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Personality Factors that Influence Truthfulness and Deception

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Abstract: Identifying personality traits that coincide with everyday deception is crucial to understanding how individual differences relate to antisocial tendencies. The current study tested the hypothesis that sensation seeking and psychopathy can predict everyday deception. Seventy-nine undergraduate students participated in an online study to assess these personality traits. A linear regression analysis found disinhibition psychopathy to be a strong predictor of everyday deception, with impulsive sensation seeking as the only other significant predictor.

Keywords: Everyday deception; sensation-seeking; psychopathy

Everyone lies, but the intent and motives behind the act of deceiving depend on the situation and the person. Often times, deception is used to benefit oneself through self-promotion, self-protection, or to achieve the desired gain (Abe, 2011). In other instances, individuals lie for others, frequently to protect the feelings of friends and family. Trivial lies can also persist over long periods of time to avoid the social shame of being caught. These situations can reflect everyday deception, endearingly referred to as "white lies." Operationally defined, everyday deception is deliberately conveying information that is different from the truth, or omitting pertinent information, within the scope of normal, daily events. Such deceptive acts do not typically reflect criminal nor abnormal behaviors since they are considered "normal." The purpose of this research was to assess everyday deception and to examine its link to both sensation seeking and psychopathic tendencies in a non-clinical sample of college students.

A substantial body of research has examined the many situations in which people deceive and what leads them to deceive. Individuals utilize deception in arguments by avoiding truths that might weaken their argument (Martínez-González, López, Iglesias, & Verdejo-Garcia, 2016; von Hippel, 2011). Deception can mirror confirmation bias, as people use it to manipulate truths that challenge their beliefs (Martínez-González et al., 2016). Individuals also incorrectly interpret the situation so that it is more socially acceptable or to avoid scrutiny from others (von Hippel, 2011). The duration and depth of a lie is also revealing and can reflect a cycle of deception that is driven by the fear of social shame if discovered (Martínez-González et al., 2016). Indeed, such uses of deception in this manner can be considered a defense mechanism to protect the self.

Deception may also be instrumental in promoting oneself and as a tool to achieve desired resources (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Epley & Whitchurch, 2008; von Hippel, 2011). Individuals will use deception if it can result in attaining or

exceeding their goals more quickly (Niven & Healy, 2015). Prior research indicates that when given a specific goal, participants will use more unethical methods of obtainment than those told to 'do their best'. Moreover, the specificity of the objectives for the goal may distract them from acknowledging their immoral behaviors (Barsky, 2008; Niven & Healy, 2015; Street et al., 2001). Not only do specific goals and goal objectives affect the use of deception, but also do benefits of deceptive behaviors. Hurkens and Kartick (2009) identified two types of deceivers: individuals who usually never lie and individuals who will lie if the benefits are greater than when they are being truthful (also see Sakamoto, 2013).

Deception is not merely intended for personal gain. Parents, for example, lie to their children to protect them or to prevent misbehavior (Heyman, 2009). Using deception as a protective measure is often an automatic decision. According to Shalvi and Bereby-Merey (2012), if given enough time to deliberate whether to be deceptive, individuals are less likely to lie. However, if the situation gives little time for deliberation, individuals are more likely to decide that the lie is worth the risk. Furthermore, when having another be the deceiver, the use of deception is perceived to be an easy decision. If the lie requires little effort, then the use of deception is also more likely (Erat, 2013; Mazar & Hawkins, 2015). Thus, lying can be used to benefit others, but is not necessarily worth the risk.

Research pertaining to this topic has yet to yield a valid measure for everyday deception. Agosta, Pessoli, and Sartori (2013) examined everyday deception in a broader context by asking participants to describe the details of a white lie they told within the last month and what the truth was behind it. The purpose of their research was to test the reliability of the Autobiographical Implicit Association Test (aIAT), which results revealed that the aIAT could accurately differentiate the truth from a white lie. Ennis, Vrij, and Chance (2008) created a deception questionnaire that examined how often individuals lied to their close friends versus strangers. The researchers

found that individuals lie more frequently to strangers than to friends, best friends, and significant others. These studies provide a broader examination of everyday deception, as well as elucidate the dearth of research examining everyday deception across many circumstances.

Sensation seeking is defined as the desire to participate in varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences while accepting the physical, social, legal and financial risks that may follow (Zuckerman, 1994). Sensation seeking has been found to be related to substance use, sexually risky behavior, aggressive behavior, and psychopathology (Cui, Colasante, Malti, Ribeaud, & Eisner, 2016; Zuckerman, 1994). According to Zuckerman (1994), there are four facets of sensation seeking. Thrill and Adventure Seeking (TAS) is the tendency to look for adventure in often-risky activities. Experience Seeking (ES) reflects the sensation experienced by the mind and senses. Boredom Susceptibility (BS) is the desire to avoid dull, repetitive, and invariant situations. Lastly, Disinhibition (DIS) is a socially oriented facet which reflects sensation seeking with drugs, alcohol, and risky sexual behaviors.

Lu (2008) has conducted the only known study that has examined a link between sensation seeking a non-criminal deception. Taiwanese college students anonymously completed a two surveys, one of which measured online deception by asking participants how much they agreed or disagreed with deceiving (e.g. "I deceive others while chatting online"), while the other measured sensation seeking with the 8-item Brief Sensation-Seeking Scale (Hoyle, 2002). The results indicated that high sensation seekers were more likely than low sensation-seekers to use deception while chatting online. Although these findings revealed that sensation-seeking is a meaningful predictor of online deception, however, they did not assess the subtraits of sensation seeking, thus revealing another gap in literature.

A defining characteristic of *psychopathy* is being untruthful and insincere (Cleckley, 1951). Psychopathy is also characterized by antisocial behaviors (i.e. hostile/rude, harming others, inconsiderate of others), disinhibition, and boldness. Traits associated with psychopathy (boldness, meanness, and disinhibition) have also been correlated with deceptive behaviors used to trick or manipulate others (Martin & Leach, 2013). Although these correlations were discovered outside of the criminal population, psychopathy is often aligned with criminal behaviors and is typically studied in an inmate population. However, the construct has also been found to be useful as an index for noncriminal behavior.

Prior research has explored the relationship between psychopathy and sensation seeking in many noncriminal populations. Indeed, according to Vitacco and Rogers (2001), there is a positive correlation between sensation seeking and psychopathy in adolescents. Additionally, the study also found that high levels of impulsivity are correlated with higher levels of psychopathy. These findings may be explained by previous investigations regarding this topic, which indicates that psychopathic traits are associated with tendencies to ignore

societal morals and values (Hosker-Field, Molnar, & Book, 2016). If those with psychopathic traints ignore societal morals and values, they will likely act on their impulses and desires due to their lack of regard for the repercussions or judgments they may receive. Furthermore, the relationship between sensation seeking and psychopathy was also found within the incarcerated/criminal or delinquent population. Indeed, Skovran, Huss, and Scalora (2010) investigated incarcerated males and sensation seeking and found that those who committed sexual offenses scored the highest on both sexual and non-sexual sensation seeking scales. Additionally, delinquent behaviors in adolescents have been correlated with sensation seeking as well (Gatzke-Kopp et al., 2002).

The Current Study

Previous literature has established a relationship between high sensation seeking and psychopathy (Gatzk-Kopp, 2002; Martin, 2013; Skovran, Huss, & Scalora, 2010), however, no prior research has analyzed how each of these factors contributes to everyday deception. A dearth of research also exists regarding the potential link between sensation seeking and everyday deception. Only Lu (2008) has explored sensation seeking and deception concurrently, however, his study focused on online deception rather than deception that occurs in a individual's everyday life.

The current study investigated subcomponents of sensation seeking (TAS, ES, BS, DIS, Impulsivity) and psychopathy to identify the personality components that contribute to deception. Prior literature has yet to create a standard self-report measure to analyze everyday deception. Though one study created a Deception Questionnaire that examined the frequency and natural lies told to strangers and friends (Ennis, Vrij, & Chance, 2008), the tool was not proposed for standardization, but rather used for the purposes of their study. Therefore, the current study sought to give bases for a standard, self-report measure for everyday deception and analyze the relationship between everyday deception, sensation seeking, and psychopathy. The study hypothesized that the frequency and magnitude of everyday deceptive behaviors are positively correlated with all forms of sensation seeking: TAS, BS, DIS, ES, as well as impulsive sensation seeking (Hypothesis 1). It also hypothesized that all traits of psychopathy (boldness, meanness, and disinhibition) positively correlate with sensation seeking and everyday deception (Hypothesis 2). The final hypothesis is that the sensation seeking and psychopathy subscales uniquely predict everyday deception (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Participants

Seventy-nine participants (61 females) enrolled at Eastern Kentucky University provided informed consent and participated in the study. Participants were college-aged students who were 18 years of age and older, and were given course completion credit as an incentive to complete the study.

Materials

A series of online surveys were used, including two sensation-seeking surveys, a psychopathy survey, and an everyday honesty and deception survey.

Sensation Seeking. Impulsive Sensation Seeking from Zukerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire (ZKPQ) consisted of eighteen true or false statements (Zuckerman & Kuhlman, 1999). The total number of "true" responses were counted to obtain total scores. Sensation Seeking Scale (form V) assessed general aspects of sensation seeking and consisted of 40 paired statements (Zuckerman, 1978). This scale includes four subscales: Thrill and Adventure Seeking (TAS), Experience Seeking (ES), Boredom Susceptibility (BS), and Disinhibition (DIS), with 10 questions indexing each subscale. Participants were asked to pick either A or B according to which statement best fits them. The total high sensation seeking response answers within each subcategory were counted to obtain the subscores.

Psychopathy. The Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM; Patrick, 2010) measured psychopathy traits within participants. The scale consisted of 58 statements about the participant's personality. The scale has three subscales to measure traits of psychopathy: boldness, meanness, and disinhibition. Participants answered each statement on a Likert Scale from one to four (1 = True, 4 = False). Subscores were obtained through mean ratings across the items within each category.

Everyday Deception. The Everyday Honesty and Deception Survey, created by the principal investigators, assessed how often participants used deception (Appendix A). The survey was the product of pilot testing consisting of 60 true or false statements and was divided into three sections. The first section contained 20 statements that were addressing the past week, the second section contained 20 statements that were addressing the past month, and the third section had the last 20 statements that were addressing the past year. If the response is endorsed as "true", it is coded as one; if endorsed as "false", it is coded as zero. Summing the coded responses created the survey's subscores. A higher total indicates the frequency of Everyday deception was high for that participant.

Procedure

All materials were placed in an online data collection system. Participants enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses at Eastern State University have access to the data collection system and were allowed to participate in the online study. Upon signing up for the study, participants read a consent statement and then continued on to study questions. The study was divided into six sections (ZKPQ, 3 everyday deception sections, in the data collection system and each section contained a survey). The order of survey sections was counterbalanced to avoid order effects. After completing all six sections, participants were shown a debriefing form. The form gave additional information on the study as well as contact information, should they have any questions after participating in the study.

Results

Table 1 reports the bivariate correlations between psychopathy subscales, sensation seeking subscales, and everyday deception. The hypothesis that everyday deception is positively correlated with Sensation Seeking was confirmed with TAS and BS. Impulsive sensation seeking was also found to be positively correlated with Everyday Deception, but not DIS nor ES sensation seeking.

The hypothesis that sensation seeking and psychopathy were related was supported with BS and DIS being significantly correlated with all the psychopathy subscales (Boldness, Meanness, and Disinhibition). ES was significantly correlated with DIS, and TAS was significantly correlated with Boldness psychopathy. The psychopathy subscales, Meanness and Disinhibition, were also significantly correlated with everyday deception, but not Boldness.

To test the hypothesis that both Sensation Seeking and Psychopathy predict unique variance in everyday deception, a linear regression analysis was conducted with the three Psychopathy subscores, Impulsive Sensation Seeking, and the four Sensation Seeking subscores. These facets were entered as predictors and everyday deception was the criterion variable (see Table 2). Disinhibition Psychopathy was a positive predictor of everyday deception. ES was a significant negative predictor of Everyday Deception.

Discussion

This study's primary focus was to examine the relationships between sensation seeking and psychopathy in relation to everyday deception. Everyday deception was positively correlated with the TAS, BS, and Impulsive sensation seeking subtraits, as well as the Meanness and Disinhibition subscales of psychopathy. Regression analyses revealed that Disinhibition Psychopathy was a positive predictor of Everyday Deception, while ES (Sensation Seeking) was a negative predictor of Everyday Deception. These results support the hypotheses that sensation seeking and psychopathy are correlated with everyday deception, and that subscales of Sensation Seeking and Psychopathy predict everyday deception.

Examining the disinhibition subscales questions for psychopathy and Sensation Seeking revealed several important differences. Both disinhibition subscales include questions concerning criminal activities, but the type of criminal activity differs. Indeed, Disinhibition Psychopathy assessed criminal behaviors that affected others, while the Disinhibition for Sensation Seeking questioned only criminal behaviors that affect oneself. For instance, the criminal behaviors in the disinhibition sensation seeking were drug use, and drug use does not typically affect others unless the self is endangering others. The criminal behaviors on the Disinhibition Psychopathy scale are actions that may benefit the self while harming others.

Other questions that made up the Disinhibition Psychopathy scale pertained more to the self in general, including one's impulsive behaviors, being careless of one's actions, and being irresponsible/incompetent. The disinhibition psychopathy is viewed as the behaviors in a manner of how the self may harm others. Disinhibition sensation seeking, on the other hand, pertains more to the social self. Social self refers to sexual experiences, drug use, and the desire to seek new experiences in general. With this in mind, the results of the current study reveal that everyday deception relates more to acts toward others than the self.

In relation to the Everyday Deception Survey, the questions presented in the Disinhibition Psychopathy subscale are more directed at the self and lying to those of close relation to the self. Because these lies are to protect the self and friends, the deception used to protect the self may fall under the category of impulsive lies. The Psychopathy Disinhibition subscale had nine questions that fell under the impulsive behaviors category. The similarity of the impulsivity between the two scales may explain why the Disinhibition Psychopathy scale was a better predictor of everyday deception. The Sensation Seeking Disinhibition subscale had behaviors that fell under sexual experiences and drug use and also reflected a hint of criminal behaviors, such as drug use. Questions like these were not presented in our Everyday Deception survey, which better explains why the two disinhibition subscales differed so dramatically in the correlations and results in relation to our Everyday Deception Scale.

The purpose of the Everyday Deception Scale was to measure deception that happens on a regular basis, and acts that would not characterize a criminal behavior nor mental illness. Much of this everyday deception can be characterized as white lies, which are not considered criminal because they bring little harm and are impulsive in nature. However, While reviewing the Psychopathy Disinhibition subscale further, while substantial, an unintentional, somewhat criminal theme appeared. What appeared what a theme of impulsivity, which is consistent with white lies. Therefore, it can be concluded that the underlying theme that connects our Everyday Deception Survey with disinhibition psychopathy is impulsiveness.

Our results revealed several positive correlations between the Sensation Seeking and Psychopathy subscales, showing similarity in personality traits measured by the two measures. The one exception was the Experience Seeking Sensation-Seeking subscale that was only correlated with Disinhibition Psychopathy. Impulsivity, an underlying theme for experience seeking, became apparent while reviewing this subscale. Other psychopathy subscales did not share a common theme with the Experience Seeking subscale. This may explain why the Experience Seeking subscale was not correlated with either boldness or meanness. However, the Disinhibition Psychopathy subscale shared the underlying theme of impulsivity with experience seeking, explaining the significant correlation between the two.

The strongest predictor of everyday deception was the Disinhibition Psychopathy subscale. Disinhibition is the lack of restraint manifested in disregard for social conventions, impulsivity, and poor risk assessment. This being said, it appears that everyday deception comes with a lack of control.

This lack of control may cause individuals to not consider the consequences of the lie. Individuals may think about the benefits in the immediate moment and some of the consequences that may happen in the near future; however, the uncontrollable urge to lie prevents them from worrying about the immediate negative consequences or the ones further into the future. Indeed, this urge prevents individuals from thinking about the possible consequences of their impulsive decision. The uncontrollable action of lying and the impulsive urge to lie may be explained by a desire to protect the self. When lying, individuals are typically doing so in order acquire something that is needed or to protect themselves from the judgment of others (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Epley and Whitchurch, 2008; von Hippel, 2011). These ideas may explain why lying is, at times, uncontrollable. Indeed, it likely occurs due to an individual's desire to keep themselves safe and away from the judgment of others.

There were several limitations to the current study, including the method of acquiring data was completely online self-report. Self-report surveys tend to be problematic due to the propensity for participants to answer not respond truthfully, which prevents the data from being accurate. Participants may not completely understand the questions asked, which prevents them from giving accurate information. It is also a possibility that participants did not thoroughly read the statements because they answered in a rushed manner or did not fully wish to participate, which may have led to false responses. An additional issue with using a self-report format is that participants may answer questions according to what they believe the research is looking to find, further providing inaccurate data. However, there were sufficient internal consistencies among the items.

An additional limitation was the number of participants in the study. Indeed, the sample-size used for the current study was relatively small, which limited the significance of the results. Not only was the number of participants low, but also the sample size was restricted to a single university, which limits this study's diversity. Future research should consider expanding the sample size used to collect data, which will allow the results to have more significance than what a smaller sample allowed. Additionally, a variety of participants should also be included. Including more diverse participants in future studies will give the data a more diverse background the current study was unable to provide. Future research should consider collecting data beyond college students, as well as collect data through methods other than the online survey at Eastern Kentucky University, which anyone can access. For example, future research can utilize online survey systems, such as Mechanical Turk, that will give researchers the option to pay their participants, or Survey Monkey, in which the link to the survey can be shared via social media. Both methods will allow future research to gain a significant number of participants as well as increase the likelihood of diversity. Indeed, a larger sample size and diverse background will allow the results to be more generalizable to society as a whole.

Future research should also investigate the relationship between disinhibition psychopathy and everyday deception. The correlation found in the current study suggests that there is a lack of restraint in relation to using everyday deception. Identifying the underlying mechanisms of the lack of restraint may explain this uncontrollable urge to lie. Furthemore, the finding that deception may be uncontrollable could have societal and judicial implications, and may change the way criminal deception is punished. The current study merely uncovered these correlations and future studies should aim to identify the causes behind them.

The current study provided a starting point for creating a standardized everyday deception measure. The measure created consisted of three sections measuring the frequency of everyday deception within a week, month, and year. Each individual section was found reliable as well as the overall measure. While the current measure was found to be a reliable tool, future research should look more closely at the sub-traits of the measure using factor analysis. The factor analysis will identify sub-traits important to deception, making the measure more valid for future use. It is important to create such a measure due to how frequently this form of deception is utilized by individuals.

In sum, the current study has allowed us to analyze everyday deception in a manner that has not been done before. The current study has helped identify many of the sensation seeking characteristics that correlated with everyday deception, giving an idea of what kinds of sensation seeking individuals are likely to use deception. The current study also identified disinhibition psychopathy as the strongest predictor of everyday deception. With this information, we can imply that everyday deception may not be a voluntary action, but rather something that is uncontrollable.

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Table 1
Bivariate Correlation among Personality Traits of Deception, Psychopathy, and Sensation Seeking

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. BS		.50**	.27**	.29**	.41**	.23*	.53**	.37**	.21*
2. DIS			.39**	.30**	.44**	.34**	.40**	.17	.14
3. ES				.33**	.36**	.15	.16	.31**	.04
4. TAS					.51**	.29**	.17	.19*	.21*
5. ISS						.32**	.36**	.31**	.32**
6. BPP							.33**	06	.00
7. MPP								.56**	.30**
8. DPP									.48**
9. ED									
M	2.18	4.22	5.51	6.03	9.72	2.61	1.62	1.91	24.10
SD	1.50	2.39	2.05	2.72	3.75	0.44	0.43	0.45	11.52
α	.33	.64	.54	.76	.83	.80	.87	.84	.92

Note. SS= Sensation Seeking. **p < .01, *p < .05

Table 2
Linear Regression for Predictors of Everyday Deception

Personality Variables	Everyday Deception
Psychopathy	
Boldness Psychopathy	03
Meanness Psychopathy	01
Disinhibition Psychopathy	.48**
Sensation Seeking	
Impulsive	.20
Boredom Susceptibility	02
Disinhibition	.05
Experience Seeking	22*
Thrill and Adventure Seeking	.09

Note. **p < .01, *p < .05

Appendix A: Everyday Honesty and Deception Scale

The following statements and questions refer to everyday acts of deception that are commonly performed. Please mark True or False if the statement applies to you.

In the past week:

1.	I have exaggerated my abilities to another to make myself appear better than I actually am.	True or False
2.	I've talked about someone in a bad way even though he/she is not that bad.	True or False
3.	I have lied to another person to spare his/her feelings.	True or False
4.	I have lied about needing to do something to get off the phone.	True or False
5.	I told a person that I liked him/her even though I really did not like him/her.	True or False
6.	I have complimented a person that I do not like.	True or False
7.	I have pretending to like a situation when I actually do not.	True or False
8.	I pretended to understand a conversation in order to not look stupid.	True or False
9.	I have told someone I will complete a task shortly when I know that it will take longer.	True or False
10.	I have lied to friends about how I was feeling.	True or False
11.	I have told friends or myself I was going to do something and did not.	True or False
12.	I have laughed at a joke I did not think was funny.	True or False
13.	I have eaten something that did not belong to me.	True or False
14.	I have pretended to be impressed when I am not.	True or False
15.	I have told someone that I just received their message when I received it a while ago.	True or False
16.	I have lied about being busy to avoid hanging out with someone.	True or False
17.	I have told someone that I just received their message when I received it a while ago.	True or False
18.	I have lied about being busy to avoid hanging out with someone.	True or False
19.	I have lied about how often I eat and how much I eat.	True or False
20.	I have said mean things about myself when I do not truly believe them.	True or False

In the past month:

21.	I have pretended to be sick to get out of an obligation.	True or False
22.	I have told my professor that I read the assignment when I did not.	True or False
23.	I have told my family that I have clean my living space when I have not.	True or False
24.	I pretended to have less money than I actually had.	True or False
25.	I have fallen asleep in class and pretend it hadn't happened.	True or False
26.	I have eaten something I did not like because a friend/family member gave it to me.	True or False
27.	I have fed someone's pet something I wasn't supposed to	True or False
28.	I have forgotten to do something for someone and told them they never told me to do it to avoid trouble.	True or False
	I have lied about why I was late to avoid judgment.	True or False
30.	I have told someone I like them to pet their dog.	True or False
31.	I have told myself everything thing is fine when it is not.	True or False
32.	Saying I can afford to buy this item and still get things I need, but you actually cannot do both.	True or False
33.	I have checked the terms and condition box but I haven't actually read them.	True or False
34.	I have used something that wasn't mine and didn't tell the owner.	True or False
35.	I have lied about my whereabouts to friends and family.	True or False
36.	I have faked emotion to please those around me.	True or False
37.	I have lied about how often I exercise and the difficulties of those workouts.	True or False
38.	I have lied about how often I have cleaned my home.	True or False
39.	I have lied about how often I drink.	True or False
40.	I lie about the types of music or songs I like.	True or False

In the

	, i	
he past	year:	
41.	I have lied about the physical existence of Santa or another mythical creature.	True or False
42.	I have lied to my parents about how well I am doing in school.	True or False
43.	I have gone out on a date and then kept it from others.	True or False
44.	I have touched something that was labeled "DO NOT TOUCH".	True or False
45.	I have broken something and then tried to hide the fact.	True or False
46.	I have taken something that wasn't mine because I really needed it.	True or False
47.	I have told family members I like their gift when I do not.	True or False
48.	I have taken an animal off the street and kept in my home/dorm when it's against the rules.	True or False
49.	I have told a family member I need them to give me more money than what was actually required.	True or False
50.	I have told someone I will pay them back the money I owe them and have not.	True or False
51.	I have lied about why I can't pick up an extra shift a work.	True or False
52.	When I broke something that wasn't mine I blamed it on the person closest to me.	True or False
53.	I have lied about partaking in an eating disorder behavior.	True or False
54.	I have lied about how many sexual encounters I have had.	True or False
55.	I have lied about the reason for an injury.	True or False
56.	I have said that I have visited somewhere that I have not.	True or False
57.	I have lied about having an addiction.	True or False
58.	I have lied about having my addiction under control.	True or False
59.	I have lied to a family member about why I need money.	True or False
60.	I have hit a parked car with mine and just left.	True or False