlying dispositions affecting altruistic behaviour have important genetic components. As Cialdini (2001: 76) notes, all societies subscribe to a norm that obligates individuals to repay in kind what they have received and one way that this is manifested is in the giving of gifts.

There is no such thing as a free gift (Mauss, 1990 [1950]), and even unsolicited gifts such as flattery require some kind of repayment. The studies examined demonstrate that flattery represents an effective and, potentially, important way for individuals to succeed in the workplace. Although flattery does not compensate for an ineffective or inefficient worker, it can make a discernible difference in the number of rewards otherwise equally skilled workers will receive. Flattery tends to increase liking, and we tend to be more generous with those we like. Essentially, flatterers and their targets form alliances that result in mutual support.

As with the triadic alliances formed by chimpanzees, any individual attempting to challenge one of the members of the alliance in some way needs to recognize the other individual in the alliance will likely come to their defense (de Waal, 1998). In the workplace, this reality can translate into a politicized environment that is not always conducive to the most effective business practices. The larger the corporation, the more

susceptible they are to these problems. Once organizations get beyond the optimal size of 150, which humans can manage on a personal basis, they become much more hierarchical. It becomes increasingly difficult to regulate the members through social controls (Dunbar, 1995: 126). It can also leave them more susceptible to manipulation.

As the research by Ekman (1996) concluded, humans are not particularly adept at discerning when they are being manipulated. It is known, though, that individuals are most likely to deceive when they are under pressure of some kind, trying to maintain a sense of privacy, gain power, or deny a source of conflict. They also use deceptive tactics in an attempt to manage the impression others have of them. It is also easiest to lie to strangers, so in the large urban centers, typical of Western European cultures, there are fewer constraints against deception, which is very beneficial for free-riders.

Increases in the size of a group, beyond the optimum, can lead to free-riders becoming a particularly intrusive problem. Dunbar (1999: 194) argues that the problem of maintaining group coherence and stability through time increases with group size. Divergent interests are more difficult to reconcile with what is best for the group, and free-riders have a distinct advantage as fewer constraints may be placed on their self-serving actions. Although our brains may be designed to remember social cheats, if we cannot establish who they are, it is difficult to hold them accountable for their actions.

Reprehensible flatterers, in many respects, are social cheats who are attempting to gain a benefit to which they are not really entitled. They give an unsolicited gift that then demands some kind of reciprocity. This is why they are so objectionable to bystanders. The flatterer is perceived to be manipulating the situation for their advantage. The bystanders fear they will somehow lose out because of this manipulation and this

conclusion, at least in a business context, seems to be warranted. In an increasingly competitive labour market, however, the bystander's negative response may result from a concern they have lost a competitive edge to the flatterer. They may view the actions as unfair. Effecting a credible performance may silence detractors, thereby ensuring one is able to maximize their inclusive fitness.

Inclusive fitness depends on the ability to influence the actions of other individuals and flattery, when performed effectively, helps achieve this outcome. Flattery can increase liking of the flatterer by the target and this can contribute to the formation of alliances that can prove to be quite beneficial to both, but especially the flatterer. In some situations, though, flattery may seem to be a social requirement, such as is found with pitiful brown-nosing where the motivation can be seen to be less grounded in the individual, but it is still intended to convey a desired image. The ability to accurately assess the social requirements of a given situation can confer social advantages.

Someone who is adept at gauging feedback and responding appropriately can have a great deal of impact on those around them. As the example of the bank teller and the customer demonstrates, this skill is not distributed equally. The customer was unaware of, or chose to ignore, the teller's discomfort with his comments and his insensitivity only seemed to make the situation worse. The teller was just being polite, adhering to the role requirements of a bank teller. She became uncomfortable with the customer's approach. As Jones (1964: 27) confirms, "outlandish or clearly unwarranted compliments are likely to prove embarrassing to the recipient and unlikely to secure the desired attraction." Individuals should never give a compliment and ask for a favour at

the same time, nor flatter the obvious (Stengel, 2000: 224). The bank customer offered an inappropriate compliment that seemed to be flattering the obvious.

Initially, the teller was taken-in by the customer's tale. He clearly overestimated her interest and consequently lost the benefits he sought. The customer really had little to lose in this situation, however, as the bank teller would continue to do his banking for him. He might have had some company while his wife was away, but there could also be a much simpler explanation. Looking at it from the perspective of gift-giving, one could suggest that because the bank-teller complimented him on being a nice man, he was just reciprocating and returning the compliment. Gauging the response of the teller in this situation though, the customer did not display a suitable level of intentional thinking, or empathy.

Although children over the age of four, generally, demonstrate a theory of mind and can begin to understand the distinction between real and apparent emotion, it is a skill that continues to develop in most people. As with other domains of mental activity it is limited by cell development and the evidence suggests there are variations in the abilities of the social actors. Consequently, their personal motivations, influenced by both biological and cultural factors, play a part in how the situation unfolds. The need for cooperation is vital to the formation and maintenance of alliances, as is reciprocity, but it is a continually developing process. New experiences will influence reactions to future events.

Protecting oneself from individuals attempting to influence attitudes and actions can be challenging in new situations. Free-riders are in their element in novel situations where their target may have no previous experience, or knowledge, on which to base their

responses or actions. Awareness of how one can be manipulated by other individuals who have self-serving motives and who may be less affected by social controls can be empowering.

Persuading another individual to buy a product or service, convincing someone to donate to charitable organization, or convincing a physician to try a new drug, may all involve strategies that require some kind of manipulation. As the example of the physician who had a drug company representative tell her she was an 'opinion leader' suggests, these sorts of approaches are not uncommon. Cialdini (2001: 77) contends pharmaceutical companies spend millions of dollars every year to support medical researchers and to provide gifts to individual physicians and it seems to benefit them. He cites a 1998 study in the New England Journal of Medicine that reported, while only thirty-seven percent of researchers who were critical of a particular drug received prior drug company support, among those who supported the drug's safety one hundred percent had received free trips, research funding or employment. Although the physician that I spoke to resisted the attempts of the drug company representative to flatter her, clearly many others do not see through the attempts at manipulation, and they are not alone. The code of reciprocity is used by other organizations to their advantage.

Charitable organizations are often aware mail campaigns requesting donations will have a low return rate. A veterans group in the United States found when they simply mailed a request for a donation, the appeal succeeded about eighteen percent of the time, but when they included a set of free personalized address labels, the success rate nearly doubled to thirty-five percent (Cialdini, 2001: 76). The unsolicited gift capitalized on the demands of reciprocity and resulted in a boost in donations to the veterans group.

Most individuals in Western societies must deal, on a fairly regular basis, with marketers, advertisers, salespeople, fundraisers and others whose financial well-being relies on their ability to manipulate others. Recognizing the strategies they employ allows individuals to analyze requests and offerings and make more informed decisions.

Although humans, and some other primates, may be genetically predisposed to deceive, we can nonetheless choose honesty, and we often do, especially in close relationships where it is highly valued. "Wherever human beings live, their cultural forms and social life are infused with social exchange relations" (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992: 206) and trust plays a central role in those relations. Social exchange is also facilitated by amity and individuals will go to great lengths to ingratiate themselves to others in pursuit of the social rewards, but they must operate within the constraints placed on them by other members of the group. To do otherwise risks damage to one's personal reputation and hence one's fitness in an evolutionary sense.

This paper has examined how and why deceptive practices are employed in social situations. The use of flattery, as a form of deception, is prevalent in hierarchical environments where advancement hinges on forming alliances. It operates as a manipulative gift requiring impression management and reciprocity to be successful. Although the human brain is designed to keep track of social cheats there are limits to this ability. This means that free-riders can more easily capitalize on those who abide by the normative expectations in a given situation. Increases in population, among other things, mean that we now deal with more strangers than we ever have in human history.

More fully understanding the genetic contributions to human behaviour, I believe allows us to make informed choices about how we deal with one another.

Rapid advances in the science of genetics and its applications introduce new and complex ethical and policy considerations for individuals, and various groups. For anthropology these changes will necessitate a new way of considering how culture is defined and behaviour is explained. This is where the adoption of a consilience approach is useful. For some time there has been talk about a crisis in anthropology, and I believe that taking a unified approach offers a way forward. Instead of guarding the boundaries, it is time to embrace whatever knowledge is available to guide and inform our understanding of social life. It is not a case of nature versus nurture, for both are irrevocably intertwined.

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