HONESTY AND INTIMACY

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Current professional and lay lore overlook the role of honesty in developing and sustaining intimate relationships. We wish to assert its importance. We begin by analyzing the notion of intimacy. An intimate encounter or exchange, we argue, is one in which one verbally or non-verbally privately reveals something about oneself, and *does so* in a sensitive, trusting way. An intimate relationship is one marked by regular intimate encounters or exchanges. Then, we consider two sorts of cases where it is widely thought permissible, if not laudatory, to lie to one's intimates. In discrediting these presumably central cases of justified dishonesty, we put forward general considerations *requiring* honesty. We end by suggesting how 'meta honesty'--honesty about one's own *efforts at* communication, including one's *efforts to be* honest--*is* particularly important in intimate relationships.

Intimate relationships do not begin at once but develop over time and derive at least in part from series of intimate encounters or exchanges. So, to understand intimate relationships and the role of honesty in such relationships, we must understand intimate encounters.

Encounters, like relationships, can be verbally or behaviorally intimate. Reportive or verbal intimacy occurs when one privately tells another something significant about oneself or shares personal information rarely shared with others. For instance, Smith informs Jones, 'I'm dying of lung cancer, and very afraid.' Behavioral intimacy occurs when one acts with or allows oneself to be seen before others in ways which are revealing, as when Smith weeps in front of Jones or allows Jones to sit in on conversations between Smith and the doctors. Of course, some intimate exchanges may be both verbal and non-verbal if one reports revealing information about oneself, while also sharing experiences or behaviors which are similarly revealing.

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Both sorts of intimate encounters are revealing inasmuch as one reveals one's personality or deeper behavior-disposing traits; or, as some would say, inasmuch as one discloses the self. This enables the other to understand one's behavior, to understand why one acts the way one does. For instance (to use the previous example), Jones now comprehends Smith's erratic behavior.

Of course, what is revealed need not be a fixed (permanent) or determinate (fully formed) or even a distinctive trait. We often reveal features of ourselves which are temporary or in the process of development, yet even the sharing of indeterminate features may enable one's intimate to understand one. However, not all the facts that a person discloses are revealing in the relevant sense. Thus, Brown could tell Green of his or her acne patterns as a teenager. If such information discloses little or nothing of personality or deeper disposing traits, then it is unrevealing. Mere sharing is not enough for revealingness and, thus, is not enough for intimacy.

Of course, our judgements of what is revealing are not infallible. One might think Brown's acne patterns are insignificant until one discovers that they help explain Brown's shyness. The listener's judgements, also, are not the only fallible ones; the sharer's may be as well. Thus, Brown might share information he or she thinks is trivial, but be mistaken. The listener might see and appreciate the significance of Brown's words or behavior. Thus, it is not always evident that some fact is genuinely revealing, but if some exchange is *not* revealing, then it is not intimate.

Privacy is also necessary for intimacy. When people speak of an intimate setting in a local restaurant or an intimate gathering among close friends, they mean, in part, private settings or gatherings. Privacy also helps to distinguish mere openness from intimacy. Black tells White of a fear of reptiles, but simultaneously tells this to many others. The report might be revealing, but the encounter isn't intimate. It is perhaps just open, candid or frank. Whereas, over a quiet dinner in a local restaurant, White tells Black that she or he also suffers from herpetophobia. This, too, might be revealing and, being private, the encounter can be intimate.

We suggest that the privacy essential for intimacy is in the actual encounter (the process of revelation) rather than necessarily in the fact revealed. On the other hand, such encounters are private usually because people wish the information to be kept secret or otherwise uniquely appreciated.

Finally, intimate exchanges require sensitivity and trust--though

these may be difficult to discern. Openness can be harsh; candor, brutal; frankness, inconsiderate, whereas an intimate encounter cannot be brutal, harsh or inconsiderate. The revealer must have the recipient in mind; that is, must have either *communicative* or *interest* sensitivity.

'Communicative sensitivity' consists in the revealer's efforts to be understood, including, if necessary, tailoring the revelation to the special capabilities or background of the listener . ' Interest sensitivity' consists in attending to the recipient's non-communicative interests or desires. For instance, one can make efforts not to offend or upset; or one can support the recipient's interests more positively (depending on what the other's interests are or are thought to be). Revelations can of course involve both forms of sensitivity.

Presence of neither form, however, means that intimacy is absent. Suppose Smith, a medical lexicographer, harps on his or her cancer, forcing Jones to imbibe every word in a flood of tears and a torrent of incomprehensible medical idioms. Smith's insensitivity might be forgivable, their encounter private and even (in some sense) personal. But Smith's exchange with Jones as described isn't intimate since it lacks sensitivity.

Trust can also distinguish intimate exchanges from mere open, candid or frank encounters. People may even openly (frankly, candidly) reveal themselves to those they do not trust. Perhaps another is more of a threat to them if they do not do so . (' I had to put an end to the gossip Frank was spreading. "Frank," I said, "your wife and I *are* having an affair. Sue for divorce if you want, but stop spreading vicious lies about her being a slut."') In an intimate exchange, however, the revealer takes it for granted that the listener will respect the privacy of the exchange and perhaps, also, its content. That is, one trusts the listener--the revealer acts as if he or she thinks that the other will neither harm him or her nor abuse his or her welfare. One thereby makes oneself vulnerable to another; and exposes oneself to the threat of exploitation. Thus, trust and sensitivity not only help to distinguish intimate exchanges from mere open encounters, they also help explain why intimate exchanges are prized and valued. Individuals need to be able to rely on others, to have the aid of others when wrestling with personal problems. Intimacy also contributes to self-knowledge. A trusting environment enables one to share thoughts, reactions, fantasies, etc., which, once voiced, may enable the revealer to discover as yet uncovered truths about oneself. Moreover. critical but sensitive feedback from an

intimate also enhances one's self-knowledge.

In contrast, lack of trust and sensitivity corrupts intimacy. It usually indicates that the relationship has ended or is eroding, though before we judge that trust and sensitivity are absent, we must be careful. Trust and sensitivity are hard to identify, especially in ongoing relationships. If a wife yells at her husband, she may be crying for help; she may be desperately calling for the renewal of trust. Her sensitivity might be momentarily masked, yet arise from her complex intentions as a participant in an ongoing relationship. Thus, sensitivity may become apparent later and we should thus be wary of quick judgements that trust and sensitivity are absent. Still, the difficulty of deciding if these criteria are present does not undermine the point that if trust and sensitivity are absent, so, too, is intimacy.

Finally, exchanges may vary in degrees or grades of intimacy. Until now we have glossed over the distinction between a reciprocal and non reciprocal intimate exchange. In a non-reciprocal intimate exchange, A is intimate with B without B being intimate in return (though B participates and for this reason there is an *exchange).* In a reciprocal intimate exchange, A is intimate with B and B is intimate in return.

Although intimate exchanges need not be reciprocal, social psychological studies say they usually are (e.g. Derlega & Chaikin, 1976). Two reasons for this are worthy of note. First, intimacy is an expression of sensitivity and trust. The listener in an intimate exchange, believing himself or herself to have been trusted and treated sensitively, therefore reciprocates by being intimate. Secondly, people often think themselves obliged to return favors and gifts; intimacy is frequently viewed as a favor or gift. This can occur independently of the belief that they have been trusted (and so is separate from the first reason). However, it does not occur in the face of mistrust or suspicion.

Intimate relationships

Intimate exchanges occur both within and outside intimate relationships. For the remainder of the paper we shall focus on intimate relationships.

We may form an intimate relationship with the neighbor with whom we share an occasional beer; similarly with colleagues in the department or office. Generally, the more regular and intimate the exchanges, the more intimate the relationship. (Remember our remark

earlier about degrees or grades of intimacy.) Consequently, since lovers and friends usually have regular intimate exchanges, they share several private revelations and are especially sensitive to one another's interests and needs. This includes not just making reports, but sharing time and property, contact with one another's bodies (in sexual behavior), involvement in mutual projects, and the entrusting of promises and commitments to each other. These features of intimate relationships give them a structure *over time,* a history which is lacking in a mere intimate encounter. This continuity fosters the expectation that parties to the relationship will continue to make intimate exchanges–the relationship is founded on them. Without them, the relationship may persist as a relationship, but will cease being intimate.

Of course, the regularity of intimate exchanges in a relationship can be overdone. Surely there is appeal to certain kinds of modesty and containedness. Lovers who reveal themselves too regularly are often perceived as boring and dull, perhaps even a bit trivial and insipid. They may even interfere with the other party's interests by constantly badgering them. If one reveals oneself so often that one becomes boring, others have grounds for thinking one insensitive and the exchange non-intimate; it may even undermine the relationship. Furthermore, repetitive similar revelations cease to be informative. This is why thinking of intimates as just regular self-revealers--as people who (say) often report this or that intense experience or belief-- is mistaken. They must also demonstrate sensitivity for another, a sensitivity which underlies these reports, and modulates their frequency.

Honesty in intimate relationships

Being revealing requires being honest, for a dishonest revelation is a contradiction in terms. However, there is a question about just how honest one must be to be intimate. Presumably, as more sensitivity enters into a relationship, this might make it more difficult to be revealing and honest with one's intimate; while on our account one must be revealing and honest to be intimate. In fact, many writers don't think that sensitivity must merely tailor or modulate honesty; they think it often trumps it. As Solomon (1981) claims, 'honesty is sometimes the obstacle rather than the essence of love.' It is justifiable, if not obligatory, for intimates to be dishonest with their partners, when they must do so to be sensitive to them.

We believe that the above way of thinking of honesty (and revealingness) and sensitivity is mistaken. Our thesis will be that while

sensitivity should modulate the honest revelations of intimates, intimacy is possible only if intimates are habitually honest with each other.

Of course, we do not wish to downplay the genuine complexities that intimates face. Neither do we want to suggest that honesty is the only significant ingredient in an intimate relationship. Sensitivity and trust are essential fertilizers as we have argued. Furthermore, an obsessive concern with honesty may blind one to (or may be used by one to obscure) other dimensions of intimacy. Yet we want to bring honesty to the surface, as essential for intimacy and as important for both the ideal and the idea of an intimate relationship.

To support our thesis we will begin by examining two cases in which it is widely thought justifiable or excusable to lie. The examples are chosen as representative of two types of reasons typically given for lying and, thus, give us a vehicle for articulating general reasons for honesty.

Why honesty is the best policy: two cases

The scarlet sweater

One's intimate comes home wearing a red sweater, proud as Punch. 'Look honey, I got a great buy on this sweater and I'm crazy about it. Don't you just love it?' In fact, you don't. You even think it's a bit 'tacky'. How should you respond? Presumably, 'Yes, it's quite nice, dear.'

The tendered justification for lying goes something like this: it is crucial for an intimate relationship that both partners be revealing-- that they share those features, beliefs, emotions, etc., which are central to their personalities. We have other features, however, which are peripheral to our personalities. Therefore, 1) this trivia is not revealing; withholding it would not be detrimental to the relationship. In circumstances like those recounted above, a decision to be honest about the sweater would not help the relationship, since one would be sharing only peripheral information about oneself. Moreover, 2) it could hurt one's partner, and sensitivity demands that we not do that. Thus, there is no reason to share; good reason to lie. It might even be that one ought to lie.

This argument is initially plausible but it has its concealed hooks on which intimacy will flounder. We want to expose those hooks, to show how dishonesty can diminish an intimate relationship. Each of our objections to this common argument will indicate not only what is wrong with lying in this case, but it will also suggest why, in general, intimates should be honest with one another.

We suspect that the line of reasoning in the argument for lying is often an unconscious subterfuge to avoid conflict. For instance, why would a partner think the sweater tacky if apparel were, in fact, peripheral to her or him? Is not the mere presence of a negative judgement a prima-facie reason for thinking it *not* peripheral? But suppose it weren't a subterfuge. Since one does not like one's partner's sweater, it will likely affect how one relates to him or her wearing it. One may be less affectionate or even curt and the other person is left in the dark as to the reason for this stand-offishness. Also, one lie is seldom sufficient. On future occasions one will be expected to compliment the intimate on the sweater; and must be careful not to criticize similar sweaters on others.

We should also be wary of the claim that an intimate will be 'hurt' by the discovery that the partner doesn't like the new sweater. A person might be momentarily bothered, even miffed. But would one be hurt? If so, then it seems one is incredibly thin-skinned, a person who gets hurt whenever someone disagrees with or disapproves of him or her. But one can't sustain genuine intimacy with such an emotionally fragile person. Persistent fear of hurting the other's frail constitution would greatly limit discussion and create an uneasy atmosphere. More generally, since everyone will be annoyed by several features of their intimates, similar reasoning will lead them to lie about other 'trivial' aspects of their intimates, e.g., their hair or shoes or mannerisms, etc.--all on the grounds that such sharing will hurt their feelings. Thus, they will have to advance and then protect a network of lies. There is no way, however, to be comfortable with another if one is constantly on guard about what one says and does. Under such circumstances one could not have an intimate relationship.

Finally, even if both conditions are satisfied, that would not establish that one should lie. Wearing certain sorts of clothes or not having one's hair cut in a certain way may not be peripheral to one's intimate even if it is to oneself, in which case one needs to know that. Each party should know the relative interest placed by an intimate on various activities, beliefs or goals. Otherwise, one would be relating only to a phantom.

This suggests a more general problem with lying to intimates. If, as in the aforementioned example, a person knows that apparel is important to one's intimate, but purposely hides one's disparagement of this interest, one is not showing respect for him or *her* ()ne has withheld information that may be pertinent to an

assessment of the other and of the relationship. By doing so, one has deprived him or her of information relevant to determining the future, thereby effectively limiting freedom. This is true whenever someone is dishonest: deprivation of relevant information limits the other's perceived options. Intentionally to limit one's intimate's options is to violate the presumption of trust on which the relationship is built. It is to treat the other as an object to be manipulated, not as an equal with whom one is close.

The original example is built upon a certain view of the self espoused by philosophers and psychologists alike: that the self is relatively fixed and determinate; each person has unimpeded access to this 'transparent self' (Jourard, 1964). Everyone need decide only whether or not to share that access.

On this account everyone knows what is peripheral or central to one's personality. Each person has direct, unmediated access to the self while others can have only indirect acquaintance--and that comes only from the person's intentional decision to let them see. Armed with this view of the self, the hypothetical intimate *knows* that interest in apparel is peripheral and, not needing to share trivial information, can legitimately mask distaste for the sweater.

We find this model of the self mistaken and we reject the view of honesty issuing from it. Of course, the view is not totally mistaken. Sometimes people are dishonest even when they know their own thoughts or beliefs. Intentional suppression does deprive the relationship of the honest fertilizing it needs, but it is certainly not the whole story. The self is very difficult to demarcate and aspects of our personalities and characters are opaque to us. Moreover, one's 'self' is constantly evolving. It is true, no doubt, that an individual may know himself or herself better than others do, but the self is *not* transparent. Everyone comes to know themselves in the same way that others do. One watches how one reacts; listens to what one says. When someone wants a reasonable account of what she or he is like--character, beliefs, etc.--the evidence will be primarily drawn from the public arena. Certainly one's self reports can be legitimate evidence in the construction of a hypothesis about oneself, but only if those reports are consistent with observed behavior. Whatever one does accurately know about oneself is drawn not primarily from mere introspection, but from a rather laborious process of *constructing* a portrait of the self from publicly observable behavior and carefully monitored introspection. Even a careful, insightful individual may not know certain features about him- or herself; others probably know one, in at

least some respects, better than one does oneself. This difficulty of knowing oneself stems not just from the typical troubles of constructing a plausible hypothesis about a complex subject (in this case, the self); it arises also from the relative non-determinateness of the self. The self is constantly emerging from decisions made and things done.

To the extent that our view of self is accurate, Jourard's advice-- that everyone should share their self--is unhelpful. People do not know (precisely) who they are, nor do they have completely determinate selves to reveal. One does not know entirely what is central and may have to find it. There may not even be a fact of the matter aboutwhatiscentral;apersonmayyethavetomouldthe(temporary) core of the self. This view of the self as malleable, evolving and opaque suggests that intimates should be honest, even about matters which are presumed peripheral. Regular and detailed sharing with an intimate is often a means for uncovering those indistinct though relatively fixed elements of the self, and to forge those as-yet-unformed elements. Moreover, that intimate can encourage one to enhance that portrait as one alternately crystallizes and modifies oneself. In this way, intimates help each other to be revealing--to have something central to tell or share.

Thus, the primary goal of honesty in an intimate relationship is not the uncovering of each person's predetermined transparent self. Rather, it is a commitment to engage in the mutual uncovering, refurbishing, and creating of a mutable, amorphous self.

The scarlet letter

The second case often cited as justifying lying to an intimate is one where the matter is admittedly central, though honesty will substantially harm the intimate and possibly destroy the relationship. The typical example: someone has a one-night stand while away on a convention. There was, in the person's mind, no love for the partner-in-promiscuity; their hormones simply got the better of them. Should this person tell the spouse? Absolutely not. Why? Because she or he will be devastated and the relationship will be forever damaged.

Clearly this is a tough case. It is not difficult to see the force of the argument for lying. But the argument proceeds much too quickly and embraces the use of lying prematurely. Many of the previously adduced arguments are potent in urging one to be honest. For example denying an intimate such information is not to treat that person with due respect. One is effectively coercing the intimate, making a decision for him or her by withholding access to information which is presumably

relevant to continued participation in the relationship. Such a lie will have to be regularly enforced by still other lies, as one maneuvers gingerly around the spouse. This guarded atmosphere will encompass the relationship and inevitably limit the closeness. Or if the network of lies does not bother the perpetrator--if one can blithely lie to one's spouse about something which is *ex hypothesi so* important--then the relationship is already on the skids.

Admittedly, the adulterer can view the behavior in two different ways; seeing the affair as indicating disgruntlements with the marriage, even if they were unrecognized except in retrospect, or, contending that the affair is perfectly compatible with a strong and abiding love for the spouse. On both options, dishonesty is unwarranted. On the former option, honesty is required to rebuild an admittedly deteriorating relationship. How else could they regain intimacy with a pregnant secret between them polluting the atmosphere of trust? On the other hand, one who holds that marriage partners can freely engage in extra-marital sex without any detrimental effects on the marriage should so inform the spouse. If the spouse holds a similar belief, fine. There would be no need for deception. If she or he disagrees, however, she or he has a right to know the partner's beliefs on important matters so as to have some control over the relationship.

Now there are two variations on the above case where at least temporary dishonesty might be justified. But, as we shall argue, these do not undermine our general thesis.

In the first variation the adulterer realizes that the affair signals trouble in the marriage but wants to 'work things out'. The adulterer realizes a present lack of intimacy with the spouse, but wants to reestablish it. According to best predictions, however, sharing details of the affair now would destroy any chance of rebuilding it. So the adulterer tries to discuss with the spouse the troubles in the marriage, assuming that as intimacy begins to grow it will be possible to share the truth about the affair, along with an explanation for the deception. Such a maneuver, one claims, would ultimately be honest, though it would momentarily suspend honesty to help refurbish the relationship. A refurbished relationship would then be strong enough to withstand the momentary trauma of learning about the affair.

We do not intend to consider this argument in detail; we do not need to. For even if the argument is cogent it does not undercut our thesis. According to this variation, the intimate relationship will be

maintained only if one is ultimately honest. Moreover, the time that honesty is suspended is the very time when the relationship is admittedly less intimate. The thesis stands.

In the second case the adulterer recognizes that the relationship is destroyed and plans to leave without telling her/his (ex-)spouse. The justification? To tell would only hurt. It would not help. Again, we are not going to pass judgement on the rationale. But whatever its moral force, it too does not undercut our general thesis. For the relationship has already dissolved. Our thesis concerns only ongoing intimate relationships, not has-been ones.

Honesty

We have tried to suggest why honesty is an essential ingredient in an intimate relationship. Now we must momentarily retreat for a close look at the concept of honesty. For not only must intimates decide whether or not to be honest, they must also discern what they must share to be honest. Determining what is honest is no simple matter. As we shall see, this complexity gives intimates additional reasons for being honest.

Honesty, we contend, can be comprehended only contextually. There is no simple dictum (e.g. 'Just speak the truth') which one should follow.

Certainly honesty cannot demand knowing *every* thought which wanders through one's tangled brain--intimates would spend all day giving instant replays from their cerebral tape-decks and that could preclude understanding their intimate. Selective sharing of relevant data is more likely to communicate and reveal.

Consequently, individuals necessarily edit their thoughts and feelings, sharing only some with their intimates–presumably those which provide the listener with an honest picture of them . Which ones will do that? We cannot decide without knowing the receiver's perspective, background information, predispositions and so forth. As every introductory logic teacher tells the students: the context in which something is uttered affects its meaning. Why presume matters would be different in personal relationships? The listener's mind-set is an integral part of the context.

For instance, every teacher knows that there is some order in which the course material must be presented if it is to be comprehended. Explanation of basic terms and simple concepts must precede

presentation of more complex notions. Knowing that, what must the teacher do to be honest? Present the simpler material first. Intentionally to present the more complex material prematurely would be in a sense dishonest--it would communicate an incorrect picture of the subject-matter. The listener's receptiveness and ability to understand are important constraints on determining what is honest.

Honesty may thus demand telling different people different things. But we should be careful. For, in the important sense, one is not telling different people different things. One is giving them both the same honest portrait; it is just that one uses different approaches to doing so.

We can now see that the notion of being honest with intimates is not simple. That is because 'honesty' is primarily an achievement; more accurately, it is an attempted-achievement. It will not suffice simply to mouth statements which truthfully describe one's views. They must be directed to someone who is capable of constructing an honest (correct) picture of the speaker.

Thus, to be honest, each intimate must know what is important about himself or herself and must know the background of the intimate sufficiently well to know how to provide an adequate picture. One should not only *tell* the truth to the intimate; one should *communicate* the truth . Admittedly, this makes honesty a sometimes difficult achievement, for one might have to assess the context of sharing to discover what would honestly communicate. On our account, however, that is not an unwanted, or at least not a mistaken, consequence. Since honesty is less difficult when each intimate knows a great deal about the other, intimates have more reason to reveal seemingly insignificant details.

Recall that one can be honest (or dishonest) in one's actions as well as one's words. Dishonest words involve misleading the listener about one's beliefs, plans, character, or whatever. Thus, dishonest actions would mislead one's 'viewers' by acting in uncharacteristic ways. One might deceive others by saying ' I am benevolently inclined, ' even when one is not, or one might delude them by giving selectively to charity, helping neighbors and so on.

In an intimate relationship one should act honestly with one's intimate. The reasons parallel those offered in defense of verbal honesty. Despite the similarities between the two forms of dishonesty, however, there is one significant difference between them. The more time people spend together the less likely it is that each can act dishonestly around the other. One can maintain a certain artificial posture in front of the other for only so long. Eventually the facade will

drop. It is far easier regularly to tailor one's verbal discourse than one's actions, for non-verbal actions are more habitual, less under our control than verbal behavior is. Thus, sustained dishonesty of action is much more difficult.

Meta-honesty

For the most part we have talked of honesty as honest revelations about specific events or character traits. But as important as such honesty is, meta-honesty, or honesty about over-arching traits, including the tendency to be honest itself, may be more important for building an intimate relationship. For instance, it is undeniable that even intimates who are attuned to the contribution honesty plays in a relationship will feel the lure of dishonesty and doubtless will, on at least some occasions, succumb to that lure (see Baxter and Wilmot, 1985). The call of meta-honesty is to share such information with one's intimate, to explain why one chose, in a specific situation, to withhold information. This would probably involve explorations into the possible motivation for the desire to be dishonest--be it fear of rejection, the desire to appear nigh-on perfect or whatever. Such honesty can uncover details heretofore withheld from everyone, possibly even oneself. This disclosure provides one's intimate with a different level of understanding and opens up possibilities for real growth--for the person and for the relationship.

Meta-honesty is particularly important when one recognizes that, in some cases at least, there's no clear fact of the matter about what one is feeling or thinking . Suppose A asks B: ' Do you love me? ' The question cannot always be answered, we would contend, merely by B's looking within for something that is, or designates, his or her loving A. A very strong (loving-like) feeling for A is a misleading basis for an affirmative answer. One may have doubts about the long-term viability of the relationship or may find oneself repulsed by some of A's traits or feel an overriding commitment to C. On the other hand, maybe one does not 'feel' great love, but finds that one wants to be with A--one enjoys A's company, revels in A's sense of humor, is titillated by A's conversations. Should one say 'No' since one is bereft of strong (loving) feelings?

In either case what this person has is blurred emotions, seemingly antithetical beliefs. A simple 'Yes' or 'No' will not do--at least if the answer is seen as a report of B's inner states. At best a simple response will indicate B's decision to (try to) love .

Meta-honesty would require sharing the details of the varied

reactions, as well as the person's reactions to the reactions (e.g. B: 'It bothers me that I have such strong feelings even though I really don't want to be with you sometimes';o `I find your revulsion to some of my behavior inconsistent with your purported commitment to tolerance. ')

In general, honesty--and with it genuine revealingness--comes with sharing these meta-observations. A willingness to share minor hunches, random thoughts, and, more importantly, a willingness to so label such musings: 'I don't know about this but . . . ', I don't like so and-so, and it bothers me', ' I am not really certain what I think about this, but . . . ' Such qualifications will provide a more accurate picture of one's beliefs. It provides a context which makes interpretation of such beliefs more reliable.

All this seems even more important once we recall that the self is opaque. Inasmuch as 'who we are' is indeterminate or undetermined, mutual sharing of such thoughts, appropriately qualified, will improve chances that the speaker will gain substantial self-knowledge .

Quest for intimacy

We have rejected the contention that sensitivity should trump honesty, and argued that honesty is vital for intimate relationships. None the less, we recognize there are some cases where temporary dishonesty seems justified. For instance, suppose one has a minor quibble about the behavior of an intimate who just so happens to be momentarily depressed or insecure. One asks the intimate: 'Is there anything about me that's presently bothering you?' To protect your sensitivity she or he decides to lie while pledging to discuss the quibble later, along with the justification for the lie.

Admittedly, in this case, a strong argument can be made for lying. But it can plausibly be argued that in such cases momentary suppression is not really dishonest. That is, since one will ultimately tell the truth, one is not trying to paint a false picture. Rather, by telling about the lie later, one is actually giving more details about oneself.

Furthermore, given our aforementioned contextual view of honesty, we have another reason for recharacterizing the alleged lie. We argued that honesty required communicating the most accurate portrait of oneself possible. But given the circumstances, telling

the intimate about the complaint *now* might not succeed in doing that. At most, it might 'tell' the other that one is more concerned to 'get it off the chest' than to share. As long as the pledge to share later is fulfilled, then, it does not seem one has been dishonest.

Recognizing the legitimacy of such cases, however, may lead an intimate to accept more pervasive dishonesty. It is quite easy to begin with sensitivity and a strong desire for honesty, yet ever-so-slowly drift away from honesty with one's intimate. This can happen in two ways. The first involves a psychological slippery slope. One begins by recognizing that sensitivity may demand temporary suppression of feelings, beliefs, attitudes (as in the case above). Slowly but surely, concerns for sensitivity begin to weigh more and more heavily and the desire for real honesty recedes. ('Why, one asks oneself, 'should I share my dissatisfaction now? I'm no longer upset.' The disgruntlement gets repressed.)

What develops is a certain attitude, a certain lore, that leads most people to equate sensitivity with coddling. On this view, one's intimate is a fragile creature who must be handled with care. One must be careful not to damage this frail self-image by pointing out troubles or difficulties with the relationship. Of course, the intimate doubtless has similar views about one, too. So each daintily tiptoes round the other, avoiding fights, but also avoiding the growth which can come from creative conflict. They close off many of the lines of communication which can lead to intimacy, and to deeper insight into themselves.

The second way is often just a bastardization of the first. Here one claims to be concerned with the feelings and needs of the other (and such concerns may well be present). In fact, though, the principal reason for suppressing information (or overtly lying) is self protection. Frequently one chooses deception because one fears rejection or is averse to conflict. One may be afraid that the intimate will find one objectionable or even leave. Or one may simply wish to avoid conflict--it is debilitating and often seemingly pointless or unproductive (see Baxter & Wilmot, 1984; 1985).

Intimates, though, should be careful to avoid this lure, for invariably their failures to discuss troubles or disgruntlements will not be hidden forever. They may emerge surreptitiously in snide comments or avoidance behavior. Or one may 'gunny sack' so long that one finally explodes, dumping all the gripes at once, often with an embellishment that comes only from stewing over complaints for a long time.

In short, what often happens in intimate relationships is the opposite of what should and could be happening. As a relationship persists intimates often become more and more closed, more and more distant. Instead, intimates should become more honest. They should be developing habits of honesty, rather than habits of dishonesty. After repetitive fruitful sharing, even when the other is feeling down, intimates should learn that honesty can promote a personal growth probably unachievable in any other way. In pressing the case for honesty, we have been sympathetic to a truth like that voiced by Somerset Maugham: 'It is a funny thing about life. Those who refuse to accept anything but the best very often get it.'

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