(Dis)honesty in individual and collaborative settings
A behavioral ethics approach
Leib, M.

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Summary
At time, people have to choose between being honest or profitable but dishonest. In such ethically challenging situations, many factors affect peoples’ (dis)honesty. This dissertation tests several key factors that shape (dis)honesty. The first two empirical chapters focused on individual settings, where people act alone and affect their own (chapter 2) or others’ (chapter 3) financial profits. Chapters 4 and 5 focused on collaborative settings, where people can coordinate on joint dishonest acts and secure mutual pay.

Chapter 2 examined how framing financial incentives as potential gains versus losses affects self-serving mistakes, which is a subtle type of dishonesty. In two experiments, participants made twice as many self-serving mistakes to avoid losses than to secure equal-sized gains. Tracking participants’ eye movements provided insights into the attentional process underlying self-serving mistakes. Results revealed that both in gain and loss framing, tempting information attracts more attention than non-tempting information, shaping self-serving mistakes. Tempting information drew attention to the same extent in loss and gain framing. The same attention to tempting information, however, translated to more self-serving mistakes in loss than in gain framing. Results thus suggest the higher use of such tempting information, and not the higher attention to tempting information, leads to more self-serving mistakes when incentives are framed as losses versus gains.

Chapter 3 tested how prior (un)fair treatment affects other-helping and harming lies. Across three experiments, participants were treated unfairly, fairly, or not at all. Participants then could lie to help or harm others. Overall, lies aimed at helping others were common. A rather large proportion of participants lied to help others, when they were treated fairly, unfairly, or not at all. Lies aimed at harming others, however, were much less common. Only a small proportion of participants, after experiencing unfair treatment, lied to harm others. The source of (un)fairness—whether intentional or not—did not affect participants’ lies, suggesting the mere (un)fair treatment, and not the motivation to reciprocate (un)fair gestures, drove participants’ lies.

Chapters 4 and 5 focused on collaborative settings in which participants could coordinate on mutual lies to secure joint gains. In such settings, two moral obligations—to be honest and collaborative—clash. Chapter 4 tested how people choose their partners in such collaborative settings, and how the ability (vs. inability) to choose partners affects collaborative dishonesty. Both dishonest and honest participants exploited the freedom to choose a partner. Naturally, dishonest participants sought a dishonest partner—a “partner in crime”—that would help them maximize profits. Honest participants engaged in “ethical free
riding”: they refrained from lying themselves, but also from leaving dishonest partners. As such, honest participants benefited from both worlds—they maintained their moral self-image, while financially profiting from their partner’s lies. Additional results revealed that the ability to select partners (vs. forcing partner switching) increased the contagiousness and efficiency of lies.

Lastly, chapter 5 presented the first meta-study on (dis)honesty in collaborative settings, analyzing 51,640 decisions, made by 3,264 participants across 43 conditions. Results revealed that in collaborative settings, partners’ lies are correlated—if one lies, the other is more likely to lie as well. Further, lies increase as the task progresses, and as the financial incentive to lie increases. Finally, compared to equivalent individual settings, people lie more in collaborative setting. Chapter 5 further outlined intriguing directions for future research on collaborative dishonesty.

Conclusions

Many factors shape the decision to be honest or lie for profit. This dissertation focuses on several key factors, both in individual and collaborative settings. Further, this dissertation aims to shed light on the social aspect of (dis)honesty and shift attention from (dis)honesty in individual settings toward collaborative settings. With many important decisions made by groups rather than single individuals, understanding how collaboration shapes our honesty is both interesting and important. I hope the insights obtained here will help open many interesting directions for future research, focusing especially on the social elements shaping (dis)honesty and ethical decision-making.
Dutch summary
Er zijn momenten waarop mensen moeten kiezen tussen eerlijk zijn of profiteren door oneerlijk te zijn. In dit soort ethisch uitdagende situaties spelen veel factoren een rol in de (on)eerlijkheid van mensen. In dit proefschrift worden verscheidene sleutelfactoren die eerlijkheid beïnvloeden, getest. De eerste twee empirische hoofdstukken waren gericht op individuele situaties, waarin mensen in hun eentje beslissingen nemen die hun eigen verdiensten (hoofdstuk 2) of de verdiensten van anderen (hoofdstuk 3) beïnvloeden. De hoofdstukken 4 en 5 waren gericht op een samenwerkingsomgeving, waarin mensen gezamenlijk oneerlijke keuzes kunnen maken en daar samen van profiteren.

In hoofdstuk 2 lag de focus op het 'framen' van financiële prikkels als potentiele winsten of potentiele verliezen en hoe dit het maken van fouten uit eigenbelang, een subtiele vorm van oneerlijkheid, beïnvloed. In twee experimenten maakten deelnemers twee keer zoveel van dit soort fouten om verliezen te voorkomen als voor een winst van dezelfde omvang. Het volgen van de oogbewegingen van de deelnemers gaf inzicht in het aandachtsproces dat ten grondslag ligt aan het maken van fouten uit eigenbelang. Interessante informatie trok evenveel aandacht in verlies- en winst situaties. Echter, dezelfde aandacht voor interessante informatie vertaalde zich in meer fouten uit eigenbelang in verlies situaties dan in winst situaties. Deze resultaten suggereren daarom dat meer gebruik van deze informatie, en niet meer aandacht voor deze informatie, tot meer fouten uit eigenbelang leidt wanneer de financiële prikkel als een verlies wordt 'geframed'.

In hoofdstuk 3 werd getest hoe eerdere (on)eerlijke behandeling invloed heeft op leugens die anderen helpen of schaden. In drie experimenten kregen deelnemers van tevoren een eerlijke, oneerlijke, of geen behandeling. Vervolgens konden ze liegen om anderen te helpen of te schaden. Over het geheel genomen kwamen leugens om anderen te helpen veel voor. Een groot deel van de deelnemers loog om anderen te helpen, nadat ze eerlijk, oneerlijk, of helemaal niet waren behandeld. Leugens om anderen te schaden kwamen daarentegen veel minder vaak voor. Slechts een klein deel van de deelnemers loog, na oneerlijk te zijn behandeld, om anderen te schaden. De bron van de (on)eerlijkheid - of deze opzettelijk was of niet - had geen invloed op de leugens van de deelnemers, wat suggereert dat de oneerlijke behandeling zelf, en niet de motivatie om (on)eerlijk gedrag te beantwoorden de deelnemers tot leugens aanzette.

De hoofdstukken 4 en 5 waren gericht op een samenwerkingsomgeving, waarin deelnemers konden coördineren op leugens voor gezamenlijk profijt. In zo'n omgeving komen twee morele verplichtingen - eerlijk zijn en samenwerken - met elkaar in botsing. In hoofdstuk 4 werd getest hoe mensen hun partners kiezen in een dergelijke omgeving, en hoe de mogelijkheid (of onmogelijkheid) om een partner te kiezen gezamenlijke oneerlijkheid beïnvloed. Zowel oneerlijke als eerlijke deelnemers maakten gebruik van de mogelijkheden om een partner te kiezen. Het mag geen verrassing zijn dat oneerlijke deelnemers een oneerlijke partner - een "partner in crime" - zochten, die hen zou helpen met zoveel mogelijk geld verdienen. Eerlijke deelnemers maakten gebruik van "ethisch
meelitten”: ze logen zelf niet, maar ondernamen ook geen actie om hun oneerlijke partners te verlaten. Op deze manier aten de eerlijke deelnemers van twee walletjes - ze hielden hun morele zelfbeeld in stand, terwijl ze ook financieel profiteerden door de leugens van hun partner. Overige resultaten lieten zien dat de mogelijkheid om een partner te kiezen (t.o.v. gedwongen partnerwissels) de verspreiding en efficiëntie van leugens deed toenemen.

Tot slot werd in een hoofdstuk 5 een meta-studie gepresenteerd over (on)eerlijkheid in samenwerkingsomgevingen, waarin 51640 beslissingen door 3264 deelnemers in 43 verschillende situaties werden geanalyseerd. De resultaten lieten zien dat er in samenwerkingsomgevingen een correlatie bestond tussen de leugens van partners - als de een liegt, is de kans groter dat de ander ook liegt. Daarnaast nam het aantal leugens toe naarmate de taak vorderde, en als de financiële prikkel om te liegen groter werd. Ten slotte, vergeleken met een equivalente individuele omgeving, logen mensen meer in een samenwerkingsomgeving. In hoofdstuk 5 werden ook intrigende richtingen voor verder onderzoek naar gezamenlijke oneerlijkheid geschetst.

**Conclusie**

Er zijn veel factoren die invloed hebben op de beslissing om eerlijk te zijn of te liegen voor financieel gewin. Dit proefschrift focust op verscheidene sleutelfactoren, zowel in individuele als in samenwerkingsomgevingen. Daarnaast is het doel van dit proefschrift om nieuw licht te werpen op het sociale aspect van (on)eerlijkheid en om de aandacht te verschuiven van (on)eerlijkheid in individuele omgevingen naar samenwerkingsomgevingen. Omdat zoveel belangrijke beslissingen worden genomen door groepen in plaats van individuen, is het zowel interessant als belangrijk om te begrijpen hoe samenwerking eerlijkheid beïnvloed. Ik hoop dat de inzichten die hiermee verkregen worden de deur zullen openen naar veel interessante richtingen voor vervolgonderzoek, met name op het gebied van de invloed van sociale elementen op (on)eerlijkheid en ethische besluitvorming.
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