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Pure Sex, Pure Love

Is Lying a Way of Life for Women?

By Dr. Christine B. Whelan

For three months I lied to my husband. I snuck around behind his back and I emailed and talked on the phone with first one—then up to a dozen—different men. I had more than 200 emails secreted away in a folder. When my husband would come into the room, I'd snap my computer shut, or click on a different screen quickly, so he wouldn't see what I was doing. By the end, nearly every other sentence I uttered was a lie. And even though I was so nervous and jittery, my husband didn't suspect a thing.

Are you horrified? You should be. Except...

All this was part of the planning for my husband's surprise 30th birthday party in Las Vegas last month: When we walked into a Vegas nightclub, 10 of his fraternity brothers and their spouses jumped up and yelled, "surprise!"

Those men, of course, were his best friends. And all those emails were to plan a weekend celebration he says was the nicest thing anyone has ever done for him.

How Easy

Still, to pull this off, I had to lie. I had to lie for months. I had to do it convincingly. It's sort of scary how easy it was.

According to her new book, *Little White Lies, Deep Dark Secrets*, author Susan Shapiro Barash wouldn't be surprised that I pulled it off: She argues that lying is a way of life for women.

A man lies as a quick fix, claims Barash, while a woman carefully guards her secrets to create opportunities, keep friends and preserve family harmony. Indeed, lies and deceptions are integral part of the public persona women show to the world. “For the majority of women, the hard work of the lie is the payoff—as long as we pretend to be good girls, cleverly covering our tracks,” she writes.

But why? “Are women afraid to appear as we actually are in our overextended lives?” asks Barash. White lies—to help us get through the day with a bit less stress—should become less frequent tools for modern women “if we demand that our families and friends become tolerant of our needs,” she writes.

Shocking Confessions

With a mix of anecdotal vignettes, pop-culture references and original research from an online classified posting on craigslist, Barash offers up deliciously compelling stories and confessions of the many lies women tell the world—and themselves.

John 8:32: The truth shall make you free. Lying is a sin, we know it’s not a good thing. But everyone has fibbed at some point, and Barash believes that only by exploring why and how we lie will we be able to stop—and tell the truth.

Some lies are defensible because they protect loved ones, like the woman who lies to her friends about her husband’s arrest for drunk driving. Other lies are enormous and all-consuming, like the mother who never told her husband their third child isn’t his. “It’s a secret I’ll take to the grave,” says Sarah, a 39-year-old waitress. “But every day I look at my son’s face and I think about it.” Still others are silly or reckless, like the woman who fibs about her age, or the one who hides the truth about her credit card debt.

Not all lies are big: Some lies just seem to slip out—to make the day go by a bit more easily. Are you late for something? There was traffic, you might say, when really it was smooth sailing, but you left the house 10 minutes late. Are your friend’s new shoes ugly? “They’re great!” you might say. “I love them—they really make a statement!”

Perverse Thrill

Are these serious lies—and are women more likely to perpetrate these turns of phrase?

Women lie about matters big and small, and Barash’s compilation of these confessions makes the reader feel complicit in these acts, offering a perverse thrill.

Men’s lies are simplistic and less interesting, writes Barash, who spends little time discussing the other gender’s fibs. “It isn’t that men don’t need to have secrets, but their skills at keeping the secret and their choice of secrets seem rudimentary compared to a woman’s,” she writes.

Yet recent political scandals (New York's former governor, Eliot Spitzer, for one) have demonstrated that men, too, experience conflicting emotions and create complex lies to get what they want, while pretending to meet social expectations of propriety.

Simple Men

Men also lie about little things: "Something came up at the office," or "I was just about to [insert household chore]." And how many times have men been faced with the dreaded "do I look fat in this?" question from a sister, girlfriend or wife? The only right answer is "No, you look beautiful," but often that's a lie. Are these serious lies?

Barash's statistics—that 80% say that women are better liars than men, and 75% of women report that they lie in the workplace to keep their jobs —should be taken with a grain of salt: Her data comes from a self-selecting group of women who responded to her craigslist query, and can't claim to be a representative sample. So while I don't quite buy her statistics, the personal stories from women evoke a more powerful response than numbers alone ever could.

So, what do you think? Is there such a thing as an acceptable lie? Are women better liars than men? Email me your thoughts at puresex@bustedhalo.com and we'll post (anonymously) the best letters and keep the conversation going.