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Erasmus University Rotterdam
Making Minds Matter

Practice What You Preach?

Parental lying and discrepancies between attitudes, behaviors, and teaching

Ines Lucieer

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Practice What You Preach?

Parental lying and discrepancies between attitudes, behaviors, and teaching

Doen wat je zegt?

Liegen door ouders en discrepanties tussen attitudes, gedrag en wat zij hun kinderen leren

Thesis

to obtain the degree of Doctor from

Erasmus University Rotterdam by command of the

rector magnificus

Prof.dr.ir. A.J. Schuit

and in accordance with the decision of the Doctorate Board.

The public defense shall be held on

Friday 20 November 2026 at 10.30 hrs by

Ines Constance Lucieer born in Voorburg, the Netherlands.



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Chapter 1



General Introduction

General Introduction

Lying in Everyday Parent–Child Interactions

Meet three parents navigating ordinary moments with their children.

On a typical weekday morning, Eva is trying to get her eight-year-old son, Tom, ready for school. Tom is not cooperating and refuses to put on his shoes. To make him hurry, Eva tells him that if he is late, his teacher will be upset. Eva knows this is not true, but she hopes it will make Tom hurry.

David listens to his ten-year-old daughter, Sam, proudly performing a song she has been practicing at school. David notices that Sam sings off-key and struggles to keep the melody. Still, he tells her that it sounds wonderful and that she sings beautifully. David knows this is not entirely true, but he does not want to hurt Sam's feelings or make her feel insecure.

After a long day, Sara's six-year-old son, Omar, asks her to play a game with him. Sara feels tired and would prefer a quiet moment to herself before the start of the evening routine. Instead of telling him this, Sara tells Omar that she still has some work to finish. Sara knows this is not true, but she hopes it will give her a few minutes of quiet time.

These vignettes illustrate several situations in which parents tell lies to their children, each serving a different purpose. The scenarios reflect the kinds of moment-to-moment decisions that can arise in everyday parent–child interactions, in which parents navigate what to say, soften, or withhold. These situations are not exceptional; telling lies is a common feature of social interaction. The present dissertation examines how lying functions within everyday parent–child interactions, with particular attention to characterizing parental lying behaviors to which children are exposed, assessing and comparing parental lying in a reliable and meaningful way, and understanding the extent to which parental lying aligns with or diverges from parents' attitudes toward lying and what they explicitly teach their children about lying.

Although lying may appear straightforward, it is not a simple or uniform behavior. Rather, it can take different forms and serve different functions in social interaction. Reflecting this complexity, scholars have proposed different definitions and examined how lying varies across relational contexts, individuals, and situations.

Defining Parental Lying

Reflecting the complexity of lying, scholars differ in how broadly or narrowly lying is conceptualized (Mahon, 2008). In its broadest conceptualization, lying has been described as all deliberate attempts to induce false beliefs in another person, including explicit falsehoods (i.e., making statements one believes to be false), distortions (i.e., reframing information in a misleading way), and omissions (i.e., withholding relevant information; Vrij, 2008). Other conceptualizations distinguish between lying and deception by defining lying more narrowly as making an explicit false statement, while treating distortions and omissions as forms of deceptive behavior (Mahon, 2008). In this dissertation, parental lying is conceptualized in its broadest sense as all deliberate attempts to induce false beliefs, encompassing explicit falsehoods, distortions, and omissions.

The Emerging Field of Parental Lying to Children

Most empirical work on lying has focused on adult interpersonal relationships, such as interactions among friends or romantic partners (e.g., DePaulo et al., 1996; Ennis et al., 2008). These studies have shown that lying occurs frequently in everyday interactions, including in close relationships. In addition, a substantial body of research has examined children's lying behavior and its developmental correlates (e.g., Evans & Lee, 2013; Talwar & Lee, 2008). Within the parent–child context, research has predominantly addressed adolescents' lying to parents (e.g., Baudat et al., 2022; Jensen et al., 2004). Given that people lie in everyday interactions, including in close relationships (e.g., DePaulo et al., 1996; Ennis et al., 2008), it is plausible that parents also lie to their children. Yet parents' lying to children has received little empirical attention, despite parents being central figures in children's everyday lives and engaging in frequent, routine interactions with them.

Over roughly the past two decades, a growing body of work has begun to examine how and why parents lie to their children in everyday contexts. One of the earliest empirical accounts was provided by Brown (2002), who documented parental lying to children in an ethnographic study conducted in Tenejapa, a rural community in southern Mexico. Brown described how parents sometimes made false statements to their children in everyday situations to control children's behavior, for example, "Don't go out on the trail, there are rabbit dogs!" (Brown, 2002, p. 244).

More systematic empirical attention to parental lying emerged from the work of Heyman et al. (2009, 2013), who examined a specific form of parental lying referred to as *parenting by lying*. Parenting by lying encompasses lies intended to influence children's behavior or emotions, such as promoting compliance, discouraging undesirable behavior, or shaping children's emotional responses by limiting distress or fear and fostering more positive emotions. The situations described in the opening vignettes illustrate these functions. Eva's false statement that the teacher will be upset targets Tom's compliance, whereas

David's exaggerated positive evaluation of Sam's singing aims to protect her feelings. This conceptualization of parenting by lying has been the primary focus in empirical research on parental lying to date. As a result, much of what is known about parental lying is based on this specific form of lying.

Research on parenting by lying has shown that it is prevalent across countries. Studies in the United States, China, Turkey, and Singapore, using both parental self-reports and retrospective reports by children, indicate that 67%–100% of parents lie to their children (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009, 2013; Jackson et al., 2021a; Setoh et al., 2022). These findings suggest that parenting by lying is widespread across diverse cultural contexts. At the same time, some studies indicate cross-country and cross-group variation in the prevalence of specific parental lies (Heyman et al., 2009, 2013), suggesting that while parenting by lying itself is widespread, the forms it takes may vary across cultural and social groups.

Moreover, previous work has linked overall parenting by lying scores to potentially adverse relational and developmental outcomes. For example, overall parenting by lying has been linked to lower parent–child relationship quality (e.g., Dodd & Malm, 2023; Liu & Wei, 2020), higher levels of children's own lying behavior (e.g., Dodd & Malm, 2023; Jackson et al., 2021a), and greater internalizing and externalizing problems in children (e.g., Santos et al., 2017; Setoh et al., 2020). Taken together, this body of work suggests that this form of parental lying is widespread and may have implications for parent–child relationships and child development.

Parental Lying and the Socialization of Lying

One reason why parental lying may have important implications for children's development is that parents are socialization agents through whom children learn about the norms, values, and standards of their social contexts (Maccoby, 1999; Smetana, 1999). Through everyday interactions with their parents, children develop an understanding of which behaviors are acceptable and expected, or unacceptable and discouraged. Theoretical work on socialization suggests that children learn through several parental influences, including parental discipline, explicit instruction, and observation of parents' lying behavior in everyday interactions (Grusec & Davidov, 2010). According to social learning theory, observational learning is a key mechanism through which children acquire social and moral behaviors, as they attend to and imitate the actions of significant others (Bandura, 1977).

In this context, parental lying behavior may represent an important source of social learning about honesty and lying. By observing lying in everyday interactions, children may encounter implicit cues about when lying occurs and how acceptable it may be in certain situations. Although children may not recognize every instance in which a parent lies, available evidence suggests that they are aware that parents lie to them. Studies based on children's reports

of parental lying often yield patterns that are broadly comparable to those reported by parents themselves (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009), suggesting that children generally notice such behavior. At the same time, this awareness may depend on the type of lie. Low et al. (2024) found that agreement between parent and child reports was somewhat stronger for parental lies used to influence children's behavior than for lies intended to promote positive emotions, indicating that children may be more aware of some types of parental lying than others. If children encounter parental lying as part of their everyday interactions with parents, understanding the nature of this behavior becomes essential for understanding the socialization context in which children learn about honesty and lying.

Despite its relevance for children's moral socialization, several aspects of parental lying remain insufficiently understood. In particular, we have limited insight into how frequently parents lie to their children, how the use of parental lying varies across types of lies, and how it can be reliably and validly measured and meaningfully compared across populations. Developing a more comprehensive and fine-grained characterization of parental lying is therefore important not only for describing a relatively understudied parenting behavior, but also for clarifying an important aspect of the socialization context in which children learn about lying.

Toward a Better Understanding of Parental Lying

A better understanding of parental lying as part of this socialization context requires a more comprehensive picture of the experiences of children with parental lying in everyday parent–child interactions. This involves not only whether parents lie, but also how often they lie, how it varies across types of lies, and how it can be reliably and validly assessed and meaningfully compared across populations.

Prevalence and Frequency of Parental Lying

Most research on parental lying has focused on whether parents lie at all, emphasizing prevalence. Although this work was essential in establishing that parental lying is common, it provides limited insight into how frequently parents lie to their children. Empirical studies have shown that lying is widespread (e.g., DePaulo et al., 1996; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998) yet unevenly distributed across individuals: most people report telling few or no lies within a given period, whereas a relatively small group accounts for a disproportionate share of lies (e.g., Serota & Levine, 2015; Serota et al., 2021). These findings point to substantial individual differences in lying frequency that are obscured by aggregate indicators. Applied to parental lying, this implies that focusing solely on whether parents lie provides an incomplete picture of its occurrence and that meaningful characterization of parental lying requires systematic attention not only to the prevalence but also to the frequency of parental lying to children.

Heterogeneity and Multidimensionality of Parental Lying

At the same time, existing research typically treats the construct of parental lying as unidimensional by relying on a single overall parenting by lying score when reporting its prevalence and examining its associations with child and family outcomes (Dodd & Malm, 2023; Liu & Wei, 2020; Low et al., 2024; Jackson et al., 2021a; Santos et al., 2017; Setoh et al., 2022). Insights from the broader lying literature suggest that such a unidimensional perspective may be overly reductive. Lying is widely conceptualized as a multifaceted form of social behavior that encompasses qualitatively different types of lies with distinct interpersonal functions and implications (e.g., DePaulo et al., 1996; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998). A common distinction differentiates self-oriented lies, aimed at protecting or advancing one's own interests, from other-oriented lies, intended to protect or benefit another person (e.g., DePaulo et al., 1996; Cantarero et al., 2018; Erat & Gneezy, 2011; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015). These different types of lies occur with varying frequency, are evaluated differently, and have different relational implications. For instance, self-oriented lies are generally evaluated more negatively and are more often associated with relational costs, whereas other-oriented lies tend to be evaluated more leniently and may help maintain or strengthen relationships (Bussey, 1999; Cantarero et al., 2025; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Mann et al., 2014; Talwar & Crossman, 2011).

Following these insights, parental lying should not be treated as a uniform phenomenon. Functionally different lies may vary in their frequency, motivations, and relational implications, and therefore should not be combined into a single overall score when examining parental lying. Aggregating qualitatively different types of lies into a single score may frame the behavior as a largely uniform and largely negative parenting practice. Such framing leaves little room for potential differences in the motives, functions, and relational implications associated with different types of lies.

Expanding the Conceptualization of Parental Lying

In addition, the predominant focus in research on parenting by lying, reflecting lies aimed at influencing children's behavior and emotions, likely captures only a limited subset of the interpersonal goals that parental lies may serve. Research on lying more broadly indicates that lies can serve a wide range of goals, such as managing self-presentation, protecting privacy, avoiding tension or conflict, or maintaining social relationships (e.g., DePaulo et al., 1996; Borsellino, 2013; Van der Geest, 2018). These goals can be understood as more specific manifestations of the broader motives captured by the distinction between self-oriented and other-oriented lies. For instance, goals related to self-presentation and privacy protection primarily reflect motives that benefit the liar and can therefore be considered self-oriented. By contrast, goals such as avoiding tension or conflict and maintaining social relationships may benefit both the liar and others. As such, these goals may reflect either self-oriented or other-oriented motives, depending on the context and the intended beneficiary. Similar

goals are likely to play a role in parental lying within parent–child interactions (Fivush et al., 2019; Furnham et al., 2014; Kok et al., 2025), yet they remain largely underrepresented in existing questionnaires and therefore underexamined in the parental lying literature. This suggests that current measures capture only a subset of the lies that parents tell within the parent–child relationship.

Measurement and Comparability in Parental Lying Research

To meaningfully interpret findings on parental lying and to enable valid comparisons across studies and populations, it is essential that the construct is measured in a reliable and comparable way. However, several methodological limitations in existing literature complicate such interpretation. Although several questionnaire-based instruments have been developed and used to assess parental lying and estimate its prevalence and associations (Allen & Kara, 2023; Heyman et al., 2009, 2013; Jackson et al., 2021a; Setoh et al., 2022), their psychometric evaluation has thus far been limited, making it difficult to draw strong conclusions about their reliability and validity. Establishing the psychometric quality of measurement instruments is essential for ensuring that constructs are assessed consistently and accurately (e.g., DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

In addition, several studies have compared parental lying across countries or groups without formally testing measurement invariance across populations. Measurement invariance testing is essential when comparing latent constructs across groups because it determines whether a scale measures the same construct in the same way across populations. Without evidence of invariance, observed differences between groups may reflect differences in how items are interpreted or function rather than true differences in the underlying construct (Meredith, 1993; Van de Schoot et al., 2012). Evidence from research on other parenting constructs suggests that such equivalence cannot be assumed and typically requires explicit testing (Huang et al., 2011; Ren et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2023). This raises questions about the extent to which findings on parental lying can be meaningfully compared across studies and populations.

Together, these limitations point to important gaps in current knowledge about parental lying. Given the potential role of parental lying in children's socialization of honesty and lying, a clearer understanding of this parenting practice is warranted. Accordingly, the **first aim of this dissertation is to provide a more comprehensive and fine-grained characterization of parental lying** by examining its prevalence and frequency, how it varies across types of lies, and the conditions under which it can be reliably and validly assessed and compared meaningfully across populations.

Apparent Discrepancies Between Parents' Lying-Related Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching

> Returning to Eva. She lied to her eight-year-old son, Tom, by telling him that his teacher would be upset if he was late in order to make him hurry when he refused to put on his shoes. Although the lie helped her to move the morning routine along, Eva believes that, as a parent, she should be honest with Tom, and she generally considers lying to him undesirable. Later that evening, after dinner and the usual bedtime routine, Eva brings Tom to bed. As they briefly talk about the day before he goes to sleep, Eva reminds him that lying is wrong and tells him that people should tell the truth.

The vignette shows that Eva's attitudes toward lying, her own lying behavior, and what she teaches her child about honesty and lying do not fully align. Although Eva believes that, as a parent, she should be honest with Tom, she nevertheless lies to him to influence his behavior. Additionally, she tells Tom that lying is wrong, thereby discouraging a behavior she engages in herself. Existing studies suggest that patterns similar to the one illustrated by Eva may occur in practice, although the alignment between parents' attitudes, lying behaviors, and teaching about lying has not yet been examined directly in an integrated way. Research indicates that many parents report lying to their children despite expressing general disapproval of lying (Heyman et al., 2009; Lavoie et al., 2016), indicating a potential discrepancy between attitudes toward lying and parental lying behavior. At the same time, although relatively few parents believe that lying is never acceptable, many communicate to their children that lying is always wrong (Lavoie et al., 2016), suggesting a discrepancy between parents' personal attitudes and the norms they convey. Misalignment may also occur between parents' lying behavior and their explicit teaching about lying. Even though many parents teach their children that lying is wrong, most parents report having lied to their children themselves (Heyman et al., 2009). Together, these findings suggest that parents' attitudes toward lying, their own lying behaviors, and what they teach their children about lying may not always align.

Examining whether such discrepancies occur is important, as they may have implications for both parents and children. From a cognitive dissonance perspective, inconsistencies between individuals' beliefs and their behavior can elicit psychological discomfort (Cooper, 2007; Festinger, 1957), suggesting that discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching may constitute a source of tension for parents. For children, discrepancies between parents' direct and indirect moral socialization may complicate the internalization of moral norms and contribute to perceptions of unpredictability in the family environment (Carrasco & Holgado-Tello, 2015; Dwairy, 2010).

Theoretical Expectations on Alignment Between Parents' Lying-Related Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching

Apparent discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching are noteworthy in light of several theoretical perspectives that view individuals' evaluations of a behavior as an important factor in shaping behavior. In the parenting literature, parents' beliefs and evaluations are thought to shape parenting behavior (Abidin, 1992; Bornstein et al., 2018). Parents' views about appropriate conduct, parenting goals, and their role as caregivers are thought to influence how they interpret and respond to everyday situations involving their children. From a broader behavioral perspective, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) conceptualizes behavior as the outcome of behavioral intentions, which are shaped in part by individuals' attitudes toward that behavior. Within this framework, more favorable attitudes increase the likelihood of forming intentions to engage in a behavior, which in turn increases the likelihood of performing it. In the context of parental lying, parents who evaluate lying more negatively may be less likely to lie to their children and more likely to communicate negative views of lying to them. However, both parenting models and the Theory of Planned Behavior also indicate that this relationship is more complex than a simple one-to-one correspondence.

Parenting models conceptualize parental behavior as embedded within a broader system of interacting values (Abidin, 1992; Bornstein et al., 2018). Although parents' beliefs and evaluations may guide how they interpret and respond to situations involving their children, their behavior is also shaped by child characteristics, situational demands, and the resources available to them. In this sense, parental lying, like other parenting behaviors, may reflect the interplay between personal evaluations and contextual pressures. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) likewise suggests that the relationship between evaluations and behavior is shaped by additional processes beyond attitudes alone. Within this framework, attitudes are only one determinant of behavioral intentions, alongside perceived social norms and perceived behavioral control. Meta-analytic evidence further indicates that attitudes, perceived subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control together explain substantial variance in intentions, but a smaller proportion of variance in actual behavior (e.g., Armitage & Conner, 2001; McEachan et al., 2011). Research applying the Theory of Planned Behavior to dishonest behavior similarly shows that attitudes toward lying are associated with intentions to lie (Alleyne & Phillips, 2011; Beck & Ajzen, 1991), whereas the translation of these intentions into actual behavior is more modest (Beck & Ajzen, 1991). These perspectives converge on a nuanced theoretical expectation: parents' attitudes toward lying are likely to show some correspondence with their lying behaviors, insofar as evaluations of a behavior contribute to the motivational processes that guide action. At the same time, this correspondence is not expected to be direct or complete, as parenting behavior reflects multiple interacting influences. Consequently, although some alignment between parents' evaluations of lying and their lying behaviors

can be expected, this relation is unlikely to reflect a one-to-one correspondence.

Taken together, existing research and theoretical perspectives point to the importance of examining potential discrepancies between parents' lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching. To date, however, these discrepancies have not been systematically examined. It therefore remains unclear whether such discrepancies exist, how they can be empirically identified, how common they are, what forms they take, and how they relate to parents' and children's outcomes. To address this gap, the **second aim of this dissertation is to systematically examine discrepancies between parents' attitudes toward lying, their lying behaviors, and their teaching about lying.**

The two aims of this dissertation contribute to an understanding of parental lying within the broader context of children's moral socialization. The first aim examines how often parents lie to their children, how parental lying varies across different types of lies, and how it can be measured in a reliable and valid way and compared meaningfully across populations. In doing so, it clarifies which lying-related behaviors children may observe and learn from in everyday parent–child interactions. The second aim focuses on how parents' attitudes toward lying and their teaching about lying align with, or diverge from, their own lying behaviors, thereby providing insight into the consistency across different ways parents socialize their children about lying.

Dissertation Overview

To achieve these aims, I conducted four empirical studies, presented in Chapters 2–5, using data from three independent parent samples. I was primarily responsible for the design, data collection, analysis, and writing of the studies, under the supervision of my co-authors. The chapters are organized as follows.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive characterization of parental lying, using a convenience sample of parents from the Netherlands and a Prolific Academic sample of parents from the United States (US). In this chapter, the prevalence and frequency of parental lying are examined, both overall and across different types of lies (other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental). In addition, measurement invariance across the Dutch and US samples is tested to assess whether parental lying can be meaningfully compared across populations. Together, these analyses contribute to the first aim by clarifying the prevalence and frequency of different types of parental lies and evaluating the measurement conditions for cross-population comparisons.

Chapter 3 introduces the Parental Lying Scenarios Scale (PLSS), a 40-item self-report instrument designed to assess parental lying across a broad range of situations, drawing on a sample of Dutch parents from the LISS Panel (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences). Analyses evaluate the psychometric properties of the PLSS, including test-retest reliability, convergent and predictive validity, and factor structure. In doing so, this chapter

contributes to the first aim by establishing the measurement conditions required for the reliable and valid assessment of parental lying.

Chapter 4 represents the first empirical study to explicitly examine discrepancies between parents' lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching in a Dutch convenience sample. This chapter explores patterns of alignment and discrepancy across three lie types (other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental) by combining between-parent associations with within-parent latent profile analyses. Together, these analyses provide initial empirical evidence for the existence of such discrepancies and offer a first characterization of how they are patterned within parents.

Building on Chapter 4, **Chapter 5** examines parental lying discrepancies using an alternative, scenario-based approach that directly assesses within-parent discrepancies in a Dutch sample drawn from the LISS Panel. This chapter investigates the prevalence and frequency of self-reported discrepancies, examines whether different types of discrepancies cluster, and explores parents' reported feelings about these discrepancies. Together, these analyses contribute to the second aim by further clarifying how discrepancies occur, how they are structured across contexts, and how they are experienced by parents.

Chapter 6 presents the general discussion, in which the findings of the empirical chapters are synthesized and situated within the broader literature. This chapter reflects on the theoretical and methodological contributions of the dissertation and outlines key directions for future research. In doing so, it integrates the insights from both overarching aims and clarifies their broader implications.

Chapter 2



Parental Lying in the Netherlands and the United States: Shifting Perspectives on Prevalence, Frequency, Lie Types, and Cross-Country Comparisons

Open Science Statement:

Preregistration	https://osf.io/hmt4b
Open data	Will be made openly available on OSF upon publication.
Open materials	https://osf.io/3vm28/files/osfstorage
Open code	Will be made openly available on OSF upon publication.
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Abstract

Parental lying to children is common. Yet, important measurement issues, such as how lying is operationalized in terms of prevalence, frequency, and lie types, as well as challenges in cross-country comparability, remain underexplored. This preregistered study examined the prevalence of parental lying (whether parents report lying) and its frequency (how often they report lying), both overall and across lie types (i.e., other-oriented, self-oriented, instrumental). Additionally, measurement invariance was assessed to determine whether parental lying is interpreted equivalently across parents from the Netherlands and the United States (US), which enables meaningful cross-country comparisons.

Cross-sectional self-report data were collected from 109 parents in the Netherlands and 122 parents in the US with children aged 6–16. Chi-square tests were used to assess differences in prevalence and frequency, overall and across lie types. Multigroup Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MGCFA) was conducted to test measurement invariance, followed by comparisons of latent means across countries.

Most parents in both countries reported lying, although frequent lying was relatively rare. Prevalence and frequency captured distinct aspects of parental lying and showed different patterns across lie types. Full measurement invariance was established, supporting meaningful cross-country comparisons. No significant differences in overall lying tendencies were found between parents from the Netherlands and the US.

This study advances the understanding of parental lying by examining not only its prevalence but also its frequency and variation across lie types. Findings further suggest similarities between parents from the Netherlands and the US in item interpretation and overall lying tendencies. Crucially, the results demonstrate that how parental lying is operationalized shapes the conclusions that can be drawn. Together, these findings provide concrete guidance for how parental lying should be measured and compared in future research.

Keywords: parental lying, prevalence, frequency, lie types, measurement invariance

Parental Lying in the Netherlands and the United States: Shifting Perspectives on Prevalence, Frequency, Lie Types, and Cross-Country Comparisons

An increasing number of studies have examined the phenomenon of parents lying to their children (Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024). While definitions of lying vary (Mahon, 2008), they commonly share the notion of "deliberate communication that misleads and fosters false beliefs" (Hart & Curtis, 2023, p. 20). Studies conducted across different countries indicate that parental lying is a widespread behavior, with lifetime prevalence rates ranging from 67% to 100% across studies (Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024). These findings suggest that a substantial proportion of parents worldwide have lied to their children at least once. Yet, we know little about the assessment of this behavior. Critical methodological issues, such as measuring the frequency of lying, distinguishing between specific types of lies, or ensuring that reported cross-country variations are meaningful, remain insufficiently addressed in the current literature. This study aims to fill these gaps. By analyzing parents' self-reports of lying to their children in the Netherlands, a population for which such data have not yet been reported, and parents in the United States (US), this study seeks: (1) to explore the prevalence and frequency of parental lying – both overall and across specific types of lies – separately for each country and (2) to assess measurement invariance of the items measuring parental lying to determine whether meaningful comparisons can be made between parents from the Netherlands and the US. Depending on the level of measurement invariance established, we explore comparisons between these two groups.

Prevalence and Frequency of Lying

To fully understand the occurrence of lying, it is important to consider both its prevalence – the proportion of individuals who lie – and its frequency – how often individuals lie. The frequency of lying in the general population is highly skewed: most individuals tell very few lies, while a small minority lies frequently (Debey et al., 2015; Halevy et al., 2013; Serota & Levine, 2015; Serota et al., 2021). This skewed distribution suggests that measures focusing solely on the prevalence of parental lying, that is, the proportion of parents who lie to their children, may not accurately reflect the actual frequency of lies told to children in an average family. Rather than prevalence alone (e.g., yes/no measures; Heyman et al., 2013), the frequency of lying may be more critical for distinguishing between occasional lying, which may be normative and not inherently harmful (Curtis & Hart, 2022), and more frequent lying, which may carry relational costs. For example, frequent lying can undermine trust, increase alienation in relationships (Engels et al., 2006), and negatively affect the liar's perceived likeability (Tyler et al., 2006).

While existing research links the prevalence of parental lying to negative outcomes, such as diminished quality of parent–child relationships, increased child lying, and increased

internalizing and externalizing problems in children (Dodd & Malm, 2023; Jackson et al., 2021a; Liu & Wei, 2020; Low et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2017; Setoh et al., 2022), fully understanding its implications requires a closer examination of not just whether parents lie to their children, but also how frequently they do so. To date, only a few studies have examined aspects of the frequency of parental lying. Cargill and Curtis (2017) found a notable difference between retrospectively reported prevalence and frequency: while 90% of children reported that their parents had lied to them, only a small proportion (5%) reported that their parents lied often. Similarly, Malloy et al. (2019) showed that parents themselves, on average, reported lying only rarely. Given the importance of distinguishing between prevalence and frequency, this study will examine both aspects separately to provide a more nuanced picture of parental lying.

Different Types of (Parental) Lies

When studying the prevalence and frequency of parental lying, it is crucial to consider different types of lies. Research on lying in general distinguishes between types of lies based on their underlying intentions. A key distinction is between lies that benefit the lie-teller and those that benefit another person (e.g., Cantarero et al., 2018). Self-oriented lies, also referred to as antisocial or egoistic lies (e.g., DePaulo et al., 1996; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998), serve the interests of the lie-teller, potentially at the cost of others. For example, someone might deny responsibility for a mistake to avoid blame. In contrast, other-oriented lies, also referred to as prosocial or white lies (e.g., DePaulo et al., 1996; Erat & Gneezy, 2011; Levine & Lupoli, 2022; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015), are told to protect or help others, sometimes even at a cost to the lie-teller. For instance, someone might give false reassurance to spare another person's feelings. This distinction has been shown to be meaningful, as self-oriented lies can damage relationships, whereas other-oriented lies may help maintain or strengthen them (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Mann et al., 2014; Talwar & Crossman, 2011).

Much of the research on parental lying has focused less explicitly on this self–other distinction and more on a specific subtype of lying for the parent–child context, namely *parenting by lying* (Heyman et al., 2009), which refers to lies intended to influence children's emotions and behaviors. Lies aimed at influencing children's emotions, such as giving false praise to reduce negative feelings (e.g., complimenting poor piano playing), resemble other-oriented lies because they are primarily intended to protect the child's well-being (Setoh et al., 2020). Lies aimed at influencing children's behavior, commonly referred to as instrumental lies, are defined as lies told with the primary purpose of securing a child's behavioral compliance (Heyman et al., 2009). While instrumental lies may benefit the parent, for example by reducing conflict or ensuring obedience, or benefit the child in the long term, for example by encouraging socially appropriate or healthy behavior (Roza et al., 2024), their defining purpose is to influence the child's behavior, which makes them a conceptually distinct category of parental lying. Accordingly, the current study distinguishes

three types of parental lies: other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental.

The research conducted thus far suggests that distinguishing between types of lies is relevant when examining their prevalence and frequency, as multiple studies indicate that these aspects may vary depending on the type of lie. For example, some studies suggest that other-oriented parental lying is less common than instrumental lying (Heyman et al., 2009) or any other type of parental lying (Cargill & Curtis, 2017). Conversely, other research reports higher prevalence rates for parental self-oriented and instrumental lying compared to other-oriented lying (Setoh et al., 2022). However, comparisons of the frequency of different types of parental lying remain limited. To date, only two studies have directly compared the frequency of self-oriented lying and other-oriented lying in parents. DePaulo and Kashy (1998) found that self-oriented lies occurred more frequently than other-oriented lies, whereas Malloy et al. (2019) reported the opposite pattern: parents indicated telling more other-oriented lies than self-oriented lies. In summary, while earlier studies suggest that distinguishing between different types of parental lies is relevant when studying prevalence and frequency, further research is needed to better understand these variations.

Cross-Country Differences in Parental Lying

Initial reviews indicate high but variable prevalence rates across different countries (Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024). Studies on parental lying in various countries, such as the US (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009, 2013), China (Heyman et al., 2013), Turkey (Jackson et al., 2021a), and Singapore (Setoh et al., 2022), reveal slight variations in lifetime prevalence rates. In addition to overall prevalence, studies report cross-country and cross-group variations in the prevalence of specific types of parental lies. For instance, Heyman et al. (2013) found that instrumental lying was significantly more prevalent among parents in China compared to those in the US, whereas no significant differences were observed between these two groups regarding other-oriented lying. Similar patterns of variation have also been identified within specific socio-cultural groups in the US: Asian American parents were more likely to engage in instrumental lying compared to European American parents (Heyman et al., 2009). However, no differences were found in the prevalence of other-oriented lying between these groups.

Interpreting such cross-country or cross-group differences is challenging for two primary reasons. First, comparisons across studies from various countries are complicated because existing studies often use different instruments to measure parental lying, making it difficult to determine whether the observed differences across studies truly reflect variations across countries or groups. Second, even in studies where the same instrument is used across countries or groups (Heyman et al., 2009, 2013), there is a lack of evidence regarding the cross-country measurement invariance of this instrument. It is crucial to test for measurement invariance, because identical items may function differently across countries or groups due to factors such as language differences, cultural assumptions, or variations in

item interpretation, potentially undermining the validity of parental reports (e.g., Meredith, 1993; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016).

Although measurement invariance has not yet been examined in the context of parental lying, evidence from broader parenting shows that measurement invariance is not always evident and requires thorough evaluation (Huang et al., 2011; Ren et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2023). For example, Huang et al. (2011) investigated measurement invariance in mother-reported disciplinary strategies across multiple countries and Zhao et al. (2023) examined parent-reported measures of various parenting domains across parents in the US and China. In both studies, full measurement invariance was not achieved. As a result, average scores could not be meaningfully compared across countries.

The degree to which measurement invariance can be established depends on the specific instruments used, the concept being measured, and the populations under study. Accordingly, this study conducts a rigorous evaluation of measurement invariance before making cross-country comparisons, to ensure that these comparisons are meaningful.

The Current Study

The aim of this study is twofold. First, we investigate the prevalence and frequency of parental lying – both overall and for other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental lies – separately for parents from the Netherlands, a population for which such data have not yet been reported, and parents from the US, a population that has been examined in previous parental lying research (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009, 2013). Second, we assess measurement invariance of the parental lying items to determine whether meaningful comparisons can be made between parents from the Netherlands and the US. Depending on the level of invariance established, we explore group differences in parental lying.

Based on prior US studies reporting prevalence rates of 78%–90% (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009, 2013), and research in other countries (e.g., Jackson et al., 2021a; Setoh et al., 2022), we expect that most parents in both the Netherlands and the US will report lying to their children. Drawing on initial findings on parental lying frequency (Cargill & Curtis, 2017) and research on lying frequency in other populations (Debey et al., 2015; Halevy et al., 2013; Serota & Levine, 2015; Serota et al., 2021), we hypothesize that prevalence and frequency will each offer different perspectives on the occurrence of parental lying: while we expect most parents to report lying to their children, only a small subgroup (approximately 5%) is expected to lie often. In addition, prior work on parental lying (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Heyman et al., 2009; Malloy et al., 2019; Setoh et al., 2022) and on lying in other populations (DePaulo et al., 1996) suggests that prevalence and frequency may vary across lie types. However, given the mixed findings in the literature, we do not propose specific hypotheses regarding these variations. Finally, regarding measurement invariance, we likewise refrain from formulating specific hypotheses

about the extent to which meaningful cross-country comparisons can be made within the context of this study.

Method

Design and Procedure

This study includes data from both the Netherlands and the US. The data from the Netherlands are part of the Fami-LIES project, a series of studies on the early roots of lying within families (https://osf.io/3vm28). Data from the US were collected by researchers at a US university in the Southwest using the same methods as the Fami-LIES protocols. Cross-sectional data for the Netherlands and the US were gathered through an online questionnaire. This questionnaire was initially developed in the Netherlands and then translated into English using the forward-backward translation method.

The current study and data collection procedures were preregistered on the Open Science Framework (see https://osf.io/hmt4b and https://osf.io/cbvth, respectively). Any deviation from the preregistrations is described below. In the US, the questionnaire received ethical approval from the Texas State University Institutional Review Board (#7533). In the Netherlands, the questionnaire was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the European Research Council (ERC; Ares(2021)37377) and the Department of Psychology, Education, and Child Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam (ETH2122-0600).

The initial plan for data collection involved recruiting samples from the Netherlands and the US, starting with the personal networks of researchers and undergraduate students and extending to various (social) media platforms, schools, organizations, and daycare centers. While these methods yielded sufficient participants in the Netherlands, where data were collected from May 2022 to May 2023, these methods proved less effective in the US. Consequently, in line with our preregistration, we transitioned to recruiting parents from the US through Prolific Academic, an online platform for participant recruitment in academic research. Most US participants were recruited via Prolific Academic, with a small subgroup recruited through social media. Data collection in the US occurred between November 2022 and August 2023. Participants recruited via Prolific Academic received $9.00 as compensation for their participation, whereas participants from the Netherlands were entered into a raffle for two gift vouchers worth €50 upon completing the questionnaire.

In both the Netherlands and the US, parents with at least one child aged 6–16 were eligible to participate. The minimum age of 6 was chosen to ensure that children had a sufficient understanding of truth and lying, which typically develops between ages 3 and 5 (Talwar & Lee, 2008), making parental lying particularly relevant once children are able to recognize and interpret such behavior. The maximum age of 16 was selected because, given the

educational systems in both countries, children typically live at home until at least this age, thereby ensuring regular parent–child interactions. If parents had more than one child within the age range of 6–16 years, they were instructed to consider their oldest child in this range. Not only biological parents but also non-biological parents (e.g., adoptive parents, foster parents, or stepparents) were eligible to participate, provided that they considered themselves a parent to a child. Informed consent was obtained from all parents for the use of their personal data. Completing the questionnaires took approximately 30 minutes.

All parents completed questions on demographics and parental lying. Questions about lying were asked separately for three lie types (other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental), which were presented in random order. In the US, panel members also received attention checks as part of Prolific Academic's standard procedure. In both countries, datasets were screened for implausible responses to open-ended questions and non-compliant response patterns (e.g., consistently selecting the lowest options). No participants were excluded from the Dutch sample based on these criteria. In the US sample, two participants were excluded. Consequently, the final dataset comprised only US participants who successfully completed the attention checks and, in both countries, participants who provided plausible responses to open-ended questions, demonstrated compliant response patterns, and completed all relevant items. As only complete cases were included, no missing data were present in the final dataset.

Participants

The study included two samples: one from the Netherlands (N = 109) and one from the US (N = 122), totaling 231 participants. Descriptive demographic statistics for both samples are presented in Table 1. The Dutch sample had a significantly higher proportion of self-identified females compared to the sample from the US, $\chi^2(1) = 25.58$, $p < .001$, $\phi c = 0.33$. Dutch and US parents' ages did not differ significantly, $t(229) = -0.859$, $p = .391$. There was also no significant difference between the ages of children between the Dutch and US samples, $t(227) = .892$, $p = .373$. The Dutch sample was more highly educated than the US sample, $\chi^2(2) = 21.80$, $p < .001$, $\phi c = 0.31$. The method of collecting cultural backgrounds in the two countries was adapted to increase cultural sensitivity. Parents from the Netherlands responded to an open-ended question specifying their cultural identity. Their responses were categorized into three groups: Dutch only, Dutch and another culture, or another culture only. Most parents from the Netherlands identified as Dutch only. Parents from the US reported their race and ethnicity in predefined categories. Most US parents identified as White or Caucasian. In addition, most US parents identified as non-Hispanic/Latino.

Table 1
Demographics of Dutch and US Samples

	Netherlands Sample	US Sample
N	109	122
Gender (in %)		
Female	81.7	49.2
Male	18.3	50.0
Non-binary or other	0	0.8
Age parent *M* (*SD*)	42.33 (6.76)	41.53 (9.50)
Age child *M* (*SD*)	11.37 (3.33)	11.76 (3.30)
Educational level (in %)		
Below college degree	24.8	51.6
College degree	40.4	34.4
University degree or higher	34.9	13.9
Cultural identity (in %)		
Dutch only	87.2	N/A
Dutch and another culture	4.6	N/A
Another culture only	8.3	N/A
Race (in %)		
White or Caucasian	N/A	76.2
Black or African American	N/A	13.9
Asian	N/A	1.6
American Indian/Alaska Native	N/A	0.8
Multiracial	N/A	5.9
Other	N/A	1.6
Ethnicity (in %)		
Hispanic/Latino	N/A	14.8
Non-Hispanic/Latino	N/A	85.2

Measures

Parental Lying

Parental lying was assessed separately for three types of lies: other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental, with one item per lie type. Before responding to each item, parents received instructions that included definitions and two examples of each type of lie. For instance, an other-oriented lie was illustrated by "telling your child that they did a great job on their project when it is mediocre"; a self-oriented lie by "telling your child that their sibling spilled water on their drawing when it was really you"; and an instrumental lie by

"telling your child that there are no more cookies in the house, even though you know there are more in the pantry." These materials were pilot tested with parents in both the Netherlands and the US, after which the most representative examples were selected. Based on the results of this pilot test, one example of an instrumental lie differed between the two countries in the final questionnaire, reflecting cultural variation. Full definitions and examples for each type of lie are detailed in the preregistration of the data collection (Kok et al., 2022). After reading the instructions, parents answered the following three questions, adapted from Dykstra et al. (2020): "Do you tell other-oriented lies to your child?", "Do you tell self-oriented lies to your child?", and "Do you tell instrumental lies to your child?" Responses were provided on a 4-point ordinal scale: 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), and 4 (often). Whereas the original response scale ranged from "never" to "always" (Dykstra et al., 2020), in the current study, the upper category was changed to "often," since "always" implies an absolute, exceptionless behavior pattern, whereas "often" was considered a more realistic and interpretable upper bound. Based on these responses, both prevalence and frequency scores were calculated.

Prevalence was assessed for each type separately and for overall lying. For type-specific prevalence, parents who answered "never" to an item were coded as 0 (did not engage in that lie type), and those who answered "rarely," "sometimes," or "often" were coded as 1 (engaged in that lie type). Overall prevalence was based on responses across all three lie types. Parents who answered "never" to all items were coded as 0 (did not lie to their child), whereas parents who gave a non-zero response to at least one item were coded as 1 (lied to their child at least once).

Frequency scores were examined separately for type-specific and overall lying. Type-specific frequency was based on parents' absolute scores on each item (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often). Overall frequency was determined by considering parents' highest reported frequency across the three lie types, thereby capturing the maximum level at which parents reported lying. Parents who responded "never" to all three items were coded as 0 (never). Parents whose highest response was "rarely" were coded as 1 (rarely), those whose highest response was "sometimes" were coded as 2 (sometimes), and parents who indicated "often" on at least one item were coded as 3 (often).

Analysis Plan

The first goal of this study was to assess the prevalence and frequency of parental lying, overall and by lie type (other-oriented, self-oriented, instrumental), separately for parents from the Netherlands and the US. Prevalence was defined as the percentage of parents reporting lying versus never lying. Frequency was examined via the distribution of overall and type-specific frequency variables.

To test whether prevalence differed across lie types, we used a single Cochran's Q test across the three prevalence scores. If significant ($p < .05$), we conducted three pairwise McNemar tests (Bonferroni corrected, $p < .017$) to identify which types differed. To test whether frequency differed across lie types, we used a Friedman test on the three frequency scores. If significant ($p < .05$), we conducted three Wilcoxon signed-rank tests (Bonferroni corrected, $p < .017$) to identify which types differed. Analyses of prevalence and frequency differences across lie types were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 29.0.1; IBM Corp., 2023).

The second goal was to assess measurement invariance of the three items assessing parental lying, to determine whether meaningful cross-country comparisons could be made between parents from the Netherlands and the US. We used Multigroup Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MGCFA) in M*plus* (version 8.10; Muthén & Muthén, 2023) with the Weighted Least Squares Mean and Variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimator, following established steps by Bowen (2021). Given the three-item structure of the measure, the model was just identified at the group level, resulting in perfect fit by definition and limiting the informativeness of separate CFAs. We therefore proceeded directly to multigroup invariance testing, treating the construct as unidimensional (i.e., parents' overall tendency to lie to their children).

Configural invariance was tested by estimating the same factor structure across groups without equality constraints. For identification with ordinal data using the WLSMV estimator, the loading of the first item (the referent indicator) was fixed to 1 in each group. In addition, all thresholds of the referent indicator were constrained to equality across groups, and one threshold of each remaining item was also fixed across groups for identification. All other loadings and thresholds were freely estimated. Model fit was evaluated using the chi-square test (with $p > .05$ indicating acceptable fit). Given the sensitivity of chi-square to sample size (Kline, 2010), additional fit indices were examined: the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), with cutoffs of > .90 for adequate fit and > .95 for excellent fit, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), with values < .06 indicating close fit, .06–.08 reasonable fit, and > .10 poor fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Metric invariance was tested by constraining all factor loadings to equality across groups, while thresholds (except those fixed for identification) remained freely estimated. Model fit was assessed as described above, and a chi-square difference test ($p > .05$) was used to evaluate whether constraining loadings significantly worsened relative fit to the configural model. Scalar invariance was tested by additionally constraining all thresholds to equality across groups. Model fit was again evaluated as above, with a chi-square difference test comparing the scalar and metric models.

Once scalar invariance was established, we compared the latent means of parental lying between parents from the Netherlands and the US. Although our preregistered analysis specified chi-square tests, the procedure was adjusted based on a more refined understanding of the appropriate methods following the establishment of scalar invariance.

In the scalar model, the latent mean of the US group (reference group) was fixed to 0, and the latent mean of the Dutch group was freely estimated. To formally test group differences, we specified an alternative model in which the Dutch mean was also fixed to 0, thereby constraining both means to equality. The two models were compared using a chi-square difference test, with statistical significance evaluated at $\alpha = .05$.

Results

Prevalence and Frequency of Parental Lying in the Netherlands

Table 2 presents the prevalence and frequency distributions for overall parental lying, as well as other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental lying among parents from the Netherlands. Most parents indicated that they lie to their children.

The overall frequency of lying shows that most parents reported lying rarely or sometimes. A minority stated they never lie, and only a very small proportion reported doing so often. Most Dutch parents reported other-oriented lying sometimes or rarely, while fewer reported never doing so. Self-oriented lying was less common, with nearly half reporting never engaging in it and most others doing so rarely, whereas instrumental lying showed a more even spread across never, rarely, and sometimes, while only a few reported doing so often.

The prevalence of parental lying in Dutch parents differed by lie type ($\chi^2(2) = 21.29$, $p < .001$). Subsequent pairwise McNemar tests showed that the prevalence of other-oriented lying was significantly higher than self-oriented lying ($\chi^2(1) = 18.38$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .41$) and instrumental lying ($\chi^2(1) = 6.76$, $p = .009$, $\phi = .25$). However, there was no significant difference between the prevalence of self-oriented and instrumental lying ($\chi^2(1) = 3.03$, $p = .082$, $\phi = .17$).

The frequency of parental lying in Dutch parents also differed by lie type ($\chi^2(2) = 41.80$, $p < .001$, Kendall's W = .19). Subsequent pairwise Wilcoxon signed-rank tests showed that the frequency of other-oriented lying was significantly higher than the frequency of self-oriented lying ($Z = 5.49$, $p < .001$, $r = .53$) and instrumental lying ($Z = 3.87$, $p < .001$, $r = .37$). Moreover, the frequency of instrumental lying was significantly higher than the frequency of self-oriented lying ($Z = 3.38$, $p < .001$, $r = .32$).

Table 2

Parental Lying Prevalence and Frequency (in %) in Samples from the Netherlands and the US

	Overall	Other-oriented	Self-oriented	Instrumental
		Netherlands sample		
Prevalence				
Never	11.0	19.3	43.1	33.0
Ever	89.0	80.7	56.9	67.0
Frequency				
Never	11.0	19.3	43.1	33.0
Rarely	40.4	37.6	43.1	37.6
Sometimes	44.0	40.4	12.8	27.5
Often	4.6	2.8	0.9	1.8
		US sample		
Prevalence				
Never	14.8	21.3	50.8	31.1
Ever	85.2	78.7	49.2	68.9
Frequency				
Never	14.8	21.3	50.8	31.1
Rarely	25.4	32.8	31.1	37.7
Sometimes	54.1	41.8	17.2	29.5
Often	5.7	4.1	0.8	1.6

Prevalence and Frequency of Parental Lying in the US

The prevalence and frequency distributions for overall parental lying, as well as for other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental lying among parents from the US, are presented in Table 2. Most parents reported that they lie to their children.

The overall frequency of lying shows that, among parents from the US, a slight majority reported lying sometimes, while a considerable minority indicated lying rarely. Only a small group stated they never lie, and very few reported lying often. Among US parents, other-oriented lying was most reported as sometimes or rarely, with fewer reporting they never do so and very few indicating doing so often. Self-oriented lying was reported less frequently, with half never engaging in it and most others doing so rarely. Instrumental lying showed an even distribution across never, rarely, and sometimes, with only a very small proportion lying often.

The prevalence of parental lying in US parents differed by lie type ($\chi^2(2) = 37.33$, $p < .001$). Subsequent pairwise McNemar tests revealed that the prevalence of other-oriented lying was significantly higher than the prevalence of self-oriented lying ($\chi^2(1) = 29.17$, $p < .001$, $\phi =$

.49). Similarly, the prevalence of instrumental lying was significantly higher than that of self-oriented lying ($\chi^2(1) = 13.92$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .34$). No significant difference was found between the prevalence of other-oriented and instrumental lying in the US sample ($\chi^2(1) = 4.32$, $p = .038$, $\phi = .19$), as this did not meet the adjusted α level of .017.

The frequency of parental lying in US parents also differed by lie type ($\chi^2(2) = 42.60$, $p < .001$, Kendall's W = .17). Subsequent pairwise Wilcoxon signed-rank tests showed that the frequency of other-oriented lying was significantly higher than the frequency of self-oriented lying (Z = 5.79, $p < .001$, $r = .52$) and instrumental lying (Z = 3.15, $p < .001$, $r = .29$). Additionally, the frequency of instrumental lying was significantly higher than the frequency of self-oriented lying (Z = 4.24, $p < .001$, $r = .38$).

Measurement Invariance Testing

Table 3 presents the estimated factor loadings and thresholds for each model (i.e., configural, metric, and scalar). The configural model demonstrated excellent fit to the data, $\chi^2(3) = 2.06$, $p = .560$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, and RMSEA = .00 (95% CI [.000, .136]). The metric model, in which factor loadings were constrained to be equal across groups, also showed excellent fit, $\chi^2(5) = 2.56$, $p = .768$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, and RMSEA = .00 (95% CI [.000, .088]). The chi-square difference test comparing the metric to the configural model was non-significant, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 0.49$, $p = .782$. These results support metric invariance, indicating that the strength of the relationship between the observed indicators and the latent construct of parental lying is comparable across parents from the Netherlands and the US. The scalar model, with both loadings and thresholds constrained to equality across groups, similarly showed excellent fit, $\chi^2(7) = 3.00$, $p = .885$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, and RMSEA = .00 (95% CI [.000, .054]). The chi-square difference test comparing the scalar to the metric model was also non-significant, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 0.39$, $p = .821$. These results support scalar invariance, indicating that parents in both countries interpret and respond to the lying items in a comparable way, allowing for meaningful comparisons of latent mean levels of parental lying across groups.

Table 3

Factor Loadings and Thresholds per Item and Group

	FL (US)	FL (NL)	T1 (US)	T1 (NL)	T2 (US)	T2 (NL)	T3 (US)	T3 (NL)
Configural model								
Other-oriented[a]	1.000	1.000	-0.793	-0.793	0.129	0.129	1.737	1.737
Self-oriented	1.094*	0.899*	-0.074	-0.074	0.904	0.904	2.400*	1.937*
Instrumental	1.861*	1.587*	-0.468	-0.468	0.512	0.512	2.135*	2.074*
Metric model								
Other-oriented[a]	1.000	1.000	-0.780	-0.780	0.125	0.125	1.706	1.706
Self-oriented	1.035	1.035	-0.076	-0.076	0.931	0.931	2.400*	2.058*
Instrumental	1.786	1.786	-0.478	-0.478	0.516	0.516	2.135*	2.130*
Scalar model								
Other-oriented[a]	1.000	1.000	-0.785	-0.785	0.125	0.125	1.715	1.715
Self-oriented	1.062	1.062	-0.076	-0.076	0.955	0.955	2.276	2.276
Instrumental	1.784	1.784	-0.481	-0.481	0.516	0.516	2.138	2.138

Note. Factor loadings (FL) are unstandardized estimates from the configural, metric, and scalar models. Thresholds (T1–T3) represent the cutoff points between response categories on the 4-point ordinal scale.

[a] This item served as the referent indicator; all factor loadings were fixed to 1.00 and thresholds were constrained to equality across groups for model identification.

* This parameter was allowed to vary freely across groups.

Cross-Country Comparisons of Parental Lying

Given that scalar invariance was established in this study, we compared the latent means of parental lying across groups. The chi-square difference test comparing the scalar model, where the latent mean of the group from the Netherlands was freely estimated (M = -0.01), to the model with both means fixed to zero indicated that constraining the means to equality did not significantly worsen model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 0.01$, $p = .926$. This result suggests that there is no significant difference in latent means of parental lying between parents from the Netherlands and the US, indicating comparable overall tendencies to lie to their children across the two countries.

Discussion

This study examined the prevalence and frequency of parental lying – both overall and across other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental lies – among parents from the Netherlands and the US. In addition, we evaluated measurement invariance of the parental lying items to determine whether meaningful cross-country comparisons were possible and subsequently conducted direct latent mean comparisons between the two groups.

The findings underscore a critical distinction between prevalence and frequency. While most parents in both the Netherlands and the US reported lying to their children, this behavior was not frequent for the majority: fewer than 6% reported lying often. Prevalence and frequency also differed across other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental lies, highlighting the importance of analyzing these categories separately. Furthermore, the measurement model demonstrated configural, metric, and scalar invariance, indicating that the items functioned equivalently across parents from both countries in terms of structure, factor loadings, and thresholds. Cross-country comparisons showed no significant difference in parents' overall tendency to lie to their children.

Prevalence and Frequency of Parental Lying

In both groups, most parents reported lying to their children (89.0% in the Netherlands; 85.2% in the US). These high prevalence rates are consistent with prior estimates from different samples (67%–100%; Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024), underscoring that parental lying is common. However, frequency results paint a different picture: the majority of parents reported lying only rarely or sometimes (84.4% in the Netherlands; 79.5% in the US), and fewer than 6% reported lying often. This pattern aligns with earlier findings that parents generally report lying rarely (Malloy et al., 2019), while only a small minority lie often (Cargill & Curtis, 2017).

Importantly, lie frequency can be conceptualized and measured in different ways. One approach relies on specific counts of lies within a defined timeframe (e.g., per day), as in the work of Serota and Levine (2015) and Serota et al. (2021). Such measures yield precise behavioral estimates of lying incidence. Another approach uses generalized frequency categories without a specific timeframe (e.g., rarely, sometimes, often), which captures parents' overall perception of how regularly they lie, as applied in previous parental lying studies (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Malloy et al., 2019). It is important to note that this approach differs conceptually from count-based measures, as it captures perceived regularity rather than precise frequency estimates.

Although our study relied on frequency labels rather than lie counts, the positively skewed distributions we observed resemble the patterns typically found in the general population from the Netherlands (Debey et al., 2015) and the US (Serota & Levine, 2015; Serota et al., 2021). This similarity raises the question of whether parental lying reflects a broader individual tendency to lie or whether it constitutes a phenomenon specific to the parent–child relationship. Future research could address this by assessing parental and general lying frequency within the same study using comparable measures.

Together, these findings provide a more nuanced picture of the occurrence of parental lying, showing that prevalence and frequency capture different perspectives: prevalence rates indicate that lying to children is widespread, whereas frequency rates add nuance by

revealing that most parents engage in it only occasionally.

Prevalence and Frequency of Different Types of Lies

Beyond overall patterns, this study explored how the prevalence and frequency of parental lying vary across lie types. Previous research on parental lying has largely focused on *parenting by lying*, typically aggregating lie types into a single composite score when examining associations with parent–child relationships, child lying, and child problem behaviors (e.g., Dodd & Malm, 2023; Santos et al., 2017), often portraying parental lying as something inherently problematic. Some recent work has begun to differentiate between lie types (e.g., Low et al., 2024, who distinguished between instrumental and white lies), but systematic attention to both prevalence and frequency across lie types remains limited.

The current study revealed significant differences across lie types in both countries, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between them. In the Netherlands, other-oriented lies were the most prevalent and frequently reported, while instrumental and self-oriented lies showed similar prevalence but differed in frequency, with instrumental lies occurring more often. In the US, other-oriented lies and instrumental lies were equally prevalent, while self-oriented lies were reported by fewer parents. In terms of frequency, other-oriented lies were most frequently used, followed by instrumental lies, with self-oriented lies being the least frequent.

These patterns may reflect prevailing societal norms regarding lie types. Other-oriented lies were not only more prevalent but also more frequently reported than self-oriented lies. This aligns with existing research suggesting that other-oriented lies are often viewed positively and sometimes even encouraged, whereas self-oriented lies are generally regarded as more negative (e.g., Jensen et al., 2004; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015). In the Netherlands, the similar prevalence of self-oriented lies and instrumental lies may suggest that parents do not perceive them as fundamentally distinct, since both ultimately may serve the parent's interest (Setoh et al., 2022). In terms of frequency, however, instrumental lies were reported more often than self-oriented lies in both the Netherlands and the US. This difference may be explained by the broader applicability of instrumental lies in parenting, used in a variety of parent–child interactions, such as encouraging compliance or discouraging unwanted behavior, whereas self-oriented lies mainly occur in specific, self-serving situations. Moreover, instrumental lies often arise more spontaneously in behavior-regulation contexts (Heyman et al., 2013), potentially making them more frequent.

These findings underscore the need for greater methodological nuance. It is important to differentiate parental lies not only by their overall prevalence and frequency but also by type. Collapsing different lie types in a single measure risks obscuring meaningful differences in how often specific lies occur and their potential implications. Prior research in the general lying literature shows that lie types can have distinct relational consequences: self-oriented

lies can undermine trust, whereas other-oriented lies can strengthen relationships (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Talwar & Crossman, 2011). Future research should therefore examine how variation in the prevalence and frequency of different parental lies relates to previously studied parent and child factors. Recognizing these distinctions is crucial for developing a more accurate understanding of the role of parental lying in parent–child relationships and child development.

Measurement Invariance of Parental Lying

Although establishing measurement invariance is essential for ensuring that the same construct is measured consistently across groups, it is frequently overlooked in cross-country research (e.g., Boer et al., 2018; Maassen et al., 2023). To date, no study had examined the measurement invariance of parental lying assessments. In this study, the measurement model demonstrated configural, metric, and scalar invariance, meaning that the items used to assess parental lying functioned similarly for parents from the Netherlands and the US. This allowed for direct comparisons of latent means. Relatively similar cultural orientations in the two countries, particularly their shared emphasis on individualism and independence (Harkness et al., 2000), may have contributed to this consistency.

It is important to reflect on the implications of our findings. Although scalar invariance was established in this study, this does not guarantee that using the same items would yield meaningful comparisons in other, more culturally divergent groups. In such contexts, item interpretation may vary due to factors such as social desirability concerns, obedience norms, or response styles like acquiescence or extreme responding (e.g., Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001; Johnson & van de Vijver, 2013). If such differences are ignored, conclusions may reflect methodological bias rather than genuine behavioral variation. Moreover, the current study results do not imply that parental lying can always be meaningfully compared between parents from the Netherlands and the US using any instrument. At the same time, these findings should not be taken to imply that previous cross-country or cross-cultural studies of lying that did not test measurement invariance are invalid or not meaningful; rather, they highlight the importance of routinely testing measurement invariance in future research to ensure that observed similarities or differences in parental lying reflect true behavioral variation.

Cross-Country Comparisons of Parental Lying

Parents from the Netherlands and the US showed no differences in their overall tendency to lie to their children. This finding may be explained by the cultural similarities between the two countries. Both the Netherlands and the US are generally classified as individualistic societies, where values such as autonomy and independence are emphasized (Harkness et al., 2000). The broad cultural dimension of individualism versus collectivism, commonly examined in cross-cultural research (e.g., Lacko et al., 2021) and previously proposed as an

explanatory factor for cross-country differences in parental lying (Heyman et al., 2009), does not strongly differentiate the populations examined in this study. It is therefore plausible that parents in both countries are guided by comparable underlying values and norms, resulting in similar levels of parental lying.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

This study provides a comprehensive perspective on parental lying by examining both overall prevalence and frequency, and by showing how these vary across different lie types. This approach allowed for a more detailed understanding of the complexity of parental lying. By including parents from the Netherlands, an underexamined population, the study also expands global knowledge in this area. Importantly, it is the first to assess measurement invariance of parental lying items before conducting cross-country comparisons, thereby introducing a more rigorous methodological standard to ensure that observed differences reflect genuine variation rather than measurement bias.

Several limitations must also be acknowledged. First, this study relies on parental self-reports of lying behaviors, which, while valuable, are inherently susceptible to bias. Parents may overreport or underreport their lying due to recall bias, lack of awareness, or impression management (e.g., Infante-Rivard & Jacques, 2000; Morsbach & Prinz, 2006). For instance, they may downplay self-oriented lies while emphasizing protective lies to appear more caring. People also genuinely overestimate the extent to which they act in generous or selfless ways (Epley & Dunning, 2000), which may further inflate reports of protective lies. This issue may be particularly relevant when reporting on morally or socially sensitive behaviors like lying. At the same time, self-reports are a widely used and empirically supported method for studying lying, and prior work shows that they can provide valid insights into dishonest behavior (Halevy et al., 2014). Still, to mitigate potential biases, future studies could complement self-reports with more objective approaches, such as observational or experimental methods. Naturalistic recordings, for example, may capture subtle and automatic behaviors that are difficult for parents to recall or recognize (Weeland & Kok, 2023). Second, the sample from the Netherlands was not fully representative, as it mainly included highly educated mothers culturally identifying as Dutch. This lack of diversity, for instance in educational background, may be explained by the linguistic complexity of the survey, which included instructions with detailed definitions and examples of different types of lies. While these instructions were intended to enhance clarity, they may have unintentionally limited participation of parents from a broader demographic.

A third limitation concerns the use of only three items, one per lie type. This restricted both the assessment of construct dimensionality and the robustness of measurement invariance testing. First, the limited number of items resulted in just-identified confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) models when estimated separately by group, making it impossible to meaningfully assess overall model fit. As a result, we had to assume that the three

items reflect a unidimensional latent construct. However, this assumption could not be empirically tested within the current model, leaving it uncertain whether the indicators indeed represent a single underlying factor or whether parental lying may be a more complex, potentially multidimensional construct. Although the three lie types examined differed significantly in prevalence and frequency, such differences do not necessarily imply multidimensionality. It remains plausible that a single underlying dimension, such as a general tendency to lie to children, accounts for variation across all three types, even if some forms of lying are more commonly endorsed than others. To examine this issue more rigorously, future research should develop and use a more comprehensive questionnaire with multiple items per lie type. This would allow for more reliable assessments of each type and enable empirical testing of whether parental lying is best conceptualized as unidimensional or multidimensional. Moreover, if measurement invariance is established, it would then be possible to meaningfully compare not only overall lying tendency but also type-specific means of scores across groups. Second, the small number of indicators may also have reduced the reliability of the measurement invariance testing. With few items, it becomes harder to detect non-invariance and model fit indices such as RMSEA and CFI are less reliable in models with limited degrees of freedom (e.g., D'Urso et al., 2021). Expanding the item set in future studies would allow for more robust construct validation and improve both the stability and interpretability of measurement invariance across groups.

In addition to these methodological limitations, there are theoretical limitations regarding the scope of the parental lying construct as measured in this study. The three categories examined (other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental) may not fully capture the complete range of lies that parents tell their children. Beyond lying to benefit children, to benefit the self, or to influence the behavior of children, parents may also lie for reasons such as self-presentation or privacy protection, as documented in general lying research (e.g., Borsellino, 2013; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998) and in qualitative interviews with parents (Kok et al., 2025). To further advance the theoretical perspective on parental lying, future research should investigate a broader set of motives and lie types and examine their prevalence and frequency in the parent–child context.

Further, our study design did not allow for analyses on developmental variation. Parents may lie for different reasons or with different frequency to younger children compared to adolescents. Moreover, parental lying may be child-specific: parents with multiple children may lie differently to each child. Future studies could address these issues by investigating parental lying as child-specific behavior or across developmental stages.

In sum, while this study makes important contributions by broadening the scope of parental lying research and raising methodological standards for cross-country comparisons, future work should expand item coverage, include more diverse samples, and examine additional motives and child-specific dynamics to develop a more comprehensive understanding of parental lying.

Conclusions

This study found that while most parents reported lying to their children at least once, frequent lying was rare. Prevalence and frequency also varied significantly across lie types, suggesting that different types of lies may carry distinct meanings or justifications for parents. Importantly, the findings demonstrate that how parental lying is operationalized shapes the conclusions that can be drawn, highlighting the need for careful measurement choices in this field. For example, collapsing different lie types into a single measure risks obscuring these differences, underscoring the importance of distinguishing lie types when assessing prevalence and frequency. Finally, the findings indicate that parents from the Netherlands and the US are comparable both in how they interpret parental lying items and in their overall tendency to engage in such behavior.

Chapter 3



Psychometric Properties of the Parental Lying Scenarios Scale (PLSS): Test-Retest Reliability, Validity, and Factor Structure

Open Science Statement:

Preregistration	https://osf.io/p3bgm
Open data	https://doi.org/10.57990/v5k3-z838 (via LISS panel)
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Abstract

Most parents lie to their children. Parental lying has been linked to parent–child relationship quality and children's social and moral development, underscoring the importance of accurately measuring this behavior. Existing instruments primarily assess prevalence, rely on a narrow conceptualization of parental lying, and their psychometric properties remain understudied. This study therefore introduces the *Parental Lying Scenarios Scale* (PLSS), a 40-item self-report instrument of parental lying prevalence and frequency across a broad range of parental lies. We assess its test-retest reliability, convergent and predictive validity, and factor structure.

Data were collected from Dutch parents of children aged 5–12 years (n = 247 for test-retest reliability and factor analysis; n = 316 for validity analyses). The PLSS demonstrated strong test-retest reliability and evidence for convergent and predictive validity. Exploratory Factor Analyses at two time points consistently identified two distinct factors: lying to influence children's behavior and lying to shape children's knowledge or emotions.

This study provides initial support for the PLSS as a reliable and conceptually meaningful instrument for capturing a broader range of parental lying. The PLSS thereby offers a promising methodological foundation for future research on the antecedents and socio-moral implications of parental lying for both parents and children.

Keywords: parental lying, test-retest reliability, validity, factor structure, moral development

Psychometric Properties of the Parental Lying Scenarios Scale (PLSS): Test-Retest Reliability, Validity, and Factor Structure

Parental lying is a widespread phenomenon (Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024). Although definitions of lying vary (Mahon, 2008), most converge on the idea of "deliberate communication that misleads and fosters false beliefs" (Hart & Curtis, 2023, p. 20). Existing parental lying instruments often adopt a narrow conceptualization of the phenomenon. Most focus on lying prevalence (i.e., whether parents lie) but fail to capture its frequency (i.e., how often parents lie). Yet distinguishing between prevalence and frequency may yield important insights: although prevalence of lying tends to be high, frequent lying appears to be relatively rare (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Lucieer et al., 2025b). Moreover, existing instruments primarily measure a specific subtype of parental lying, known as *parenting by lying* (Heyman et al., 2009), which involves deliberate attempts to influence children's behavior or emotions. This conceptualization may not fully capture the broader range of lies parents may tell in everyday interactions with children (Kok et al., 2025). Understanding how frequently parents tell various types of lies to their children may be crucial, as lying can affect parent–child relationships and children's moral and social development (e.g., Dodd & Malm, 2023; Santos et al., 2017).

Currently, no instrument exists that assesses both the prevalence and frequency of a broad range of parental lies. Moreover, existing instruments have received limited psychometric evaluations. The current study addresses these gaps by (1) introducing an instrument with a response format suited to assessing both prevalence and frequency that covers a wider range of parental lies than previous instruments, and (2) evaluating its psychometric properties.

Existing Instruments and Conceptualizations of Parental Lying

Several instruments have been developed to assess parental lying. The first was the nine-item *Parenting by Lying Scale* (Heyman et al., 2009), which measured lies aimed at influencing children's behavior or emotions. This instrument was later expanded into the 24-item *Parenting by Lying Questionnaire* (Heyman et al., 2013), which assessed specific examples of such lies using a binary (yes/no) response format.

Building on this instrument, several adaptations and revisions have been developed. Setoh et al. (2022) developed the *Singapore Parental Lying Scale*, a 35-item version that added newly identified items to better reflect parental lying in the Singaporean context. They also introduced a 5-point response scale to capture parents' likelihood of telling each lie. Similarly, Allen and Kara (2023) adapted the Heyman et al. (2013) instrument for use in Turkey by removing culturally less relevant items and adding context-appropriate ones, resulting in a 25-item version, called the *Instrumental Lie-telling Scale*, and implementing

a 4-point frequency scale to move beyond prevalence toward frequency. Such frequency-based approaches make it possible to distinguish between occasional and more frequent lying, which may have different implications for parent–child relationships (e.g., Engels et al., 2006).

Jackson et al. (2021b) revised the *Parenting by Lying Questionnaire* by partly retaining and partly replacing original items. In contrast to instruments that focus on specific lie examples (e.g., "There's no more candy in the house"; Heyman et al., 2013; Setoh et al., 2022), Jackson et al. (2021b) reformulated items into broader behavioral descriptions, using examples only illustratively and clarifying the intended motive when necessary (e.g., "Lied to your child to stop him/her from wanting a certain food? For example, 'There's no more candy in the house.'"). This approach may help parents relate the items more easily to their own experiences and reduce ambiguity regarding the motive behind the lie. Jackson et al. (2021b) also introduced a frequency-based response format, asking parents how often they had told each lie in the past month (i.e., 0 times, 1–2 times, 3 or more times).

Although these developments have expanded item content and introduced more nuanced response formats, existing instruments still exhibit key limitations. First, conceptualizations of parental lying remain narrowly focused on lies intended to influence children's behavior or emotions. Yet, research on lying in general interpersonal contexts shows that people also lie to manage self-presentation, for privacy protection, and for the avoidance of tension or conflicts (e.g., Borsellino, 2013; DePaulo et al., 1996; Van der Geest, 2018). These motives may likewise play a role in parental lying. For example, parents may lie to present themselves as ideal caregivers in line with social expectations (e.g., Craig et al., 2014). Supporting this, in a qualitative study, Kok et al. (2025) found that some parents lie for self-presentation purposes, such as preventing their child from forming a negative impression of them. Similarly, Fivush et al. (2019) reported that parents sometimes conceal or distort family-related issues when interacting with their children to maintain a positive image of the family. Privacy concerns may also motivate parental lying: parents may lie or withhold information to protect their own privacy or that of others, for example regarding personal relationships or financial matters (Furnham et al., 2014; Kok et al., 2025). Finally, Kok et al. (2025) also reported that parents may lie to avoid situations such as conflicts or difficult conversations with their child. In sum, the scope of parental lying appears to extend beyond lies to influence children's behavior or emotions currently represented in existing instruments.

Second, psychometric evaluation of parental lying instruments remains limited. Previous studies have primarily reported internal consistency estimates for overall parental lying scores, which were acceptable to good (Roza et al., 2024). Allen and Kara (2023) additionally explored the factor structure of their instrument and identified three factors: threat lies, positive affect lies, and lies about resources or money. These factors correlated positively with

everyday lie-telling, providing evidence for convergent validity. However, a comprehensive psychometric evaluation, including assessments of test-retest reliability, validity of the overall instrument, and replication of the factor structure has not yet been conducted.

Taken together, these developments highlight the need for a psychometrically validated instrument that captures a broader range of parental lies than existing instruments. A broader conceptualization is essential for deepening theoretical understanding of parental lying itself, including the different motives, contexts, and functions it may serve in family life. It also enables examination of whether different types of lies relate differently to parent–child relationship dynamics and to children's social and moral development. There is little reason to assume that only behavior- or emotion-focused lies are consequential in these domains; a more comprehensive instrument allows these possibilities to be evaluated empirically.

The Current Study

This study introduces and psychometrically evaluates the *Parental Lying Scenarios Scale* (PLSS). First, we assess test-retest reliability to examine score stability over time. Second, we assess convergent and predictive validity by examining associations with theoretically related constructs: parental modeling of lying, lying in other relational contexts (i.e., parents' lying in interactions beyond the parent–child relationship), and child lying. Parental modeling of lying is expected to correlate positively with PLSS scores, as it reflects parents' use of lies both directly toward and in front of their children. We also examine lying in other relational contexts, given evidence that parents who lie to their children also tend to lie in other interactions (Allen & Kara, 2023). Predictive validity is assessed through correlations between PLSS scores and child lying. Drawing on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), and considering parents' central role in socialization (e.g., Smetana, 1999), exposure to parental lying may teach children that lying is acceptable or effective (Grusec & Davidov, 2010; Low et al., 2024). Consistent with this framework, prior studies indicate that parental lying is positively associated with child lying (e.g., Dykstra et al., 2020; Dodd & Malm, 2023). Therefore, we expect higher PLSS scores to be associated with higher levels of child lying. Finally, we explore the factor structure of the PLSS and evaluate whether this structure is stable over time to determine whether different parental lies cluster into distinct and consistent patterns.

Method

Development of the Parental Lying Scenarios Scale

The *Parental Lying Scenarios Scale* (PLSS) is an extension of the 24-item revised version of the *Parenting by Lying Questionnaire*, developed by Jackson et al. (2021b), which assesses how often parents lie to influence children's behavior or emotions. Development of new items was informed by interview data from Kok et al. (2025). The interviews explored different types of lie examples parents tell their children, which were classified in a taxonomy based on the motives and goals underlying these lies. For this study, the most common themes in the lie examples were translated into survey items, resulting in 28 potential items. The 28 items based on the lie examples were compared with the 24 items from Jackson et al. (2021b). To build on previous work, original items were prioritized in case of conceptual overlap. This process resulted in a 40-item instrument comprising all 24 original items (retained without wording changes) and 16 new items. The new items captured parental lies motivated by factors beyond influencing children's behavior or emotions. To ensure coherence, new items were formulated in the style of the original items. The PLSS was pilot tested with 20 parents of children aged 5–12, recruited via convenience sampling. Based on their feedback, minor wording and formatting refinements were made, and the language was simplified to B1 Dutch (CEFR intermediate level). No substantive changes were made to the item content.

Design and Procedure

This study was embedded within the Fami-LIES project, a series of studies on lying in Dutch families (https://osf.io/3vm28/). The study plan was preregistered on the Open Science Framework (OSF; https://osf.io/p3bgm). Any deviation from the preregistrations is described. Data were collected via the LISS panel, administered by CenterData (Tilburg University, the Netherlands). The LISS panel is a probability-based household panel comprising approximately 7,500 individuals from 5,000 households, randomly selected from the Dutch population register by Statistics Netherlands. Informed consent was obtained in three steps: households consented during recruitment; individual panel members confirmed participation via the LISS portal, and all participants formally consented during their first general questionnaire. The procedures were approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology, Education, and Child Studies (DPECS) at Erasmus University Rotterdam (ETH2324-0800).

Data collection was part of a larger study targeting parents of children aged 0 to 18 years. For the current study, we included only parents of children aged 5 to 12 years. This age range was selected to align with that of the qualitative study by Kok et al. (2025), which informed the item development.

To ensure data quality and maintain participant engagement, the LISS panel limits surveys to a maximum of 20 minutes per session. Accordingly, questionnaires were distributed across four sessions. Participants received €2.50 per 10 minutes of participation, amounting to €20 for completing all four sessions. For the current study, we used data collected during the second, third, and fourth session, which we refer to as Timepoint 1 (T1: September–October 2024), Timepoint 2 (T2: October–November 2024), and Timepoint 3 (T3: November–December 2024).

For the test-retest reliability analysis, a temporal interval between assessments was required to assess the stability of PLSS scores, which ranged from 42 to 111 days (M = 65, SD = 12). Due to the 20-minute session limit, an unintended time gap occurred for two of the three validity analyses, as two comparison measures (i.e., lying in other relational contexts and child lying) were collected at T2 while PLSS data were collected at T1. Because of this unintended gap, we conducted a sensitivity analysis by controlling for the number of days between assessments.

Participants

In total, 330 parents participated. Of these, 233 completed all three data collection sessions (T1, T2, and T3). Sample sizes varied across analyses due to differences in response rates across the sessions. A total of 316 parents completed both T1 and T2 and were included in the validity analyses, and 247 parents completed T1 and T3 and were included in the test-retest reliability and factor structure analyses.

Demographic characteristics for both subsamples are presented in Table 1. Gender distribution was relatively balanced within each subsample. Educational level and migration background were classified according to Statistics Netherlands (CBS, 2022; 2024). Educational levels were grouped into low, intermediate, and high. Migration background was grouped into Dutch, first-generation migrant, and second-generation migrant. Educational levels differed somewhat from national figures, with relatively fewer lower-educated participants. Migration background distributions were broadly comparable to national figures as of January 2024.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Subsamples

	Subsample 1 (*n* = 316)	Subsample 2 (*n* = 247)
Gender (% female)	58.5	52.2
Parent age, *M* (*SD*)[a]	41.10 (5.58)	41.22 (5.70)
Child age, *M* (*SD*)[a]	8.09 (2.28)	8.00 (2.26)
Education level (%)		
Low	7.3	8.9
Intermediate	39.9	40.9
High	52.8	50.2
Migration background (%)[b]		
Dutch	76.3	74.1
First generation	10.8	12.0
Second generation	12.9	14.0

Note. [a] Means and standard deviations of parent and child age were based on the responses at T1. [b] Percentages are valid percentages; migration background data were missing for four participants in each sample.

Measures

Parental Lying to Children

Parental lying to children was assessed at two time points (T1 and T3) using the *Parental Lying Scenarios Scale* (PLSS). The PLSS consists of 40 items measuring instances of parental lying to children. Twenty-four items were directly translated from the instrument developed by Jackson et al. (2021b), and 16 newly developed items were added based on qualitative interviews with parents (Kok et al., 2025). A full overview of the PLSS is provided in Appendix A of this dissertation, including English translations of the items that were originally developed in Dutch.

Parents were asked to reflect on the past month and select from three ordinal response categories: "0 times," "1 or 2 times," and "3 times or more" while responding to items such as: "In the past month, have you lied to your child about what will happen if they didn't finish their food? For example, *'Finish all your food or you'll grow up to be short.'*" or "In the past month, have you lied to your child about how long something will take to avoid discussions and nagging? For example, by saying it is already bedtime (when it is not) or that we will be home very soon." A quasi-continuous lying score was calculated separately for T1 and T3 by averaging responses across all 40 items. Higher scores indicated a higher frequency of lying to children.

Parental Modeling of Lying

Parental modeling of lying was assessed by the *Parental Modeling of Lying* subscale from the revised *Socialization of Lying (SoL)* scale developed by Lavoie et al. (2023). This subscale consists of four items that focus on different types of lies a parent may tell either directly to their child (3 items, e.g., "I tell lies to my child to obtain his or her compliance.") or to someone else in the child's presence (1 item: "I tell lies to others in front of my child."). Responses were recorded on a 4-point scale (1 = *never* to 4 = *frequently*). A quasi-continuous score was calculated for each parent by averaging the responses to the four items, treating the ordinal responses as continuous. Higher scores reflected a greater tendency for the parent to model lying behavior to the child. The scale showed good internal consistency, with Cronbach's α = .71, which aligns with the reliability reported in previous research (Cronbach's α = .72, Lavoie et al., 2023).

Lying in Other Relational Contexts

Lying in other relational contexts was assessed using the *Relational Lying* Subscale of the *Lying in Everyday Situations (LiES)* scale developed by Hart et al. (2019). This subscale consists of seven items describing various types of lies told with different intentions. Participants responded to statements such as "I lie to hide the bad things I've done." Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). A quasi-continuous score was calculated for each participant by averaging the responses to the seven items. Higher scores reflected a greater tendency to engage in relational lying behavior. The scale showed high internal consistency, with Cronbach's α = .92, which aligns with the reliability reported in previous research (Cronbach's α = .94, Hart et al., 2019).

Child Lying

Child lying was assessed using 12 items adapted from Malloy et al. (2019), which evaluate the frequency with which children tell antisocial (8 items) and prosocial (4 items) lies, as reported by their parents. For instance: "My child lies to trick or manipulate others," and "My child lies to be polite/spare another's feelings." Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). A quasi-continuous child lying score was calculated by averaging the responses to all 12 items, with higher scores indicating a greater frequency of lying behaviors in children. The scale showed high internal consistency in the current study (Cronbach's α = .88). In previous research, internal consistency was reported separately for the antisocial (α = .85) and prosocial (α = .64) subscales rather than for the combined scales (Malloy et al., 2019).

Analyses

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and ranges) were computed for all variables. Test-retest reliability of the PLSS was examined between T1 and T3 using Spearman's rank-order correlation. Validity was evaluated using Spearman's rank-order

correlations between mean PLSS scores at T1 and theoretically relevant constructs. Convergent validity was tested against parental modeling of lying and lying in other relational contexts; predictive validity was tested against child lying behavior. To adjust for multiple comparisons (three in total), the original α level of .05 was Bonferroni-corrected to α = .017. Correlations were interpreted using conventional effect size guidelines (Kline, 2010; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), with coefficients < .30 considered weak, .30–.50 moderate, and > .50 strong.

To identify the underlying dimensions of the PLSS, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted in M*plus* (version 8.10; Muthén & Muthén, 2023) using the Maximum Likelihood Robust (MLR) estimator. The analysis was preregistered before data inspection, but several data characteristics necessitated deviations from the preregistered plan. A detailed overview and justification of these modifications is provided in Table S1 in the supplementary materials. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. An oblique Geomin rotation was applied, as the underlying factors were expected to correlate. The number of factors was determined by inspecting the scree plot of eigenvalues and model fit indices: Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), and Sample-Size Adjusted Bayesian Information Criterion (SSABIC), with lower values indicating a better balance between model fit and parsimony. Factor loadings ≥ .30 were considered meaningful. Items were classified as cross-loadings when they loaded ≥ .30 on more than one factor, and the difference between loadings was smaller than .20.

To examine the temporal stability of the identified factor structure, the EFA was repeated at T3 using the same procedures as at T1. We compared the number of extracted factors, factor loading patterns, and the conceptual correspondence of factors across time points. In addition, Spearman's rank-order correlations between factor scores from T1 and T3 were calculated to quantify temporal stability.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables (including correlations for test-retest reliability and validity analyses) are presented in Table 2. At both T1 and T3, parents generally reported infrequent use of lying toward their children. The distribution of scores was similar across the two time points, indicating that the overall variability in parental lying remained stable. Importantly, the correlation between PLSS scores at T1 and T3 was strong and statistically significant, indicating strong test-retest reliability of the PLSS. Parents generally reported low to moderate levels of modeling of lying. For lying in other relational contexts, data reflected substantial variation. PLSS scores were significantly and moderately to strongly correlated with parental modeling of lying and with lying in other relational

contexts, supporting convergent validity. Parents reported low to moderate levels of lying among children. PLSS scores showed significant and moderate positive correlations with child lying, providing evidence for predictive validity of the instrument.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for PLSS (T1, T3) and Validity Constructs

	N	*M*	*SD*	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4
1. Parental lying T1	247	0.23	0.21	0.00	1.58				
2. Parental lying T3	247	0.20	0.22	0.00	1.60	.74***			
3. Parental modeling of lying	316	1.77	0.57	1.00	3.25	.50***	.45***[a]		
4. Lying in other relational contexts	316	2.99	1.30	1.00	7.00	.37***	.39***	.28***[a]	
5. Child lying	316	1.91	0.53	1.00	3.25	.31***	.37***	.45***	.27***[a]

Note. *** $p < .001$. Correlations remained unchanged in the sensitivity analysis.

[a] Correlation based on $N = 233$.

PLSS data at T1 were suitable for factor analysis, as indicated by a good KMO (.83) and a significant Bartlett's test ($\chi^2(666) = 2475.11$, $p < .001$). An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using the Maximum Likelihood Robust (MLR) estimator. Full EFA results are provided in Table S2 and Figure S1 in the supplementary materials. The scree plot suggested a two- or three-factor solution. Fit indices provided mixed recommendations: AIC favored a three-factor model, whereas BIC and SSABIC favored a more parsimonious two-factor model. Inspection of the Geomin-rotated factor loadings revealed that the third factor in the three-factor model was unstable. One item (i.e., "Lied to your child to stop/prevent him/her from being scared? For example, "Thunder is just the angels bowling.") loaded meaningfully on Factor 3 without cross-loadings, whereas five items showed ambiguous or stronger loadings on other factors, indicating that this factor did not present a distinct underlying construct. In contrast, the two-factor model showed stable and interpretable factors, each represented by enough items, with most items loading clearly on a single factor without notable cross-loadings. Therefore, the two-factor solution was selected as the most appropriate representation of the data.

The two factors were moderately correlated ($r = .50$, $p < .05$), indicating that they represent related but distinct dimensions of parental lying. Factor interpretation was based on the clustering of items that loaded on one factor without cross-loadings on the other. Factor 1 reflected instances in which parents lie to their children with the intention of directly influencing or controlling the child's behavior. Parents do so by, for example, making false threats or promises, inventing or exaggerating consequences, or invoking external authorities. These lies are typically intended to stop or prevent misbehavior or gain compliance, reflecting both control-oriented and avoidance-oriented motives. Because

these lies serve immediate, situation-specific purposes related to behavioral management, we labeled this factor *Lies to influence behavior*.

In contrast, Factor 2 reflected instances in which parents lie to their children with the intention of shaping their knowledge or emotions. For example, they may provide comforting but untrue explanations, omit distressing details, or create positive narratives to guide what the child knows, thinks, believes, and feels. This factor encompasses lies with diverse underlying motives, including protective, relational and self-oriented goals, such as shielding the child from distressing realities, preserving relational harmony, or maintaining the parent's positive self-image. Rather than aiming to control the child's immediate behavior, these lies are used to shape the child's perception of reality and manage emotions. Accordingly, we labeled this factor *Lies to shape knowledge or emotions*.

Most items were assigned directly to one of the two factors based on statistical criteria (loading ≥ .30 on a single factor without cross-loading). Ten items showed cross-loadings. These items were assigned to one of the factors based on their conceptual fit with the factor interpretations: two of these were assigned to Factor 1 (*Lies to influence behavior*) and eight to Factor 2 (*Lies to shape knowledge or emotions*). One item (i.e., lied to your child in order to prevent him/her from lying? For example, "I know everything, and I can always tell when you are lying.") loaded .29 on Factor 1 and .36 on Factor 2. Although the loading on Factor 1 was slightly below the conventional cutoff of .30, its content showed a stronger conceptual fit with this factor, and it was therefore assigned to Factor 1. Finally, one item ("Lied to your child to hide that you don't know the answer to his/her question?") showed low loadings on both factors (*Lies to influence behavior* = .20; *Lies to shape knowledge or emotions* = .23) and could not be clearly assigned based on its content. This item was therefore excluded from the final factor structure. An overview of the final factor structure and Geomin-rotated loadings is presented in Table 3. Both factors demonstrated good internal consistency: Factor 1 (20 items) Cronbach's α = .81; Factor 2 (19 items) Cronbach's α = .84.

To examine the temporal stability of the identified factor structure, the EFA was repeated on the PLSS data at T3 using the same procedures as at T1. Full EFA results are presented in Table S2 and Figure S2 in the supplementary materials. The scree plot and model fit indices (AIC, BIC, SSABIC) supported the retention of a two-factor solution, consistent with the structure identified at the first administration. A comparison of factor loading patterns across time indicated strong structural similarity. An overview of the loadings at the second administration is presented in Table S3 in the supplementary materials. For Factor 1: *Lies to influence behavior*, all 20 items that were assigned to this factor at T1 were also retained in this factor at T3. For Factor 2: *Lies to shape knowledge or emotions*, 15 items that were assigned to Factor 2 at T1 were also retained in this factor at T3. However, four items (items 19, 24, 30, and 40) assigned to Factor 2 at T1 showed unique loadings on Factor 1 at T3 and could therefore not be replicated. This indicates minor variation at the item level, while the

overall factor structure remained comparable across time points.

Internal consistencies were comparable to those observed at the first administration, with strong reliability for both factors: Factor 1 (24 items) Cronbach's α = .88; Factor 2 (15 items) Cronbach's α = .85. Spearman correlations between corresponding factor scores across administrations indicated substantial temporal stability: Factor 1: r_s = .69, p < .001; Factor 2: r_s = .67, p < .001.

Table 3

Geomin-Rotated Factor Loadings and Factor Structure at T1 (Abbreviated Item Labels)

Factor and Item Labels	Factor 1 (Lies to influence behavior)	Factor 2 (Lies to shape knowledge or emotions)
Factor 1: Lies to influence behavior (20 items)		
Lying about eating consequences (to encourage eating)	**.474**	.236
Lying by using food myths (to discourage eating)	**.489**[a]	.354[a]
Lying to stop the child from requesting certain foods	**.424**	.279
Lying to encourage eating specific foods	**.323**[a]	.360[a]
Lying about leaving (to make the child comply)	**.646**	-.033
Lying to keep the child in place	**.543**	.080
Lying about circumstances when leaving the child with someone else (to facilitate separation)	**.809**	-.016
Lying about throwing away belongings to stop misbehavior	**.648**	-.079
Lying about sending the child away to stop misbehavior	**.592**	.036
Lying about someone taking the child away to stop misbehavior	**.987**	-.255
Lying about consequences of lying (to discourage lying)	**.438**	.234
Lying about detecting lies to discourage lying	**.291**[b]	.362
Lying to make the child take medicine	**.730**	-.003
Lying to stop annoying but harmless behavior	**.582**	.089
Lying to make the child do chores.	**.545**	.169
Lying to make it easier to avoid buying a requested item	**.481**	.286
Lying about others' reactions to make the child comply	**.822**	.102
Lying about taking away privileges to make the child comply	**.460**	.218
Lying about dangers to prevent or stop behavior	**.426**[a]	.538[a]
Lying about giving a reward to make the child comply	**.354**	.261
Factor 2: Lies to shape knowledge or emotions (19 items)		
Lying to prevent or reduce fear	.166	**.444**
Lying to protect the child's self-esteem	-.061	**.757**
Lying to encourage persistence	.163	**.558**
Lying to reduce the child's sadness about their actions	.162	**.517**
Lying about reasons (to avoid conflict or disappointment)	.360[a]	**.412**[a]
Lying to avoid discussing sensitive topics	.277	**.630**
Lying to hide financial constraints	.315[a]	**.427**[a]

Table 3

Geomin-Rotated Factor Loadings and Factor Structure at T1 (Abbreviated Item Labels)

Factor and Item Labels	Factor 1 (Lies to influence behavior)	Factor 2 (Lies to shape knowledge or emotions)
Lying about the child's appearance to make the child feel good	.071	**.621**
Lying about time to avoid discussion or nagging	.359[a]	**.557[a]**
Lying about food (content) to avoid discussion or nagging	.322[a]	**.426[a]**
Lying about family matters to protect the child emotionally	-.189	**.794**
Lying about world events to protect the child emotionally	.002	**.733**
Lying about general behavior to protect parental image or avoid child's disappointment	-.124	**.766**
Lying about opinions to protect parental image or avoid child's disappointment	.029	**.782**
Lying about preferences to protect parental image or avoid child's disappointment	.406[a]	**.490[a]**
Lying about specific actions to protect parental image or avoid child's disappointment	-.319[a]	**.468[a]**
Lying about finances to protect one's own privacy	-.002	**.610**
Lying to protect someone else's privacy	-.391	**.853**
Lying to maintain fantasy beliefs	.446[a]	**.298[a]**

Note. [a] = Cross-loading; assigned based on content. [b] = Loading just below < .30; assigned based on content. **Bold** indicates the factor to which the item was assigned. Goals in parentheses were not explicitly stated in the item wording but were inferred from context.

Discussion

In this study, we introduced the *Parental Lying Scenarios Scale* (PLSS), an instrument that extends existing instruments by capturing a broader range of parental lies. The PLSS consists of 40 items, based on an existing measure of parental lying (Jackson et al., 2021b) and newly developed items, based on a qualitative study on parental lying (Kok et al., 2025). Across two measurement administrations, the PLSS demonstrated strong test-retest reliability and evidence for both convergent and predictive validity. Exploratory factor analyses indicated a two-factor structure that was largely stable over time. Taken together, these findings illustrate that the PLSS is a coherent instrument and provide initial evidence that the PLSS is a reliable and conceptually meaningful measure of parental lying.

The PLSS identified two types of parental lying: lies aimed at influencing children's behavior and lies aimed at shaping their knowledge or emotions. These findings both confirm and extend prior distinctions between behavior-focused and emotion-regulating lies (e.g., Heyman et al., 2009, 2013). Lies aimed at influencing children's behavior align with earlier descriptions of behavior-influencing lies involving false threats or promises (e.g., Allen & Kara,

2023; Heyman et al., 2013; Setoh et al., 2022). Lies aimed at shaping children's knowledge or emotions broaden earlier conceptualizations of so-called "comparison" or "white" lies (e.g., Heyman et al., 2013; Setoh et al., 2022) by capturing not only attempts to influence children's feelings but also their beliefs, interpretations, and understanding of situations. Together, these findings highlight that parental lying is a multidimensional construct that can be distinguished by the immediate aim parents seek to achieve.

It is important to note that within the two factors reflecting lies to influence behavior and lies to shape knowledge or emotions, diverse underlying motives appear to converge. Lies aimed at influencing behavior include both control-oriented (e.g., stopping ongoing misbehavior) and avoidance-oriented goals (e.g., preventing unwanted behavior). Lies aimed at shaping knowledge or emotions include protective motives (e.g., shielding a child from distress), relational motives (e.g., avoiding conflict or preserving relational harmony), and self-oriented motives (e.g., maintaining parental authority or a positive self-image). The clustering of these motives within the same factor suggests that they are interrelated and may co-occur in practice.

Although most items clearly belonged to either lies to influence behavior or to lies to shape knowledge or emotions, some contained elements of both. In some cases, the stated goal was to influence behavior, while the example involved shaping knowledge, reflecting behavioral influence achieved *via* knowledge manipulation. For example, a parent might say, "I know everything and can always tell when you are lying," to discourage lying. This lie primarily targets behavior (preventing dishonesty) but does so by shaping the child's beliefs about the parent's knowledge. Such examples show that specific lies may serve different immediate aims. One parent may use a particular lie to gain immediate compliance, whereas another may use the same lie to shape what the child knows or believes. Beyond such variation in immediate aim, Kok et al. (2025) note that a single parental lie can serve multiple goals simultaneously. For example, a lie about having "lost" a child's craft project may help the parent avoid loss of face while also sparing the child's feelings.

The results of this study offer both theoretical and methodological contributions to research on parental lying. The two factors identified within the PLSS provide empirical support for distinguishing lies aimed at influencing children's behavior from lies aimed at shaping their knowledge or emotions, thereby advancing previous conceptualizations of parental lying. Methodologically, the PLSS offers a promising instrument for examining how different types of parental lies may relate to characteristics of the parent–child relationship and children's social and moral development. The present validation in a Dutch sample provides initial evidence of the instrument's usefulness and lays the groundwork for future work across more diverse populations and developmental contexts.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

The PLSS expands on existing instruments by incorporating newly developed items that capture additional types of parental lies, informed directly by qualitative interviews with parents (Kok et al., 2025). This approach broadened the behavioral scope of parental lying assessed in research to date. In addition, the current study provided an evaluation of the instrument's reliability, validity, and factor structure across two measurement occasions, providing a robust foundation for the empirical study of parental lying.

At the same time, several limitations should be considered. First, the study relied on parents' self-reports, which may be subject to recall bias and socially desirable responding (e.g., Infante-Rivard & Jacques, 2000; Morsbach & Prinz, 2006). However, self-report is a widely used and informative method for studying lying, as individuals are uniquely aware of the contexts and intentions behind their own statements (e.g., Halevy et al., 2014). To minimize the risk of social desirability concerns, we explicitly adopted a nonjudgmental stance toward lying and normalized this behavior in the PLSS instructions. Specifically, the introduction preceding the items acknowledged that lying is often viewed negatively but emphasized that it can serve a wide variety of motives and is common among parents.

Second, although data were collected through a probability-based national panel, the sample included somewhat fewer lower-educated parents than national distributions would suggest. While there is no clear evidence that parental lying differs systematically by educational level (Roza et al., 2024), this sampling pattern may still affect the functioning of the PLSS. The instrument is relatively language-intensive: each item presents a lying scenario with an illustrative example, and responding requires reflection on one's own experiences. Parents with different educational backgrounds may vary in how they interpret the wording or accessibility of the examples, which could influence response patterns or factor loadings (Van de Vijver & Tanzer, 2004).

Because this study provides the first psychometric evaluation of the PLSS, several steps are needed to further develop the instrument and guide future research. First, replication across diverse samples is required to test the robustness of its psychometric properties, both within the Netherlands (e.g., across demographic or cultural subgroups) and in other countries. Second, the cultural applicability of the PLSS should be examined. This includes translation and potential adaptation of item wording and examples to ensure relevance across cultural settings (Arafat et al., 2016). For instance, whereas the Dutch version of the PLSS directly asks parents about "lying," this may be unacceptable in other cultures due to stronger social taboos surrounding this behavior (e.g., Fu et al., 2001). Likewise, specific examples may need modification to reflect culturally relevant situations. The PLSS lends itself well to such adaptation, as both wording (e.g., the term "lying") and examples can be adjusted to fit cultural norms while preserving the item's conceptual meaning. Third, the response scale and reference period warrant consideration. In this study, few parents

reported using a given type of lie more than three times within a month, suggesting restricted variability. Extending the reference period (e.g., asking about a longer timeframe) could increase variability, whereas shortening it may improve recall accuracy (Clarke et al., 2008). Finally, while this study takes an important first step in empirically distinguishing types of parental lies by their immediate aim (i.e., influencing children's behavior versus shaping their knowledge or emotions), each factor still encompasses multiple underlying motives. Specifically, lies to influence behavior reflected both control- and avoidance-oriented motives, whereas lies to shape knowledge or emotions included child-protective, relational, and self-oriented motives. Future research could explore the relevance of further differentiating among these motives within each factor to examine whether and how they may relate differently to parent and child characteristics.

Conclusions

The development and psychometric validation of the PLSS provide a promising foundation for advancing research on parental lying. By distinguishing between behavioral and knowledge- or emotion-oriented lies, the PLSS enables a more differentiated understanding of how parents use lying in interactions with their children. Although further validation across populations and contexts is needed, the PLSS offers a practical and conceptually grounded instrument for examining how different types of lying relate to parenting processes and children's social and moral development.

Supplementary Materials

Table S1

Deviations From Preregistration

Preregistered plan	Actual analysis	Reason for deviation
Exploratory Factor Analysis		
Conduct EFA in R using WLSMV or MinRes	Conducted EFA in M*plus* using MLR (and MLF if needed)	M*plus* provided more robust handling of sparse distributions of categorical data
Analyze ordinal data (3 categories per item)	Analyzed dichotomous data (0 = "0 times", 1 = "1 time or more")	Empty cells in the highest response category prevented reliable estimation of polychoric correlations
Compute polychoric correlation matrix as analysis basis	Used raw categorical data (MLR estimator) instead of correlation matrix	Even after dichotomization, many item pairs had expected cell counts < 5, indicating insufficient variation for reliable estimation of the tetrachoric correlation matrix (Brown & Benedetti, 1977)
Determine number of factors via parallel analysis (PA)	Determined number of factors using scree plot and model fit indices (AIC, BIC, SSABIC)	PA infeasible given sparse data and non-positive definite correlation matrices
No alternative estimator specified	Added MLF as fallback when MLR encountered saddle points	Ensured model convergence and robustness
Stability of Factor Structure		
Assess configural invariance across T1 and T3 using MGCFA	Repeated EFA at T3, compared factor structures descriptively, and computed Spearman correlations	MGCFA infeasible due to unreliable fit statistics with binary data

Note. EFA = Exploratory Factor Analysis; WLSMV = Weighted Least Squares Mean and Variance adjusted; MLR = Maximum Likelihood Robust; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion; SSABIC = Sample-Size Adjusted Bayesian Information Criterion; MGCFA = Multigroup Confirmatory Factor Analysis; MLF = Maximum Likelihood with First-Order Derivatives; PA = Parallel Analysis.

Table S2

Model Fit Indices for Exploratory Factor Models (T1 and T3

Time	Model	AIC	BIC	SSABIC
T1	2-factor	7802.907	**8220.524**	**7843.296**
	3-factor	**7802.102**	8353.076	7855.388
T3	2-factor	**7160.610**	**7578.227**	**7200.999**

Note. AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion; SSABIC = Sample-Size Adjusted BIC. Bold values indicate the favored model according to the respective fit statistic.

Table S3

Geomin-Rotated Factor Loadings and Factor Structure at T3 (Abbreviated Item Labels)

Factor and Item Labels	Factor 1 (Lies to influence behavior)	Factor 2 (Lies to shape knowledge or emotions)
Factor 1: Lies to influence behavior (24 items)		
Lying about eating consequences (to encourage eating)	**.811**	-.195
Lying by using food myths (to discourage eating)	**.807**	-.018
Lying to stop the child from requesting certain foods	**.857**	-.153
Lying to encourage eating specific foods	**.793**	.006
Lying about leaving (to make the child comply)	**.749**	-.207
Lying to keep the child in place	**.824**	-.118
Lying about circumstances when leaving the child with someone else (to facilitate separation)	**.664**	.151
Lying about throwing away belongings to stop misbehavior	**.569**	.116
Lying about sending the child away to stop misbehavior	**.632**	.037
Lying about someone taking the child away to stop misbehavior	**.903**	-.028
Lying about consequences of lying (to discourage lying)	**.687**	.162
Lying about detecting lies to discourage lying	**.484**	.254
Lying to make the child take medicine	**.361**[a]	.453[a]
Lying to stop annoying but harmless behavior	**.591**	.226
Lying about reasons (to avoid conflict or disappointment)	**.608**	.284
Lying to make the child do chores	**.637**	.114
Lying to make it easier to avoid buying a requested item	**.567**	.247
Lying to hide financial constraints	**.719**	.149
Lying about others' reactions to make the child comply	**.798**	.009
Lying about taking away privileges to make the child comply	**.519**	.177
Lying about dangers to prevent or stop behavior	**.600**	.324
Lying about food (content) to avoid discussion or nagging	**.482**	.263
Lying about giving a reward to make the child comply	**.606**	-.150

Table S3

Geomin-Rotated Factor Loadings and Factor Structure at T3 (Abbreviated Item Labels)

Factor and Item Labels	Factor 1 (Lies to influence behavior)	Factor 2 (Lies to shape knowledge or emotions)
Lying to maintain fantasy beliefs	**.435**	.185
Factor 2: Lies to shape knowledge or emotions (15 items)		
Lying to prevent or reduce fear	.358[a]	**.536[a]**
Lying to protect the child's self-esteem	.142	**.660**
Lying to encourage persistence	.150	**.650**
Lying to reduce the child's sadness about their actions	.179	**.647**
Lying to avoid discussing sensitive topics	.374[a]	**.389[a]**
Lying about the child's appearance to make the child feel good	.106	**.601**
Lying about time to avoid discussion or nagging	.325	**.556**
Lying about family matters to protect the child emotionally	-.072	**.781**
Lying about world events to protect the child emotionally	.011	**.734**
Lying about general behavior to protect parental image or avoid child's disappointment	-.222	**.838**
Lying about opinions to protect parental image or avoid child's disappointment	.000	**.834**
Lying about preferences to protect parental image or avoid child's disappointment	.498[a]	**.424[a]**
Lying about specific actions to protect parental image or avoid child's disappointment	.244	**.475**
Lying about finances to protect one's own privacy	.005	**.678**
Lying to protect someone else's privacy	-.215	**.781**

Note. [a] = Cross-loading; assigned based on content. **Bold** indicates the factor to which the item was assigned. Goals in parentheses were not explicitly stated in the item wording but were inferred from context.

Figure S1

Scree Plot of Eigenvalues for Extracted Factors (T1)

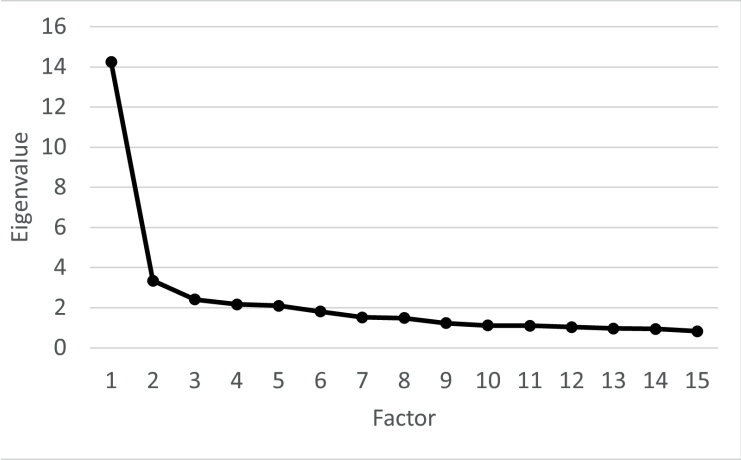
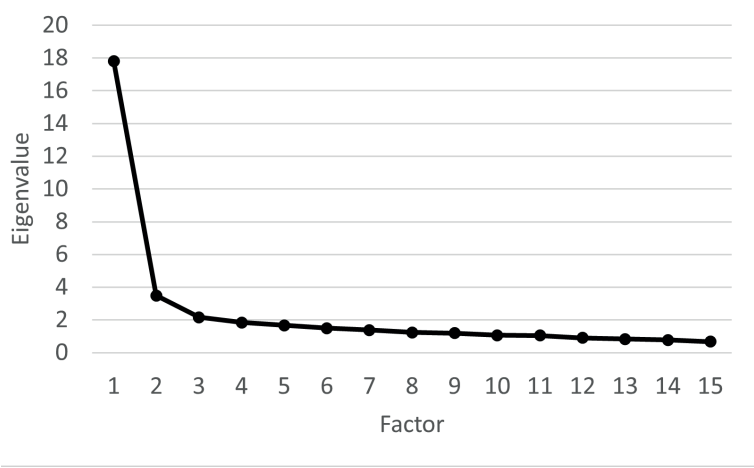


Figure S2

Scree Plot of Eigenvalues for Extracted Factors (T3)



Chapter 4



Practice What You Preach? Exploring Parental Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching About Lying

Open Science Statement:

Preregistration	https://osf.io/2q6gy
Open data	https://osf.io/3vm28/files/osfstorage
Open materials	https://osf.io/3vm28/files/osfstorage
Open code	https://osf.io/3vm28/files/osfstorage
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Abstract

Many parents lie to their children. Paradoxically, many also disapprove of lying to children, and teach that lying is unacceptable, suggesting discrepancies between parental lying attitudes, behaviors, and teaching. This study explored the alignment and discrepancies between parental attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction across three lie types: other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental. Cross-sectional data were collected from parents in the Netherlands (*N* = 312, 79.8% mothers) and analyzed using correlational and latent profile analyses. Between-parent associations suggested general alignment between attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction, with variations in strength depending on lie type. However, within-parent analyses showed many parents exhibited discrepancies between their lying attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction. Prevalence and patterns of alignment and discrepancies differed by lie type. For instance, discrepant profiles were more prevalent for self-oriented and instrumental lying than for other-oriented lying. These findings suggest most parents do not fully practice what they believe or preach, nor consistently preach what they believe, reflecting internal moral conflicts within parents and inconsistencies in children's moral socialization. This study expands understanding of parental alignment and discrepancies and proposes hypotheses about environmental, societal, and relational factors influencing how parents navigate moral beliefs, behaviors, and teaching in daily life.

Keywords: parental lying, attitude-behavior discrepancy, moral socialization, latent profile analysis, parent–child relationship

Practice What You Preach? Exploring Parental Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching About Lying

Honesty is generally highly valued and encouraged (Bureau & Mageau, 2014; Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Hsieh, 2004), while dishonesty is typically viewed as immoral behavior that can violate trust and seriously harm relationships (e.g., Conley et al., 2011). Much of the research on dishonesty has focused on lying. While definitions of lying vary (Mahon, 2008), most include the element of "intentionally misleading communication meant to create untrue beliefs" (Hart & Curtis, 2023, p. 20). Since honesty is highly valued, parents worldwide generally teach their children to be honest (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Evans & Lee, 2022) and report negative attitudes toward lying (Lavoie et al., 2016). Paradoxically, studies increasingly show that many parents lie to their children (Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024). Thus, parental attitudes toward lying to children, parental lying behaviors, and parental teaching about lying may not align. To what extent are parental attitudes toward lying, parental lying behaviors, and parental teaching about lying aligned? This study is the first to empirically explore the alignment and discrepancies of parental attitudes, behaviors, and teaching across different types of lies.

Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching Across Different Types of Lies

Although research indicates that most parents strive to give their children a uniform message emphasizing the unacceptability of lying in general (Lavoie et al., 2016), their attitudes and behaviors appear to vary across types of lies. Lies are typically classified based on the intended benefit or cost to either the lie-teller or the recipient (e.g., Cantarero et al., 2018; DePaulo et al., 1996). Some lies are intended to benefit or protect the lie-teller, potentially causing harm to others, also referred to as self-oriented, self-serving, or antisocial lies (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; DePaulo et al., 1996). For example, one may deny wrongdoing to come across as a more sociable person. Telling self-oriented lies is generally disapproved of (e.g., Fu et al., 2007; Jensen et al., 2004). In contrast, other lies, also referred to as prosocial or white lies, are intended to benefit or protect the recipient of the lie, potentially at the cost of the lie-teller, also referred to as other-oriented lies (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; DePaulo et al., 1996; Erat & Gneezy, 2011; Talwar & Crossman, 2011). For example, one may give false praise to a person to be polite or protect the recipient's feelings. Telling other-oriented lies is generally considered acceptable and sometimes even encouraged (e.g., Bussey, 1999; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015; Talwar & Lee, 2002). Studies on parental lying indicate that parents commonly approve of other-oriented lying to children as it is intended to benefit or protect the child (Lavoie et al., 2016), even though parents disapprove of lying to children in general (Heyman et al., 2009).

Research on parental lying behaviors often does not distinguish between self-oriented and other-oriented lies. Instead, it focuses on a specific form of lying unique to the parent–child

relationship: parenting by lying (Heyman et al., 2009). The term parenting by lying refers to lies intended to influence children's emotions and behaviors. These lies are proposed to serve different purposes and therefore fall into different categories. Lying to influence children's emotions aligns with the concept of other-oriented lying (Setoh et al., 2020). Lying intended to influence children's behavior has specific socializing intentions, for instance to elicit children's compliance, a phenomenon also referred to as instrumental lying (Heyman et al., 2013). Instrumental lies are both parent-benefiting and goal-directed, as they are used strategically to regulate children's behavior. For example, a parent may falsely claim to leave the child alone by saying: "If you don't come with me now, I will leave you here by yourself," to encourage the child to comply. Although instrumental lies share with self-oriented lies that they benefit the parent (Setoh et al., 2020), they are not interchangeable. Self-oriented lies do not always serve an instrumental, goal-directed purpose. For example, if a parent falsely claims to have searched for a missing toy, the lie benefits the parent but lacks an instrumental purpose.

The variation in parental attitudes and behaviors regarding lying to children across different lies underscores the inherent ambiguity of the concept of lying (DePaulo et al., 1996). This ambiguity highlights the importance of considering different types of lies when exploring parental attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, it is crucial to explore whether previously documented variations in parents' attitudes toward lying and their lying behaviors extend to what parents teach their children about lying. In this study, parental attitudes, behaviors, and teaching are measured separately for different types of lies: other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental.

Relations Between Parental Lying Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching

Integrated evidence from previous studies suggests that parents' attitudes toward lying to children may not align with their lying behaviors. For instance, Heyman et al. (2009) found that many parents told instrumental lies, whereas Lavoie et al. (2016) found that parents predominantly disapproved of lying to children, unless lies were for the benefit of the child (other-oriented). A potential discrepancy between parents' attitudes toward lying to children and their actual lying behaviors contradicts expectations derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). According to this theory, attitudes toward a specific behavior are an important predictor of engaging in that behavior. More favorable attitudes are expected to increase the likelihood of performing the behavior, whereas less favorable attitudes are expected to reduce it. In the case of parental lying, however, integrated findings from previous studies suggest that this framework may not always hold.

In addition to a potential discrepancy between attitudes and behaviors, parents' attitudes may not align with what they teach their children about lying. Specifically, although many parents seem to approve of telling other-oriented lies to children, most teach their children from an early age that lying in general is unacceptable (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et

al., 2009; Lavoie et al., 2016). Lavoie et al. (2016) found that although only 8% of parents believed that lying to children was never acceptable, 67% taught their children that lying was never acceptable. This suggests that parents' nuanced attitudes toward lying to children may not translate into a similar nuanced approach of teaching about lying, as parents seem to emphasize the negative aspects of lying rather than teaching a nuanced understanding of lying in specific circumstances and underlying intentions.

Moreover, a discrepancy may exist between parents' teaching about lying and their lying behaviors. Although parents in general appear to teach their children that lying is unacceptable (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009; Lavoie et al., 2016), research indicates that nearly all parents lie to their children (Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024). Heyman et al. (2009) showed that although 88% of parents admitted lying to their children, 74% of the same parents taught their children that lying is wrong. Moreover, parents' willingness to tell lies to children and their teaching about honesty were unrelated. Finally, parents who were more punitive about their children's lying behaviors were found to be more likely to lie to their children (Heyman et al., 2009).

Such a discrepancy between parental teaching and behaviors may lead to inconsistencies in children's moral socialization. Children learn about lying through explicit and implicit socialization strategies. Explicit socialization involves proactive teaching, such as establishing rules about the acceptability of lying, and reactive teaching, such as punishing lying behaviors (Lavoie et al., 2016; Malloy et al., 2019; Talwar et al., 2022). Implicit socialization, on the other hand, occurs when children observe their parents' lying behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Grusec & Davidov, 2010). Although children may not always recognize parental lies, the high prevalence of parental lying (Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024) and the likelihood that many lies will eventually come to light suggest that children will witness such behaviors. Furthermore, studies using children's reports on parental lying (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009) show prevalence rates similar to those reported by parents themselves (Heyman et al., 2009, 2013), indicating that children are indeed aware of their parents' lying behaviors. Through observing these behaviors, children may receive implicit messages about the acceptability of lying (Low et al., 2024).

Interestingly, contrary to the findings that indicate a discrepancy between parental teaching about lying and parental lying behaviors, other research suggests alignment. Specifically, Lavoie et al. (2023) found that parents who strongly emphasized honesty to their children were less likely to lie themselves.

In summary, some empirical evidence suggests discrepancies between parental attitudes toward lying to children, parental lying behaviors, and parental teaching about lying (e.g., Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009; Lavoie et al., 2016), whereas other evidence suggests alignment between some of these constructs of parental lying (Lavoie et al., 2023). To date, it remains unclear whether this can be attributed to different types of parental lies.

Associations between attitudes, behaviors, and teaching may vary across different types of lies. For example, Heyman et al. (2013) suggested that instrumental lies may be driven by parental stress in response to child noncompliance. Building on this idea, it is conceivable that instrumental lying tends to occur more reactively, in emotionally charged situations, whereas self-oriented or other-oriented lies may reflect more proactive, deliberate forms of lying. As such, instrumental lying may be less strongly grounded in parents' attitudes or the messages they convey to their children, which could contribute to relatively weaker associations between parental attitudes, behaviors, and teaching for this type of lie compared to self-oriented and other-oriented lies.

Furthermore, associations between lying attitudes, lying behaviors, and teaching about lying may vary across parents. Previous studies have predominantly used a variable-centered approach, focusing on average between-parent associations (Howard & Hoffman, 2018). This approach fails to capture how lying attitudes, behaviors, and teaching align within individual parents. To gain a deeper understanding of these associations, a person-centered exploration is an essential first step.

The Current Study

The current study aims to explore the extent to which parental attitudes toward lying, parental lying behaviors, and parental teaching about lying are aligned. We specifically focus on direct moral instruction as one aspect of parental teaching, namely, parents' explicit communication endorsing a given type of lie. Specifically, we examine (1) between-parent associations regarding attitudes toward lying to children, lying behaviors, and direct moral instruction about lying across other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental lies; and (2) how these attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction cluster within parents. By examining the within-parent clusters, we aim to identify alignment and discrepancy profiles that reflect variations in how lie-type-specific attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction are related within parents. At the between-parent level, we tentatively hypothesize that associations between attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction for instrumental lies will be weaker compared to those of other-oriented and self-oriented lies (Heyman et al., 2013). At the within-parent level, we expect the associations between attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction to vary across parents. Since this is the first study to explore within-parent alignment, we do not have specific expectations regarding profiles.

Method

Design and Procedure

The current study was embedded within the Fami-LIES project, a series of studies on lying in families (https://osf.io/3vm28/). Cross-sectional data were collected from Dutch parents through an online questionnaire. Both the data collection and plans for the current study were preregistered on the Open Science Framework (OSF); see https://osf.io/cbvth and https://osf.io/2q6gy, respectively. Deviations from the preregistrations are described below.

The data collection was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the European Research Council (ERC; Ares(2021)37377) and the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology, Education, and Child Studies (DPECS) of Erasmus University Rotterdam (ETH2122-0600). Data were collected from May 2022 to May 2023. Parents were recruited via personal networks of researchers and undergraduate students, schools, organizations, various media platforms (i.e., social media, newspapers, television, radio), and flyers. Parents with children of all ages were eligible to participate. Parents gave informed consent before completing the questionnaire, which took approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Two gift vouchers (€50 each) were raffled among participants. Parents first answered questions about demographics and their current attitudes toward lying to children. Parents were categorized into three groups, based on their child's age: (1) 0–5 years, (2) 6–16 years, and (3) over 16 years. Parents with a child aged 6–16 were asked about their current behavior and teaching regarding their oldest child in this range. Parents of 0–5 year-olds were asked about their planned behaviors and teaching for their oldest child in this age range. Those with children over 16 answered retrospectively, focusing on their youngest child. The timeframe for planned and past behaviors was not specified. Initially, questions prioritized parents of 6–16-year-olds (who were asked first if they had a child in this age range). Later, the order was adjusted to better represent parents with children aged 0–5 and over 16 years. Questions on attitudes, behaviors, and teaching were asked separately for three types of lies: other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental lies. Before answering these lie-specific questions, parents received instructions, including definitions and two examples for each type of lie (see Kok et al., 2022). The types of lies were presented in a randomized order.

Data were screened for invalid and non-compliant responses to open-ended questions and non-compliant response patterns to closed-ended questions, such as consistently selecting the lowest answer option. From the initial sample (n = 318), six parents were excluded.

Participants

A total of 312 parents with children aged 0–5 years (n = 101), 6–16 years (n = 109), or over 16 years (n = 102) participated. Children in the 6–16 group ranged from 6–16 years (M = 11.37, SD = 3.33). The distribution within this group was fairly even, with approximately half the

cases between 6 and 11 years and half between 12 and 16 years. Most parents identified as female (79.8%). Parents' ages ranged from 24 to 77 years (M = 44.40, SD = 11.19). More than half of parents within the sample were highly educated. Specifically, 36.2% held a degree from a university or higher, 35.6% held a degree from a higher professional education institution, and 27.6% had an educational level below higher professional education. For two parents (0.6%), their specific educational level was unknown. Parents were given an open-ended question to identify their cultural background, rather than being presented with preselected options that may not accurately reflect their cultural self-identification. These open-ended responses were categorized into the following cultural categories: Dutch only (86.9%); Dutch as well as another cultural ethnic region (5.4%); or another cultural ethnic region only (7.7%).

Measures

Parental Attitudes Toward Lying to Children

Parental attitudes toward lying to children were measured using six items based on Ajzen's (2006) Theory of Planned Behavior Questionnaire. Parents were presented with two items for each type of lie (i.e., other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental), for which they received instructions that included detailed definitions and two examples for each lie type. These definitions and several examples were pilot tested with parents in the Netherlands. The most representative ones were selected. Full definitions and examples are available in the preregistration of the data collection. After reading the instructions, parents answered items such as "Lying to children to influence their behavior is…," to which they responded using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *bad* or *useless* to 7 = *good* or *useful*). Lie-specific attitude scores were computed by averaging the scores of the two attitude items addressing the specific type of lie. Higher lie-specific attitude scores indicate more positive attitudes toward the specific type of lie. To calculate the internal consistency of our lie type-specific attitude scores, we calculated Spearman-Brown coefficients[1], following recommendations of Eisinga et al. (2013), instead of our preregistered Pearson correlations. Spearman-Brown coefficients demonstrated acceptable reliability for the scale measuring parental attitudes toward instrumental lies (ρ = .73), good reliability for self-oriented lies (ρ = .88), and excellent reliability for other-oriented lies (ρ = .93).

Parental Lying Behaviors

Parental lying behaviors were assessed using six items adapted from the instrument of Dykstra et al. (2020). Parents were presented with two items for each type of lie. Prior to

1 We used the Spearman-Brown coefficient to assess reliability of two-item scales, as it is considered more appropriate than Cronbach's alpha or Pearson correlations in this context. As Eisinga et al. (2013) note, the Pearson correlation reflects the reliability of a single item rather than the overall two-item scale and tends to underestimate scale reliability

answering these behavior items, they were again provided with the same definitions and examples used in the attitudes section. Example items include: "Do you lie to your child to influence the behavior of your child?" or "Do you tell lies to influence the behavior of someone, in front of your child?" Parents responded using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 4 = *often*). Lie-type-specific behavior scores were calculated by averaging the scores across the two items addressing behaviors of the specific type of lie. Higher lie-specific behavior scores indicate higher frequencies of telling the specific type of lie. Spearman-Brown coefficients demonstrated acceptable reliabilities for the scales measuring parental lying behaviors of other-oriented lies (ρ = .77), self-oriented lies (ρ = .76) and instrumental lies (ρ = .69).

Parental Teaching About Lying: Direct Moral Instruction Endorsing Lying

Parental teaching about lying was assessed using nine items adapted from the instruments of Dykstra et al. (2020) and Malloy et al. (2019). Parents were presented with three items for each type of lie. Before answering these items, parents were reminded of the previously introduced definitions and examples to ensure consistent understanding across measures. Example items include: "I teach my child that it is okay to tell lies to influence another's behavior."; "I encourage my child to tell lies to influence another's behavior."; "I punish my child when I catch him/her telling a lie to influence another's behavior." (reverse-coded). Responses were given on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all* to 4 = *very much*). Inter-item correlations showed weak correlations between the punishment item and the other items, ranging from *r* = .13 to .31. Therefore, in contrast with our preregistered plan to calculate teaching scores based on the three items, we excluded the punishment item and calculated lie-specific scores based on the remaining two. These items primarily reflect direct moral instruction endorsing a given type of lie, that is, parents explicitly communicating its acceptability and encouraging the child to tell it. Higher lie-specific direct moral instruction scores indicate that parents provide more direct moral instruction endorsing the telling of that specific type of lie. Spearman-Brown coefficients demonstrated good reliability for the scale measuring parental direct moral instruction about other-oriented lies (ρ = .86), questionable reliability for self-oriented lies (ρ = .61), and acceptable reliability for instrumental lies (ρ = .76).

Covariates

Child Age. Considering that parents are more likely to encourage and tell prosocial lies to older children (Talwar et al., 2022; Walper & Valtin, 1992), we included child age as a covariate in our analyses. Specifically, parents of children between 6 and 16 years were asked the age of the child they had in mind when responding to the questions. Since parents of children aged 0–5 years and over 16 years answered questions on their planned and past actions, the current ages of these children were not included as a covariate in the analyses.

Number of Children. Despite our preregistered plan to include the number of children as a

potential moderator in the analyses, we decided not to do so, as research suggests that the number of children is not related to parental lying (Heyman et al., 2009, 2013).

Plan of Analyses

Data Preparation

Before conducting the main analyses, we evaluated the appropriateness of pooling data from the three age groups: prospective data (0–5 years age group), cross-sectional data (6–16 years age group), and retrospective data (over 16 years age group). We visually inspected the means, score ranges, and variabilities of the key variables to identify any notable differences. The results indicated no substantial differences across age groups. To further assess whether pooling was appropriate, we tested whether the correlations of interest significantly differed by age group. Specifically, we conducted nine pairwise correlation comparisons for each type of lie to examine whether the three associations of interest varied significantly across the age groups. To account for multiple comparisons, we applied a Bonferroni correction by dividing the conventional significance level ($\alpha = .05$) by the nine tests per type of lie, resulting in an adjusted threshold of $\alpha = .006$. The analyses revealed no significant differences in any of the pairwise correlation comparisons (see supplementary materials, Tables S1–S3). This indicates that the associations investigated in this study do not vary by age group, supporting the decision to pool data from the three age groups.

Statistical Analyses

To explore the between-parent associations between attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction, we performed nine bivariate correlations (i.e., three per type of lie). Although the correlation analyses were exploratory, we conservatively corrected for multiple testing. Consequently, we set the significance threshold to $\alpha = .006$, given the nine correlations we conducted. Following the calculation of the correlations, we examined differences in their strengths using Fisher's Z-transformation approach for non-overlapping correlations (Zou, 2007). This method, a specialized application of Fisher's Z-transformation, was chosen to derive 95% confidence intervals for differences between correlations, taking into account that these correlations were obtained from the same sample. To analyze the role of child age, we conducted nine partial correlations between type-specific parental attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction among parents with children aged 6–16 years. Although we preregistered a moderation analysis with child age as a continuous moderator, we instead included age as a covariate to control for its potential confounding influence on these associations. This approach was chosen because the study was exploratory in nature and aimed to rule out confounding rather than to test moderation effects.

To explore how attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction cluster together within parents, we performed latent profile analyses in R (version 4.2.2; R Core Team, 2022), utilizing the "tidyLPA" and "dplyr" packages (Rosenberg et al., 2018; Wickham et al., 2023).

In total, we performed three latent profile analyses, one for each type of lie. Standardized mean scores on attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction of each specific lie were used as profile indicators. The selection of the final profile solutions was based on several criteria: (a) fit indices, including the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), in which smaller values for AIC and BIC indicate better model fit (Tein et al., 2013); (b) the Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT), in which BLRT p-values < .05 indicate significant model improvement; (c) the probabilities with which a parent can be allocated to a certain profile; (d) entropy, in which values closer to 1 indicate a more accurate categorization of profiles (Celeux & Soromenho, 1996); (e) profile sizes of at least 5% of participants in each profile; and (f) theoretical meaningfulness of the different profiles. To enhance the interpretability of the latent profiles and to describe their characteristics, the standardized means (z scores) of the profile indicators were reported (Spurk et al., 2020).

To interpret the alignment and discrepancies between attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction within each identified profile, as well as how attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction differ between profiles, Cohen's d was used. A within-profile difference with an effect size of $d \geq 0.3$ and a between-profile difference of $d \geq 0.5$ was considered meaningfully discrepant (Cohen, 1988; Lakens, 2013). Effect sizes were calculated using pairwise comparisons based on standardized mean scores, providing a standardized interpretation of discrepancies, while accounting for variations in sample sizes across the profiles. For within-profile differences, pairwise comparisons were made between constructs within the same profile. For between-profile differences, the standardized scores of a construct in a specific profile and the average score of the same constructs across all profiles were compared. To ensure accuracy in the between-profile calculations, the pooled standard deviation was used to account for variations in variability and sample sizes across profiles.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction, as well as the differences in attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction across the three types of lies. Paired sample *t* tests indicate that, on average, for other-oriented lies parents reported the most positive attitudes, highest frequency of lie-telling, and the most direct moral instruction endorsing these lies, followed by instrumental lies, and then self-oriented lies.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Pairwise Comparisons of Attitudes, Behaviors, and Direct Moral Instruction

Study Variables	M or $M_{difference}$	*SE*	Minimum	Maximum	*t*
Attitudes					
Other-oriented	3.45	0.10	1.00	7.00	
Self-oriented	1.94	0.06	1.00	6.00	
Instrumental	3.06	0.10	1.00	7.00	
Other-oriented – Self-oriented	1.52	0.09			16.84***
Other-oriented – Instrumental	0.39	0.09			4.34***
Self-oriented – Instrumental	-1.12	0.08			-13.49***
Behaviors					
Other-oriented	2.18	0.04	1.00	4.00	
Self-oriented	1.63	0.03	1.00	3.50	
Instrumental	1.90	0.04	1.00	4.00	
Other-oriented – Self-oriented	0.55	0.04			14.73***
Other-oriented – Instrumental	0.28	0.03			8.31***
Self-oriented – Instrumental	-0.27	0.03			-8.57***
Direct moral instruction					
Other-oriented	1.64	0.04	1.00	4.00	
Self-oriented	1.21	0.02	1.00	2.50	
Instrumental	1.29	0.03	1.00	4.00	
Other-oriented – Self-oriented	0.43	0.04			11.56***
Other-oriented – Instrumental	0.35	0.04			9.63***
Self-oriented – Instrumental	-0.08	0.03			-2.78**

Note. **p < .01. *** p < .001.

Between-Parent Associations Between Attitudes, Behaviors, and Direct Moral Instruction

Correlation Analyses

Bivariate between-parent correlations between parental attitudes toward lying to children, lying behaviors, and direct moral instruction about lying for the three types of lies are presented in Table 2. Significant positive correlations were found among attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction across all three types of lies, indicating that parents with more positive attitudes toward lying to children tend to report higher frequencies of lie-telling and provide more direct moral instruction endorsing lies. The strength of these correlations varied from weak to strong. Specifically, moderate to moderately strong positive correlations

were observed for other-oriented lies. For self-oriented lies, correlations ranged from weak to moderate. Correlation strengths for instrumental lies were mixed. Correlations were similar when controlling for the age of the child.

Table 2

Correlation Statistics of Attitudes, Behaviors, and Direct Moral Instruction (N = 312)

Variable		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Other-oriented									
1.	Attitudes								
2.	Behaviors	.66***							
3.	Direct moral instruction	.51***	.59***						
Self-oriented									
1.	Attitudes	.45***	.34***	.28***					
2.	Behaviors	.32***	.47***	.27***	.51***				
3.	Direct moral instruction	.11	.23***	.27***	.24***	.39***			
Instrumental									
1.	Attitudes	.58***	.50***	.44***	.54***	.40***	.20***		
2.	Behaviors	.48***	.62***	.45***	.41***	.61***	.26***	.69***	
3.	Direct moral instruction	.17**	.28***	.40***	.14*	.24***	.25***	.30***	.39***

Note. Correlation coefficients were similar in terms of magnitude and direction when the punishment item was included within the direct moral instruction scores.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$.

Correlation Comparisons Across Lie Types

Significant differences were found in the correlations between attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction across different types of lies (see Table 3). First, there was a significant difference in the correlations between attitudes and behaviors for other-oriented versus self-oriented lies, and for instrumental versus self-oriented lies. However, no significant difference was found between the correlations for other-oriented versus instrumental lies. These findings suggest a stronger alignment between parental attitudes and behaviors regarding other-oriented and instrumental lies compared to self-oriented lies. Alignment of parental attitudes and behaviors for other-oriented and instrumental lies was similar.

Second, significant differences were found in the correlations between attitudes and direct moral instruction for other-oriented lies compared to self-oriented lies and instrumental

lies. No significant difference was observed between the correlations for self-oriented versus instrumental lies. However, a stronger alignment between parental attitudes and direct moral instruction was found for other-oriented lies compared to self-oriented and instrumental lies. Furthermore, the findings suggest a similar degree of alignment between parental attitudes and direct moral instruction for self-oriented and instrumental lies.
Finally, we found significant differences in the correlations between behaviors and direct moral instruction for other-oriented lies compared to self-oriented and instrumental lies. Correlations between behaviors and direct moral instruction for self-oriented and instrumental lies did not differ significantly. These findings suggest a stronger alignment between parental behaviors and direct moral instruction regarding other-oriented lies compared to self-oriented and instrumental lies. Alignment between parental behaviors and direct moral instruction for self-oriented and instrumental lies was similar.

Table 3
Correlation Comparisons With Fisher's-z Transformation: 95% CI for Nonoverlapping Correlations

Correlation	r_1	r_2	$r_{difference}$	95% CI (*L, U*)
Other-oriented (r_1) versus Self-oriented (r_2)				
$r_{attitudes,\ behaviors}$	.66***	.51***	.15*	[0.06, 0.25]
$r_{attitudes,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.51***	.24***	.27*	[0.14, 0.40]
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.59***	.39***	.20*	[0.09, 0.31]
Other-oriented (r_1) versus Instrumental (r_2)				
$r_{attitudes,\ behaviors}$	.66***	.69***	-.03	[-0.11, 0.04]
$r_{attitudes,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.51***	.30***	.21*	[0.09, 0.33]
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.59***	.39***	.20*	[0.09, 0.31]
Self-oriented (r_1) versus Instrumental (r_2)				
$r_{attitudes,\ behaviors}$	.51***	.69***	-.18*	[-0.27, -0.10]
$r_{attitudes,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.24***	.30***	-.06*	[-0.20, -0.08]
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.39***	.39***	0	[-0.13, 0.13]

Note. *$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$.

Within-Parent Alignment and Discrepancy Profiles

Latent Profile Analysis for Other-Oriented Lies

For other-oriented lies, the model fit improved with an increased number of profiles, up to six profiles (see Table 4). Model fit indices and the BLRT favored a six-profile solution over a five-profile solution. A satisfactory entropy value and acceptable profile probabilities within the six-profile solution suggested a reliable allocation of parents into the profiles. Moreover, all six profiles were substantial in size and theoretically meaningful. Therefore, we selected the six-profile solution for other-oriented lies.

Latent Profile Analysis for Self-Oriented Lies

For self-oriented lies, the fit indices and BLRT demonstrated that a four-profile solution fit the data significantly better than a three-profile solution (see Table 4). However, one profile within the four-profile solution included only 4% of parents, below the minimum threshold of 5%. The three-profile solution yielded a satisfactory entropy value and high profile probabilities, indicating reliable allocation of parents into the profiles. All three profiles were substantial in size and theoretically meaningful. Therefore, we selected the three-profile solution for self-oriented lies.

Latent Profile Analysis for Instrumental Lies

For instrumental lies, the fit indices and BLRT demonstrated that a five-profile solution provided a significantly better fit to the data than a four-profile solution (see Table 4). The five-profile solution exhibited a satisfactory entropy value and acceptable profile probabilities. Additionally, all five profiles were substantial in size and theoretically meaningful. Consequently, we selected the five-profile solution for instrumental lies.

Table 4

Latent Profile Results: Other-oriented, Self-oriented, and Instrumental Lies

					Profile probabilities		Profiles sizes (%)	
Profiles	AIC	BIC	Entropy	BLRT_P	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.
				Other-oriented				
1	2665.25	2687.71	1.00	NA	1.00	1.00	100	100
2	2409.66	2447.09	0.78	.01	0.92	0.94	44	56
3	2315.59	2368.00	0.86	.01	0.91	0.95	6	55
4	2298.33	2365.71	0.77	.01	0.84	0.93	6	38
5	2229.37	2311.71	0.82	.01	0.81	1.00	7	31
6	**2205.78**	**2303.10**	**0.88**	**.01**	**0.77**	**1.00**	**7**	**28**
7	2262.84	2303.10	0.76	1.00	0.74	0.97	4	20
				Self-oriented				
1	2665.25	2687.71	1.00	NA	1.00	1.00	100	100
2	2508.05	2545.48	0.80	0.01	0.94	0.96	48	52
3	**2353.73**	**2406.14**	**0.86**	**0.01**	**0.90**	**0.99**	**23**	**49**
4	2304.68	2372.05	0.92	0.01	0.91	0.99	4	49
5	2312.68	2395.02	0.79	1.00	0.00	0.99	0	49
				Instrumental				
1	2665.25	2687.71	1.00	NA	1.00	1.00	100	100
2	2430.56	2467.99	0.83	0.01	0.93	0.96	39	61
3	2388.43	2440.83	0.79	0.01	0.83	0.96	22	48
4	2368.36	2435.74	0.66	0.01	0.00	0.98	0	56
5	**2273.78**	**2356.13**	**0.84**	**0.01**	**0.80**	**0.96**	**8**	**42**
6	2281.80	2379.12	0.70	1.00	0.42	0.96	8	25

Note. Profile solutions in bold are the selected solutions.

Clusters of Parental Profiles Based on Alignment or Discrepancies

We identified three clusters of profiles based on effect sizes of the differences between attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction for other-oriented (O), self-oriented (S) or instrumental (I) within each individual profile: (1) aligned (Profiles O1 and O4), (2) partially discrepant (Profiles O2, O3, O6, S1, S2, I1, I3, I5), and (3) fully discrepant (Profiles O5, S3, I2, I4) (see Table 5 and Figures 1–3; see Table 6 for between-profile effect sizes).

Parents in the aligned cluster of profiles exhibited no meaningful differences between their attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction (d = −0.03 – 0.17). Interestingly, the aligned cluster of profiles was only observed for other-oriented lies. About half of parents (45.5%) were allocated to an aligned cluster for this type of lie (Profile O1 and O4), of which the majority (61.3%) was allocated to Profile O1. These parents exhibited more negative attitudes, provided less direct moral instruction endorsing other-oriented lies and told them less often than other parents. For the remaining parents within this cluster (Profile O4), attitudes and behaviors did not differ from other parents, but they provided less direct moral instruction endorsing other-oriented lies.

A partially discrepant cluster was assigned when parents exhibited meaningful differences (d = 0.35 – 2.90) between one construct and another, or between one construct and two others (e.g., only a discrepancy between attitude and behavior). The cluster of partially discrepant profiles was observed across all three types of lies, representing at least one-third of the parents. For self-oriented and instrumental lies, most parents were allocated to a partially discrepant profile, respectively 76.6% (Profile S1 and S2) and 70.8% (Profile I1, I3, and I5) of parents. For other-oriented lies, 40% of parents were categorized into partially discrepant profiles (Profile O2, O3 and O6). For example, a group of parents (Profile O3) showed alignment between their attitudes toward telling other-oriented lies to children and the frequency with which they lied. Compared to other parents, they held more positive attitudes and told such lies more often. However, they provided less direct moral instruction endorsing other-oriented lies, both relative to their own attitudes and behaviors and to other parents.

Profiles in which parents showed meaningful differences (d = −0.33 – 2.80) between their attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction were categorized as fully discrepant. This cluster of fully discrepant profiles was observed across all three types of lies. For instrumental lies and self-oriented lies, about a quarter of parents were allocated to a fully discrepant profile, respectively 29.2% of parents (Profile I2, I4) and 23.4% of parents (Profile S3). For other-oriented lies, 14.4% of parents (Profile O5) were allocated to such a profile. For instance, a group of parents (Profile O5) held more negative attitudes toward other-oriented lies than would be expected from how frequently they told such lies, and they provided less direct moral instruction endorsing other-oriented lies compared to their own attitudes and behaviors.

Table 5

Effect Sizes of Within-Profile Differences

Profile	Attitudes – Behaviors	Attitudes – Direct moral instruction	Behaviors – Direct moral instruction	Assigned cluster
		Other-oriented lies		
O1	0.10	-0.03	-0.14	Aligned
O2	0.15	0.35*	0.17	Partially discrepant
O3	0.22	2.90*	2.75*	Partially discrepant
O4	0.06	0.17	0.13	Aligned
O5	-0.42*	-1.69*	-0.67*	Fully discrepant
O6	-0.23	-2.08*	-2.48*	Partially discrepant
		Self-oriented lies		
S1	0.57*	0.08	-0.61*	Partially discrepant
S2	-0.28	-0.75*	-0.60*	Partially discrepant
S3	-0.33*	0.95*	2.80*	Fully discrepant
		Instrumental lies		
I1	-0.36*	-0.96*	-0.27	Partially discrepant
I2	-0.84*	-1.99*	-1.26*	Fully discrepant
I3	0.20	-0.71*	-0.96*	Partially discrepant
I4	0.61*	2.22*	0.70*	Fully discrepant
I5	0.15	1.80*	1.44*	Partially discrepant

Note. * Indicates a within-profile effect size with a minimum of moderate strength, considered meaningful.

Table 6

Effect Sizes of Between-Profile Differences

Profile	$Attitudes_{profile}$ – $Attitudes_{overall}$	$Behaviors_{profile}$ – $Behaviors_{overall}$	$Direct\ moral\ instruction_{profile}$ – $Direct\ moral\ instruction_{overall}$
	Other-oriented lies		
O1	-1.56*	-1.63*	-4.42*
O2	1.44*	1.22*	3.09*
O3	1.00*	0.72*	-4.42*
O4	-0.11	-0.19	-0.97*
O5	-0.61*	0.08	2.47*
O6	1.57*	1.77*	11.33*
	Self-oriented lies		
S1	-0.55*	-1.52*	-1.21*
S2	0.55*	1.35*	3.22*
S3	0.53*	1.56*	-1.33*

Profile	Attitudes$_{profile}$ – Attitudes$_{overall}$	Behaviors$_{profile}$ – Behaviors$_{overall}$	Direct moral instruction$_{profile}$ – Direct moral instruction$_{overall}$
	Instrumental lies		
I1	-2.20*	-0.97*	-1.03*
I2	-1.27*	0.00	3.60*
I3	2.76*	1.47*	3.80*
I4	1.01*	-0.13	-1.24*
I5	3.00*	1.64*	-0.13

Note. * Indicates a between-profile effect size with a minimum of moderate strength, considered meaningful.

Figure 1

Parental Profiles for Other-Oriented Lies

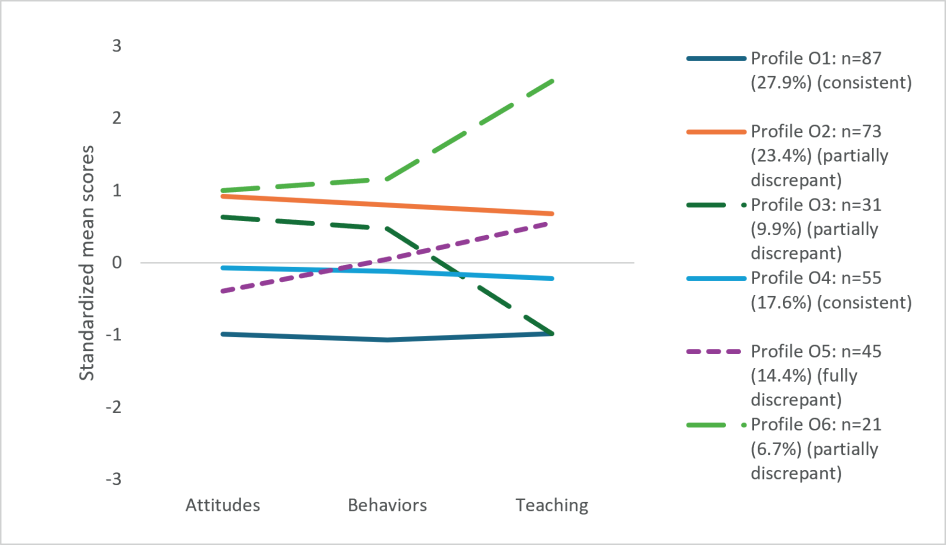


Figure 2

Parental Profiles for Self-Oriented Lies

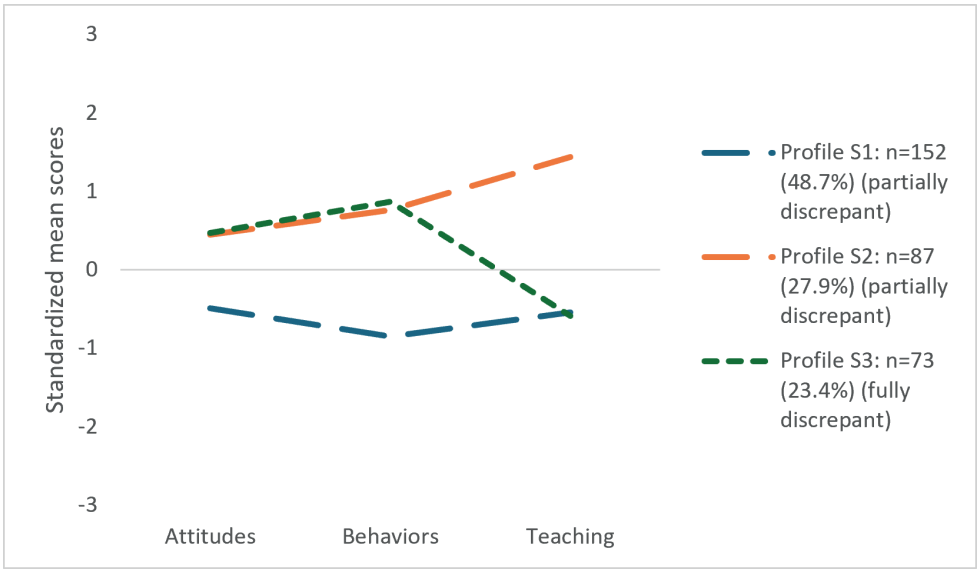
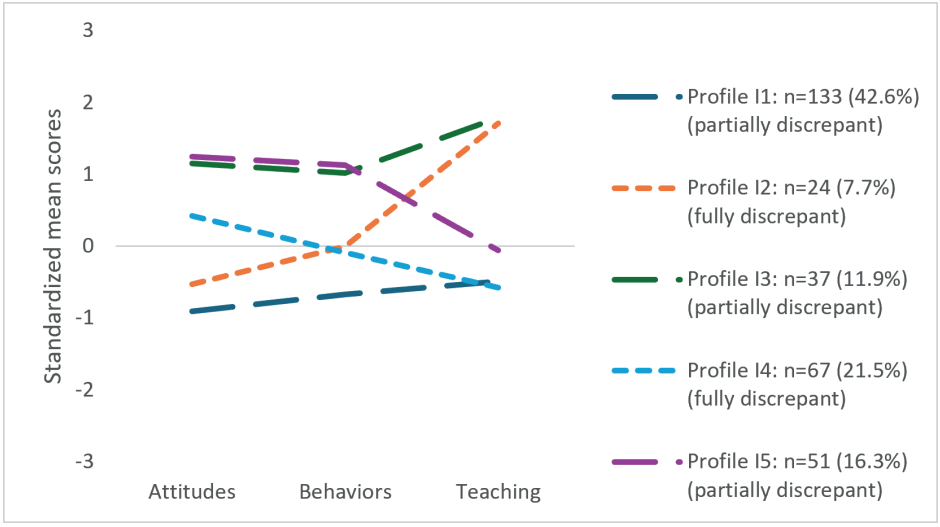


Figure 3

Parental Profiles for Instrumental Lies



Discrepancies Between Attitudes, Behaviors, and Direct Moral Instruction per Type of Lie

Other-Oriented Lies. Three partially discrepant profiles were identified: Profile O2, O3, and O6. Parents in Profile O2 showed a discrepancy between their attitudes and direct moral instruction, providing less moral instruction endorsing other-oriented lies than their attitudes would suggest. Their behaviors aligned with both their attitudes and direct moral instruction. Compared to other parents, they held more positive attitudes toward other-oriented lies and told such lies more frequently, while their level of direct moral instruction did not differ. For parents in Profile O3 and O6, direct moral instruction differed from both attitudes and behaviors. Parents in Profile O3 provided less direct moral instruction endorsing other-oriented lies than would be expected from their attitudes and from how frequently they told such lies. Compared to other parents, they provided less direct moral instruction, while holding more positive attitudes and telling such lies more often. Conversely, parents in Profile O6 gave more direct moral instruction endorsing other-oriented lies than their own attitudes and behaviors would suggest. Compared to other parents, they reported more positive attitudes, more frequent lie-telling and more direct moral instruction endorsing such lies.

The remaining profile, Profile O5, was fully discrepant. Parents in this profile held more negative attitudes toward other-oriented lies than would be expected from their direct moral instruction and behavior, while providing more direct moral instruction endorsing such lies than they themselves tell. Compared to other parents, they reported more negative attitudes, an average frequency of telling other-oriented lies, and higher levels of direct moral instruction endorsing them.

Self-Oriented Lies. Two partially discrepant profiles were identified: Profile S1 and S2. Parents in Profile S1 exhibited discrepancies between their behaviors and both their attitudes and direct moral instruction. Specifically, they told self-oriented lies less frequently than would be expected from their attitudes and their direct moral instruction. Additionally, parents in Profile S1 held more negative attitudes, provided less direct moral instruction endorsing self-oriented lies, and they told such lies less often than other parents. Parents in Profile S2 exhibited discrepancies between their direct moral instruction and both their attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, they provided more direct moral instruction endorsing self-oriented lies than would be expected from their attitudes and frequency of lie-telling. Compared to other parents, they reported more positive attitudes, told self-oriented lies more frequently, and provided more direct moral instruction endorsing these lies.

The remaining profile, Profile S3, was fully discrepant. Parents in this profile reported telling self-oriented lies more frequently than their attitudes and direct moral instruction would suggest. They also provided less direct moral instruction endorsing self-oriented lies compared to both their attitudes and behaviors. Compared to other parents, Profile S3 parents reported more positive attitudes and a higher frequency of telling self-oriented lies,

while providing less direct moral instruction endorsing such lies.

Instrumental Lies. Three partially discrepant profiles were identified: Profile I1, Profile I3, and Profile I5. Parents in Profile I1 held more negative attitudes toward instrumental lies than would be expected from how frequently they told such lies and the extent to which they provided direct moral instruction endorsing them. Compared to other parents, Profile I1 parents reported more negative attitudes, provided less direct moral instruction endorsing instrumental lies, and told such lies less frequently. Parents in Profile I3 and I5 exhibited discrepancies between their direct moral instruction and both their attitudes and behaviors. Parents in Profile I3 provided more direct moral instruction endorsing instrumental lies than would be expected from their attitudes and from how frequently they told such lies. In contrast, parents in Profile I5 provided less direct moral instruction endorsing instrumental lies than would be expected from their attitudes and behaviors. Relative to other parents, parents in both Profile I3 and I5 reported more positive attitudes toward instrumental lies and told them more frequently. Additionally, Profile I3 parents provided more direct moral instruction endorsing instrumental lies, while Profile I5 parents did not differ from other parents in this respect.

The remaining two profiles, Profile I2 and I4, were fully discrepant. Parents in Profile I2 held more negative attitudes toward instrumental lies than would be expected from how frequently they told such lies, while at the same time providing more direct moral instruction endorsing them than would be expected from their attitudes and from their behaviors. In contrast, Profile I4 parents reported more positive attitudes toward telling instrumental lies than their frequency of lie-telling would suggest, while providing less direct moral instruction endorsing them than would be expected from their behaviors. Compared to other parents, Profile I2 parents reported more negative attitudes toward instrumental lies, told such lies at an average frequency, and provided more direct moral instruction endorsing them. Profile I4 parents, by contrast, reported more positive attitudes toward instrumental lies, told such lies at an average frequency, and provided less direct moral instruction endorsing them.

Discussion

In this study, we explored the alignment and discrepancies among parental attitudes toward lying to children, parental lying behaviors, and parental direct moral instruction about lying across three types of lies: other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental lies, both between (correlations) and within (latent profile analyses) parents. The between-parent analyses showed that, in general, parents with more positive attitudes toward a specific type of lie also reported engaging more frequently in such lying behaviors and providing more direct moral instruction endorsing these lies. Furthermore, parents who told a specific type of lie more often were more likely to provide more direct moral instruction endorsing the lie.

These findings suggest an overall alignment between parental lying attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction. The strength of these associations varied by type of lie. The weakest association was observed between attitudes and direct moral instruction regarding self-oriented lies, while the strongest association was between attitudes and behaviors for instrumental lies. Consistent with our expectations, the associations between parental lying attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction were significantly stronger for other-oriented compared to instrumental lies. When comparing the associations for self-oriented and instrumental lies, the type of lie that demonstrated the strongest association varied depending on the combination of constructs being examined.

The within-parent analyses showed that most parents were allocated to a (partially) discrepant profile, indicating that their attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction were not fully aligned. Interestingly, aligned profiles were identified only for attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction concerning other-oriented lies. These included parents, who, compared to other parents in the sample, reported attitudes that were more negative, lower frequencies of lie-telling and less direct moral instruction endorsing other-oriented lies. In contrast, for self-oriented and instrumental lies, all parents exhibited discrepancies to varying degrees between their attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction.

Although based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), one could expect that parents' attitudes toward telling specific types of lies to children would align with their lying behaviors and teaching practices, our findings reveal notable discrepancies across all three types of lies. Importantly, the proportion of parents allocated to a discrepant profile (partially or fully discrepant) varied by lie type and differed across specific parental profiles.

Discrepancies Between Attitudes and Behaviors

Although most parents exhibited discrepancies between their attitudes and behaviors regarding self-oriented and instrumental lies, this was true for only a minority of parents concerning other-oriented lies. Discrepancies between attitudes and behaviors reflect differences between what parents think is acceptable and what they actually do. Parents may view telling self-oriented and instrumental lies to children as wrong but resort to them for personal gain. For instance, despite having negative attitudes toward these self-oriented or instrumental lies, such as falsely stating that there is no more candy, parents may resort to such lies to avoid arguments and to handle parenting challenges (Heyman et al., 2013; Kok et al., 2025). The self-interest involved in telling such lies may outweigh parents' commitment to their moral ideals. This could be explained by ethical dissonance, which refers to the tension between one's desire to uphold a moral self-image and the temptation to benefit from unethical actions (Barkan et al., 2015). The fact that parents' self-interest is less pronounced when telling other-oriented lies to children may explain why parental attitudes and behaviors regarding other-oriented lies were less discrepant compared to self-oriented and instrumental lies. Moreover, emotional states of parents can influence them to

engage in behaviors that contradict their beliefs. For instance, stress resulting from children's noncompliance (Heyman et al., 2013) may drive parents to impulsively lie to influence their children's behavior, even when they generally believe such lies are wrong. Previous research on other parenting behaviors, such as physical discipline or punitive practices, indeed has suggested that parental emotional states can explain discrepancies between their attitudes toward and engagement in such behaviors (Cappa & Khan, 2011; Vittrup et al., 2006).

Interestingly, while most parents told more self-oriented and instrumental lies than they deemed acceptable, some actually told fewer than they believed were acceptable. One possible explanation for this behavior is that parents may aim to implicitly socialize their children through their own actions (Bandura, 1977; Grusec & Davidov, 2010), signaling that it is not acceptable to tell self-oriented and instrumental lies. These parents may strive to act as ideal role models, hoping their children will observe and imitate this behavior, even if they personally consider such lies acceptable. Another possible explanation is that these parents' behaviors are influenced by prevailing societal norms against lying to children, which may be stricter than their personal beliefs. In fact, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) highlights the importance of subjective norms – beliefs about whether most people approve or disapprove of a particular behavior – as a key predictor of behavior, alongside personal attitudes. This suggests that societal expectations could shape parents' actions, leading them to align their behaviors more closely with societal norms than with their personal attitudes.

Discrepancies Between Attitudes and Direct Moral Instruction and Behaviors and Direct Moral Instruction

Discrepancies between parental attitudes and direct moral instruction, as well as between parental behaviors and direct moral instruction, may be explained by moral hypocrisy: the phenomenon where individuals (claim to) uphold certain moral standards for others while inconsistently applying those standards to their own behavior (Batson et al., 1997). When parents instruct their children differently from what they believe is acceptable, this could reflect a specific form of moral hypocrisy known as moral double standards (Graham et al., 2015). This involves judging one's own moral transgressions more leniently than similar transgressions committed by others (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007). For example, parents may believe that lying is unacceptable for their children and accordingly refrain from providing direct moral instruction that endorses lying, even though they consider it acceptable for them as parents. Parents' use of moral double standards may arise from differences in cognitive reasoning, specifically practical reasoning versus theoretical reasoning (Lavoie et al., 2016). Practical reasoning involves flexible thinking about specific circumstances (Foley, 1991; O'Neill, 2007), while theoretical reasoning assumes there is a single objectively correct response or truth that guides one's intentions (Bratman, 1987; Foley, 1991). Parents may rely on practical reasoning to justify their own lying behaviors while applying stricter, theoretical

reasoning when teaching their children (Lavoie et al., 2016). For instance, they may believe that children lack the understanding of when lying is acceptable, leading parents to present lying as universally wrong. When parents instruct their children differently from their own behaviors, this could indicate moral duplicity (Graham et al., 2015), a form of moral hypocrisy in which individuals preach one thing while doing another (Monin & Merritt, 2012). For example, parents may provide little or no moral instruction endorsing lying to their children in order to project themselves as morally upright, while simultaneously engaging in lying themselves.

In our study, the prevalence of discrepancies between parents' attitudes and direct moral instruction, as well as between their behaviors and direct moral instruction, varied by the type of lie, with the highest prevalence found for instrumental lies, followed by self-oriented lies. The elevated prevalence of discrepancies for instrumental lies may be attributed to the unique benefits these lies provide for parents. The asymmetrical, hierarchical structure of the parent–child relationship (Maccoby, 1999), in which parents hold authority and bear responsibility for their children, may lead parents to believe that for them as parents it is acceptable to lie to influence their children's behaviors and thereby facilitate parenting challenges. At the same time, as the primary socializing agents of their children (Smetana, 1999), parents may feel a strong responsibility to rear their children as morally upright individuals, leading them to teach stricter standards about lying, contrasting their actual beliefs and own behavior. In other words, while parents may view their own lying as acceptable and engage in it, they may simultaneously refrain from providing moral instruction that endorses such behaviors for their children, particularly in their horizontal relationships, such as those with peers.

Contrary to expectations, most parents who exhibited discrepancies between their attitudes and direct moral instruction, as well as their behaviors and direct moral instruction, for self-oriented and instrumental lies provided more direct moral instruction endorsing these lies than they believed was acceptable for themselves or compared to how often they engaged in such behaviors. This unexpected finding suggests that despite their (belief in) avoidance of telling self-oriented or instrumental lies, most parents nonetheless encourage their children to view such behavior as acceptable. One possible explanation is that parents perceive children's lies as relatively harmless, particularly in early and middle childhood, when such behavior is often regarded as developmentally normative (Talwar & Crossman, 2011). Another possibility is that parents anticipate lying to be common among peers and therefore teach their children that such lies are acceptable, perhaps to prevent them from being at a disadvantage. A stricter evaluation of their own lying, by contrast, may reflect parents' beliefs that, as the primary socializing agents of children (Smetana, 1999), they should model honesty and take responsibility for enforcing rules. Finally, parents' tendency to be more lenient toward children's self-oriented or instrumental lies may be driven by a desire to act as ideal role models (Eibach & Mock, 2011; Snell et al., 2005). Such striving for

perfection may lead parents to avoid telling self-oriented or instrumental lies themselves, as these behaviors are generally viewed negatively (Fu et al., 2007; Jensen et al., 2004).

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Our study offers new insights into the alignment and discrepancies between parental attitudes toward lying, their lying behaviors, and their direct moral instruction about lying. By examining these constructs across different types of lies and using a person-centered approach with sophisticated latent profile analyses (Ferguson et al., 2019; Lanza & Rhoades, 2013), we addressed various key questions regarding parental alignment and discrepancies. This approach allowed us to formulate new hypotheses about the mechanisms underlying parental discrepancies, such as parental stress, hierarchical structures in parent–child relationships, moral hypocrisy, role modeling, and subjective and societal norms.

The findings of this study should be interpreted with several limitations in mind. First, the reliance on self-report measures introduces the risk of self-report bias, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their practices (Bound et al., 2001). Factors such as social desirability (Kuncel & Tellegen, 2009), recall bias (Hassan, 2006), and lack of awareness of certain practices may influence responses. Given that lying is generally disapproved (e.g., Erat & Gneezy, 2011; Lavoie et al., 2016), the risk of socially desirable responses may be even more substantial than in studies measuring less disapproved behaviors. Nevertheless, because our analyses examined clustering of attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction within parents, any potential underreporting across all three constructs may not have affected the generated latent profiles. Second, although we provided parents with detailed definitions and illustrative examples for each lie type across all measures, responses may still have been shaped by parents' own interpretation of the questions and the specific instances they personally considered more or less acceptable within a lie type. Such variability may have misrepresented the level of alignment for some parents. Third, the allocation of parents into the latent profiles relied on probabilities, reflecting the likelihood of their membership in a given profile. While all probabilities guiding our allocations were substantial, it is important to note that true profile membership remains unknown (Lanza & Rhoades, 2013). Fourth, the study was conducted with a relatively homogeneous sample comprising primarily highly educated, Dutch mothers. However, there is no clear evidence to suggest that demographic factors such as educational level or gender are related to parental lying practices (Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024), let alone alignment or discrepancies between parental lying attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction. Finally, the study utilized limited measures, with only two items per construct, and the operationalization of teaching turned out to be narrower than originally intended. Our initial conceptualization included both endorsement (i.e., communicating acceptability and encouragement) and discouragement strategies (i.e., punishment). However, the punishment item showed low internal consistency with the endorsement items, suggesting that it tapped into a different

underlying dimension of parental socialization. As a result, the final construct reflected only direct moral instruction endorsing lying. This narrower operationalization restricts the breadth of the construct and should therefore be considered when interpreting the findings. Future research should employ broader measures of parental teaching, integrating both endorsement and discouragement strategies, to examine whether similar alignment and discrepancy patterns emerge when the teaching construct is defined more comprehensively.

This study represents an initial exploration of the associations between parental attitudes toward lying to children, parental lying behaviors, and parental direct moral instruction about lying, both between and within parents. Future research should aim to replicate these findings in more diverse samples. For instance, because cultural norms and values may shape parental views and practices around lying (e.g., Heyman et al., 2009, 2013), it remains an open question to what extent the present findings generalize beyond our sample and the Dutch context. Dutch cultural values, such as an emphasis on autonomy and directness in communication (Harkness et al., 2000; Rottier et al., 2011), may have influenced how parents in our sample responded. Replication in other cultural contexts and with more diverse groups of parents is therefore needed. Another important step is to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon itself. Future research could examine parents' awareness of their discrepancies, their emotional impact, and the strategies parents use to cope with them. In general, discrepancies between attitudes and behaviors are often associated with negative feelings, such as tension or guilt (Barkan et al., 2015; Cooper, 2007). Individuals may attempt to rationalize their actions by attributing them to alternative values (Graham et al., 2015). More broadly, studies could investigate mechanisms that may underlie parental lying discrepancies, such as parental stress, moral hypocrisy, role modeling, and subjective norms. These were not directly tested in the current study and should therefore be regarded as hypotheses for future work. Another important direction is to investigate variation in alignment and discrepancies. One question is whether parents show consistent tendencies across different lie types or whether discrepancies are more type-specific and context-dependent. A further question is whether such patterns differ with children's age. Although in our study child age did not systematically confound the associations between attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction, our study was not designed to explore age effects. Using larger and more targeted samples than the current study, future research could therefore explicitly test developmental hypotheses and provide a more fine-grained understanding of how alignment and discrepancy patterns may differ across developmental stages. Finally, future research could explore whether and how children perceive their parents' discrepancies and the potential implications for their moral socialization and parent–child relationships. Mixed messages about the values of honesty, resulting from discrepant parental behaviors and direct moral instruction, may create confusion in children about why different moral standards apply to them compared to their parents. Such confusion could negatively impact children by fostering an unpredictable environment, complicating their

adherence to parental standards (Carrasco & Holgado-Tello, 2015; Dwairy, 2010).

Conclusions and Implications

This study provides initial insights into how parental attitudes toward lying, parental lying behaviors, and parental direct moral instruction about lying align across different types of lies. Between-parent analyses indicated alignment between parental attitudes, behaviors, and direct moral instruction for other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental lies, with the strength of associations varying by type. Within-parent analyses revealed that most parents exhibited discrepancies, suggesting that many parents do not fully practice what they believe or preach, nor preach what they believe. Interestingly, discrepancies were more pronounced for self-oriented and instrumental lies, with variability across parental profiles; some parents were stricter with themselves than with their children, while others were more lenient toward their own behaviors.

The findings of this study have important implications for both research and practice. For researchers, this study underscores the need to further explore parental alignment and discrepancies, as well as the parental, family, and societal factors contributing to them. Future research should also investigate the potential impacts of these discrepancies on parents, children, and overall family dynamics. For practitioners and parents, recognizing discrepancies can help raise awareness of internal conflicts within parents and the inconsistencies in moral socialization that may arise within families.

Supplementary Materials

Table S1

Correlation Comparisons Between Age Groups for Other-Oriented Lying

Correlation	Group 1	Group 2	$r_{difference}$	*p*
	0–5 (n = 101)	6–16 (n = 109)		
$r_{attitude,\ behaviors}$	.71	.64	.07	.358
$r_{attitude,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.50	.52	-.02	.849
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.59	.69	-.10	.223
	0–5 (n = 101)	Over 16 (n = 102)		
$r_{attitude,\ behaviors}$	.71	.62	.09	.254
$r_{attitude,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.50	.48	.02	.857
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.59	.50	.09	.368
	6–16 (n = 109)	Over 16 (n = 102)		
$r_{attitude,\ behaviors}$	.64	.62	.02	.810
$r_{attitude,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.52	.48	.04	.704
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.69	.50	.19	.032

Note. Two-tailed p values. Statistical significance was set at $p < .006$.

Table S2

Correlation Comparisons Between Age Groups for Self-Oriented Lying

Correlation	Group 1	Group 2	$r_{difference}$	*p*
	0–5 (n = 101)	6–16 (n = 109)		
$r_{attitude,\ behaviors}$	.47	.59	-.12	.230
$r_{attitude,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.06	.36	-.30	.024
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.30	.49	-.19	.105
	0–5 (n = 101)	Over 16 (n = 102)		
$r_{attitude,\ behaviors}$	.47	.45	.02	.857
$r_{attitude,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.06	.32	-.26	.056
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.30	.35	-.05	.697
	6–16 (n = 109)	Over 16 (n = 102)		
$r_{attitude,\ behaviors}$	.59	.45	.14	.168
$r_{attitude,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.36	.32	.04	.749
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.49	.35	.14	.223

Note. Two-tailed p values. Statistical significance was set at $p < .006$.

Table S3

Correlation Comparisons Between Age Groups for Instrumental Lying

Correlation	Group 1	Group 2	$r_{difference}$	*p*
	0–5 (n = 101)	6–16 (n = 109)		
$r_{attitude,\ behaviors}$	.69	.71	-.02	.780
$r_{attitude,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.27	.37	-.10	.424
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.40	.50	-.10	.368
	0–5 (n = 101)	Over 16 (n = 102)		
$r_{attitude,\ behaviors}$	.69	.65	.04	.610
$r_{attitude,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.27	.33	-.06	.646
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.40	.33	-.07	.569
	6–16 (n = 109)	Over 16 (n = 102)		
$r_{attitude,\ behaviors}$	.71	.65	.06	.424
$r_{attitude,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.37	.33	.04	.741
$r_{behaviors,\ direct\ moral\ instruction}$	.50	.33	.17	.139

Note. Two-tailed p values. Statistical significance was set at $p < .006$.

Chapter 5



Lying Discrepancies in Parenting: When Beliefs, Actions, and Lessons Diverge

Open Science Statement:

Preregistration	https://osf.io/35b2u
Open data	https://doi.org/10.57990/v5k3-z838 (via LISS panel)
Open materials	https://osf.io/3vm28/files/osfstorage
Open code	Will be made openly on OSF available upon publication.
Open access	https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/dj7t9_v1

This chapter is based on:

Lucieer, I. C., Weeland, J., Lucassen, N., & Kok, R. (submitted for publication). Lying discrepancies in parenting: When beliefs, actions, and lessons diverge.

Abstract

Many parents lie to their children even though they disapprove of lying and teach their children that lying is wrong. However, discrepancies between parents' attitudes toward lying, their lying behaviors, and their teaching about lying have received little empirical attention, and their extent and nature remain largely unknown. In this preregistered study, we examined the prevalence and frequency of parental lying discrepancies, how these discrepancies cluster, and how parents feel about them.

Parents (*N* = 348) of children aged 5–12 years completed 12 scenario-based items assessing discrepancies in other-oriented (i.e., to benefit or protect someone) and instrumental (i.e., to influence someone's behavior) lying, as well as their feelings about these discrepancies. Descriptive analyses assessed prevalence, frequency, and parents' feelings, whereas confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses examined clustering.

Results indicated that discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying were highly prevalent, with 96.6% of parents showing at least one discrepancy. A substantial proportion of parents (22.4%) reported showing at least one discrepancy often or very often. Depending on the item, 25%–50% reported negative feelings about their discrepancies. Both confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses showed that discrepancies clustered by lie type (other-oriented vs. instrumental lies), suggesting distinct, context-specific patterns rather than a single form of discrepancy. Overall, these findings indicate that discrepancies between what parents believe, do, and teach about lying are widespread, structured, and can evoke negative feelings, highlighting the need for further research on their antecedents and implications for parents and children's social and moral development.

Keywords: parental lying, attitudes, socialization, moral inconsistency, cognitive dissonance, parent–child relationship

Lying Discrepancies in Parenting: When Beliefs, Actions, and Lessons Diverge

Most parents lie to their children (Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024). Theoretically, one might expect parents' lying behavior to be broadly aligned with their attitudes toward lying and the messages they communicate to their children, as behavior is often assumed to reflect underlying attitudes (Ajzen, 1991). Parenting theories also emphasize that parental beliefs and evaluations constitute one component of the processes that shape how parents behave in everyday interactions (Abidin, 1992; Bornstein et al., 2018). However, several studies suggest that this alignment may not always occur. For example, many parents generally disapprove of lying (Lavoie et al., 2016) and explicitly teach their children that lying is unacceptable (e.g., Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009), even though evidence suggests that most parents lie to their children. In our previous work, we conducted the first empirical examination of these discrepancies and found that discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying are common (Lucieer et al., 2026).

A better understanding of these discrepancies is important, as they may carry emotional and behavioral implications for both parents and children. For parents, discrepancies between beliefs and behavior may evoke psychological discomfort, which may be reflected in negative feelings (Cooper, 2007; Festinger, 1957). For children, conflicting parental messages may complicate moral learning and undermine trust in their parents (Bandura, 1977; Carrasco & Holgado-Tello, 2015; Hui et al., 2011).

The current study builds on our previous work (Lucieer et al., 2026) by examining parental lying discrepancies in an independent sample and using a different measurement approach. Specifically, we examine how often parents show discrepancies, how parents feel about these discrepancies, and whether distinct clusters of discrepancies can be identified, focusing on two common types of parental lies: lies to benefit or protect the child and lies to influence the child's behavior.

Defining Parental Lying

Although definitions vary (Mahon, 2008), lying is generally defined as "deliberate communication that misleads and fosters false beliefs" (Hart & Curtis, 2023, p. 20). Research on parental lying has primarily examined *parenting by lying*, that is, lies used to influence a child's emotions or behavior (Heyman et al., 2009). Lies aimed at influencing children's emotions, such as comforting them or shielding them from worry, conceptually align with other-oriented lies (Setoh et al., 2020), also referred to as prosocial or white lies. These lies are intended to benefit or protect others and have been widely studied in the broader lying literature (e.g., DePaulo et al., 1996; Levine & Lupoli, 2022; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015). For instance, a parent might praise a child's performance by saying "That was beautiful

piano playing," even when the performance was poor, in order to protect the child's feelings (Heyman et al., 2013). In contrast, lies used to influence children's behavior, for example, to promote compliance or discourage unwanted behavior, are typically described as instrumental lies (Heyman et al., 2013) and have been examined primarily in the parent–child context. For example, a parent might say "If you do not come with me now, I will leave you here by yourself," despite having no intention of doing so, to encourage the child to comply (Heyman et al., 2013). Empirical studies show that both parents' lying attitudes and practices differ between other-oriented and instrumental lies (Heyman et al., 2009; Lavoie et al., 2016; Lucieer et al., 2025b; Setoh et al., 2022). Distinguishing between lie types is therefore essential for understanding parental lying and the potential discrepancies between what parents believe, do, and teach.

Discrepancies Between Parents' Lying-Related Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching

Evidence across studies suggests that parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying do not always align (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009, 2013; Lavoie et al., 2016). First, many parents report using lies despite generally disapproving of lying (Heyman et al., 2009; Lavoie et al., 2016), suggesting a potential discrepancy between attitudes and behavior. Second, although few parents believe lying is never acceptable, most teach their children that lying is never acceptable (Lavoie et al., 2016), pointing to a potential discrepancy between attitudes and teaching. Finally, although most parents teach their children that lying is wrong, nearly all parents admit to lying to their children (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009, 2013), suggesting a discrepancy between behavior and teaching.

However, these discrepancies have rarely been examined directly. To date, only one study has empirically examined such discrepancies within parents (Lucieer et al., 2026). In this study, discrepancies were examined for other-oriented lies (to benefit another), self-oriented lies (to benefit the self), and instrumental lies (to influence another's behavior). The findings showed that discrepancies were common, but their prevalence varied across lie types. For other-oriented lies, 54.4% of parents showed some degree of discrepancy across their attitudes, behaviors, and teaching. In contrast, all parents showed some degree of discrepancy for self-oriented and instrumental lies. For instance, some parents showed discrepancies between only two constructs (e.g., attitudes and behavior or behavior and teaching), whereas others showed discrepancies across all three constructs. These patterns were described as partially discrepant and fully discrepant profiles, respectively. Discrepancy patterns also differed in normative direction. For example, some parents reported using certain lies more frequently than their teaching would suggest, whereas others reported using such lies less frequently than their teaching would suggest. Together, these findings provide initial evidence that discrepancies in parental lying are widespread and may not

reflect a single uniform pattern, but instead vary by lie type, the combination of constructs that are discrepant, and the direction of the discrepancy. However, little is known about how frequently parents show different discrepancies, how they feel about these discrepancies, or whether particular discrepancy patterns tend to co-occur.

Clustering Parents' Lying-Related Discrepancies

The dual-process theory of judgment and decision-making (Kahneman, 2011) provides one useful framework for understanding whether and how different discrepancy patterns may co-occur. This theory distinguishes between fast, automatic cognitive processes that often guide immediate responses and slower, more deliberate processes that can influence decision-making.

Some discrepancies may arise reactively, when parents feel stressed, fatigued, or emotionally strained. Under such conditions, parents may respond quickly to situational demands, with limited opportunity for reflection. For example, when a child refuses to comply or becomes emotionally upset, a parent may tell a lie as a quick way to manage the situation, even if this conflicts with their usual attitudes toward lying or the direct messages they convey to their child. Prior work indeed illustrates that parents sometimes tell lies "in the heat of the moment," for example, when managing a child's non-compliance (Heyman et al., 2013) or when feeling overwhelmed by the emotional demands of parenting (Kok et al., 2025). In these situations, discrepancies may be the result of situational pressures that lead to more rapid, intuitive responding.

However, discrepancies may also arise from slower, reflective processing. In some situations, parents may consciously weigh competing values before deciding how to act or what to teach. Although parents generally value honesty (Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Evans & Lee, 2022), they may also value protecting their children from emotionally difficult information or harsh truths (Kok et al., 2025), as well as encouraging politeness and sensitivity to others' feelings (Talwar & Lee, 2002). When such values conflict, parents may deliberately prioritize one over another, for example prioritizing protecting the child or maintaining politeness over strict honesty, resulting in discrepancies between their attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying. For example, a parent may value honesty yet decide to tell a reassuring lie to avoid upsetting the child, while still teaching that honesty is important in everyday interactions. In such cases, discrepancies reflect deliberate value-based trade-offs within specific contexts.

In addition to differences in cognitive processing, some discrepancies may arise because parents apply different moral standards to themselves than to their child, reflecting the hierarchical and asymmetric nature of the parent–child relationship (Maccoby, 1999). Parents may hold stricter moral expectations for their child than for themselves, consistent with moral hypocrisy (Batson et al., 1997; Graham et al., 2015). For example, they may teach that lying is unacceptable while nonetheless using protective or instrumental lies in their

own behavior. In other cases, parents may adopt more lenient moral expectations for the child (Lucieer et al., 2026), for instance because they view certain lies as developmentally understandable or appropriate (Talwar & Crossman, 2011). Such normative asymmetries can explain discrepancies between attitudes and teaching or behavior and teaching, in different normative directions.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that discrepancies may differ in form and origin. They may arise through situationally driven responding, deliberate value-based trade-offs, or the application of different normative standards for parents and their children. These distinctions provide a conceptual basis for examining whether discrepancies cluster along multiple, non-exclusive domains, including the type of lie involved (e.g., other-oriented vs. instrumental), the combination of constructs that diverge (attitude-behavior, attitude-teaching, or behavior-teaching), and the normative direction of the discrepancy (e.g., stricter versus more lenient standards for the child than for the parent). Examining how discrepancies cluster may therefore clarify whether misalignments in parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying follow meaningful and interpretable patterns across parents and contexts.

Measuring Discrepancies in Parental Lying

Several approaches can be used to assess discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying. In the broader literature, discrepancies are often examined using self-report measures of dissonance (e.g., Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2007; Sweeney et al., 2020), which capture the psychological discomfort that arises when beliefs conflict with behavior (Festinger, 1957). Although such measures provide insight into the subjective experience of discrepancy, they offer limited information about the prevalence and frequency of discrepancies.

To address prevalence, our earlier work assessed attitudes, behaviors, and teaching separately and inferred discrepancies statistically, both at the group level and within individual parents (Lucieer et al., 2026). This approach allows discrepancies to be identified even when parents may not be consciously aware of them and thus would be unlikely to report them directly. At the same time, because discrepancies are statistically inferred rather than directly assessed, the extent to which these discrepancies reflect meaningful inconsistencies from parents' own perspectives remains unclear. Moreover, conclusions are strongly shaped by the analytical strategy used, with group-level analyses potentially obscuring substantial individual variation (Lucieer et al., 2026).

Building on this work, the current study adopts a scenario-based approach to more directly examine parental lying discrepancies. Parents are presented with realistic, ecologically valid lying scenarios based on prior research (Heyman et al., 2009, 2013; Kok et al., 2025; Lucieer et al., 2026). These scenarios depict concrete situations involving lying and allow parents

to reflect on whether they show similar discrepancies in their own parenting. By anchoring responses to specific situations, the approach reduces the likelihood that apparent discrepancies arise because parents draw on different situations when answering separate questions about attitudes, behaviors, and teaching. Together, this provides an alternative way to examine whether the discrepancies identified in prior work are also recognized by parents themselves when reflecting on concrete parenting situations.

The Current Study

This preregistered study has two primary aims. First, we investigate the prevalence and frequency of self-reported parental lying discrepancies. Second, we examine whether these discrepancies cluster in theoretically meaningful ways, including by lie type, construct combination, and normative direction, and explore any additional clustering patterns that may emerge from the data. In addition to these aims, we explore parents' reported feelings about discrepancies to gain further insight into how these inconsistencies are experienced.

Based on prior results (Lucieer et al., 2026), we expect discrepancies to be common. We further anticipate that their prevalence will vary across lie type, construct combination, and normative direction. Moreover, based on our theoretical framework, we expect discrepancies to cluster along one or more of these dimensions. Given the limited previous research, we do not advance specific hypotheses regarding either how frequently parents report specific discrepancies or how they feel about them; both are examined exploratorily.

Method

Design and Procedure

This study was part of the Fami-LIES project, a series of studies on lying in Dutch families (https://osf.io/3vm28/). The current study was preregistered on the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/35b2u) and received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology, Education, and Child Studies (DPECS) at Erasmus University Rotterdam (ETH2324-0800) and from the Ethics Committees of the European Research Council (ERC; Ares(2021)37377).

We used cross-sectional survey data from the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel, a probability-based panel of approximately 7,500 individuals from 5,000 Dutch households, administered by CenterData at Tilburg University. Informed consent was obtained through a three-step procedure: households first consented via a recruitment questionnaire, individual panel members confirmed participation through the LISS portal, and all participants provided formal consent before completing their first general questionnaire.

Data collection for the Fami-LIES project was combined with another study and targeted parents of children aged 0–18 years. The combined data collection included several questionnaires totaling approximately 405 items. Because the LISS limits participation to 20 minutes per session, questionnaires were administered across four sessions, resulting in a total participation time of approximately 80 minutes for those who completed all four sessions. Participants received €5 per session and €20 for full participation.
The current study used data from parents of children aged 5–12 years collected during the second (T2: September–October 2024) and third (T3: October–November 2024) sessions. This age range corresponds to the Dutch primary school period, a well-defined developmental phase in which parents are primary socializing agents. The scenario-based instrument focused on parental lying situations that are particularly relevant and recognizable during middle childhood; parents of adolescents were therefore excluded. Parents of children under five were also excluded, as theory of mind, an ability crucial for understanding lying, typically develops between ages three and five (Talwar & Lee, 2008).

Thirty parents appeared to refer to different children at T2 than at T3, as indicated by child age differences greater than one year between sessions. Because the focus was on within-parent discrepancies rather than child-specific characteristics, these cases were retained. Sensitivity analyses excluding these participants showed no meaningful differences. Therefore, all reported results are based on the full sample.

Participants

The study sample consisted of 348 Dutch parents of children aged 5–12 years. Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. The gender distribution of participants was relatively balanced. Classifications of educational level and migration background followed the categories used by Statistics Netherlands (CBS, 2022, 2024). Educational level was categorized as low (primary education, pre-vocational secondary education, or lower secondary vocational education), intermediate (upper secondary education or intermediate vocational education), and high (higher professional education or university education). The distribution of migration background was broadly comparable to national figures as of January 2024. However, the sample included fewer participants with lower levels of education and more participants with higher levels of education than in national averages.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Gender (female in %)	57.8
Parent age, *M (SD)*[a]	41.01 (5.50)
Child age, *M (SD)*[a]	8.09 (2.27)
Education level (in %)	
Low	7.1
Intermediate	39.9
High	52.9
Migration background (in %)[b]	
Dutch	75.3
First generation (Western and non-Western)	10.7
Second generation (Western and non-Western)	12.9

Note. [a] Means and standard deviations of parent and child age were based on the responses at T2.
[b] Percentages are valid percentages; migration background data were missing for four participants.

Measures

Parental Lying Discrepancies Between Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching

Parental lying discrepancies between attitudes, behaviors, and teaching were assessed using 12 scenarios developed for this study: six addressing other-oriented lies and six addressing instrumental lies. The scenarios were originally developed in Dutch. The English translations are available in Appendix B of this dissertation. Within each type of lie, we included three construct combinations (attitude-behavior, attitude-teaching, behavior-teaching), and for each construct combination we assessed two discrepancy directions. For attitude-behavior, scenarios described situations in which parents disapproved of lying but lied and situations in which parents approved of lying but refrained from lying. For attitude-teaching, scenarios described situations in which parents approved of lying but taught that lying is unacceptable and situations in which parents disapproved of lying but taught that lying is acceptable. For behavior-teaching, scenarios described situations in which parents lied but taught that lying is unacceptable and situations in which parents refrained from lying but taught that lying is acceptable.

All scenarios followed a standardized structure. Before responding to the scenarios, parents received definitions of other-oriented and instrumental lying, along with four examples per lie type. Each scenario was preceded by a brief normalizing statement (e.g., "Sometimes we do things that we believe we should not do"), followed by the scenario description and an explicit sentence highlighting the discrepancy. For example: *"Father Josiah and his son Amir are at home together. Amir tells his father that he told his friend his favorite toy is lost, while in reality Amir just didn't want his friend to play with it. Father Josiah teaches Amir that you shouldn't lie in such situations. But in fact, Josiah tells similar lies to Amir himself to avoid*

arguments and nagging. ***Josiah teaches his child that lying is not allowed, yet he does it himself.***".

Across the other-oriented lying scenarios, we used the same specific lie (i.e., saying someone's singing sounded good despite being off key) because this lie is plausible both for parents' own lying and for children's lying. In contrast, for instrumental lying scenarios we used different lies depending on whether the scenario involved a parent's lie or a child's lie, to ensure that the specific lie was plausible for the interaction partner involved (parent–child vs. child–peer). Specifically, parent instrumental lies involved telling children that the cookies were finished in order to discourage further requests, whereas child instrumental lies involved telling peers that their favorite toy was lost to prevent them from taking or playing with it.

For each scenario, parents indicated how often they personally show the described discrepancy on a 5-point scale (0 = *never*, 1 = *rarely*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *often*, 4 = *very often*). Parents also rated how they feel about each reported discrepancy on a 5-point scale (0 = *very unpleasant*, 1 = *unpleasant*, 2 = *neutral*, 3 = *pleasant*, 4 = *very pleasant*).

Prevalence, Frequency, and Feelings Scores. For item-level prevalence, frequency responses (0–4) were recoded into a dichotomous variable indicating whether parents had ever shown the discrepancy. Responses of 0 (never) were coded as 0, and responses of 1–4 (rarely to very often) as 1. Lie-type prevalence was computed separately for other-oriented and instrumental discrepancies (six items each). Parents were coded as 0 if they scored 0 (*never*) on all six items within a lie type and as 1 if they scored 1 or higher (*rarely* to *very often*) on at least one item. Construct combination prevalence was computed for attitude-behavior, attitude-teaching, and behavior-teaching discrepancies (four items each), using the same coding procedure. Normative-direction prevalence focused specifically on teaching-related discrepancies (attitude-teaching and behavior-teaching; eight items). These discrepancies reflect whether parents held stricter or more lenient standards for the child than for themselves. Items were grouped according to whether parents applied stricter standards to the child (e.g., the parent lies but teaches the child that lying is unacceptable) or more lenient standards (e.g., the parent refrains from lying but teaches the child that lying is acceptable). Each direction included four items and was coded using the same dichotomous scheme described above.

Frequency was examined at the item level using parents' responses on the original 5-point scale (0 = never to 4 = very often). For each of the 12 discrepancy items, we reported the percentage of parents who selected each response category. In addition, we classified parents as frequently showing discrepancies if they scored 3 or 4 on at least one of the 12 items.

Feelings about discrepancies were examined at the item level among parents who reported

having shown the specific discrepancy. Parents rated how they felt about each discrepancy they reported on the original 5-point scale (0 = very unpleasant to 4 = very pleasant). For each of the 12 items, we reported the percentage of these parents selecting each feeling category.

Analyses

All descriptive statistics were computed in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 29.0.1, IBM Corp., 2023). Because the discrepancy items were measured on ordinal scales, we computed a polychoric correlation matrix in R (version 4.4.0; R Core Team, 2022) using the "psych" package (Revelle, 2019). Polychoric correlations estimate the associations between the underlying continuous variables assumed to generate ordinal responses and were inspected to assess associations among the discrepancy items. To examine whether self-reported discrepancies clustered along theoretically defined dimensions, we conducted three Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFAs) in M*plus* (version 8.10; Muthén & Muthén, 2023) using the Weighted Least Squares Mean and Variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimator. An oblique Geomin rotation was used to allow for correlations among factors. Model fit was evaluated using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), following conventional cutoffs (CFI/TLI > .95, RMSEA < .06, SRMR < .08; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

In Model A, the 12 items were grouped by lie type, yielding two latent factors representing other-oriented and instrumental lying discrepancies. In Model B, the 12 items were grouped by construct combination, resulting in three latent factors representing attitude-behavior, attitude-teaching, and behavior-teaching discrepancies. In Model C, only the teaching-related discrepancy items were included. Specifically, the eight items involving teaching were grouped by normative direction, forming two latent factors reflecting stricter standards for the child versus the parent.

In addition to these confirmatory analyses, we explored whether alternative latent structures might emerge beyond the predefined models by conducting an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in M*plus* (version 8.10; Muthén & Muthén, 2023), using the same data and estimator. Prior to factor extraction, sampling adequacy was evaluated in R (version 4.4.0; R Core Team, 2022) using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. An oblique rotation was used to allow for correlations among factors. Decisions regarding the number of factors to retain were based on visual inspection of the scree plot and evaluation of model fit indices (CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR). Items were considered to load meaningfully on a factor if they showed a primary loading ≥ .30 and cross-loadings < .30.

Results

Prevalence and Frequency of Discrepancies

Table 2 provides an overview of the prevalence and frequency of each discrepancy, as well as parents' reported feelings about each specific discrepancy. The results showed that discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying were highly prevalent. Nearly all parents (96.6%) reported showing at least one discrepancy across the assessed scenarios. Across lie types, combinations of constructs, and normative directions, discrepancies were reported by 85%–95% of parents. At the item level, the frequency with which parents reported specific discrepancies varied. The discrepancy reported by the largest proportion of parents was telling other-oriented lies despite disapproving of them. The discrepancy reported by the smallest proportion of parents was refraining from instrumental lying while teaching their children that telling these lies is acceptable.

In terms of frequency, parents reported showing most discrepancies occasionally (i.e., rarely or sometimes). Across all 12 discrepancy items, 22.4% of parents reported showing at least one discrepancy often or very often.

Table 2

Item-Specific Prevalences, Frequencies, and Feelings About Discrepancies

Scenario Description	Lie Type	Prev. (%)	Frequency (%)					Feelings about discrepancies (%)				
			Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant
Parent disapproves but lies	Other-oriented	84.5	15.5	48.3	32.5	3.2	0.6	6.1	33.0	56.8	4.1	0.0
Parent disapproves but lies	Instrumental	81.6	18.4	44.5	33.3	3.2	0.6	4.6	43.3	47.2	4.6	0.4
Parent approves but refrains	Other-oriented	76.4	23.6	35.6	36.2	3.2	1.4	5.3	44.7	45.1	4.5	0.4
Parent approves but refrains	Instrumental	74.4	25.6	34.8	30.7	6.0	2.9	3.1	23.9	55.6	15.4	1.9
Parent approves but teaches unacceptability	Other-oriented	65.5	34.5	29.0	34.8	1.7	0.0	1.8	26.3	65.4	6.6	0.0
Parent approves but teaches unacceptability	Instrumental	67.5	32.5	36.8	28.2	2.0	0.6	2.1	27.7	61.7	7.2	1.3

Table 2

Item-Specific Prevalences, Frequencies, and Feelings About Discrepancies

Scenario Description	Lie Type	Prev. (%)	Frequency (%)					Feelings about discrepancies (%)				
			Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant
Parent disapproves but teaches acceptability	Other-oriented	65.8	34.2	33.6	30.7	1.4	0.0	1.3	28.8	64.2	5.7	0.0
Parent disapproves but teaches acceptability	Instrumental	59.2	40.8	36.2	22.1	0.9	0.0	3.4	38.3	52.4	5.3	0.5
Parent lies but teaches unacceptability	Other-oriented	71.3	28.7	35.1	33.0	2.9	0.3	3.6	35.1	56.9	4.4	0.0
Parent lies but teaches unacceptability	Instrumental	75.9	24.1	42.8	29.6	3.4	0.0	4.5	40.9	48.1	6.4	0.0
Parent refrains but teaches acceptability	Other-oriented	62.9	37.1	32.8	29.3	0.9	0.0	1.4	25.1	67.6	5.9	0.0
Parent refrains but teaches acceptability	Instrumental	57.2	42.8	37.4	17.8	2.0	0.0	1.5	25.1	64.3	9.0	0.0

Note. Prev. = prevalence.

Feelings About Discrepancies

When asked about their feelings regarding the discrepancies they reported, parents most often indicated neutral feelings. However, across items, 25%–50% of parents reported negative feelings (unpleasant or very unpleasant) about discrepancies. Positive feelings (pleasant or very pleasant) about discrepancies were rarely reported, with fewer than 10% of parents reporting positive feelings across items. Parents felt most negative about discrepancies reflecting approving other-oriented lying and refraining from telling such lies, as well as disapproving of instrumental lying while nevertheless telling such lies.

At the item level, negative feelings were reported more often for instrumental lying discrepancies than for other-oriented lying discrepancies. Across construct combinations, negative feelings were somewhat more common for attitude-behavior discrepancies than for teaching-related discrepancies. Within teaching-related discrepancies, negative feelings were reported slightly more often for discrepancies reflecting stricter standards for the child

than for discrepancies reflecting more lenient standards for the child.

Clustering of Discrepancies

Three confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to examine whether the 12 discrepancy items clustered into theoretically meaningful factors based on lie type, construct combinations, and normative directions. Prior to model estimation, the response distributions of the 12 ordinal discrepancy items were inspected. For six items, the highest response category (*very often*) was not endorsed, resulting in empty cells in the polychoric correlation matrix and unstable model estimation. Collapsing only the two highest categories did not sufficiently improve cell counts. Therefore, the three highest response categories (*sometimes, often, very often*) were combined into a single category, resulting in a three-point scale that was used in the CFA models. Polychoric correlations were computed for the recoded variables. The resulting polychoric correlation matrix based on these recoded variables is presented in Table S1 in the supplementary materials.

Model A, distinguishing between other-oriented and instrumental lying discrepancies, showed good fit, $\chi^2(53) = 115.35$, $p < .001$, CFI = .98, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .058, SRMR = .045. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .69–.87 for the other-oriented lying factor and from .69–.84 for the instrumental lying factor, indicating strong item-factor relations. The latent factors were moderately correlated ($r = .54$, $p < .001$), indicating that other-oriented and instrumental lying discrepancies are related but empirically distinct. The factor solution of Model A is presented in Table 3. Model B, which grouped items by construct combination (attitude–behavior, attitude–teaching, behavior–teaching), did not converge on a valid solution. The covariance matrix was non-positive definite, and the latent correlations were extremely high (attitude–behavior with attitude–teaching: $r = .94$; attitude–behavior with behavior–teaching: $r = .97$; attitude–teaching with behavior–teaching: $r > 1.00$), indicating severe multicollinearity and a Heywood case. These results suggest that the proposed three-factor structure lacked discriminant validity, as the factors could not be empirically distinguished. Model C, which grouped the eight teaching-related items by normative direction (stricter toward the child vs. stricter toward oneself), also did not converge. The correlation between the two latent factors exceeded 1.00, again indicating a Heywood case and a lack of discriminant validity. In summary, only Model A was supported.

Table 3
CFA Results for Model A: Other-oriented and Instrumental Discrepancy Factors

Scenario item	Lie type	Factor loading
Factor 1: Other-oriented lying discrepancies (6 items)		
Parent disapproves but lies	Other-oriented	.734
Parent approves but refrains	Other-oriented	.691
Parent approves but teaches unacceptability	Other-oriented	.789
Parent disapproves but teaches acceptability	Other-oriented	.848
Parent lies but teaches unacceptability	Other-oriented	.786
Parent refrains but teaches acceptability	Other-oriented	.870
Factor 2: Instrumental lying discrepancies (6 items)		
Parent disapproves but lies	Instrumental	.787
Parent approves but refrains	Instrumental	.685
Parent approves but teaches unacceptability	Instrumental	.794
Parent disapproves but teaches acceptability	Instrumental	.836
Parent lies but teaches unacceptability	Instrumental	.798
Parent refrains but teaches acceptability	Instrumental	.783

To examine whether alternative clustering patterns might emerge beyond the theoretically specified models, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted on the same recoded data. The data were suitable for factor analysis (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin = .87; Bartlett's test of sphericity = $\chi^2(66) = 2761.33$, $p < .001$). Inspection of the scree plot and eigenvalues supported a two-factor solution. The retained two-factor model showed a good fit to the data (CFI = .98, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .077, SRMR = .048). A three-factor solution was also estimated but did not yield salient primary loadings for the additional factor. The exploratory results converged with the confirmatory findings, indicating clustering by lie type (see Table S2 and Figure S1 in the supplementary materials).

Discussion

In this study, we used a scenario-based instrument to examine the prevalence and frequency of self-reported discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about other-oriented and instrumental lying. We also explored parents' feelings about these discrepancies and whether discrepancies clustered in meaningful ways. Discrepancies were highly prevalent: nearly all parents (96.6%) reported at least one discrepancy. At the same time, most parents reported showing specific discrepancies only occasionally, although a substantial minority of parents (22.4%) reported showing at least one discrepancy often.

Across items, parents most frequently reported neutral feelings; however, a considerable proportion (25%–50%) experienced negative feelings about at least some discrepancies. Finally, discrepancies clustered by lie type rather than occurring at random. Together, these findings indicate that parental lying discrepancies are widespread, typically situational, not always experienced as neutral, and structured by lie type.

The high prevalence of parental lying discrepancies observed in this study is consistent with earlier work (Lucieer et al., 2026), suggesting that this pattern is not tied to a specific measurement approach. The scenario-based approach shows that parental lying discrepancies are not only detectable through statistical analyses but are also consciously recognized by most parents in their own parenting. The pattern of frequency adds important nuance: although specific discrepancies typically occurred only occasionally, a substantial minority of parents reported showing at least one discrepancy often or very often. Together, this indicates that parental lying discrepancies are widespread across parents, with specific discrepancies usually occurring situationally rather than as stable, routinized patterns.

Across items, parents most frequently reported neutral feelings. However, a substantial proportion of responses reflected negative feelings for at least some discrepancies. Negative feelings about discrepancies may reflect underlying dissonance-related discomfort, consistent with cognitive and ethical dissonance theories, which propose that inconsistencies between one's attitudes and behaviors can evoke psychological tension (Barkan et al., 2015; Festinger, 1957). Such tension can motivate individuals to restore coherence by adjusting future behavior or attitudes, or by reinterpreting the situation in ways that justify the discrepancy (e.g., Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; McGrath, 2017). The first route may help explain why specific discrepancies were reported only occasionally rather than frequently, as dissonance-related discomfort could motivate parents to reduce such discrepancies over time. The second route may help account for the predominance of neutral feelings. Parents may reinterpret their behavior by emphasizing good intentions (e.g., "I needed to lie to protect my child") or by drawing moral distinctions ("It's not really wrong to lie if it helps them behave"). At the same time, neutral responses do not necessarily indicate that parents first experienced discomfort that was subsequently resolved. It is also possible that some parents did not experience substantial dissonance in the first place. The present data cannot distinguish between cases in which parents regulated or justified discomfort and cases in which discrepancies did not evoke substantial discomfort to begin with.

The fewer negative feelings reported for other-oriented lying discrepancies compared to instrumental lying discrepancies may reflect broader norms that other-oriented lies are generally viewed as relatively more acceptable and socially appropriate than instrumental lies, including by parents (e.g., Jensen et al., 2004; Lavoie et al., 2016). This more accepting normative perspective may make discrepancies in other-oriented contexts feel less problematic.

Furthermore, negative feelings were reported somewhat more often for attitude-behavior discrepancies than for discrepancies that involved teaching (attitude-teaching or behavior-teaching). This difference may reflect the extent to which the discrepancy concerns parents' *own* behavior versus the standards they communicate to their child. Attitude-behavior discrepancies involve a direct inconsistency between parents' beliefs and their own actions, which may feel particularly personally implicating and evoke discomfort (Cooper, 2007; Festinger, 1957). Discrepancies that involve teaching introduce an interpersonal socialization component within the hierarchical parent–child relationship (Maccoby, 1999). In this context, parents may intentionally communicate standards that differ from their own attitudes or behavior (e.g., holding others to stricter expectations; Batson et al., 1997; Graham et al., 2015). When such teaching-related discrepancies are experienced as deliberate, they may be perceived as more justifiable and therefore elicit fewer negative feelings.

With respect to normative direction, parents reported negative feelings somewhat more often for discrepancies in which they held their child to stricter standards than for discrepancies reflecting more lenient standards for the child. One possible explanation is that communicating stricter standards to the child while personally endorsing or engaging in lying may be experienced as a double moral standard or as failing to adhere to one's own standards (Graham et al., 2015; Monin & Merritt, 2012; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007). In contrast, communicating more lenient standards to the child may be easier to justify as leniency or developmentally appropriate, potentially eliciting less negative feelings.

The clustering by lie type suggests that discrepancies follow distinct patterns in other-oriented and instrumental lying contexts, pointing to potentially different underlying motivations or decision processes. From a value-conflict perspective, discrepancies involving other-oriented lies may arise when parents balance honesty against protection or consideration for others. Discrepancies involving instrumental lies may reflect different tensions, such as weighing honesty against goals related to efficiency or promoting compliance. The distinction between lie types may also relate to differences in how reactive versus deliberate parents' responses tend to be. Instrumental lies may be more likely to occur in high-pressure moments, as they are often used when parents feel stressed or overwhelmed by parenting demands (Heyman et al., 2013; Kok et al., 2025). Under such conditions, discrepancies between attitudes, behaviors, and teaching may occur before parents have the opportunity to reflect. In contrast, discrepancies involving other-oriented lies may be less shaped by such situational pressures and more by deliberate judgments about how to balance honesty with care for others. Future research is needed to directly test these proposed mechanisms by examining whether discrepancies in other-oriented and instrumental lying contexts are associated with different motivations and decision-making processes.

In contrast to this clear distinction by lie type, discrepancies did not show similarly distinct clusters by combinations of attitudes, behaviors, and teaching or normative direction.

Discrepancies were not organized around attitude-behavior, attitude-teaching, or behavior-teaching mismatches, nor did teaching-related discrepancies separate into patterns reflecting consistently stricter versus more lenient standards for the child. This suggests that parental lying discrepancies may not be driven by a single dominant type of inconsistency (e.g., attitude versus behavior), or by a stable tendency toward strictness or leniency. Instead, within each lie type, discrepancies may reflect a more general tendency for parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying to misalign across situations.

Strengths and Limitations

This study contributes to the emerging literature on parental lying discrepancies by examining discrepancies between lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching as reported by parents themselves, using concrete everyday parenting scenarios that capture discrepancies consciously recognized by parents in contexts closely resembling real-life situations. A further strength is the analytic approach, which combined theoretically expected discrepancy structures with openness to alternative clustering patterns. This is particularly valuable in a developing field, where theory is still emerging, and more rigid models may obscure meaningful patterns.

At the same time, limitations should be acknowledged. The scenario-based instrument requires parents to read multiple text-based situations, reflect on past experiences, and evaluate their own attitudes, behaviors, and teaching within each context. This makes the assessment cognitively and linguistically demanding, which may reduce its feasibility in larger-scale studies and limit its applicability in more diverse populations with varying literacy or language proficiency levels. In addition, responses to hypothetical scenarios may not fully correspond to parents' behavior in real-life interactions. Because the current study relies on parents' self-reports, the findings reflect discrepancies as recognized by parents themselves. Discrepancies that remain outside of parents' awareness may nevertheless be observable for children and may therefore still play a role in the socialization of honesty. Given that discrepancies clustered by lie type, future research should develop shorter, lie-type-specific versions of the instrument to facilitate broader implementation and to examine whether similar patterns emerge using alternative methods and perspectives, including those of children.

Future Directions

Building on the present findings, several directions for future research can be identified. First, future research could examine parental characteristics and situational factors associated with discrepancies and with the negative feelings they may elicit. Prior work suggests that reduced self-regulation, stress, and situational demands may contribute to the emergence of inconsistencies in parents (e.g., Chung et al., 2025; Vittrup et al., 2006). Identifying when and for whom different types of discrepancies arise would clarify the

conditions under which parents are most likely to show them. In addition, further research is needed to understand why some discrepancies elicit stronger negative feelings than others and to explain individual differences in these responses. Research on cognitive dissonance indicates that factors such as the centrality of morality to one's identity (Xu et al., 2017) and personality traits including neuroticism, conscientiousness, and agreeableness (Murray et al., 2012) may play a role. Finally, extending this work beyond the parents' perspectives by examining whether and how children perceive parental discrepancies and how these discrepancies relate to parent–child dynamics and children's social and moral development is an important next step.

Conclusions

Discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying are not rare exceptions but a common and consciously recognized phenomenon in parenting. Their near-universal prevalence, replicated with a different method, shows that these discrepancies reflect a real and robust phenomenon rather than a measurement artifact. Most discrepancies occur occasionally. At the same time, a substantial minority of parents report showing at least one discrepancy often, suggesting that for some parents these patterns recur more regularly. The fact that many parents experience negative feelings about at least some discrepancies shows that these discrepancies are affectively meaningful. Moreover, the clustering by lie type demonstrates that discrepancies follow clear and meaningful patterns rather than occurring at random.

Together, these findings show that parents do not communicate a single, fully aligned message about lying. Instead, the alignment between their beliefs, actions, and the lessons they convey varies across situations. Understanding when and why such variation occurs is important for understanding how parents navigate everyday moral dilemmas in parenting and how children encounter and interpret these messages about lying in the course of moral socialization.

Supplementary Materials

Table S1

Polychoric Correlation Matrix of Discrepancy Items

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Other-oriented lies												
1. Parent disapproves but lies												
2. Parent approves but refrains	.51											
3. Parent approves but teaches unacceptability	.46	.59										
4. Parent disapproves but teaches acceptability	.57	.57	.72									
5. Parent lies but teaches unacceptability	.63	.48	.60	.64								
6. Parent refrains but teaches acceptability	.60	.55	.69	.75	.72							
Instrumental lies												
7. Parent disapproves but lies	.48	.34	.31	.38	.38	.32						
8. Parent approves but refrains	.30	.37	.22	.21	.33	.28	.59					
9. Parent approves but teaches unacceptability	.36	.29	.32	.35	.27	.26	.67	.54				
10. Parent disapproves but teaches acceptability	.34	.30	.36	.35	.26	.40	.56	.54	.68			
11. Parent lies but teaches unacceptability	.41	.34	.31	.31	.37	.31	.63	.56	.59	.69		
12. Parent refrains but teaches acceptability	.28	.32	.36	.40	.22	.43	.51	.48	.64	.71	.62	

Table S2

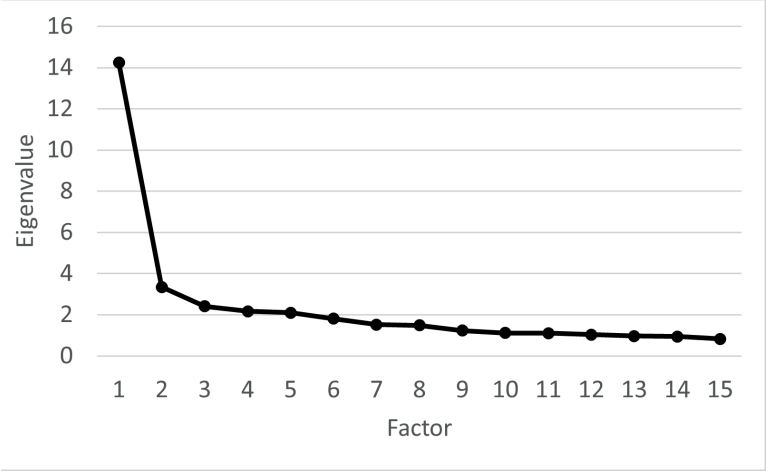
Geomin-Rotated Factor Loadings for the Two-Factor Solution

Scenario item	Factor 1	Factor 2
Other-oriented lies (6 items)		
1. Disapproves but lies	**.621**	.158
2. Approves but refrains	**.619**	.105
3. Approves but teaches unacceptability	**.798**	-.002
4. Disapproves but teaches acceptability	**.851**	.004
5. Lies but teaches unacceptability	**.794**	.000
6. Refrains but teaches acceptability	**.889**	-.016
Instrumental lies (6 items)		
7. Disapproves but lies	.080	**.730**
8. Approves but refrains	-.001	**.689**
9. Approves but teaches unacceptability	-.043	**.828**
10. Disapproves but teaches acceptability	-.026	**.856**
11. Lies but teaches unacceptability	.011	**.792**
12. Refrains but teaches acceptability	.032	**.760**

Note. **Bold** indicates the factor to which the item was assigned.

Figure S1

Scree Plot of Eigenvalues for Extracted Factors



Chapter 6



General Discussion

General Discussion

Parents shape children's understanding of lying, both through the behavior they model and through what they explicitly teach their children about lying. Earlier studies have linked parental lying to various outcomes, including lower parent–child relationship quality, more child lie-telling, and more child internalizing and externalizing problems (Dodd & Malm, 2023; Jackson et al., 2021a; Liu & Wei, 2020; Low et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2017; Setoh et al., 2020). Yet parental lying itself remains insufficiently understood. Little is known about the parental lying behaviors to which children are exposed in everyday interactions, how such behaviors can be meaningfully assessed and compared across populations, and to what extent parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying are aligned. This dissertation pursued two central aims: first, to provide a comprehensive and fine-grained characterization of parental lying to children and examine how parental lying can be assessed in a reliable and valid way and compared meaningfully across populations; second, to examine discrepancies between parents' attitudes toward lying, their lying behaviors, and their teaching about lying. Together, the findings clarify the lying behaviors children may encounter in parent–child interactions and the extent to which parents may convey consistent or mixed messages about the acceptability of lying. Across these aims, this dissertation drew on multiple samples of Dutch parents, thereby extending the literature to an understudied population.

In this chapter, I integrate the main findings of the dissertation and consider their broader theoretical and methodological implications. I first discuss how the findings contribute to our understanding of parental lying as a parenting practice, with particular attention to its prevalence, frequency, heterogeneity, and measurement. I then discuss discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying, focusing on their occurrence, underlying structure, and how parents feel about discrepancies.

A Comprehensive and Fine-Grained Characterization of Parental Lying (Aim 1)

Earlier research on parental lying has established that it is a common parenting practice with potential consequences for the parent–child relationship and child development (Dodd & Malm, 2023; Jackson et al., 2021a; Liu & Wei, 2020; Low et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2017; Setoh et al., 2020). Yet, parental lying had remained only partially understood as an everyday parenting practice due to limitations in how it has been measured. This dissertation advanced understanding of parental lying by examining how often parents lie to their children, how parental lying varies across types of lies, and how parental lying can be assessed in a reliable and valid way and compared meaningfully across populations.

Prevalence and Frequency of Parental Lying

Our findings indicate that parental lying is highly prevalent yet typically occurs infrequently. In **Chapter 2**, the majority of parents in both the Netherlands and the United States (US) reported lying to their children (89.0% and 85.2%, respectively), but most indicated that they did so only occasionally, with frequent lying reported by a small minority (4.6% in the Netherlands and 5.7% in the US). These prevalence rates align with prior research across diverse samples and countries (Roza et al., 2024). Moreover, the observed frequency pattern mirrors findings from the broader lying literature, in which most individuals report lying infrequently and a relatively small subgroup accounts for more frequent lying (e.g., Serota et al., 2021; Serota & Levine, 2015). Our findings indicate that focusing on prevalence alone may therefore overstate the extent to which parental lying is a recurring parenting practice.

Sole reliance on prevalence-based measures also has potential limitations for the interpretation of associations with relational and developmental outcomes. Parents who only lie occasionally are grouped together with those who lie more frequently, which limits the ability to distinguish whether outcomes are associated with any occurrence of parental lying or with its frequency. Consequences of parental lying may depend on how frequently it occurs. For example, more frequent liars tend to be perceived as less likable and less trustworthy (Bitterly, 2026; Tyler et al., 2006), and higher perceived frequencies of lying have been associated with lower relationship satisfaction (Peterson, 1996).

In future research, the use of prevalence and frequency measures of lying should be guided by the research aim, as both capture distinct aspects of parental lying. Assessing prevalence is informative when the aim is to establish whether parents engage in lying at all or how widespread the behavior is across populations. Assessing frequency is suitable for examining how often parental lying occurs, how the behavior is distributed across parents, and how it relates to relational or child developmental outcomes. Importantly, even within frequency-based approaches, different measurement strategies capture different aspects of behavior. Global frequency measures, as used in **Chapter 2** (e.g., including responses such as “rarely” or “often”), reflect individuals’ general perceptions or subjective summaries of their behavior. These measures are well suited for assessing broad behavioral tendencies, such as how parents rate their overall use of different types of lies (Schwarz & Oyserman, 2001). However, such responses depend on how individuals interpret response categories, which may vary across respondents and contexts, making such measures less suitable for estimating and comparing absolute levels of behavior (Schwarz, 1999). In **Chapter 3**, the Parental Lying Scenarios Scale (PLSS) applied a behavior-specific frequency approach, asking parents to report how often they engaged in specific lying behaviors within the past month, using response options that reflect behavioral counts (e.g., “0 times,” “1–2 times”). Such measures can capture how often specific behaviors occur within a defined period and are less dependent on subjective interpretation, thereby enabling comparisons across behaviors and individuals. At the same time, these measures rely on the recall of specific events and

may therefore be subject to memory-related biases (Schwarz, 1999; Tourangeau et al., 2000). These approaches are not interchangeable but provide complementary insights, underscoring the importance of aligning assessment with the research question.

Parental Lying as a Heterogeneous Parenting Practice

The findings of this dissertation further show that the prevalence and frequency of parental lying vary across lie types. **Chapter 2** examined the prevalence and frequency of three types of parental lies in two samples, one from the Netherlands and one from the US: lies to benefit the child (other-oriented), lies to benefit the parent (self-oriented), and lies to influence the child's behavior (instrumental). In the Netherlands, other-oriented lies were reported by the largest proportion of parents (80.7%), whereas instrumental (67.0%) and self-oriented (56.9%) lies were reported by smaller proportions that did not differ significantly. In the United States, other-oriented and instrumental lies were reported by a similarly high proportion of parents (78.7% and 68.9%, respectively), whereas self-oriented lies were reported by a significantly smaller proportion of parents (49.2%). In terms of frequency, other-oriented lies were reported most often in both samples, followed by instrumental lies, with self-oriented lies being the least frequent. These findings indicate that parental lying is not a single, undifferentiated practice, but consists of distinct types of behaviors that differ in how commonly they are used. Aggregating across lie types may therefore obscure meaningful differences in prevalence and frequency, potentially leading to an inaccurate characterization of parental lying.

Distinguishing between lie types is also important for understanding the consequences of parental lying. Research suggests that the consequences of lying depend on the type of lie involved: lies told to benefit others are generally associated with more positive relational outcomes, whereas lies told for self-benefit are associated with more negative relational outcomes (e.g., DePaulo & Kashy, 1998). Developmental research has shown that children evaluate lies in light of the intentions underlying them (e.g., Bussey, 1999) and expect different effects on trust depending on whether a parental lie primarily benefits the parent or the child, with lies that primarily serve the parent's interests generally associated with lower levels of trust (Schröer & Kok, 2025). Accordingly, exposure to different types of parental lies is likely to have distinct implications for relational and developmental outcomes.

Previous research is consistent with this expectation. Studies relying on aggregate parenting-by-lying scores have linked parental lying to more child lie-telling (e.g., Dodd & Malm, 2023; Jackson et al., 2021a), whereas research differentiating between lie types suggests that these associations are not uniform. Specifically, Low et al. (2024) found that exposure to instrumental lies was positively associated with children's lying to parents, whereas associations involving other-oriented lies were more conditional. These findings suggest that the implications of parental lying may differ across lie types. The findings of this dissertation indicate that parental lying is best understood as a heterogeneous parenting

practice in which lie types differ in their prevalence and frequency, rather than as a single undifferentiated practice.

Expanding the Conceptualization of Parental Lying

In addition to obscuring differences between lie types, existing measures of parental lying capture only a limited subset of lie types. Prior instruments have primarily focused on lies aimed at influencing children's behavior or emotions, so-called parenting by lying (e.g., Heyman et al., 2009, 2013; Jackson et al., 2021a; Setoh et al., 2022). Building on recent qualitative work from the Fami-LIES research project (Kok et al., 2025), **Chapter 3** broadened the scope of parental lies by introducing the Parental Lying Scenarios Scale (PLSS), which incorporates a wider range of parental goals, such as privacy protection, managing self-presentation, and avoiding conflict or difficult conversations. **Chapter 3** showed that parents also engage in these additional forms of lying, thereby providing quantitative evidence that parental lying serves a broader range of interpersonal and self-regulatory goals than previously captured. Accordingly, conceptualizing parental lying solely as a strategy for regulating children's behavior or emotions provides only a partial account of the lies that children are exposed to.

Using this expanded set of lie scenarios, **Chapter 3** examined the underlying structure of parental lying. The findings support a multidimensional organization in which lie scenarios clustered around two factors that reflected distinct immediate aims: influencing children's behavior and shaping their knowledge and emotions. These findings partly align with the distinction between lies used to influence children's behavior or emotions (e.g., Heyman et al., 2009, 2013), while extending that work by showing that influencing children's internal states involves not only regulating emotions, but also shaping what children know, think, or believe in a given situation. Moreover, lies aimed at shaping children's knowledge and emotions serve a broader range of underlying goals beyond benefiting or protecting the child, including managing interactions and addressing parents' own concerns. That these conceptually distinct goals cluster around the same immediate aim suggests that parental lying may be organized by what parents seek to influence in children rather than by underlying goals.

Measurement and Comparability in Parental Lying Research

Beyond capturing the complexity and multidimensionality of parental lying, this dissertation underscores the importance of reliable, valid measurement, as well as instruments that allow meaningful comparisons across populations. Although important initial steps have been taken in this emerging field to develop appropriate instruments designed to measure parental lying (e.g., Allen & Kara, 2023; Heyman et al., 2013; Jackson et al., 2021b; Setoh et al., 2022), their psychometric properties have rarely been evaluated. Moreover, reported cross-country and cross-group variation in parental lying (e.g., Heyman et al., 2009, 2013) remains difficult to interpret, as it is unclear whether this variation reflects substantive

differences or differences in measurement across populations.

The findings of this dissertation help address these limitations in two ways. First, **Chapter 3** introduced and tested the Parental Lying Scenarios Scale (PLSS), a newly developed instrument that builds on and broadens earlier instruments in this field. The PLSS demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity, supporting its use for assessing parental lying and examining associations with related constructs. Second, **Chapter 2** showed that meaningful cross-population comparisons are possible when appropriate measurement conditions for invariance testing are met. Configural, metric, and scalar invariance across samples from the Netherlands and the US indicate that observed similarities and differences can be interpreted as reflecting variation in parental lying rather than differences in item interpretation or response styles (e.g., Meredith, 1993; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000).

At the same time, measurement invariance is inherently instrument- and sample-specific and should not be assumed when using different instruments or when studying different populations or cultural contexts. Consistent with broader measurement principles, reliability, validity, and invariance need to be empirically tested when studying parental lying using different instruments or populations. **Chapters 2** and **3** provide concrete measures and guidance for future research, illustrating which properties are required and how they can be established in practice.

Discrepancies Between Parental Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching About Lying (Aim 2)

Existing research suggests that parents often report lying to their children while at the same time disapproving of lying and teaching their children that lying is unacceptable (e.g., Cargill & Curtis, 2017; Heyman et al., 2009, 2013; Lavoie et al., 2016). However, because these dimensions have typically been studied in isolation, it remained unclear whether and how such discrepancies occur within individual parents. This dissertation is the first to systematically examine discrepancies between parents' attitudes toward lying, their own lying behaviors, and their teaching about lying within individuals. Specifically, I examined the occurrence and structure of these discrepancies, as well as how parents feel about discrepancies. Addressing these questions is essential for understanding how parents navigate and communicate moral norms about lying in parent–child interactions.

Evidence for Discrepancies Between Parental Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching

Across **Chapters 4** and **5**, the findings provide clear evidence of discrepancies between lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching *within* parents, demonstrating that this phenomenon is not an artifact of combining findings across separate studies. Moreover, these discrepancies were observed among the majority of parents, indicating that they are the rule rather than the exception. **Chapter 4** analyzed parents' attitudes toward different types of lies (other-oriented, self-oriented, and instrumental), their reported use of these

lies, and what they teach their children about the acceptability of these lies. Examining these dimensions jointly revealed distinct patterns of alignment and discrepancy. Some parents reported using certain lies more frequently than their attitudes would suggest, consistent with accounts of moral weakness, which suggests that individuals do not always act in accordance with their own standards (Graham et al., 2015). Others communicated stricter norms to their children than reflected in their own attitudes and behaviors, resembling moral double standards, whereby individuals judge their own moral transgressions more leniently than similar transgressions committed by others (Graham et al., 2015; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007). Discrepancies also emerged in the opposite direction, with some parents reporting that they use certain lies less frequently than their attitudes would suggest, or communicating greater acceptance of specific lies to their children than suggested by their reported attitudes and behavior. These findings illustrate the different ways in which attitudes, behaviors, and teaching may diverge within parents.

To complement this analytic approach, **Chapter 5** further examined discrepancies as experienced by parents themselves. Using scenario-based items derived from **Chapter 4** and prior literature (Heyman et al., 2009, 2013; Kok et al., 2025), parents directly indicated whether and how often they showed discrepancies between what they believe about lying, what they do in practice, and what they explicitly teach their children. The results of this approach confirmed that discrepancies are not only analytically observable but also subjectively recognized, with most parents reporting some discrepancies between their lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching.

Taken together, the findings from **Chapters 4** and **5** demonstrate that discrepancies between parents' lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching are empirically observable, recognized by parents themselves, robust, and widespread. At the same time, the two approaches capture different aspects of this phenomenon. The analytic approach in **Chapter 4** is particularly suited for examining the presence and prevalence of discrepancies within parents, including those outside their conscious awareness. However, it raises questions about when differences between dimensions should be considered substantively meaningful, as such differences do not have a straightforward interpretation (Edwards, 1994). In contrast, the scenario-based approach in **Chapter 5** captures discrepancies as perceived by parents themselves, identifying whether discrepancies are recognizable to parents, how often they occur, and how parents experience them in everyday interactions.

Between- and Within-Person Perspectives on Discrepancies

The findings of **Chapter 4** further show that conclusions about alignment or discrepancy depend on the level of analysis. At the between-person level, parents with more favorable attitudes toward specific types of lies reported using them more frequently and were more likely to communicate their acceptability, suggesting overall alignment at the between-person level. However, within parents, attitudes, behaviors, and teaching showed

substantial variability, including both alignment and discrepancies. Accordingly, between-person analyses may overestimate alignment by obscuring within-parent variation.
This distinction is consistent with broader methodological insights. Research based on the Theory of Planned Behavior has typically examined associations at the between-person level (e.g., Armitage & Conner, 2001; McEachan et al., 2011), where more favorable attitudes are associated with stronger intentions and, to a lesser extent, with actual behavior (Alleyne & Phillips, 2011; Beck & Ajzen, 1991). However, such associations do not necessarily generalize to within-person processes (e.g., Curran & Bauer, 2011; Hoffman & Stawski, 2009). The present findings illustrate this clearly: within-person analyses reveal meaningful discrepancies that remain hidden in between-person analyses. This underscores the importance of incorporating within-person approaches in future research to accurately capture discrepancies between parental attitudes, behaviors, and teaching.

Prevalence and Frequency of Discrepancies Between Parental Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching

Chapters 4 and **5** show that discrepancies are highly prevalent among parents. Within-parent analyses in **Chapter 4** indicated that all parents exhibited at least some discrepancy between their attitudes, behaviors, and teaching, whereas findings from **Chapter 5** showed that nearly all parents (96.6%) recognized at least one discrepant situation in their own parenting.

This widespread presence of discrepancies likely reflects the inherent complexity of parenting. Parenting requires not only responding to situational constraints, but also actively navigating multiple, sometimes competing values in their day-to-day behavior. Findings from Kok et al. (2025) suggest that parental lying is sometimes a reactive response to challenging situations but can also be the result of deliberate, proactive considerations. For instance, parents may choose to lie to protect their child from distressing realities or to manage children's behavior effectively. In doing so, they weigh honesty against other important values, such as kindness or the maintenance of social harmony, particularly in situations in which being fully honest may be hurtful, socially disruptive, or perceived as unnecessarily distressing (Levine & Lupoli, 2022; Levine & Schweitzer, 2014). Similar tensions can arise in what parents aim to teach their children. Parents may seek to raise their children as morally upright individuals by emphasizing values such as honesty, while also wanting to equip them with the social skills needed to navigate everyday interactions, which may at times involve saying something that is not entirely true, for example, to be polite or considerate (Talwar & Lee, 2002). Discrepancies should therefore not be understood simply as failures of consistency. Rather, they are a natural feature of parenting, arising from both the constraints parents face and the deliberate choices they make in prioritizing one value over another.

In addition to examining the overall prevalence of discrepancies, **Chapter 5** further assessed

the frequency with which specific discrepancies between attitudes and behaviors, attitude and teaching, and behavior and teaching were reported. The findings indicated that most parents reported engaging in specific discrepancies only occasionally. This suggests that, while discrepancies are widespread across parents, specific discrepancies do not reflect stable or routinized patterns in parenting. At the same time, a substantial minority of parents reported showing at least one discrepancy frequently, pointing to variation in how often parents exhibit discrepancies overall. Variation in how frequently discrepancies occur points to the importance of identifying individual, relational, or contextual factors that shape not only their presence but also their recurrence.

Interpreting Discrepancies Between Parental Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching

Given the widespread occurrence of discrepancies between parents' lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching, it is important to consider how these discrepancies can be interpreted within existing theoretical frameworks on behavior and parenting. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) provides a useful starting point by proposing that behavior is shaped by intentions, which in turn are influenced by individuals' attitudes, perceived social norms, and perceived behavioral control. From this perspective, discrepancies between attitudes and behaviors may arise when perceived social norms and perceived behavioral control shape intentions and behavior in ways that do not align with individuals' attitudes. Specifically, when parents refrain from lying despite viewing it as acceptable, behavior may be constrained by prevailing norms about honesty and appropriate parenting. Prior research suggests that societal norms that discourage lying are generally strong (Evans & Lee, 2022), which may lead parents to prioritize these norms over their own evaluations. Conversely, when parents engage in lying despite disapproving of it, this may reflect situations in which they experience limited perceived behavioral control over how to respond. Findings from Kok et al. (2025) suggest that parents sometimes feel too overwhelmed or inadequately equipped to respond effectively in challenging situations, which may lead them to use lying as a response of last resort, potentially even when doing so conflicts with their attitudes. Together, these considerations suggest that discrepancies between attitudes and behaviors may arise from the interplay between personal evaluations, perceived norms, and contextual constraints, including situational pressures and limited perceived coping resources. Parenting models align with this interpretation by conceptualizing parenting behavior as guided, but not determined, by parents' beliefs (Abidin, 1992; Bornstein et al., 2018), and similarly accommodate the idea that, under conditions of heightened stress, parents may be less able to act in line with their beliefs (Abidin, 1992). Such stress may arise from multiple sources, including characteristics of the child, for example when children are perceived as more demanding, less adaptable, or more emotionally reactive (Abidin, 1992). In this respect, parenting models emphasize the relational and transactional nature of parent–child interactions, in which characteristics of the child can shape the demands placed on the parent, thereby contributing to the conditions under which parents' behavior

may diverge from their attitudes.

At the same time, these frameworks do not fully account for the extent and variety of discrepancies observed. While they allow for imperfect alignment between attitudes and behaviors, they do not necessarily predict the widespread occurrence of such discrepancies. Moreover, they offer limited insight into discrepancies involving what parents teach their children. Although parenting models acknowledge that parents play a role in the socialization of norms and values, they do not directly explain why and how parents may communicate normative standards that diverge from their own attitudes or behavior. Discrepancies between parents' teaching and their own attitudes or behavior therefore point to socialization processes that extend beyond models focused primarily on individual motivation or behavioral determinants. Future research would therefore benefit from frameworks that more explicitly address how parents decide which norms to communicate to their children, and why these communicated norms may diverge from parents' own attitudes, their own behavior, or both. Such frameworks may further consider how parents balance competing goals and values when communicating norms to their children, as well as how situational pressures and limited coping resources may hinder acting in accordance with those communicated norms.

Structural Organization of Discrepancies

Our findings indicate that discrepancies between parents' lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching are not randomly distributed, but show a meaningful structure. In **Chapter 4**, discrepancies were more prevalent for self-oriented and instrumental lies than for other-oriented lies. Whereas all parents showed some discrepancy between their attitudes, behaviors, and teaching for self-oriented and instrumental lies, only about half did so for other-oriented lies. This suggests that discrepancies are more prevalent for some lie types than others, and that the same parents may show alignment for one type of lie while showing discrepancies for another. **Chapter 5** converged with this interpretation by showing that discrepancies do not reflect a general tendency across lies. Instead, a two-factor structure distinguishing other-oriented and instrumental lying discrepancies provided the best fit.

This structural differentiation may reflect the fact that different lie types involve different moral trade-offs and differ in the extent to which they are shaped by situational demands. Specifically, other-oriented lies require balancing honesty against values such as kindness or protection (Levine & Lupoli, 2022; Levine & Schweitzer, 2014), self-oriented lies may involve tensions between honesty and self-benefit (Gneezy, 2011), and instrumental lies may involve weighing honesty against pragmatic parenting goals, such as achieving immediate compliance (Heyman et al., 2013). The role of situational factors may likewise differ across lie types, with instrumental lies potentially being more strongly shaped by immediate pressures such as stress or time constraints (Heyman et al., 2013), whereas other-oriented lies may more often reflect deliberate considerations about how to protect or care for the child.

The Affective Experience of Discrepancies

To better understand the significance of discrepancies, **Chapter 5** explored parents' feelings about discrepancies between their lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching. Across discrepancy items, between about half and 70 percent of parents reported neutral feelings, whereas roughly one quarter to one half reported negative feelings. Fewer than 10 percent reported positive feelings. These findings suggest that parents most often report neutral or negative feelings about discrepancies, but also that some discrepancies are more likely to elicit negative feelings than others. For instance, discrepancies involving instrumental lying were more often accompanied by negative feelings than discrepancies involving other-oriented lying. At the same time, parents may differ in the extent to which they experience discrepancies as negative.

These reported negative feelings may be understood through a cognitive dissonance perspective, which proposes that people experience psychological discomfort when their behavior conflicts with their attitudes, and are motivated to reduce this inconsistency by changing their behaviors, adjusting their attitudes, or reinterpreting the situation (Cooper, 2007; Festinger, 1957). Prior research suggests that negative feelings following lying shape subsequent judgments and behavior (Argo & Shiv, 2012). Rather than viewing such feelings as mere byproducts of discrepancies, they may also play a role in shaping how discrepancies are managed. Future research should examine how variations in experienced tension relate to the development of discrepancies over time, and whether parents who experience discomfort may benefit from support in reflecting on and navigating tensions between moral standards and everyday parenting demands.

These processes are unlikely to operate uniformly across parents or across discrepancies. Responses to inconsistencies may depend on individual differences, such as the centrality of morality to one's identity or personality traits (Xu et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2012), but also on characteristics of the discrepancy itself. For example, discrepancies involving instrumental lying were more often associated with negative feelings than discrepancies involving other-oriented lying, suggesting that some discrepancies may evoke stronger feelings of tension or discomfort than others. Examining how both individual characteristics and discrepancy-specific features shape the experience and development of discrepancies may provide further insight into how discrepancies evolve within parent–child interactions and how parents navigate tensions between their moral standards and everyday parenting behavior.

What Remains Underexplored

In summary, this dissertation has advanced our understanding of parental lying to children and discrepancies between parents' lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching. At the same time, several key areas warrant further investigation. First, future research should examine the consequences of parental lying for parent–child relational outcomes and

children's developmental outcomes, and how these consequences depend on variation in lie type and frequency. Although parental lying has previously been linked to a range of outcomes, such as parent–child relationship quality, child lie-telling, and internalizing and externalizing problems, it remains unclear to what extent these associations depend on lie type and children's level of exposure (Roza et al., 2024; Setoh et al., 2024). Moving beyond aggregate approaches to examine specific combinations of lie type and lying frequency may provide a more differentiated understanding of its implications.

Second, future research should examine children's perspectives on parental lying discrepancies. This dissertation focused on discrepancies between lying-related attitudes, behaviors, and teaching as reported by parents. This focus on the parents' perspective is essential, as these discrepancies are internal to the parent and involve attitudes, which are not directly observable (e.g., Ajzen, 1991). However, discrepancies between what parents teach and what they do may be observable to children. Recognizing discrepancies requires that children detect parental lying behaviors, understand communicated norms, and apply a consistency principle, capacities that develop with age and become more reliable from around age 10 (Rotenberg et al., 2023). Accordingly, the importance of incorporating children's perspectives is likely to increase across child development.

Earlier research incorporating the children's perspectives suggests that it adds unique insight into the meaning and effects of parental lying. Low et al. (2024) show that children's beliefs about lies shape how these lies relate to children's own lying behaviors, indicating that the impact of parental lying depends on how it is interpreted by the child. For example, exposure to other-oriented lies was associated with more lying to parents only among children who believed that those lies were true. Similarly, Schröer and Kok (2025) demonstrate that children distinguish between different types of parental lies and evaluate them in terms of trust, highlighting that children actively assign meaning to parental lying behaviors. Specifically, they found that children judged other-oriented parental lies more leniently than self-oriented lies, and that trust in parents was lower when children perceived the lie as serving the parent's own interests rather than the child's well-being. It remains unclear how children interpret and respond to discrepancies between the lying behaviors parents model and the messages they explicitly communicate about honesty and lying. Children may perceive them as instances of moral inconsistency or hypocrisy, potentially affecting their social evaluations and trust (Hui et al., 2011; Rotenberg et al., 2023), or experience ambiguity about norms (Carrasco & Holgado-Tello, 2015; Dwairy, 2010). However, these consequences are likely contingent on whether children actually recognize discrepancies. If parents report discrepancies that children do not perceive, their impact may be limited, consistent with perspectives emphasizing that parenting effects depend on how children interpret parental behavior (Grusec & Davidov, 2010). Moreover, discrepancies may exist at the level of perception rather than as objective inconsistencies. Parents may consider their attitudes, behaviors, and teaching to be consistent, whereas children may nevertheless

perceive a discrepancy. This may occur when parents do not recognize inconsistencies in their own behaviors, but also when children interpret parental behavior differently from how it was intended. For example, a parent may consistently reject lying for personal gain while still telling prosocial lies, which could be interpreted by children as violations of a general rule against lying. These considerations highlight the importance of incorporating children's perspectives to understand both recognition and interpretation of discrepancies.

A third suggestion for future research concerns how discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying may change across children's development. While parental lying varies with children's age (Talwar et al., 2022), it remains unclear whether parents of younger and older children differ in the extent of such discrepancies, and whether discrepancies change within parents as children grow older. Discrepancies may emerge as parents adapt their communication to the child's developmental level, for example by conveying simplified and more absolute rules to children while holding more nuanced views themselves and introducing these more gradually as children grow older (Lavoie et al., 2016). As a result, parents may allow for exceptions in their own behavior while communicating general norms to their children. At the same time, as children grow older and parents communicate more nuanced norms, such discrepancies may diminish or be resolved. Addressing these questions requires longitudinal designs and comparisons across parents of children at different developmental stages.

Finally, future research should examine the mechanisms underlying discrepancies between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and teaching by distinguishing between situational and more deliberate processes. Situations involving stress or other immediate demands may be particularly likely to foster discrepancies, as such conditions can reduce parents' capacity to act in accordance with beliefs and increase the need for immediate, pragmatic responses (Bruch & Feinberg, 2017; Chung et al., 2025; Florean et al., 2025). At the same time, discrepancies may also reflect more deliberate considerations, as parents may sometimes choose to prioritize certain values or immediate goals over others in specific situations (Kok et al., 2025; Levine & Lupoli, 2022). Future research is needed to test whether these situational and deliberate processes underlie discrepancies in parenting. Moreover, discrepancies may also vary across parents. Individual differences, such as parents' capacity for self-control, may influence how consistently parents align their attitudes, behaviors, and teaching. Research on self-control suggests that individuals differ in their ability to regulate behavior in line with their standards (Tangney et al., 2004), and parenting research shows that lower self-control is associated with more inconsistent parenting practices (Chung et al., 2025). Parents with more self-control may be better able to act in accordance with their beliefs even under challenging conditions, whereas lower self-control may increase the likelihood of discrepancies. Examining both situational and individual-level factors, and their potential interplay, may help clarify why discrepancies arise, when they occur, and for whom they are more likely.

Final Remarks

This dissertation began with three stories of parents navigating what to say, soften, and withhold in ordinary interactions with their children. Eva told her son that his teacher would be upset if he arrived late to make him hurry, while knowing this wasn't true. David praised his daughter's singing despite its flaws to avoid hurting her feelings. Sara told her son she still had work to finish so she could have a few quiet minutes to herself. The findings of this dissertation show that such situations are a common part of everyday parenting.

Parental lying can be understood as a set of behaviors that most parents engage in occasionally, varying across lie types and serving different immediate aims in parent–child interactions. Moreover, parents' beliefs, behaviors, and teaching about lying do not always align, and such discrepancies are not exceptional but part of how parenting unfolds in practice. The findings also point to a broader insight into the role of lying in parenting: raising children does not simply involve consistently applying a single moral rule but navigating multiple and sometimes competing goals. In the context of parental lying, this may involve balancing honesty with protecting the child, guiding behavior, and responding to parents' own needs and practical demands. These considerations do not always align, and the discrepancies that arise from them are not exceptional but a natural feature of everyday parenting.

This dissertation suggests that research should move beyond asking whether parents lie or whether their beliefs, behaviors, and teaching are fully aligned. Future research should give greater attention to how parents manage competing demands in everyday situations and how children experience and interpret these interactions as part of their moral socialization. In this light, parental lying and inconsistencies between parents' beliefs, behaviors, and teaching are best understood not as failures to adhere to a moral standard, but as reflections of how parents navigate the complexities of raising a child.

Addendum



References

Samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

The Parental Lying Scenarios Scale (PLSS)

Parental Lying Discrepancy Scenarios

Curriculum Vitae

Dankwoord (Acknowledgements in Dutch)

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Samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

Bijna alle ouders liegen weleens tegen hun kind. Ze zeggen bijvoorbeeld dat de juf boos wordt als hun kind te laat komt om gedoe te voorkomen bij het klaarmaken voor school; ze prijzen een vals gezongen liedje om hun kind niet te kwetsen; of ze vertellen dat ze nog moeten werken, terwijl ze eigenlijk gewoon even tijd voor zichzelf willen. In het dagelijkse opvoeden wegen ouders af wat zij hun kind vertellen, wat ze anders verwoorden of wat ze achterhouden.

Ouders spelen een belangrijke rol in de morele opvoeding van hun kinderen, zowel via wat ze hun kinderen expliciet leren over liegen als via het gedrag dat ze zelf laten zien. Eerder onderzoek heeft ouderlijk liegen in verband gebracht met onder meer een lagere kwaliteit van de ouder-kindrelatie, meer liegen door kinderen zelf en meer internaliserende en externaliserende problemen bij kinderen. Het onderzoeksveld rond ouderlijk liegen staat echter nog in de kinderschoenen en er zijn veel belangrijke vragen nog onvoldoende beantwoord. Zo was nog weinig bekend over hoe vaak ouders liegen, hoe dit verschilt tussen verschillende typen leugens, welke leugens ouders in het dagelijks leven vertellen, en hoe ouderlijk liegen op een betrouwbare en betekenisvolle manier gemeten kan worden. Ook was nog onduidelijk in hoeverre wat ouders van liegen vinden, wat zij zelf doen en wat zij hun kinderen hierover leren, met elkaar overeenkomen of juist verschillen. Dit proefschrift richtte zich op deze belangrijke vragen.

Opzet van dit proefschrift

Dit proefschrift had twee doelen. Het eerste doel was om ouderlijk liegen tegen kinderen systematisch in kaart te brengen. Daarbij onderzocht ik hoeveel ouders weleens tegen hun kind liegen (prevalentie), hoe vaak zij dat doen (frequentie) en hoe beide variëren tussen verschillende typen leugens. Daarnaast onderzocht ik welke leugens ouders in het dagelijks leven vertellen en hoe ouderlijk liegen op een betrouwbare en betekenisvolle manier gemeten en tussen groepen vergeleken kan worden. Het tweede doel was te onderzoeken in hoeverre er discrepanties bestaan tussen wat ouders vinden van liegen, wat zij zelf doen en wat zij hun kinderen hierover leren.

Om deze doelen te bereiken, voerde ik vier empirische studies uit met cross-sectionele data uit meerdere steekproeven van Nederlandse ouders en, in één studie, een vergelijkingssteekproef van Amerikaanse ouders.

Doel 1: Ouderlijk liegen tegen kinderen systematisch in kaart brengen

Hoe vaak liegen ouders tegen hun kinderen? En verschilt dat tussen verschillende typen leugens? Om die vragen te beantwoorden, onderzocht ik in **Hoofdstuk 2** de prevalentie en frequentie van ouderlijk liegen in een Nederlandse en Amerikaanse steekproef. Daarbij keek ik zowel naar ouderlijk liegen in het algemeen als naar drie specifieke typen ouderlijke leugens: leugens in het voordeel van het kind (bijvoorbeeld zeggen dat de outfit van je kind er geweldig uitziet terwijl je dat niet vindt), leugens in het voordeel van de ouder (bijvoorbeeld zeggen dat je naar kwijtgeraakt speelgoed hebt gezocht terwijl je dat niet hebt gedaan) en leugens om gedrag te beïnvloeden (bijvoorbeeld zeggen dat er geen koekjes meer zijn terwijl je weet dat die er nog wel zijn). De resultaten lieten zien dat de meerderheid van de ouders in beide steekproeven weleens tegen hun kind liegt (89,0% in Nederland en 85,2% in de Verenigde Staten), maar dat de meesten dit slechts af en toe doen. Frequent liegen werd slechts door een kleine minderheid gerapporteerd (4,6% in Nederland en 5,7% in de Verenigde Staten). De prevalentie en frequentie verschilden daarnaast tussen de verschillende typen leugens. Zo logen meer ouders in het voordeel van hun kind dan in hun eigen voordeel, en deden zij dit ook vaker.

Deze bevindingen laten zien dat het belangrijk is om bij ouderlijk liegen onderscheid te maken tussen prevalentie en frequentie, en tussen verschillende typen leugens. Kijk je alleen naar de vraag óf ouders ooit liegen, dan lijkt liegen een veelvoorkomend onderdeel van opvoeden, omdat bijna iedere ouder het weleens doet. Kijk je naar de frequentie, dan ontstaat een genuanceerder beeld: voor de meeste ouders is liegen eerder uitzondering dan regel. Dit onderscheid tussen prevalentie en frequentie is ook methodologisch van belang. Als ouders alleen worden ingedeeld in “liegt weleens” versus “liegt nooit”, worden ouders die slechts af en toe liegen in dezelfde categorie geplaatst als ouders die heel vaak liegen, terwijl de gevolgen van liegen juist kunnen samenhangen met hoe vaak het gebeurt. Ook het onderscheid tussen typen leugens is daarbij belangrijk. Wanneer verschillende typen leugens niet van elkaar worden onderscheiden, blijven betekenisvolle verschillen in prevalentie en frequentie buiten beeld. Bovendien kunnen verschillende typen leugens uiteenlopende gevolgen hebben, die mogelijk onzichtbaar blijven wanneer ouderlijk liegen als één geheel wordt beschouwd.

Om ouderlijk liegen tegen kinderen goed in kaart te brengen, is het belangrijk dat het meetinstrument de verscheidenheid aan leugens omvat die ouders in het dagelijks leven vertellen. Bestaande vragenlijsten richtten zich vooral op leugens om het gedrag of de emoties van kinderen te beïnvloeden, terwijl ouders om uiteenlopende andere redenen tegen hun kinderen kunnen liegen. Voortbouwend op kwalitatief werk uit het Fami-LIES project ontwikkelde en testte ik in **Hoofdstuk 3** de *Parental Lying Scenarios Scale* (PLSS). Deze vragenlijst meet naast leugens om gedrag en emoties te beïnvloeden ook leugens met andere doelen, zoals het beschermen van privacy of het vermijden van een conflict of lastig

gesprek. De PLSS bleek een betrouwbaar en valide instrument om ouderlijk liegen te meten. De betrouwbaarheid werd onderzocht door ouders de vragenlijst na ongeveer twee maanden opnieuw te laten invullen. Ouders behaalden beide keren vergelijkbare scores, wat erop wijst dat de PLSS stabiel meet over tijd. De validiteit werd onderzocht door scores op de PLSS te vergelijken met scores op bestaande, gevalideerde vragenlijsten die verwante vormen van liegen meten. Zoals verwacht hingen hogere scores op de PLSS samen met andere vormen van lieggedrag van ouders en met meer liegen door hun kinderen. Dit ondersteunt dat de PLSS meet wat de vragenlijst beoogt te meten. Hoewel de PLSS leugens met uiteenlopende doelen omvat, lieten de analyses zien dat daarbinnen twee bredere groepen te onderscheiden waren: leugens gericht op het beïnvloeden van het gedrag van het kind en leugens gericht op wat het kind weet of voelt.

Dat een meetinstrument betrouwbaar en valide is, betekent echter niet automatisch dat het ook geschikt is om ouderlijk liegen tussen verschillende groepen te vergelijken. Om zulke vergelijkingen betekenisvol te kunnen maken, moet eerst worden vastgesteld of het meetinstrument in verschillende groepen op dezelfde manier werkt. Zonder zo'n controle is namelijk niet zeker of eventueel gevonden verschillen werkelijke verschillen in ouderlijk liegen weerspiegelen, of het gevolg zijn van verschillen in hoe verschillende groepen ouders de vragen of antwoordmogelijkheden interpreteren of gebruiken. Daarom onderzocht ik in **Hoofdstuk 2** of de items waarmee ouderlijk liegen werd gemeten vergelijkbaar functioneerden voor Nederlandse en Amerikaanse ouders. Dat bleek het geval: de items maten in beide groepen dezelfde onderliggende neiging tot ouderlijk liegen, waardoor ik de twee groepen betekenisvol met elkaar kon vergelijken. Uit die vergelijking bleek vervolgens dat Nederlandse en Amerikaanse ouders niet verschilden in hun algemene neiging om tegen hun kind te liegen.

Doel 2: Discrepanties tussen wat ouders vinden van liegen, wat ze doen en wat ze hun kinderen leren

Ouders spelen een belangrijke rol in wat kinderen leren over eerlijkheid en liegen. Zij doen dat niet alleen door wat zij hun kinderen vertellen over het belang van eerlijkheid of de regels omtrent liegen, maar ook door het voorbeeld dat zij zelf geven. Het tweede doel van dit proefschrift was om te onderzoeken of wat ouders vinden van liegen, wat zij zelf doen en wat zij hun kinderen leren met elkaar overeenkomen. Eerder onderzoek suggereerde al dat veel ouders liegen tegen hun kind, terwijl de meeste ouders liegen afkeuren en hun kind leren dat liegen onacceptabel is. Omdat deze drie aspecten (attitudes, lieggedrag en wat ouders hun kinderen leren over liegen) doorgaans los van elkaar werden onderzocht, was echter nog onduidelijk of en in welke mate zulke discrepanties zich binnen individuele ouders voordoen. In **Hoofdstuk 4** en **5** onderzocht ik daarom voor het eerst systematisch in

hoeverre ouders discrepanties laten zien tussen hun attitudes, hun eigen lieggedrag en wat zij hun kinderen hierover leren.

In **Hoofdstuk 4** onderzocht ik voor drie typen leugens wat ouders ervan vinden, hoe vaak ze die leugens vertellen en wat zij hun kind hierover leren. Vervolgens vergeleek ik deze drie aspecten binnen dezelfde ouder om op basis daarvan consistenties of discrepanties vast te stellen. De resultaten lieten zien dat discrepanties tussen deze drie aspecten voorkomen en uiteenlopende vormen kunnen aannemen. Sommige ouders logen vaker dan je op basis van hun attitude zou verwachten, terwijl anderen juist minder vaak logen. Ook waren er ouders die hun kind strengere normen over liegen leerden dan uit hun eigen attitude en gedrag naar voren kwam. Zij konden een bepaalde leugen bijvoorbeeld relatief acceptabel vinden of die zelf vertellen, terwijl zij hun kind leerden dat zo'n leugen niet acceptabel was. Bij andere ouders zag ik juist het omgekeerde patroon: zij leerden hun kind dat bepaalde leugens acceptabel waren, terwijl zij die zelf minder acceptabel vonden of minder vaak vertelden.

Hoewel ik in **Hoofdstuk 4** liet zien dat discrepanties tussen wat ouders vinden van liegen, wat ze doen en wat ze hun kinderen leren bestaan, betekent dit niet automatisch dat ouders die discrepanties zelf ook herkennen en ervaren. In **Hoofdstuk 5** onderzocht ik daarom hetzelfde vraagstuk op een andere manier, door ouders rechtstreeks naar zulke discrepanties te vragen. In plaats van attitudes, gedrag en wat ouders hun kind leren afzonderlijk te meten, legde ik ouders korte, herkenbare opvoedsituaties voor waarin deze drie aspecten niet met elkaar overeenkwamen. Een voorbeeld was een ouder die zijn kind leert dat je niet mag liegen om het gedrag van iemand te beïnvloeden, terwijl hij zelf weleens tegen zijn kind liegt om diens gedrag te beïnvloeden. Vervolgens vroeg ik ouders of zij zulke verschillen ook bij zichzelf herkenden en, zo ja, hoe vaak die voorkwamen en hoe zij zich daarover voelden.

De resultaten uit **Hoofdstuk 4** en **5** laten zien dat discrepanties geen uitzondering zijn, maar bij vrijwel alle ouders voorkomen. In **Hoofdstuk 4** vond ik bij iedere ouder voor ten minste één type leugen een discrepantie tussen attitude, gedrag en wat zij hun kind hierover leerden. In **Hoofdstuk 5** herkende 96,6% van de ouders minstens één van de voorgelegde discrepanties in het eigen opvoedgedrag. Tegelijkertijd bleek dat specifieke discrepanties slechts af en toe voorkwamen; 22,4% van de ouders rapporteerde dat ten minste één discrepantie vaak of zeer vaak voorkwam. Ook hier blijkt dus het belang van het onderscheid tussen prevalentie en frequentie: discrepanties zijn wijdverspreid onder ouders, maar lijken voor de meeste ouders geen voortdurend of routinematig patroon in de opvoeding te vormen.

Ouders verschilden bovendien in hoe zij deze discrepanties ervoeren. Ongeveer een kwart tot de helft van de ouders die een discrepantie rapporteerden, gaf aan zich daar (enigszins) negatief over te voelen. De meeste ouders stonden er echter neutraal tegenover, en een kleine minderheid ervoer hun discrepanties als (enigszins) positief. Discrepanties verschillen daarmee niet alleen in hoe vaak ze voorkomen, maar ook in hoe ouders ze zelf beleven.

De resultaten uit **Hoofdstuk 5** laten daarnaast zien dat discrepanties niet willekeurig voorkomen. Discrepanties kwamen vaker voor bij leugens in het voordeel van de ouder zelf en bij leugens om gedrag te beïnvloeden dan bij leugens in het voordeel van het kind. Dit suggereert dat de mate waarin discrepanties voorkomen afhangt van het type leugen.

Een andere belangrijke bevinding was dat het antwoord op de vraag of ouders consistent zijn, afhangt van of je ouders onderling met elkaar vergelijkt, of het fenomeen binnen dezelfde ouder onderzoekt. Wanneer ik ouders met elkaar vergeleek, bleken ouders die positiever stonden tegenover een bepaald type leugen dat type ook vaker te gebruiken en hun kind sterker mee te geven dat zulke leugens acceptabel zijn. Wanneer ik daarentegen binnen dezelfde ouder keek naar de samenhang tussen attitude, lieggedrag en wat zij hun kinderen leren, bleek juist veel variatie te bestaan, met zowel overeenkomsten als discrepanties. Vergelijkingen tussen groepen ouders kunnen de mate van consistentie dus overschatten, omdat verschillen binnen individuele ouders daarbij buiten beeld blijven.

Wat betekenen de bevindingen van dit proefschrift?

De bevindingen uit dit proefschrift laten zien dat ouderlijk liegen niet kan worden teruggebracht tot één vorm van gedrag of één eenvoudige morele keuze. Ouders verschillen niet alleen in hoe vaak zij liegen, maar ook in de typen leugens die zij vertellen en in de mate van consistentie tussen wat zij van liegen vinden, wat zij zelf doen en wat zij hun kinderen hierover leren. Ouderlijk liegen blijkt daarmee een veelzijdig verschijnsel dat verweven is met het dagelijks opvoeden.

De resultaten laten bovendien zien dat ouderlijk liegen niet los kan worden gezien van de bredere context waarin het plaatsvindt. Ouders kunnen eerlijkheid belangrijk vinden en tegelijkertijd kiezen voor een leugen om hun kind te beschermen, gedrag te sturen of een lastige situatie op te lossen. De discrepanties die ik in dit proefschrift vond, hoeven daarom niet alleen te wijzen op het niet naleven van eigen overtuigingen, maar weerspiegelen mogelijk ook hoe ouders voortdurend concurrerende (opvoed)doelen tegen elkaar moeten afwegen.

Deze bevindingen onderstrepen ook het belang van een zorgvuldige manier van onderzoek doen. Wie ouderlijk liegen wil begrijpen, moet niet alleen kijken óf ouders liegen, maar ook hoe vaak zij dat doen, welk type leugen het betreft en hoe ouderlijk liegen op een betrouwbare manier gemeten en tussen verschillende groepen vergeleken kan worden. Daarnaast laten de resultaten zien dat het belangrijk is om niet alleen afzonderlijk te kijken naar wat ouders van liegen vinden, wat zij zelf doen of wat zij hun kinderen hierover leren, maar juist naar de samenhang tussen deze drie aspecten binnen dezelfde ouder.

Tegelijkertijd roepen deze bevindingen ook nieuwe vragen op voor vervolgonderzoek. Zo is nog onduidelijk welke gevolgen de frequentie en het type leugen hebben voor de ouder-kindrelatie en de ontwikkeling van het kind. Ook is nog weinig bekend over hoe kinderen

zelf discrepanties tussen wat ouders zeggen en doen waarnemen en interpreteren, of dit anders wordt naarmate kinderen ouder worden, en wat de mogelijke gevolgen van zulke discrepanties zijn voor de ouder-kindrelatie en de ontwikkeling van het kind. Daarnaast is onduidelijk of discrepanties bij ouders zelf veranderen naarmate hun kind ouder wordt, bijvoorbeeld doordat ouders hun communicatie over liegen aanpassen aan de ontwikkeling van hun kind. Tot slot verdient het aanbeveling om te onderzoeken hoe ouders met ervaren spanningen rondom het vertonen van discrepanties omgaan en welke mechanismen aan discrepanties ten grondslag liggen: ontstaan zij vooral in het moment, bijvoorbeeld door stress of tijdsdruk, of komen zij ook voort uit weloverwogen keuzes van ouders?

Conclusies

Dit proefschrift laat zien dat ouderlijk liegen een veelvoorkomend, maar veelzijdig onderdeel is van het dagelijks opvoeden. Door ouderlijk liegen systematisch in kaart te brengen en door voor het eerst te onderzoeken in hoeverre wat ouders van liegen vinden, wat zij zelf doen en wat zij hun kinderen hierover leren met elkaar overeenkomt, draagt dit proefschrift bij aan een beter begrip van ouderlijk liegen als onderdeel van de morele opvoeding.

De bevindingen laten zien dat opvoeden niet altijd draait om het consequent toepassen van één morele regel. Ouders kunnen eerlijkheid belangrijk vinden, maar tegelijkertijd andere opvoeddoelen nastreven, zoals hun kind beschermen, gedrag beïnvloeden of lastige situaties vermijden. De discrepanties tussen wat ouders van liegen vinden, wat zij doen en wat zij hun kinderen leren, hangen mogelijk samen met zulke soms tegenstrijdige opvoeddoelen.

Juist omdat liegen zo verweven is met het dagelijks opvoeden, verdient het wetenschappelijke aandacht, niet alleen als afwijking van een morele norm, maar als een alledaags onderdeel van de complexe praktijk van opvoeden.

The Parental Lying Scenarios Scale (PLSS)

Introduction text:

Lying is often seen as something negative, but almost everyone does it at times, even to their own child. As a parent, there are various reasons why you might lie. In this questionnaire, we are looking at situations where parents choose to tell a little lie. This questionnaire is not meant to judge but to understand the types of lies parents sometimes tell. For each question, please think about how often you have told such a lie to your child in the past month.

Tick the appropriate box to indicate your answer.

In the past month, how often have you...

1. …lied to your child about what will happen if they didn't finish his/her food? For example, "finish all your food or you'll grow up to be short".
2. …lied to your child about what will happen if he/she eats a specific food? For example, "if you swallow a watermelon seed, it will grow into a watermelon in your stomach".
3. … lied to your child to stop him/her from wanting to eat a certain food? For example, "there's no more candy in the house" (even though there really is candy in the house).
4. …lied to your child to encourage him/her to eat a certain food? For example, "if you eat all your carrots, you will develop night-vision".
5. …threatened to leave your child behind if they don't follow you? For example, "if you don't come with me now, I will leave you here by yourself" (when you have no intention of leaving him/her).
6. …lied to your child to get him/her to stay in a certain place (e.g., daycare/school)? For example, "I will be in the next room if you need me" (when you will not be there).
7. …lied to your child about leaving him/her with someone else (e.g., babysitter) so that he/she wouldn't get upset? For example, "I'll be back soon" (when you know you will be away for several hours or all night).
8. …threatened to getting rid of your child's belongings if he/she doesn't stop misbehaving? For example, "if you do not behave I will throw your [favorite toy] in the garbage" (when you have no intentions of doing so).
9. …threatened to send your child away if he/she keeps misbehaving? For example, "if you keep misbehaving I will send you to live with grandma" (when you have no intentions of doing so).
10. … claimed that someone would try and take your child away if your child did not behave? For example, "if you don't behave then the police or child and family services will take you away" (when you have no intentions of doing so).
11. …lied to your child about the consequences of lying? For example, "if you tell a lie, your nose will grow longer".

12. …lied to your child in order to prevent him/her from lying? For example, “I know everything and I can always tell when you are lying”.
13. …lied to your child to stop/prevent him/her from being scared? For example, “thunder is just the angels bowling”.
14. … lied to your child to get him/her to take their medicine? For example, “take your medicine, it tastes good” (when the medicine actually tastes bad).
15. ……lied to your child to make him/her feel good/better about themselves? For example, “It’s ok, no one saw it happen” (after the child did something embarrassing in front of people).
16. …lied to your child to encourage him/her to keep trying something? For example, “you did a great job at your piano recital (when the child did not perform at their best).
17. …lied to your child to stop/prevent him/her from being upset about their actions? For example, “It’s not your fault that the plate broke, it broke because it was too old” (after he/she accidentally dropped and broke a plate).
18. …lied to your child to get him/her to stop doing something that annoys you, but is harmless? For example, “they don’t make replacement batteries for that (annoying) toy”.
19 ...lied to your child about why he/she can’t do a certain activity? For example, “we don’t have enough time to play” (when your child wants to lay in de playground but you don’t want to wait for them).
20. …lied to your child when he/she asked about a sensitive topic, so you didn’t have to talk to him/her about it (e.g., where do babies come from)?
21. …lied to your child to hide that you don’t know the answer to his/her question?
22. …lied to your child to get him/her do their chores? For example, “if you do not clean up your toys I will donate them to charity” (when have no intention donating the toys).
23. ...lied to your child so you didn’t have to buy him/her something? For example, “we don’t have time to buy [the item] right now, we will come back to buy it another time” (when you have no intention of doing so).
24. ...lied to your child so him/her didn’t find out you cannot afford to buy him/her something? For example, “I did not bring money with me today, we can come back another day” (when you know you won’t be able to afford the item).
25. …lied to your child by giving an exaggerated or untrue compliment about their appearance to make them feel good? For example, by saying that you like your child’s clothing choice, while you actually do not.
26. ...lied to your child about other people doing something of your child does not comply? For example: “If you don’t listen, the teacher will get angry” or “If you don’t listen, Santa Claus will not bring any presents”.
27. ...lied to your child by claiming that you will take away something that you know your child wants if your child does not comply? For example: “If you don’t listen, you may not watch TV/iPad” or “If you don’t listen, you won’t get dessert after dinner.”

28. …lied to your child about the danger of an activity or behavior to prevent your child from doing it? For example, by saying that your child may become hurt, injured, or seriously ill as a result, while you know that this is not true.
29. ...lied to your child about how long something will take to prevent discussions or nagging with your child? For example: “It is already bedtime” or “We are almost home.”
30. …lied to your child about what you and your children are going to eat or what is in the food in order to avoid discussions or nagging with your child? For example: “There are no vegetables in the food” (while you know that there are).
31. …lied to your child by promising that your child will receive a reward if your child complies, while you knew that your child would not receive that reward? For example: “If you tidy up your things, you will get an ice cream.”
32. …lied to your child or withheld information about family events because you believe that your child is not yet ready for them? For example, about illness or death of family members or marital or family conflicts.
33. …lied to your child or withheld information about difficult topics from the outside world because you believe that your child is not yet ready for them? For example, about war or about the climate.
34. …lied to your child or withheld information about your own behavior in the present or past that you are not proud of, in order to prevent your child from getting a negative impression of you as a parent or becoming disappointed in you? For example, about smoking, alcohol or drug use, skipping school/school dropout, or infidelity.
35. …lied to your child or withheld information about your opinion of someone else to prevent your child from getting a negative impression of you as a parent or becoming disappointed in you? For example about what you think of your child’s friends, neighbors, or teacher.
36. …lied to your child that something is not possible because you yourself have a different preference, but you do not want your child to get a negative impression of you as a parent or become disappointed in you? For example: “The playground is already closed” (while you actually do not feel like going or want time for yourself).
37. …lied to your child about something you have done in order to prevent your child from getting a negative impression of you as a parent or becoming disappointed in you? For example: “I lost your craft project” (while you actually threw it away).
38. …lied to your child or withheld information about financial matters to protect your privacy? For example about your PIN code, the amount of your salary, or your savings account.
39. …lied to your child or withheld information about someone else to protect that person’s privacy? For example because you believe it is not your place to share information about someone’s new partner, pregnancy, or separation.
40. …lied to your child about fantasy (figures) with the aim of encouraging or maintaining

belief in them? Such as about Sinterklaas, Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, or the Tooth Fairy, or by attributing characteristics, emotions, or behavior to things, for example: "The teddy bear is happy."

Response scale: 0 = 0 times, 1 = 1–2 times, 2 = 3 times or more.

Disclaimer: Items 25–40 are direct translations of the original Dutch items. They are provided for informative and illustrative purposes only. The translations aim to preserve meaning and structure, and therefore the wording may not reflect natural or fully idiomatic English.

Note: Items 1–24 were originally developed in English by Jackson et al. (2021b). Items 25–40 correspond to the Dutch items developed by Lucieer et al. (2025a).

Parental Lying Discrepancy Scenarios

Other-oriented lying

The following questions concern lying for the benefit of another person. By this, we mean lying in order to be polite. We also mean lying to protect another person from harm or from negative feelings, behaviors, or experiences.

For example:

- You tell your child that an outfit looks nice, even though you do not think so.
- You tell your child that you like the newest song by their favorite band, even though you do not.
- You tell your child that they did a very good job on a task, even though it was average.
- You tell your child that they can sing well, even though it actually sounds off-key.

Scenario 1

Sometimes we **do** things that we **believe** we should not do.

For example, when you lie to your child, even though you believe that you should not do so. Example: *Igor (father) and his son Mitchel are at home together. Mitchel sings a song and asks, "Can I sing well, Dad?" Even though Mitchel's singing is very off-key, Igor says that Mitchel sings beautifully in order to protect his feelings. In fact, Igor believes that he should not lie to Mitchel about this*. **Igor has lied to his child, even though he believes that he should not do so.**

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you lie to your child even though you believe that you should not do so?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Scenario 2

Sometimes we **do** things that we **believe** we should not do.

For example, when you tell the truth to your child, even though you believe that you should not do so.

Example: *Christina (mother) and her son Don are at home together. Don sings a song and asks, "Can I sing well, Mom?" Don's singing is very off-key. Christina tells Don the truth. In fact, Christina believes that in such situations she is allowed to lie to Don in order to protect his feelings.* **Christina has told the truth to her child, even though she believes that she could have lied.**

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you tell the truth to your child even though you believe that you should not do so?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Scenario 3

Sometimes we **set rules** for others that do not correspond to what we actually **believe**. Example: *Maryam (mother) and her son Matias are at home together. Matias tells his mother that his friend is singing and then asks, "Do you think it sounds nice?" Matias thinks that it sounds off-key. Maryam teaches Matias that in such situations, you should not lie. However, Maryam actually believes that in such situations, it is acceptable to lie*. **Maryam teaches her child that he should not lie for the benefit of another person, even though she believes that this is acceptable**.

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you teach your child that they should not lie even though you believe that this is acceptable?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Scenario 4

Sometimes we **set rules** for others that do not correspond to what we actually **believe**. Example: *Ties (father) and his daughter Sara are at home together. Sara tells her father that her friend is singing and then asks, "Do you think it sounds nice?" Sara thinks that it sounds off-key. Ties teaches Sara that in such situations, it is okay to lie in order to protect another person's feelings. However, Ties actually believes that such lies should not be used*. **Ties teaches his child that lying is acceptable, even though he believes that it is not**.

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you teach your child that lying is acceptable even though you believe that it is not?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Scenario 5

Sometimes we **set rules** for others that do not correspond to what we ourselves **do**. Example: *Josiah (father) and his son Amir are at home together. Amir tells his father that his friend is singing and then asks, "Do you think it sounds nice?" Amir thinks that it sounds offkey. Josiah teaches Amir that in such situations, you should not lie. However, Josiah himself does tell such lies to Amir in order to protect Amir's feelings*. **Josiah teaches his child that lying is not allowed, even though he does it himself**.

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you teach your child that lying is not allowed even though you do it yourself?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Scenario 6

Sometimes we **set rules** for others that do not correspond to what we ourselves **do**. Example: *Fred (father) and his son Mees are at home together. Mees tells his father that his friend is singing and then asks, "Do you think it sounds nice?" Mees thinks that it sounds offkey. Fred teaches Mees that in such situations, it is okay to lie in order to protect another person's feelings. However, Fred himself does not tell such lies to Mees*. **Fred teaches his child that lying is acceptable, even though he does not do this himself**.

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you teach your child that lying is acceptable even though you do not do this yourself?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Instrumental lying

The following questions concern what you think, what you do, and what you teach your children about lying to influence another person's behavior. By this, we mean lying in order to avoid a particular situation. We also mean lying to encourage or pressure someone to behave differently. These types of lies often make life easier for the person telling them. For example, they may help to prevent conflict.

Examples

- You tell your child, who always takes a long time to get ready, that an appointment starts earlier than it actually does.
- You tell your child that their favorite shirt is in the wash, even though you simply do not want them to wear it.
- You tell your child that there are no cookies left, even though you know there are still some in the cupboard.

Scenario 7

Sometimes we **do** things that we **believe** we should not do.

For example, when you lie to your child, even though you believe that you should not do so. Example: *Igor (father) and his son Mitchel are at home together. Mitchel, who has just had two cookies, asks if he may have another one. Igor says that the cookies are finished (even though he knows there are still cookies left) in order to avoid an argument and complaining*

from Mitchel. In fact, Igor believes that he should not lie about this to Mitchel. **Igor has lied to his child, even though he believes that he should not do so**.

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you lie to your child even though you believe that you should not do so?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Scenario 8

Sometimes we **do** things that we **believe** we should not do.

For example, when you tell the truth to your child, even though you believe that you should not do so.

Example: *Christina (mother) and her son Don are at home together. Don has just had two cookies and asks if he may have another one. Christina tells Don that he has already eaten enough and is therefore not allowed another cookie, which leads to a substantial argument between Christina and Don. In fact, Christina believes that in such situations she is allowed to lie to Don in order to avoid arguments and complaining*. **Christina has told the truth to her child, even though she believes that she could have lied**.

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you tell the truth to your child even though you believe that you should not do so?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Scenario 9

Sometimes we **set rules** for others that do not correspond to what we actually **believe**. Example: *Maryam (mother) and her son Matias are at home together. Matias tells his mother that he told his friend that his favorite toy is lost, even though he simply does not want his friend to play with it. Maryam teaches Matias that in such situations, you should not lie. However, Maryam actually believes that in such situations, it is acceptable to lie*. **Maryam teaches her child that he should not lie, even though she believes that this is acceptable**.

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you teach your child that they should not lie even though you believe that this is acceptable?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Scenario 10

Sometimes we **set rules** for others that do not correspond to what we actually **believe**. Example: *Ties (father) and his daughter Sara are at home together. Sara tells her father that she told her friend that her favorite toy is lost, even though she simply does not want her friend to play with it. Ties teaches Sara that in such situations, it is okay to lie in order to avoid arguments and complaining. However, Ties actually believes that such lies should not be used*. **Ties teaches his child that lying is acceptable, even though he believes that it is not**.

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you teach your child that lying is acceptable even though you believe that it is not?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Scenario 11

Sometimes we **set rules** for others that do not correspond to what we ourselves **do**. Example: *Josiah (father) and his son Amir are at home together. Amir tells his father that he told his friend that his favorite toy is lost, even though he simply does not want his friend to play with it. Josiah teaches Amir that in such situations, you should not lie. However, Josiah himself does tell such lies to Amir in order to avoid arguments and complaining*. **Josiah teaches his child that lying is not allowed, even though he does it himself**.

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you teach your child that lying is not allowed even though you do it yourself?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Scenario 12

Sometimes we **set rules** for others that do not correspond to what we ourselves **do**. Example: *Fred (father) and his son Mees are at home together. Mees tells his father that he told his friend that his favorite toy is lost, even though he simply does not want his friend to play with it. Fred teaches Mees that in such situations, it is okay to lie in order to avoid arguments and complaining. However, Fred himself does not tell such lies to Mees*. **Fred teaches his child that lying is acceptable, even though he does not do this himself**.

How often do you personally experience a situation like this, in which you teach your child that lying is acceptable even though you do not do this yourself?

0	1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

How do you feel about this situation?

0	1	2	3	4
Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neutral	Pleasant	Very pleasant

Disclaimer: The scenario items are direct translations of the original Dutch items. They are provided for informational and illustrative purposes only. The translations aim to preserve the original meaning and structure; therefore, the wording may not always reflect natural or fully idiomatic English.

Curriculum Vitae



Ines Lucieer was born in Voorburg, the Netherlands, on 25 July 1996. After starting her studies in Pedagogy at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, she continued at Erasmus University Rotterdam, where she obtained her bachelor's degree in Pedagogical Sciences in 2020 and her master's degree in Pedagogical Sciences (Orthopedagogiek) in 2022. During her master's degree, she developed a strong interest in scientific research, which led her to complete two research internships at Erasmus MC, where she contributed to the *Grow It!* and *MARIO* projects.

In March 2022, she started as a PhD candidate at the Youth & Family research group in the Department of Psychology, Education and Child Studies (DPECS) at Erasmus University Rotterdam, within the ERC-funded Fami-LIES project. Throughout her PhD trajectory, Ines has been strongly committed to advancing the emerging field of parental lying research. Her work includes the development of two research instruments, contributions to the conceptualization and measurement of parental lying, and the introduction of a novel research niche focusing on discrepancies between parental attitudes, behavior, and teaching. During her PhD, she collaborated with international colleagues, including collaborations with dr. Katherine Warnell and dr. Jennifer Clegg (Texas State University), resulting in a cross-national dataset and two publications. In addition, she has been actively involved in a large international lying consortium, comprising researchers from eleven countries and coordinated by an international team including dr. Laura Visu-Petra, Narcisa Prodan, dr. Victoria Talwar, dr. Guilherme Wendt, and dr. Marta Bialecka. This collaboration has resulted in large-scale data collection across eleven countries and has laid the groundwork for future cross-cultural studies.

Ines strongly values rigorous and transparent research practices; all studies conducted during her PhD have been preregistered as part of her commitment to open science.

Alongside her research, Ines has contributed to teaching and supervision within the Bachelor's and master's programs in Pedagogical Sciences. She has supervised Bachelor's and master's theses, external and internal internships, and contributed as a lecturer in quantitative research methods.

In addition, she has contributed to the academic community through the organization of research events, including two editions of the VNOP-CAS Research Days, a national conference organized by the Dutch Association of Developmental Psychology (VNOP), and the Graduate Research Day at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Since June 2026, Ines has been working as a postdoctoral researcher at Erasmus University Rotterdam within the Samen Opgroeien project. In this project, she studies how parents can best be supported in everyday parenting, with specific attention to parents' current needs, which forms of support they experience as helpful, and which aspects of support may increase or reduce stress.

In close collaboration with parents, she contributes to the co-creation of tools aimed at accessible and effective parenting support.

Ines's ambition is to contribute to research that takes everyday parenting questions seriously. Questions that may seem small, such as how parents navigate lying to their children in everyday life, can be highly meaningful to families. By studying common parenting challenges and translating findings into practical support, she hopes to make a meaningful difference for parents and children.

Publications and Manuscripts

Articles in this dissertation

Lucieer, I. C., Weeland, J., de Moor, M. H. M, Clegg, J. M., Warnell, K. R., Lucassen, N., & Kok, R. (2026). Parental lying in the Netherlands and the United States: Shifting perspectives on prevalence, frequency, lie types, and cross-country comparisons. [*Chapter 2* - *Preprint*]

Lucieer, I.C., Lucassen, N., Slob, E. A. W., Weeland, J., & Kok, R. (2025). Psychometric properties of the Parental Lying Scenarios Scale (PLSS): Test-retest reliability, validity, and factor structure. [*Chapter 3* - *Preprint*]

Lucieer, I., Roza, E., Lucassen, N., Bocanegra, B., Clegg, J., Warnell, K., Weeland, J., & Kok, R. (2026). Practice what you preach? Exploring parental attitudes, behaviors, and teaching about lying. *Self and Identity*, *25*(3), 393–418. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2025.2608370 [*Chapter 4*]

Lucieer, I. C., Weeland, J., Lucassen, N., & Kok, R. (2026). Lying discrepancies in parenting: when beliefs, actions, and lessons diverge. [*Chapter 5* - Preprint].

Articles outside of this dissertation

Kok, R., Schröer, L., Roza, E., **Lucieer, I.**, & van der Horst, F. (2025). The honest truth about lying parents: A qualitative study and taxonomy of parental lying. *Journal of Moral Education*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2025.2509112

Kok, R., Schröer, L., **Lucieer, I. C.**, Clegg, J., & Warnell, K. R. (2025). Parental lying and parental control. [Preprint]

Roza, E. C. A., **Lucieer, I. C.**, van deBongardt, D., Luijk, M. P. C. M., & Kok, R. (2024). Parental lying to children: A systematic review. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 16*(4), 804–833. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12592

Conference Contributions

2026 **Lucieer, I.C.,** Lucassen, N., Weeland, J., dr., & Kok, R. (2026). Do Parents Practice What They Preach? Alignment and Discrepancy in the Socialization of Lying (symposium). Fami-LIES conference, March 2026.

2025 **Lucieer, I. C.**, Lucassen, N., Weeland, J., dr., & Kok, R. (2025) Psychometric Properties of the Parental Lying Scenarios Scale (PLSS) (symposium). Decepticon, online, December 2025.

Lucieer, I. C., Weeland, J., de Moor, M., Clegg, J. M., Warnell, K. R., Lucassen, N., & Kok, R. Parental Lying in the Netherlands and United States: Shifting Perspectives on Prevalence, Frequency, Lie Types, and Cross-Country Comparisons (symposium). Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Biennial Meeting 2025, Minneapolis, USA, May 1-3, 2025.

2024 **Lucieer, I. C.**, Roza, E. C. A., Lucassen, N., Bocanegra, B., Warnell, K. R., Clegg, J., Weeland, J., & Kok, R. (2024). Practice What You Preach? Exploring Parental Lying Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching (poster). International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD), Lisbon, Portugal, June 16-20, 2024.

Lucieer, I. C., Roza, E. C. A., Lucassen, N., Bocanegra, B., Warnell, K. R., Clegg, J., Weeland, J., & Kok, R. (2024). Practice What You Preach? Exploring Parental Lying Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching (poster). Dutch Society for Developmental Psychology (VNOP) Conference, Tilburg, the Netherlands, 30-31 May 2024.

2023 **Lucieer, I. C.**, Roza, E. C. A., Lucassen, N., Bocanegra, B., Warnell, K. R., Clegg, J., Weeland, J., & Kok, R. (2024). Practice What You Preach? Exploring Parental Lying Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching (poster). VNOP-CAS Research Days, Utrecht, the Netherlands, November 16-17, 2023.

	Lucieer, I. C., Roza, E. C. A., Lucassen, N., Bocanegra, B., Warnell, K. R., Clegg, J., Weeland, J., & Kok, R. (2024). Practice What You Preach? Exploring Parental Lying Attitudes, Behaviors, and Teaching (poster). Graduate Research Day Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 20 April 2023.
	Lucieer, I. C., Roza, E. C. A., Lucassen, Warnell, K. R., Clegg, J., Weeland, J., & Kok, R. (2024). Research project (Dutch data & US data) (poster). Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Biennial Meeting 2023, Salt Lake City, USA, March 23-25, 2023
2022	**Lucieer, I. C.**, Lucassen, N., Weeland, J., Kok. R. Research project (pitch). Graduate Research Day Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 23 June 2022.

Research Experience

2022-2026	**PhD-Candidate,** Youth & Family, the Department of Psychology, Education and Child Studies (DPECS), Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Research Project: Fami-LIES Supervision: dr. Rianne Kok, prof. dr. Nicole Lucassen, dr. Joyce Weeland
2021-2022	**Research and Thesis Intern,** Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry/Psychology, Erasmus MC, the Netherlands. Research Project: Mario
2023	**Research Intern**, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry/Psychology, Erasmus MC, the Netherlands. Research Project: Grow it!

Education

2020-2022	**Master's Degree in Pedagogical Sciences (Orthopedagogiek),** Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands (thesis grade: 9.5/10; average grade: 8.2/10).
2016-2020	**Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogical Sciences**, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands.
2015-2016	**Propaedeutic Year in Pedagogy**, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands.

Teaching experience

2022-2025	**Thesis Supervision, Pedagogical Sciences**, Erasmus University Rotterdam (supervised 4 master's and 8 bachelor's students). **Internship Supervision, Pedagogical Sciences,** Erasmus University Rotterdam (supervised 11 bachelor's students).
2023-2025	**Internship Supervision, Fami-LIES Research Project**, Erasmus University Rotterdam (provided daily supervision to 2 master's and 5 bachelor's students). **Q&A Sessions: Pursuing a PhD (Bachelor and Master),** Erasmus University Rotterdam
2024	**Lecturer, Course "Quantitative Learning Research" (Bachelor)**, Erasmus University Rotterdam (taught 18 tutorial sessions for groups of 20-30 students). **Assessment, Course "Parenting Advice Consultations" (Bachelor),** Erasmus University Rotterdam
2023	**Guest lecture: Pursuing a PhD (Bachelor)**, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Courses and Training

ECTS-bearing courses were completed trough the Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities (EGSH).

2025	Research grants: Opportunities and Core Skills (1.5 ECTS)
	Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (2.5 ECTS)
2024	Prepare Your Publication Package (1 ECTS)
	Open Science and Research Transparency (2.5 ECTS)
	Making an Academic Poster (1.5 ECTS)
2023	Searching and Managing Your Literature (1 ECTS)
	Survey Design (1.5 ECTS)
	How to Manage Your PhD Project (1 ECTS)
	Making the Most of Your PhD (workshop)

2022	English Academic Writing (4 ECTS) Professionalism and Integrity in Research (1.5 ECTS) Science Communication (workshop) Building an academic cv (workshop) What to do outside of academia (workshop, Graduate Research Day) How to Pitch Your Idea (workshop) Academic Writing in English (workshop) How Can Research Data Management Help You Practice Open Science? (workshop)

Academic Service

Panel member during the national research assessment of the Department of Psychology, Education and Child Studies (DPECS), Erasmus University Rotterdam

PhD representative, organizing committee of the VNOP-CAS Research Days (two editions), Dutch Association of Developmental Psychology (VNOP)

Organizing committee member, national lab visit, Dutch Association of Developmental Psychology (VNOP)

Organizing committee member, Graduate Research Day, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Outreach Activities

Newsletters, social media, and website content for the Fami-LIES project: https://fami-lies.eu

Organized and presented the activity Who is the Biggest Pinocchio? Parents or Children? during the Weekend van de Wetenschap at Erasmus University Rotterdam: https://weekendvandewetenschap.nl/

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