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Deception: From Ancient Empires to Internet Dating.
Brooke Harrington, ed. Stanford, CA: Stanford University
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It is often said that knowledge is the knowledge of differences. What this refers to, of course, is that there are benefits to taking a comparative perspective when trying to better understand a phenomenon. When it comes to the topic of this book—deception—this strategy pays off, and in a big way. Who among us has not experienced deception and its close relative, lying? Who has not lied, fibbed, dissembled, or prevaricated at some time in our lives? How many books, plays, films, or television programs are based on a deception, large or small? With all this exposure, one might assume that we are somewhat expert in this domain. But based on my reading of this book, we would be wrong. In fact, as explored in this book, the concept of deception is so complex that it appears that we, as scholars, have just begun to fathom its true nature.

The book is the product of a workshop on deception given by the Santa Fe Institute, a well-regarded think tank. The group of authors was assembled by Brooke Harrington, a research fellow at the Max Planck Institute in Germany and a visiting scholar at the Santa Fe Institute. Harrington has done original research on what she refers to as “pop finance” and the way that major players in the financial markets have often been deceptive in their practices, to the detriment of the average investor. So she has a strong but well-informed opinion about deception. But, as it turns out, so do each of the contributors to this volume. All have a well-thought-out perspective on the topic of deception, typically based on years of original research. All are very good at communicating their views in the form of succinct chapters—15 chapters ranging in length from 12 to 29 pages. There is also a very interesting Foreword by Murray Gell-Mann, a physicist and distinguished fellow at the Santa Fe Institute. Harrington herself offers a very informative Introduction.

As befits a comparative treatment of a very interesting topic, the authors also have very different disciplinary roots. These include biology, policy analysis, psychology, computer science, communications, anthropology, creative writing, poetry, even military history and strategy. This allows for a multitude of perspectives on deception to come through clearly. The alternative frames not only reflect differences in epistemology, they serve to highlight the key facets of deception, including its manifestations from ancient Greece to the present, the operation of deception across levels of analysis (individual, dyad, subgroups, societies, and nation states), its cognitive and emotional elements, and, significantly, how the concepts of truth telling, trustworthiness and trust, and outright lying relate to one another. The chapters are not only erudite and full of information on deception, most are highly entertaining. The book is an easy read but has a great story to tell.

Fortunately for the reader, in spite of its complex nature, deception is defined fairly consistently across chapters. As it turns out, deception is not viewed as synonymous with lying. Whereas lying is believed to involve intention to promote a

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falsehood, deception may occur without such motivation. In fact, most chapter authors accept that deception can take place without either awareness or intent on the part of the deceiver. Needless to say, this complicates things a bit. All of this said, deception does involve systematically misleading others in one way or another. The authors also are able to write about deception without moralizing or portraying it in ethical terms. In fact, some of the more interesting material offered in this book derives from biologists who frame deception in terms of survival by both humans and animals (attracting suitable sexual partners, tricking competitors). Much of the tension in this book stems from the observation that though a society may condemn deception, at the same time, it accepts it in so many settings (e.g., art and theater). Indeed, in the context of warfare (and business?), deception is viewed as absolutely necessary.

The book is divided into four sections. The first is a set of four chapters designed to examine the definition and detection of deception. Here, the perspectives of biologists ("Dealing with Deception in Biology"), political scientists ("Paltering"), communications ("Thoughts, Feelings and Deception"), and psychologists ("Why Most People Parse Palter, Lies, Whoppers and other Deceptions Poorly") are shared with some degree of consistency. Among other things I learned is that "paltering" is a real word that implies deception in the domain "other than lying." Most often, we palter when we say things that are not literally false to produce a misleading effect, like basking in the achievements of our subordinates. I also found very compelling the research summarized by O'Sullivan in chapter 4, which indicates that most (but not all) of us are poor at detecting deception. Readers involved in human resource management, security, and risk management would be well advised to immerse themselves in this chapter. But so might those of us who are parents of teenagers.

The second section, "Deception and Technology," is made up of three chapters that are equally informative but also a bit scary. The titles include "Digital Doctoring: Can We Trust Photographs?" (by Hany Farid), "Digital Deception: The Practice of Lying in the Digital Age" (by Jeffery Hancock), and "Cognitive Hacking: Detecting Deception on the Web" (by Paul Thompson). The scary part stems from the fact that threats to personal privacy, increased business risk, and harm to national security seem to be becoming more prevalent, not less, with each advance in information technology. Collectively, these chapters show that deception today is easier to carry out than ever. Who among us has not been "spammed" or "phished"? Who has not had our "caller ID" filters circumvented?

Many ASQ readers will find a lot to their liking in the third section of the book, "Trust and Deception." A major theme running through the four chapters included here has to do with the way that our expectations of trust in someone can both enable or, in some circumstances, prevent deception. Mollering sets up the section well with his chapter, "Leaps and Lapses of Faith: Exploring the Relationship between Trust and Deception." Urton ("Tying the Truth in Knots") then goes back several hundred years and offers original research to

show how the Inkas (Incas) of Central and South America were able to maintain trust within their society relative to their trading and commercial accounts while at the same time deceiving their Spanish conquerors. Deception as practiced in more contemporary venues is explored by Fine ("Does Rumor Lie? Narrators, Trust and the Framing of Unsecured Information") and by Lutz ("Crocodile Tears or Method Acting in Everyday Life"). I had not thought much about the role of rumor as a channel for practicing deception in the workplace, so Fine's chapter was particularly interesting to me.

The final section of the book shifts from an examination of deception at the interpersonal level (dyad or social group) to forms that are practiced by institutions. If there is any one chapter in this book that I would strongly endorse as essential reading for America's leaders, it's Rowan's "Deception and Trust in Health Crises." Rowan uses past examples of poor or even duplicitous information coming from organizational, agency, or government leaders on health-related crises. He makes his points with an examination of institutional responses to such events as the SARS epidemic, the tampering with consumer products, the Katrina relief effort, and the mail-based anthrax attacks. He argues effectively that in all of these cases, deception as practiced by organizations actually hampered responses to the emergency at hand. He describes how inaccurate or unwarranted assurances backfired or served to make things worse. There are no heroes here. As I was reading this chapter, I was seeing all of his points played out once again in today's news. Many people feel that institutional deception was involved in the way that U.S. government spokespeople handled the recent H1N1 virus outbreak or the way that the revised recommendations regarding screening for colon and especially for breast cancer were communicated.

In section 4, Harrington offers a chapter based on her research with members of investment clubs, "Responding to Deception: The Case of Fraud in Financial Markets." Her data come from her study of retail customers' reactions to past instances of financial media hype ("DOW 36,000," Kramer's television program "Mad Money"), unwarranted claims by leaders in the financial field (like those that came out of the dot-com bubble), and actual deception as practiced by organizational leaders (Amgen, WorldCom, Medtronic, and more recently, Lehman Brothers). While her focus is on how those "deceived" go about trying to adjust to the discovery that they were betrayed, like the aforementioned chapter on deception in medical crises, her analysis of the role and impact of past deceptions in financial markets rings true today as well.

Military history enthusiasts are not the only ones who would derive insights from Glenney's chapter, "Military Deception in the Information Age: Scale Matters." Glenney is able to abstract principles from cases of deception in military campaigns across the centuries that are applicable to many non-military contexts. For example, he argues that when a deception is to be promulgated by institutions, armies, or nation states, it takes an alignment of all actors representing the institution. Historically, military leaders used soldiers of all

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of its units to convey misinformation to the enemy. Thus to be successful, a leader must be as effective in deceiving the typical soldier as much as the adversary. Similarly, to be effective, a deception must be directed toward the *members* of the opposition, not just their leader. Glenney stresses how complex it has become for today's military commanders to promote a deception, given that access to communications technology is so widespread. As he notes, it's hard to convince a foreign insurgent group of a (false) plan to attack when CNN or FOX news is covering military strategy debates among U.S. national leaders or when U.S. soldiers are in regular (and unsecure) e-mail contact with friends and family regarding war preparations. On a more critical note, I found the last chapter, Fields' "The Pleasures of Lying," less than satisfying. He informs us that societies routinely highlight the "sport" of lying as a way to instill cultural expectations for when and where deception is warranted. But his larger point becomes obscured by his writing. It's just a hard chapter to follow.

The major lessons about the nature and dynamics of deception that I was able to glean from reading this well-crafted book are far too numerous to detail, but a few comments along these lines are in order. For example, it's clear that deception can be used for good or for evil. In several forms, deception can actually promote solidarity and smooth working relationships, but deception can also be costly. Whether it involves an insect seeking to attract a mate or a military commander trying to confuse an adversary, deception requires a great deal of resources. Similarly, to be effective at deception (or its detection), one needs skill.

Deception is a relational construct. What comes through in several chapters is that the expectations, needs, or goals of the parties involved contribute to the ease or difficulty of deception. In fact a fair amount of self-deception on the part of the deceived is often involved. Ironically, without a trusting target, we might not even try deception, as its detection is all too likely. Similarly, deception in our relationships becomes possible because we often see and hear what we want to. There is a kind of complicity between the deceiver and the deceived.

Perhaps one final insight might be mentioned. From the book's comparative perspective, it's clear that deception has been practiced in one form or another from the beginning of life as we know it. It has a biological basis, and it certainly has survival value. This implies that deception will continue to be performed in its many forms and in most social and institutional contexts long into the future. For this reason, this book is not only very interesting, it is one that should be read by all those who are interested in achieving a better understanding of human behavior, regardless of context. At least on this point, I would certainly *not* try to deceive you.

Richard Klimoski
Management and Psychology
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA 20130