

Lying and cheating easier if you don't have to make an effort: study

BY REBECCA LINDELL, POSTMEDIA NEWS NOVEMBER 25, 2010

You're more likely to lie, cheat and behave badly if it is doesn't involve a lot of work, according to new research out of the University of Toronto.

"People are more likely to cheat and make immoral decisions when their transgressions don't involve an explicit action," says Rimma Teper, PhD student and lead author on the study. "If they can lie by omission, cheat without doing much legwork, or bypass a person's request for help without expressly denying them, they are much more likely to do so."

Teper made the discovery in two experiments that measured people's willingness to cheat and to refuse help to someone in need. The results were published yesterday in the academic journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

In the first test, 84 participants were told to take a math test after being warned there was a glitch in the system. Half of them were told that if they pressed a space bar, the answer would appear. The others were told that if they did not press the enter key right away, the answer would appear.

Very few people cheated in either group, but those who could just wait for the answer to appear cheated an average of 1.5 times out of 15. Those who had to click the space bar cheated an average of 0.18 times.

Teper said the difference is in the action. People in the first group have to intentionally cheat, while those in the second group can claim that they didn't do anything to make the answer appear, making the transgression easier to swallow, she said.

The results were similar in the second experiment, which tested people's willingness to volunteer by asking them to help a student with a learning disability complete the test. People who were asked to follow a link to volunteer were five times less likely to help than those that had to click a 'yes' or 'no' box.

"The emotions associated with pushing 'no' are probably a little more intense than the emotions associated with clicking 'continue.' You don't feel like you are doing anything explicitly wrong when you are clicking 'continue,'" Teper said.

The researchers hope the studies have practical applications for charities and volunteer organizations looking to recruit people and solicit donations.

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