### Your Mind on Deception, with Dr. David Markowitz

0:00:06.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: Welcome back to Minds Matter, a podcast sponsored by the Monash Centre for Consciousness and Contemplative Studies. I'm Ava.

0:00:14.0 Beth Fisher: And I'm Beth. And on Minds Matter, we explore research from neuroscience to psychology whilst talking about our own personal experiences.

0:00:21.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: This week on the podcast, I spoke to Dr. David Markowitz, who is an assistant professor at the University of Oregon in the School of Journalism, and he's also an incoming associate professor at Michigan State University in the Communications Department. In this episode, we talk about lies and deception in the realms of technology, like dating apps. We also talk about how often people lie, when they're most likely to do it and why people lie.

[music]

0:00:53.8 Dr. David Markowitz: My name is Dr. David Markowitz, I'm an assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Oregon, and I study the psychology of language. Quite often I look at deception in language, but quite often I study just how people reveal themselves through language patterns at large.

0:01:11.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: One of the things that you've looked at specifically is how people might deceive others in different mediums of texts, so I was wondering if you could talk about ascension that you did have a 2004 paper that had looked at to how people lie in those different types.

0:01:24.3 Dr. David Markowitz: So, a real important interests has been, how often are people lying? And you can go back from the 1980s all the way to today, and it's quite consistent, people tend to at least disclose that they lie 1-2 times per day. But that's not a monolith if you look across different forms of media, so for example, a 2004 paper looked at how different parts of media, these different features such as the synchronicity of the medium, such as we're having a conversation right now, back and forth, the recordability of the medium and also the distributed nature of the communication, are we far away from each other or not? And look to see how those different features might actually predict lying rates across different media and platforms.

0:02:10.3 Dr. David Markowitz: So back in 2004, the verdict was people tended to lie most over the phone, so as a recordless medium, it was distributed in people who were synchronous. Fast-forward to today, I wanted to replicate or attempt to replicate those results. Essentially, we live in a very different media environment. Not only are options more vast than before, but the dynamics associated with technology are quite different than 2004. What's really, really interesting is that the results held quite well, so media that are typically recordless, they're distributed and they're synchronous being not only the phone, but also video chat, just like we're doing right now in addition to this podcast interview, and that's where people tended to have the most lies.

0:02:53.7 Ava Ma De Sousa: Theoretically, why is it that recordless and especially synchronous types of features, why are those the ones that lead to most lying? I guess, intuitively, it feels like a lot of lies take place on social media with more that anonymity type of thing. It was interesting to me that it was more so those synchronous types of interactions.

0:03:12.9 Dr. David Markowitz: Look, just to push back a little bit, how often are you actually anonymous online?

0:03:16.7 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah, that's true.

0:03:17.4 Dr. David Markowitz: Not often, right? So you actually have a record of who you are, and not only a record of who you are, you have a very clear identifier that you are who you say you are. So most people are viable online, but when we have a little bit less of a record like when you're talking on the phone or when you have a video chat, when you don't have a record, that could leave people a little bit more open to using deception as a strategy for communication to achieve a variety of different communication or psychological goals. And now the distributed nature of communication that's predicted by something that's called the social distance hypothesis, where it's a little bit easier perhaps psychologically for people to lie when they're not as close to someone else, psychological distancing argument, where people are essentially, were comfortable or they feel like it's less problematic or less likely for someone to pick up on their deception if they're far away. And the synchronicity argument that it's really important for people to be able to see, oh was this person on the other end buying my communication? Are they actually picking up on any specific cues or tells in my active communication? We can have a very clear understanding of if you're buying my argument by us going back and forth really seamlessly.

0:04:27.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: So what were some of the specific types of goals that people were trying to achieve by using deception in the study?

0:04:32.5 Dr. David Markowitz: So in those studies, we don't exactly know about specific goals, but in other studies, goals are really important interests in terms of, what are people trying to achieve with their deception? For example, I think we also want to talk about mobile dating deceptions and the lies that people tell in order to get love. Two goals in particular actually accounted for over two-thirds of all the goals that people have when they were communicating their lives to a partner, these are goals related to self-presentation, trying to look really attractive, interesting and likeable. And another goal, what we call availability management goals. So you're trying to manage quite easily how available you appear or seem to others, it's really negative when you appear incredibly desperate on when you're trying to online date with someone, especially when you don't know them. So if you were to answer right away on your phone, oh, how's your day going? Oh, it's amazing. How about your day? It's wow, does this person not have a life, what's going on, why are they answering right away? The lies that we're told to massage that relationship, again, it's not trying to be a jerk, but it's trying to manage how available you are, it's...

0:05:37.4 Dr. David Markowitz: Oh, so sorry I didn't see your message right now, or I'm sorry, my phone died when really, those were strategic. They were intentional, they were also deceptive in order to put a distance between you and the other person and technology can facilitate that. Now, the key is that it doesn't sit more lying, just different types of lying.

0:05:56.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: So it seems like for that availability type of goal, there's potentially two reasons that someone might lie about that, one is that they're actually not interested in that person and trying not to be a jerk about it and kind of being like, oh, I wasn't on my phone, I didn't have the time or they're kind of trying to play that game and those different norms of trying not to be as available, so are we able to separate those types of lies?

0:06:19.3 Dr. David Markowitz: I think you're picking up on something that's really cool and we haven't separated that actually in literature yet, so I've just been thinking about this in the past five seconds. But it's either playing it cool or ending it, right? So you're trying to play it cool, like, of course, I was just doing something really important. Of course, I didn't see your message. I'm so sorry. But you're still interested, you don't wanna end the relationship or the other one is, oh, I'm so sorry I didn't see your message. My reason for delaying the interaction is because I really just don't wanna see you or talk to you anymore, those are two very different psychological pathways, and it could be really interesting to see which one is more prevalent, but more importantly, what they reveal psychologically about people.

0:06:55.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: So how frequently are people telling these types of lies on dating apps?

0:07:00.7 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, so again, all these... So lives are very infrequent, right? So they're not the norm. They are the exception. In general, on average, people told about less than one out of every 10 messages were deceptive, so around 7% of messages were deceptive, 7.1-7.4 in different studies, but the ones that we've had is about 7%. And that flies in the face of what most people think is going on, not only in online dating, but with deception in general. So I'll have a bunch of students in class, not only when in deception classes, but in general journalism communication classes, where I say, "How often do you think people are lying?" And I'll get percentages that range all the way from 70%-95%, and what's kind of interesting is that when you contextualise that, so I say, "Well, you're telling that seven out of every 10 messages are deceptive?" And then students to walk it back and say, "Okay, well, maybe that's not exactly the case." We think that deception is more prevalent, that's I think a really interesting research question, why are our intuitions about deception really wrong? Why does it not match the evidence, and this is just not one-offs, these are decade worth of studies and it's really important to think about why deception is that exception, but still really important and consequential for us psychologically.

0:08:15.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: So in the past when this has been studied, were people also over-estimating the amount of deception that they thought that other people were engaging in, or is this more of a recent phenomenon?

0:08:25.2 Dr. David Markowitz: But we're actually, I'm familiar with work, actually of asking people to estimate how much deception there is in everyday life, but what's really interesting is actually in that same paper about deception in mobile dating and also some more recent work that I published, there's what's called the deception consensus effect, a false consistency effect for deception, essentially drawing a lot of Lee Ross's work where it's an ego-centric bias. So the more that you think things are going on in the world, it really reveals a lot about you. The deception consensus effect essentially is the idea that the more that we think others are lying, the more that we lie, and the reverse is true. So it's an egocentric bias, so if we lie a lot, we think the world is a very dishonest place, if we're pretty honest, we think the world's an honest place, so our rates or perceptions about deception in everyday life are often tied to our own behavior, our own perceptions.

0:09:17.1 Ava Ma De Sousa: That's really interesting. I guess the reason I ask that is because I was thinking of your students who are probably Gen Zs, who grew up on the internet and who are also seeing the rise of these amazing filters and AI and types of things that kind of allow you to deceive people in a more subtle way that's not necessarily in language, but maybe on how you're presenting yourself online in these ways that people can't really tell. I think that also makes... From what I've seen on TikTok, there's kind of this feeling of insecurity and feeling like other people are constantly deceiving you, and there's these accounts that specialize in exposing influencers or trying to show real faces and bodies, so I'm wondering kind of in line with that Lee Ross stuff that maybe people are engaging in that type of behavior more, but also seeing it more and therefore I feel like there's more deception. Is that possible?

0:10:04.1 Dr. David Markowitz: It's certainly possible. One thing that's also kind of interesting though, is that we find that there are many offline examples of, if you wanna call the deception in some degree that's related to self-presentation, for example, people who might wear heels to make them a little bit taller, men and women. We don't think of that as deception, we just think of that as people in society might view taller people as more attractive, we don't think that is deception, but we think of other forms of enhancing the self as perhaps deceptive. Why is that disconnect there? Why is it when it's an online example, we think of deception, but an offline example we think of honesty yet the underlying principles are kind of consistent? So I think whenever we think about deception and technology, we often think there must be more of it, but it's actually really not the case. Again, we can extend this argument all the way to phenomena such as a fake news and disinformation, there's really amazing work, again, just published in 2021 that looked at media diets, how often people are consuming fake news or disinformation, it is... Fake news or disinformation is like essential...

0:11:09.5 Dr. David Markowitz: The most exception, compared to the rule, it's only 0.15% of all people's media diets. Now, some may argue, well, that's just still too high and the costs to society are really grand if we even have that much there, right? But over 99% of information we consume is honest and that's a great thing, but also we have to think about strategies and ways to mitigate even just that 0.15%.

0:11:35.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: So is that specifically for news articles that are run online or is it all types of content?

0:11:39.5 Dr. David Markowitz: I believe it's just related to media that people consumed.

0:11:43.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: Okay. I'm just wondering, so then how do you define deception, because there seem to be these fuzzy lines, how do you look at that in your research? I guess a lot of it is more based on language, so maybe the lines are a little bit cleaner, but I'm just wondering how you think about that generally.

0:11:57.3 Dr. David Markowitz: Overall, even before we get into the verbal or non-verbal aspects of it, so it's usually like a two-pronged model, so the first one is fairly obvious. It's like a statement must be false or an act must be false. But the other critical component is intentionality, so it must be deliberate and intentionally false otherwise it's a mistake or an error despite something being false, right? It's where we draw the line between disinformation and misinformation. Disinformation is outright deception, you're trying to pull a fast one on someone, where you know what the truth is but the other person doesn't. Misinformation, it's a mistake. It still is false but you didn't intend it to be. Another in critical part of if you wanna say a three-pronged model of deception would be where the truth is a problem, and I find this to be a really elegant way of thinking that deception, because quite often, if you look at literature from the '80s, '90s or...

0:12:49.4 Dr. David Markowitz: Even some folks today, they suggest that liars have this really difficult time and they go through a struggle of trying to decide lie versus truth and experiencing this cognitive load when lying. It's actually not really the case, sometimes lying is the easier option just because the truth is really problematic. And that's a really critical part of honesty and deception because quite often, lies are told because they help to achieve some goal, and sometimes if you really need to tell someone something that deviates from the truth, that's just the best thing for you. It's easier.

0:13:21.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: So, I'm hearing that sometimes the outcomes of lies are very different, so sometimes it's more self-serving deceiving someone else for an end that's not necessarily pro-social, but in other cases, it can be pro-social.

0:13:35.3 Dr. David Markowitz: Of course, they're self-serving lies or other serving lies. So let's say a family member got a really awful haircut, objectively awful. But it would be pretty problematic and also hurtful if you told them, so little white lies such as, oh, your hair looks great, or perhaps nobody is actually fooled, maybe they're like, yeah, I know my haircut looks terrible, and maybe the communicator knows that as well. That just makes communication work, it makes interactions work, and that's such a beautiful evolutionarily adaptive thing for us to do.

0:14:04.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: So in the context of dating, do the goals that motivate people to lie or be deceptive in whatever type of way it may be, do those evolve from the dating phase into our long-term relationships? I'm assuming that in the dating phase, it would be more lying about height if you're a man on your profile or maybe those availability lies, and then that goes into more of the lies that are more maintenance of the relationship.

0:14:28.8 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah. We don't have great longitudinal evidence, we only have just some cross-sectional data where the more that people lied in general, the more than they were interested in more short-term relationships compared to long-term ones. And it's quite interesting to think about the possibility of tracking couples long-term and tracking dates long-term to figure out how their goals and lying tendencies actually map on to the status of their relationship, how their relationship evolves over time, just don't have those data, unfortunately.

0:14:57.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: It's interesting that people who lie more often early on are not interested in long-term things, is there any evidence of that playing into the concept of authenticity and presentation?

0:15:08.1 Dr. David Markowitz: It's possible. One interesting thing is that when we think about why deception could be more prevalent for short-term relationships, we think about if you lie a lot, what that might do for the foundation of a relationship, right? So you can imagine lying a lot about perhaps consequential or even inconsequential things, they will add up over time and be discovered. So if you lie a lot and that's what your goal is, and it turns out you really wanna date someone long-term, that's gonna create a pretty shaky scaffolding for building something that's long-term, so thinking about the frequency of deception, mapping that onto goals, it's really critical areas.

0:15:44.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: Are people generally aware of the fact that they're presenting themselves in a way that's not true?

0:15:50.3 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, these are all people who... So we ask people to rate on the scales of one 1-5, how deceptive was this message all the way from one to not deceptive at all to five, extremely deceptive. And we gave definitions of what deception actually is and examples and yes, people are very aware of it and they have no problem really identifying their lies.

0:16:08.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: So in those dating studies, you have people go through their messages and then...

0:16:12.3 Dr. David Markowitz: Exactly, right. They go through their logs, have them write out their messages and we have them rate them after, and then human coders go in and we code them based on the different goal types.

0:16:23.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: Oh, you have other people code on the goals, you don't ask the participants themselves about the goals? Interesting.

0:16:27.6 Dr. David Markowitz: Correct. It's possible that the senders themselves might actually not have access to understanding, oh yeah, what was I perhaps trying to achieve here? But we can have outsiders or human coders who are trained in social scientific research and understanding how people are trying to communicate goals through messages, have people do that in a really reliable and objective way.

0:16:48.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: So is there any worry in that type of research that the people who are compulsive liars are also lying about the fact that they're lying, or is that...

0:16:56.6 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, we get this question all the time, meta deception. So there are a few reasons why you don't think it's necessarily a problem. First one is that there's really no reason for people to lie to us, they're not identifiable, they're completely anonymous, their data is stored securely, all the stuff to safeguard them from ever being outed. So yeah, they really have no reason to lie to us, and across decades of studies, we find that no matter how we ask different types of deception questions or how we probe at deception, we center on many key in seminal findings about how often people lie so that one or two lies per day finding and the stability of lying over time, so these things are quite similar.

0:17:40.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: So as someone who studies dating apps, do you have any advice for how people should be presenting themselves on these apps?

0:17:46.3 Dr. David Markowitz: Some advice that I would give is just be authentic, genuine self is really important because regardless of wanting short or long-term relationships, being who you are is really critical. That doesn't necessarily mean that you should be devoid of deception, I'm not the honesty police here, but essentially exaggerations, they're not entirely problematic for just getting your foot in the door for dates, I'm not advocating for people to lie. What I'm saying is that small exaggerations might actually perhaps increase liking, increase attractiveness but really core foundational parts of the self really should always remain honest.

0:18:21.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah, I've seen some research on aspirational self-deception. There's this research maybe 10 years ago or more, where they had college students come in and they ask them to self-report their grades, and they found that the people who inflated their grades more were the ones who then ended up doing better, and they would also track with their heart rate such that they weren't freaking out about lying, they just felt more kind of equanimity and calm.

0:18:45.5 Dr. David Markowitz: That's interesting.

0:18:46.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah, so I'm wondering, are there any lies that are kind of aspirational in that sense, in what you've studied?

0:18:51.5 Dr. David Markowitz: A lot about the presentation lies, so for example, a person suggesting, oh, I love hiking. Then they're like, yeah, hiking is fine, or I like hiking. Technically, would that be a lie? Sure, you're trying to intentionally provide a false belief in another person, but might that help you get a first date with someone who says that they love hiking as well? But again, one of the really important things, and this is something that was pioneered in the online dating deception research many, many moons ago, is that we think of the profile as being a really important foot in the door for understanding who people are and a profile quite often is a promise. So you're not gonna be lying about your height to the degree where someone's gonna stare at you and say, "Oh my God, you are a foot shorter than you thought you were." If you're gonna exaggerate maybe an inch or two either direction, it's not gonna absolutely make or break the relationship. But if you were lying in your profile that you have no kids, then you have five kids, that's a pretty big shake in trust where mostly people are predominantly honest in the things that they communicate about.

0:19:55.1 Ava Ma De Sousa: So when people deceive, they're kind of doing it in a smart way then.

0:19:58.3 Dr. David Markowitz: It's a strategic way.

[music]

0:20:05.7 Beth Fisher: I thought one of the things that David spoke about that was really interesting was the availability lie, so how available we are. And I know that the more available you are, kind of the less appealing you can be, but I am so bad at that lie. So anyone who knows me, if you text me, I respond in like a second. And [chuckle] when I...

0:20:29.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: I can confirm.

0:20:31.3 Beth Fisher: Yeah. [laughter] And I know when it also comes to dating, that's not a good look, but I just have never been able to not... I can't look at my phone and be like, "Oh, I'll do that later," I, constant availability all the time, and I'm doing stuff, I don't know. Ava, what do you think? Are you constantly available? [laughter]

0:20:53.1 Ava Ma De Sousa: No, you know, I'm a terrible texter which is why, if it were just me, this podcast would have fallen apart because I would have... If it was two of mes, no one would have responded after a while, so thank God for Beth for many reasons, but that's one of them. And if I don't respond, I feel like Beth will be like, "Are you okay?" But I'm really bad at texting back because I am doing the thing where I'm constantly doing way too many things at once, and I'm one of those people who thinks I can multi-task, but I really cannot.

0:21:18.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: So I'll have seven million tabs open and my phone on the side. I'll see a text and I'll be like, cool, I know I have to answer that, formulate the opinion in my head, everything, and then I flip my phone back over and I don't respond. So it's not even necessarily that I'm trying to not respond, it's just that I forget because my brain is cooked. It's really cooked.

[laughter]

0:21:40.3 Beth Fisher: Yeah. I remember once, I was worried that if something happened to me and no one would know and Ava reassured me by saying, "Beth, if no one heard from you for three hours, we would send out search parties."

0:21:52.4 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah, exactly.

0:21:52.7 Beth Fisher: That's a pro of being constantly available and communicating.

0:21:56.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah. I think with now it's just me being an air head, but I think when I was dating and stuff when I first met my current partner, 'cause he was a very slow texter, and I think that was genuine on his part, but I would definitely do the thing of, he hasn't texted me in four hours, I'm gonna have to wait four hours and two minutes to text him back 100%, which I think if... I don't even know if we've ever talked about this, but I think if he knew that he'd be like, that's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. But I think I definitely had that availability stress in my mind of being like, I need to look like I'm not there too much.

0:22:33.4 Beth Fisher: Another thing I thought that was interesting, I'm sure a lot of people will, were the lies we tell on dating apps and whether they're really lies and what level of deception that is. And I find this really interesting because I think I've spoken a bit about when I came back to Australia during the pandemic, it was a very strange time and really hard to meet people. So dating apps kind of became the only way you could meet someone dating 'cause we're in lockdowns. And we weren't getting a lot of social interactions. So you got so much of your self esteem from these apps.

0:23:10.1 Beth Fisher: So a lot of the things you would do is you would have your friends and you would be looking at each other's profiles and who's matching with who, but I'm not very good at... Maybe you guys can even tell from our social media, I feel like Ava and I aren't great at the selfies or the presenting ourselves in that way. I'm not good at that, and I wasn't good at that on the app either, but another thing I did initially, I was honest about doing a PhD, I put where I went to university, and I thought something about my profile isn't really working, and I kinda just wanna get...

0:23:44.7 Beth Fisher: And go on these dates. And keeping in mind, this isn't good advice, I thought, "Okay, well, what's kind of different about people's profiles that I can see that they're getting a lot of likes?" I was like, "Well, they're not doing something like a PhD," so I took that off and lo and behold, I got heaps more likes.

0:24:01.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: That's so sad. That's really horrible because it's obviously a gendered thing. I don't think if a man took off that he was doing a PhD, he would be getting more likes. I think it'd be the opposite. But I think we all like to think that we're past that age where women should be seen and not heard, and you don't want a woman who's too smart, but that's just... I have to say, I'm pretty shocked by that too, and I never would have even thought to take that off if I were on a dating app.

0:24:33.5 Beth Fisher: Yeah, 'cause I also had one of these prompts and made some joke about coding, so it was clear not only was I doing a PhD. I was doing a PhD and it wasn't something cool like literature reviews. [laughter]

0:24:45.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: Something cool Beth or something classically feminine.

0:24:49.2 Beth Fisher: Yeah, exactly.

0:24:50.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah.

0:24:50.5 Beth Fisher: But unfortunately, it worked, but of course, doing that, I didn't meet anyone that was a good match for me because they didn't want someone who was doing the things I was doing.

0:25:01.2 Ava Ma De Sousa: Well, how did people react when you did reveal the whole truth about yourself, was it surprise and dismay?

0:25:12.2 Beth Fisher: Yeah, and I think you can... I feel like maybe I'm giving too much away, but you can say I'm doing a PhD in Philosophy, and maybe not so much exactly what I'm doing and those kind of things, and I think that that was maybe more so you get to know someone a bit, they can tell that you're fun over text somehow, and already like, okay, she's maybe a cool girl I'd wanna meet. And then what are you doing? Oh, you just say I'm studying or something like this, you don't say, I'm doing this PhD in computational modeling and I love it, and those kind of things.

0:25:48.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: That's really sad.

0:25:50.2 Beth Fisher: But it didn't work. So yes, I met people, but they weren't the right people, so no one do this.

0:25:55.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah, that definitely matches on to what David was saying about, you probably shouldn't lie because you're not gonna get the people that you wanna match with in the end if you're lying. But I'm just curious about how you decided to take off the PhD thing, how much of the idea of women shouldn't be too smart, or I don't wanna be intimidating as a woman factored into your decision, or was it just, this is something that's not "normal" regardless of gender norms, so I'm just gonna take that out to just appear more regular.

0:26:27.9 Beth Fisher: No, it was definitely the first one.

0:26:30.7 Ava Ma De Sousa: So you were fully aware of your perception as a woman. Yeah, I think that's interesting because I'm sure that a lot of the lives on these more heteronormative dating apps are probably pretty gendered in appearance because you're trying to market yourself to as many people as possible, that's what those dating apps are for. It's like, get as many swipe rights as possible, so clearly not creating an environment that allows for authenticity.

0:26:58.4 Beth Fisher: No, and then because if you don't get any likes, then you're not really shown to anyone, so you're not...

0:27:06.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: Really?

0:27:07.6 Beth Fisher: Yeah, the more likes you get, the more you're shown. So its also like, what do I need to do to be shown, to be seen?

0:27:17.2 Ava Ma De Sousa: I did have a friend who was telling me about a few months where he was on dating apps, and he became obsessed with the idea of it as a game and trying to crack the algorithm of it, and even if he met someone that he really liked, he'd be like, "No, I have to go back to the game and get as many matches and dates as I possibly can." So from the outside, it definitely seems like people turning into monsters to play the game, but also I think in David's work, it's interesting because it's about deception but it's the line between deception, full-on lies and just massaging the truth is very different, 'cause you're saying that you were trying to package yourself in a way that was as pleasant as possible, as least intimidating as possible, but we do that when we meet people anyway.

0:28:07.4 Ava Ma De Sousa: You're never gonna be your full self on a first date like burping super loud if you need to or whatever, and we wouldn't count that as a deception, so I feel those lines also seem really blurry.

0:28:19.6 Beth Fisher: Yeah, and I feel like the apps are encouraging us to be deceitful because they reward this kind of profile that is these amazing photos, so I think we're encouraged to do that.

0:28:33.7 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah, I think that's what in David's work was surprising and maybe somewhat reassuring, but also weird to hear because it didn't match up with my intuitions was that people aren't actually lying as much as you think on the internet and even on dating apps, people aren't really lying that much of the time. But maybe we're not lying, but I think maybe there's a piece missing of feeling the pressure at least to package yourself in a certain way and present yourself in a certain way, and maybe you become some of the lies that you're saying 'cause if you're realizing, oh people really don't wanna hear that I'm coding, maybe that will eventually cause you to really lean into the philosophy side of it. Because if you don't find anyone who is interested in you in that, and one of your biggest goals is to be able to find someone that you really connect with, that you can share your life with, then that seems maybe you would actually change to fit that description.

0:29:29.1 Beth Fisher: Yeah. Well, this is pretty disheartening. No, but then I did put my profile as something that was honest, and I met someone great, so I think moral of the story is, to be honest, I guess too. Yeah, and then, yeah, and then I got less matches, but I got a match that was right.

0:29:47.1 Ava Ma De Sousa: Quality match.

[music]

0:29:52.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: You've looked at how people communicate about different out groups, so this was the dehumanisation work, and so I was wondering if you could discuss that study and its findings in the context of deception that we've been talking about.

0:30:03.6 Dr. David Markowitz: So I've studied the idea of dehumanisation, the treatment of out groups as being less than in a variety of different ways. I've studied in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, where a variety of Asian populations were viewed as less than or dehumanised, and I've studied immigrant populations, I've studied in a variety of different settings and out groups, but another area of mine, blending my deception work with dehumanisation work was trying to figure out this idea of what's called deceptive dehumanisation.

0:30:31.2 Dr. David Markowitz: This idea that you're going to fake support for an out group, but really you hold these internally negative and quite undermining beliefs about other people. And this is expressed quite often by politicians, so for example, politicians will say, of course, I don't hate this other group, or I don't view them as being less than but their policies say otherwise and their support says otherwise. So essentially looking at that linguistically could perhaps be an important psychological pathway to understand either processes or mechanisms that might be going on with this deceptive dehumanisation idea, and essentially ran an experiment randomly assigned people to either lie or tell the truth about a group that they dehumanised or didn't dehumanise, and quite often, emotion plays a really critical role here in identifying the deceptive dehumaniser.

0:31:21.3 Dr. David Markowitz: And what's really critical is we can then take some of these data points as particularly related to negative emotion, and we can actually perhaps use them for either identification of those who might hold these internally negative views about people, but they're outwardly expressing support. It's really critical to consider language as an ingredient here of dehumanisation. There's a really great quote, I think it's a Brene Brown quote actually, that dehumanisation starts with language. I think that's really critical because how you outwardly talk about people really matters.

0:31:54.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: So just to understand the study, you had participants come in, rate different groups, and on a dehumanisation scale?

0:32:01.4 Dr. David Markowitz: So essentially in order to measure dehumanisation, there's a really great scale by Nour Kteily and colleagues that is called The Ascent of Man, and it's these hominids that are getting progressively larger, it's like the evolution of man, essentially, that you might either see on bumper stickers or people are typically familiar with this actually across different areas of social life. And people rate that all the way from 0-100 of where out groups fall on that feeling thermometer, and really anything less than a hundred is dehumanising.

0:32:37.3 Dr. David Markowitz: You're calling that a group of people less evolved, less than fully evolved, and it's really critical to use that measure to then understand thoughts and feelings about dehumanised out groups. And in the context of the study, after people rated a bunch of these out groups, they were randomly selected to write about one of those out groups and then essentially lie or tell the truth about their feelings. So we know ground truth based on their dehumanisation ratings, and then basically look at how their writing style can actually reflect their deceptive or honest dehumanisation.

0:33:14.2 Ava Ma De Sousa: And how extreme were people rating different groups, 'cause I'm assuming maybe some people are rating a group at a 95, even though that is latently dehumanizing, 'cause you're saying they're not 100% human, but would that be someone who, if they were asked to lie about their feelings towards that group, would you be expecting them to talk about that group in a dehumanised way, or in a more humanised way? If they're rating a group at a 97, are they still dehumanizing that group?

0:33:41.3 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, they're still dehumanizing that group because it's still not fully evolved, and in the descriptions of The Ascent of Man and the writing on The Ascent of Man, all humans are fully evolved, there should be no distinction between any group. People are systematic in their judgments. I'm just looking at the table right now in the paper, the means are quite staggering. The means are from 80-90 in that feeling thermometer with groups in the high 70s. There are a bunch of people here that believe that certain out groups are indeed less evolved.

0:34:16.4 Dr. David Markowitz: Now, why people might feel that way, have some intuition, based on some of our other works on one of my colleagues, Paul Slovic here at the University of Oregon has been a really great collaborator and colleague on this work, where some people are quite virtuous in their beliefs. They actually believe that thoughts on these individuals are just the right way to do it, or a right way to view them, and their views are indeed virtuous and the violence that they inflict on these individuals are quite virtuous as well. So people hold these internal beliefs quite systematically in these horrifying and unjust ways.

0:34:49.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: Okay. So people are really believing that they're correct in their assessments.

0:34:53.7 Dr. David Markowitz: They're correct and it's the right thing.

0:34:55.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: And are these just online participants?

0:34:57.6 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, these are about online research participants.

0:35:00.1 Ava Ma De Sousa: Okay. So nothing, particularly, you're not getting an extremely conservative sample or proud boys.

0:35:05.4 Dr. David Markowitz: No and I conduct this, but 50-50 across self-identified Democrats and Republicans in the US.

0:35:11.2 Ava Ma De Sousa: In regards to the study then, I guess because you know the ground truth of whether they're lying or not, and you're kind of assigning them to that, what are the things that come out in the people who are lying both ways, are there similarities and would you be able to detect that if you hadn't known that they were lying?

0:35:27.5 Dr. David Markowitz: So quite often, we probably wouldn't be able to tell only because these are socially undesirable things that people are being asked to report on. So if you ask someone like, "How do you feel about this group?" Quite often, they might actually just say, "Oh, they're fine, or I don't really have an opinion one way or the other." But again, being anonymous and being in a research study, people feel pretty open about expressing how they feel. I didn't go in content-wise to look at what people were writing about. There is a whole 'nother study there to see what were people actually picking out in terms of when they were deceptively humanising or dehumanising a group.

0:36:05.4 Dr. David Markowitz: But just anecdotally, they really talked about personal experiences, I thought that this was quite an interesting phenomenon where people would say, "I had this personal interaction with this group, and therefore that's why I feel this particular way," rather than just largely making blanket statements about a particular group. People actually honed in on personal experiences, so there's something about stories, there's something about a narrative, there's something about personal experience that actually can either change someone's mind or it can actually lead to that feeling, which then could potentially be an intervention to create more humanity in the world.

0:36:39.8 Dr. David Markowitz: We need to show amazing stories about groups that people say that they have these negative feelings about to perhaps either change your mind or show that, no, your experience was maybe a one-off.

0:36:49.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: And so this was for people who were telling the truth and lying. They were all sharing these personal stories?

0:36:53.8 Dr. David Markowitz: Quite often, yeah, across different types. I often saw those stories.

0:36:58.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: Do you think the motivation underlying those things is the same if someone were to be lying, that they can kind of take that cover of a personal story and be like, this isn't really what I think, it's not really statistical, it's just a made up story versus someone who really believes those things also is like, I believe this because it happened to me.

0:37:18.0 Dr. David Markowitz: We don't know, but the interesting phenomenon here is that people are drilling down to a personal story, yet they're asked to be making generalizations about a group. And that is like... That's an interesting way to think about... Well, if I'm being told to talk about all Democrats or all Republicans, 'cause those were two of the eight out groups that were in the study, they would make a generalisation about that group probably when they're thinking about it, but then when they have to write about it, they go down to that personal experience and that layered approach is actually kind of a psychologically interesting one. Were they indeed thinking about that one incident when they were making that judgment, or are there different layers to it as they're thinking about their judgements more deeply?

0:38:02.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: So in this study, for the outcome of looking at deception, what did you hope to find in terms of making people lie about these groups?

0:38:10.2 Dr. David Markowitz: The main idea was a theoretical interest of mine. Where we often think about dehumanisation as people are expressing their negative thoughts and feelings with a group that tends to be looked at as less than or not, but that's not the way the world works. [chuckle] The world works by sometimes we have niceties in terms of, I can't really express how I feel about this group, and therefore I'm going... What strategies can I use to fake an outward sense of humanity, but really, internally, I don't feel like these groups are human. And deception actually is that strategy and so for mine, what I was trying to achieve with this work was blend these two seemingly disparate literatures, and so just know there's actually a lot of symbiosis here, there's a lot of connection, and if we think about it in a way that people lie and tell the truth about groups they like and dislike, that's important to look at, and something that language can really inform.

0:39:08.4 Ava Ma De Sousa: And ultimately, are you looking at being able to detect these types of lies?

0:39:15.0 Dr. David Markowitz: It's really tough. Any deception detection task is gonna be fraught with base rate issues, can be fraught with not having enough data, which is again a good and bad thing. We don't have enough lies, people don't lie enough for us to really have a good enough detection ability. So for me, deception detection literature and the deception detection problem is really interesting, but stays away from my core interests.

0:39:40.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: Are we actually able to detect lies? I feel like in media, there's a lot of stuff on lie detectors and that physiological component and body language, are those real things?

0:39:51.4 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, the typical accuracy is about 54%, you'll see that number oft scattered throughout the deception literature. But way more accurate for truths than lies, and quite often, it's something that's called the veracity effect, pioneered by a really brilliant colleague of mine, Tim Levine, this idea that people are more accurate for truth than lies 'cause we often guess true more often. I guess that, like you said, the statement to me and I had to guess is this a lie or truth, I would more often guess true than not, we're biased towards the truth. And that truth bias is a really powerful and adaptive thing, and that partly leads to really, really poor deception detection accuracy.

0:40:30.6 Ava Ma De Sousa: Okay, so even technology doesn't really help us there?

0:40:34.4 Dr. David Markowitz: Not always, for example, it's really interesting, there are some papers that you'll come across, at least in, let's say the disinformation or fake news literature where computers can detect fake news or just information at the language level with 95% accuracy, like super, super accurate. Those are all retrospective studies, you know exactly what a lie is, you know exactly what a truth is, and the world doesn't allow us to have that really neat and clean design. Prospectively, it's really tough to detect lies and truths, because quite often we are biased towards that truth, and there's no trigger to knock us out of that truth default state. We're not sceptical about something, we don't own our arguments or counter evidence to suggest that one claim was actually not truthful. So there's a really amazing book. Again, it's by my colleague, Tim Levine, called Duped, and it's on his theory called truth default theory just published in 2020. It's a magnum opus of deception research. I highly recommend it for anyone who's really interested.

0:41:34.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: It's really interesting because you said that people overestimate how many lies people tell, but it seems like in those individual cases, that generalized thinking kind of goes out the window. Your students, for example, will say that 70% of the time people are lying around dating apps, people are lying that much, so people seem to be over-estimating how much deception there is out there, but then when it comes down to judging an individual case, they tend to go the opposite way?

0:42:01.8 Dr. David Markowitz: Do they go the opposite way? Or they're just really bad at it still, they just... I think the underlying idea is that we have really... We're just really bad intuitors and detectors of deception. We cannot intuit how often people lie, if someone is lying, we need ground truth, and that is... That's why fact-checking is really critical, it's why it's such an incredible not only public service but a central part of democracy in order to figure out what lies are, we need to know what the truth is, and that's such a foundational part of deception research, and an obvious one. But it really makes all the difference.

0:42:40.4 Ava Ma De Sousa: So you do have a study looking at detecting fake news, does that also go with what you've been saying that we're not very good at detecting that fake news?

0:42:48.7 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, so detection accuracy by humans is really horrible, just in the same way as a really hot topic right now of can people detect automated text from ChatGPT? Any sort of AI system, people are horrible at it. No more than chance 50-50 accuracy in terms of discerning, is this human generated or is this AI generated. It almost replicates the deception findings essentially of just being bad at intuiting human versus not deception versus not... It's kind of remarkable.

0:43:20.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah, that's insane. I remember when I was an undergrad, which was only three, four years ago, and I was in philosophy class and we were talking about the Turing test, and it was like, oh we are not...

0:43:30.4 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, Turing test is over.

0:43:31.9 Ava Ma De Sousa: I know.

0:43:32.1 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, one of my colleagues, and actually he was my advisor in grad school, but I call him my colleague now, Jeff Hancock he's at Stanford, he has a great phrase, and I think it's exactly true. The Turing test is dead.

0:43:45.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah, that's what it feels like. It's shocking because I remember writing my essays about it being not there yet, it's maybe not even in my lifetime, but now it's... Yeah, ChatGPT is doing a better job at writing cover letters than I am.

0:43:57.7 Dr. David Markowitz: Exactly. Except, and we have this pre-print that's up right now that's under review at a journal that looks at like, okay, if we know that humans are really bad at detecting automated versus human-generated speech, are there any linguistic differences when you ask, let's say a large language model to create or fake human experiences? And this also blends into my deception research 'cause there's really great work where people have written fake hotel reviews or fake headlines, and I want to look at, well, do humans lie differently than automated assistants like ChatGPT, like do they lie? What's amazing is that you can ask ChatGPT to actually write fake hotel reviews, and there is a very separable linguistic signal in the AI-generated hotel reviews from the human deceptive ones, and we're calling this ChatGPT and AI generated text is inherently deceptive. It cannot have a human-like experience. It is deceptive by it's own very nature when it's relating a personal experience. But humans are intentionally deceptive, they have the choice to lie or tell the truth, and there are these separable linguistic signals, namely that automated text or AI-generated text is less readable, and it's more emotional, and you're talking about personal experiences compared to humans.

0:45:16.3 Ava Ma De Sousa: And these separable signals, are they detectable and separable by humans, or is it more machine learning?

0:45:23.6 Dr. David Markowitz: That's the next step. That's the thing we wanna look at. So statistically, if we just look at what the classification accuracy between humans and automated text, it's actually quite good, I think it's anywhere between 60%-80% in terms of being able to discriminate between AI-generated text and human-generated text. Can humans pick up on these things and actually use those cues perhaps to identify differences, that's what we wait to be seen.

0:45:50.1 Ava Ma De Sousa: And is there a reason or do you have a theory as to why the AI would be more emotional when relating these personal stories?

0:45:58.5 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, so there's really great work, again, Jeff Hancock and his group at Stanford, that it was generally a positivity and emotional bias in AI-generated text. For example, in smart replies, anything you have on Gmail or something, where it's like, yes, that sounds great. Where an AI basically did that for you, they tend to be way more positive and way more flowery, I guess, if you wanna put it, than what humans would produce. There's this positivity bias or emotional bias that often occurs with that AI produces compared to humans.

0:46:30.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: And this definitely might be beyond the scope of what you do, but does that have to do with the training sets that they're being trained on or is it implemented on purpose, is there a way for us to know that?

0:46:43.4 Dr. David Markowitz: Could be the training data, could also be the programmers say, humans are really... Humans will respond more positively when you are positive to it. We really don't know, but there is... At least documented, the evidence suggests there is that emotional or positivity bias.

0:47:00.2 Ava Ma De Sousa: Okay, definitely getting into that scary territory of, yeah, if we're gonna be using this stuff more often than the people who are coding it, if there are these specific breaks or specific added weights that people are putting on additionally to these training sets that we don't really know what's going on? That's kind of scary how much is lying in the hands of...

0:47:18.0 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, I'll say not even the if, but when we continue to be using these things, because we've been using them for many, many years now. All the way from smart replies to getting reservations for a variety of different experiences, they are a part of our life, just haven't known it yet, but now it's interface.

0:47:38.7 Ava Ma De Sousa: What are you working on next that you're most excited about? And I'm sure with the amount of publications and stuff that you're working on, this could be long, but whatever you feel like sharing.

0:47:47.0 Dr. David Markowitz: Sure, I'll share one thing that's kind of exciting and it relates to some of the deception work that we talked about earlier, so there's a segment of the population, it's called prolific liars, or people who lie prolifically. Those are individuals who lie significantly more than the everyday liar. I mentioned to you before that people tend to lie one or two times per day, well, think about someone who says that they lie 10 times a day, 20 times a day, if not more. And what we know about these individuals is actually quite little. Don't know too much beyond that... About them beyond they tend to be younger, male, 10-20 times higher on psychopathy compared to everyday liars. But for me, as someone who also likes to study deception and technology, I'm trying to figure out the digital lives of these prolific liars. Who do they interact with? How much they interact with them, what do they do on everyday basis in terms of their browsing history? Who are these individuals at the minute detail level of what seems every day, mundane things. But they actually could provide a really interesting glimpse psychologically into the lives of these prolific liars. I'm trying to do some of the first work of it's kind to figure out who are these individuals psychologically through their digital traces.

0:48:58.4 Ava Ma De Sousa: Could you give us just a glimpse of how you would go about finding these people and testing them?

0:49:04.1 Dr. David Markowitz: Yeah, so the way that you identify prolific liars, you have to track them over time, 'cause rather than just having a one-shot sense of deception, quite often you wanna have their long-term behavior and you get them to cheat or lie on behavioral tasks number of times, let's say, cheat on a math test or cheat on different word problems. You can separate the population based on those who are at the long right tail of a distribution compared to the remainder of the distribution, so you can separate them statistically, you can also separate them just through their self-report measures, there are a variety of different ways to do it tend to yield the same answers. But essentially, if you think of a distribution of lying, lying is not normally distributed, so that long right tail is the population of people who we're really interested in.

[music]

0:49:51.4 Beth Fisher: David was speaking about this dehumanizing scale. And I have a question about this because I've never heard of this before. I definitely know the images of evolution, but I was wondering, by presenting someone with that scale and asking them to place where they think a certain group is, are you already then... Are you changing their opinion for them to assume that they're on a different place on the scale? I was just wondering, before people are presented with that scale and that image, do they hold that belief or by showing that and saying, "Oh, you know what, you can put someone anyway on that." Then they're like, "Oh, I can do that now." Does that make sense?

0:50:36.5 Ava Ma De Sousa: Yeah, I see what you're saying, but I think that that question is a general psychology question of if you're saying to someone in inter-group stuff in general, if it's just a language question that's like, how important is it for you personally to not behave in ways that are prejudiced, then that might influence how they're responding. This isn't an answer to your question, but I think to me, the most interesting part of that scale, and I think even the first research that came out about it was that the researchers didn't think this was gonna work, because who is going to put other humans... Even if you're asked that, who is going to say that, oh, I think Chinese people are at a 60% on the evolutionary scale and put them as not even bipedal or something, that's insane. And I think they didn't think that it was gonna work because before they started doing this work, so a lot of it is Nour Kteily's work, and a late researcher now, Emil Bruno.

0:51:36.8 Ava Ma De Sousa: They were doing this work on blatant dehumanisation because before that, there was this belief in psychology that a lot of prejudice had gone underground, so that we would never explicitly de-humanise someone else, it's just that we might hold these kind of implicit dehumanisation. And most of the research in that space was we are more likely to ascribe complex thoughts and complex emotions to certain groups rather than out groups, for example, so people that are in our own group were more likely to think of them as complex and more human in that way. But there wasn't a lot of research about explicit dehumanisation, 'cause there was kind of a rise of that after World War II, but then that fell after people were like, oh, civil rights happened, everything's okay now, Obama is president. And then they started realizing that people were still explicitly dehumanizing others, and obviously in the age of Donald Trump, where migrants were literally called animals, we see that. But then they started doing this research with that scale, and they were shocked that it worked because we didn't think that people would even ever wanna respond that.

0:52:38.1 Ava Ma De Sousa: And when I've used the scale, there are people, a lot of people who are like, what the hell? And who put everything at 100, but as David was saying, a lot of the averages were 70, and we can put a picture of what the scale is on our show notes, you can take a look at it, it's pretty intense, it's not that subtle of changes from one picture to the next, it's very evolution of man from on all fours to fully homo sapiens as we are now.

0:53:06.1 Beth Fisher: I guess that's why I was so shocked to hear about a scale that people don't just put it at 100, I was wondering, I was like, "Oh, is it because they feel like they're forced?" 'Cause I was so shocked. Yeah, okay, so it sounds like the people originally were as well, that anyone wouldn't put someone at 100. I just didn't... Yeah, I just... Yeah, that just is shocking.

0:53:27.2 Ava Ma De Sousa: So the prompt is, some people think that people can vary in how human-like they seem. According to this view, some people might seem highly evolved, whereas others might seem no different than lower animals. Using the sliders below, indicate how evolved you consider this group of people to be. And then you would rate those groups. So it's very explicit. I think there's obviously that first part of some people think this, so I don't think it's necessarily saying to people you should be placing some groups at the top and some groups at the bottom, but it is saying you wouldn't be the only one to have this view, so kind of making it socially acceptable because obviously, you think it's really not socially acceptable to put someone low or not at 100% on that slider.

0:54:09.0 Ava Ma De Sousa: But yeah, I think those findings were ground breaking and disturbing at the time when they came out maybe 10 years ago-ish or less, because we thought that we were passed that.

[music]

0:54:30.1 Ava Ma De Sousa: Our intro and outro music is Nobody Stayed for the DJ, by Glassio. Our transition music is Back for More also by Glassio. Minds Matter is mixed, edited and created by Beth Fisher. She's the Australia one, and me Ava Ma de Sousa. We will be back in two weeks with a brand new episode of Minds Matter. In the meantime, find all our episodes and show notes on mindsmatterpodcast.com.