

Truth, Daring & Dating at Midlife

From Philip Belove, Ed.D.

June 2005

Welcome. This letter represents the fruit of ten years of academic and clinical research into the world of midlife singles. It's designed to help you figure out what's going on in relationships and how to create meaningful and satisfying relationships. Please enjoy it, please forward it, please always give credit. To submit questions, to see other issues and articles, to subscribe, go to <http://www.datingatmidlife.com>

Commercial message:

Don't forget about "What's My Next Step? Coaching." One introductory consultation, no charge, and the result will be a set of instructions on the one next step you can make to make a difference. Here is why it's effective: The most common dating mistake is to try to go from a to d without going through b and c. Sometimes it's hard to see the intermediate steps. Find out more. Arrange for an appointment at drbelove@datingatmidlife.com

Lies & Dazzling Lies

(conclusion)

By Philip Belove, Ed.D.

All rights reserved.

A Quiz.

Now let's look at more complex lies.

A man goes to a therapist and after the first interview he decides he wants to bring in his partner.. He says to the therapist, "She has a real hard time with the fact that I talk about her to other people. I want you to tell her that this is our first session. I don't want her to know that I've already talked to you about her. She'll be suspicious and upset."

A) Is this a lie about sex or about power? B) If a man lies about one thing, will he lie about the other? C) What is the effect on the one lied to? D) What is the effect on the one who lies? E) What is the effect on the relationship?

A) *Lies about Power.*

It's most likely a lie about power. The man did what men do 25% more often than women; he acted submissive. He acted like he was going along with something when he wasn't. She had said, "Don't talk about me to other people" which is one

of those rules people make that's right half the time. (We'll deal with this later when we talk about relationship triangles.) But rather than challenge it, or confront her, rather than say, "I need to talk to other people some times," the man lied.

It's a form of manipulation. What's at stake here is the relationship contract, the set of rules that will govern the relationship. Every partnership has a contract that evolves over time which is the foundation for safety between the partners. It's what each partner believes is predictable. In this case, instead of this piece of the foundation being made of stone, it's made of cardboard painted like stone.

B) If he lies about power, will he lie about sex?

Not necessarily. They are separate issues. Still, you have to wonder. If he gives himself permission to lie in one circumstance, does he give himself permission in different circumstances? A lot of men who lie to manipulate wouldn't think of cheating. Many submissive men are sexually loyal. When they do cheat, they aren't doing it for recreation, it's not in the "It was nothing, honey" category; rather they are lying because they are on the way out and they are using a covert relationship to give them the strength to leave. If the man hasn't the capacity to stand up on his own and challenge his partner, he probably also hasn't the courage to leave on his own. (Which, by the way, is why these affairs that end marriages almost never work out without therapy for both partners.)

C) What is the effect on the one lied to?

Ordinarily, or in a reasonable sane world, we go into a relationship with a certain, but limited generosity and hope for the best. We start out with a limited supply of good will, like the money you get at the beginning of a monopoly game, like the optimism we automatically extend to young people. A lie eats up that starter batch of good will and it has to be rebuilt. A lot depends on how bad the lie is. Some are just disappointments and a disappointment in a relationship is not the worst thing that can happen. Resilience in relationships is built by weathering little storms with honor.

Being lied to is always shocking unless you have been lied to so much you've grown weary. Some midlife singles, those who haven't experienced that midlife wake-up, are numb. They've accepted being lied to and continue as if they didn't notice. (You get a sense of how this weariness can seem like everyday reality when you think about how many people are apathetic about voting. The word, "apathetic" means "no passion.") Other people take the opposite extreme and get extremely touchy and don't trust anything they hear. The trick is to avoid the either/or position – when you only see a black or white choice, you know you are in trouble – and we'll talk about how to handle that.

D) What is the effect on the one who lies?

We are adults, not kids, and we are running our own lives. We need to know what's true. When an adult tells a lie, he still has to keep track of the truth. This is a strain. He (or she) has to hold two versions of reality in mind at the same time, living out and keeping track of two, usually contradictory, story lines.

Lying like this, but really any lying, is so demanding mentally that you can hook a person up to a machine that measures stress reactions – small changes in pulse, breathing and the appearance of thin sweat on the surface of the skin – and it can detect changes in those measures when people lie.

We so depend on knowing what's true that we have a sort of built-in lie detector as well. When we know someone well, we can have a funny feeling about them when they are lying to us. We feel the foundation shift and the normal relationship connection goes weird. Something is off. There's a red light on the dashboard of the mind and we have no details, only the signal. Was it a shift in the eyes, a change in rhythm in speech, a slight tension on the voice, a tick?

But some times we don't even get those signals. And this part is important. But it is possible to fool a human and a mechanical lie detector. All you have to do is ignore the warning lights on your own mental dashboard and believe your own lie. Embrace the false version of reality, make a deep investment in it, and you are no longer under the strain of holding a true and false version in your mind. The lie comes out as smooth as reality. And this is very dangerous to both lied to and liar.

After a while, it's hard to know what's true anymore. As life strategies go, it's very expensive and there really isn't a lot you can do with someone who operates that way except stay at a safe distance and be sure he doesn't have any significant power in your life.

E) What is the effect on the relationship?

Lies distort relationships. The man who asked his therapist to lie had, in his mind, made his female partner into someone impossible to deal with. His exaggerated sense of her power justified the lying, but then, having lied, he was committing himself to believing how powerful she was, that he had to do it. The mirror effect was that it made him into a guy who, when it came to women, just couldn't win. As it exaggerated her power, it undermined his. The effect on her? He has painted her into a corner. He has defined her as being "impossible," in some specific way. And she didn't even know it. Lying distorts relationships.

Lying is the opposite of intimacy. If intimacy is what happens when you and your partner each reveal yourselves to each other, lying prevents that. It establishes a fiction that certain inner rooms of the soul don't exist.

(But, of course, these denied inner rooms continue to exist and long for visitors. This is the heart of the restless urge to have an affair and why that urge is a sign

that something is being un-lived in the primary relationship. Anyone with a history of affairs also has a history of these denied and secret inner rooms. But that's for the conversation about triangles. Later.)

The core of a long-term relationship is the wise conversation. This is where two people put every sensibility they have available and co-create a shared vision about the future. The more honest partners are with each other, the more wisdom their conversation produces. Lying reduces the wisdom and increases folly.

What do you do when you think you are being lied to?

Here are some good rules of thumb:

- 1) *If someone lies to you, they don't trust you.* They are trying to control the relationship using unfair means. You have to take that into consideration when you calculate the risks involved in getting more intimate with that person.
- 2) *You have to have confidence in your doubts.* The best way to handle your discomfort and suspicion is to take a stand on the strength of it. Most of us have a pretty good B.S. detector. When Marge caught him in a lie, Homer Simpson said, in his defense, "It takes two to make a lie, Marge. One to tell it and one to believe it." Homer was right; it does take two to make a lie happen.
- 3) *Don't accuse, don't accept; just don't go along.* Often what prevents us from using our B.S. detector when we think we are being lied to is a reluctance to make an accusation and get into a fruitless argument. Instead, you can say, "I don't believe you." Which is the stronger statement, a) 'You are lying?' Or b) 'I don't believe you'? The correct answer is "b" because, unlike with statement 'a,' with statement 'b,' there is no arguing with it. You have to be willing to respect your intuitions.

Dazzle camouflage.

So now we get back to that song, "Do nothing till you hear from me." It is a form of lying worth noticing and being able to name. It's commonly used by virtuoso liars, politicians, public relationships, diplomats – anyone in a business where the goal is to persuade others, regardless – and, yes, many midlife singles. As I said in the beginning of this article, I chose the song because it's hard to know, even after listening carefully to the lyrics, what is being said. Is the person lying? Has the person been dating others? Is the person faithful? Is the person just trying to get away with something? Will you ever know the whole truth?

You are not getting the whole truth, instead, you are being offered a handful of small, curious, contradictory and distracting truths. As a result, you don't know what to argue with or where to begin. The name for this technique is "dazzle camouflage." It's a form of camouflage because something is hidden in there and you know it, and it's dazzling because you are constantly distracted by this, that, and the other thing so you don't know what to focus on. This is virtuoso lying.

Dazzlers.

Let's call those kinds of lies, *dazzlers*. Dazzlers are effective because they trap you into trying to decide *which* of the various things in a dazzler are true. And when

they do this, they distract you from the real question, which is, “Do I feel safe?”

Look at the song again. If you were being told those words, here are some of the questions that would spring to your mind, involuntarily as you listen: *Has he been seen with someone new? Does it mean he’s been untrue? Why is he telling me that other arms may hold a thrill? Why does he say wait to hear from him and then say that I’ll never hear from him? Does that mean he has something to tell me and he’s not, or does it mean that he doesn’t have anything to tell me? And how does it all fit together?*

The great Psychiatrist and innovator in hypnotism, Milton H. Erickson pointed out that if you wanted to hypnotize someone, you can do it directly – just say, “You’re getting sleepy, sleepy, sleepy,” and so on – or indirectly by saying something that is both fascinating and confusing. Then, while the hypnotize-ee is struggling to figure out what you’ve said and what to think, he, or she, will be very open to almost any suggestion. The situation is loaded to say to you: “Don’t try to figure it out. It’s too much work. Just trust me and sign here.” That’s the magic of the Dazzler.

They are common in Midlife relationship because midlife relationships are in themselves confusing. You always face multiple possibilities – “Could this be IT? Am I fooling myself? And so on. In addition you are highly aroused and motivated and excitable about those possibilities. So you can work yourself into a trance and you and your partner can work each other into these trances. And then you commit to a course of action you later regret. Think of the Patriot Act, the War in Iraq, and this story, taken from the logs of “last regrettable love affairs.”

A man is very excited about this new woman. He calls, sends email, talks to his brother, his business partner and his mom about the woman and tells the woman about his conversations with his mom. And then one Friday he seems to her to be a little off balance. “What’s up?” “Nothing.” Okay? By Sunday he lets her know that he’s spent the night with his ex-wife. But more than that, he more or less regularly does that, even though he’s been divorced five years, been in another relationship, and says that he can’t believe he was ever married to her. But he believes in monogamy and that’s why he has asked her to sleep with him. Yet at the same time he isn’t sure what he’s doing and he’s confused and he did tell you the truth, so therefore... and so on.

In response, you might ask yourself: Has he lied up to this time? Is he *discovering* a new truth or just *coming clean with something he’s hidden*? What if he or she has just figured out something he thinks I need to know? If that’s the case, why am I so furious?

How do you respond? What do you do with your anger and feelings of betrayal? Again, here is that temptation to get into an either/or frame of mind – always a sign of trouble. Either: You get really angry and dump a lot of your anger on your

partner and maybe even blow out of the relationship, and in general get thoughtlessly emotional. Or: You are embarrassed to be so angry and so you pretend that you're not and you didn't notice anything disturbing and, in ignoring your own emotional judgment, you make yourself intellectual, ideological and naïve.

The trick is to find the position between “either” and “or.” Recognize that you are confused and let that alone be the signal for you to stop and both think and feel about what's going on. Take a stand on your emotional reaction. Your deepest truth is you don't know what to make of this situation, that you are dazzled. That's really important. You don't know what to think? Then that's your best advice. Listen to it. Speak from it. Be ready to say: “I don't know what to believe and I don't know what to make of your answer. Therefore I can't trust what you are saying. Go home. I'll talk to you later.”

Often this stance will prompt an eruption of more dazzle. And this next is important: You don't have to listen to it again. You can say, “I'll just have to think about this and get back to you.” You call a time out on yourself. It could take you a day, a week, a couple of weeks. It doesn't matter. You're the CEO of your dating life. It's very important that you take charge, and one of the mature ways of taking charge is knowing when you don't know something and when to make no decision.

When all else fails...

Intimacy is built out of trust. Trust is built over time. It grows slowly because it's an animal thing. It doesn't happen quickly, like thought. Animals establish trust by testing each other out. They test each other by showing some vulnerability, and then seeing what gets done with it. One of my teachers, Gregory Bateson, wrote his story of building trust with a porpoise. He said that finally he put his hand in the porpoise's mouth – a porpoise can bite off your hand with a single chomp. In response to this vulnerability, the porpoise revealed a vulnerable spot in it's neck. Think of how dogs roll on their backs and expose their bellies. Lying, of course, is the opposite of doing this.

The best advice I ever got about lying and truth came from Robert Powers, another teacher. He said that his Irish Grandad said, “Bobby, when all else fails, tell the truth.” The piece I would add is...”Starting with telling it to your self.”