

HONESTY: BE TRUE TO LOVE

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community

try to read "partner" as "community", "group" or "classmates"

When we reveal ourselves to our partner and find that this brings healing rather than harm, we make an important discovery—that intimate relationship can provide a sanctuary from the world of facades, a sacred space where we can be ourselves, as we are. . . . This kind of unmasking—speaking our truth, sharing our inner struggles, and revealing our raw edges—is sacred activity, which allows 2 souls to meet and touch more deeply.

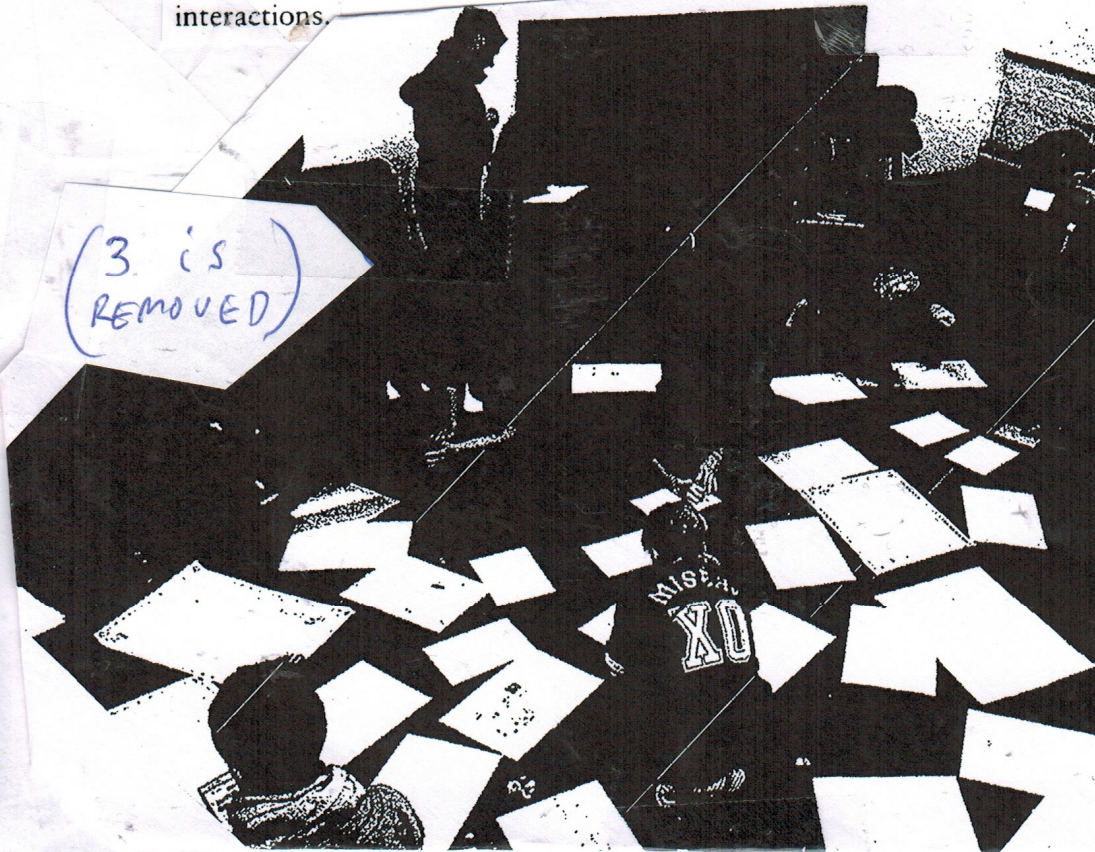
Try to just skip the "two" while reading.

—JOHN WELWOOD



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IT IS NO accident that when we first learn about justice and fair play as children it is usually in a context where the issue is one of telling the truth. The heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be. In recent years sociologists and psychologists have documented the fact that we live in a nation where people are lying more and more each day. Philosopher Sissela Bok's book *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* was among the first works to call attention to the grave extent to which lying has become accepted and commonplace in our daily interactions.

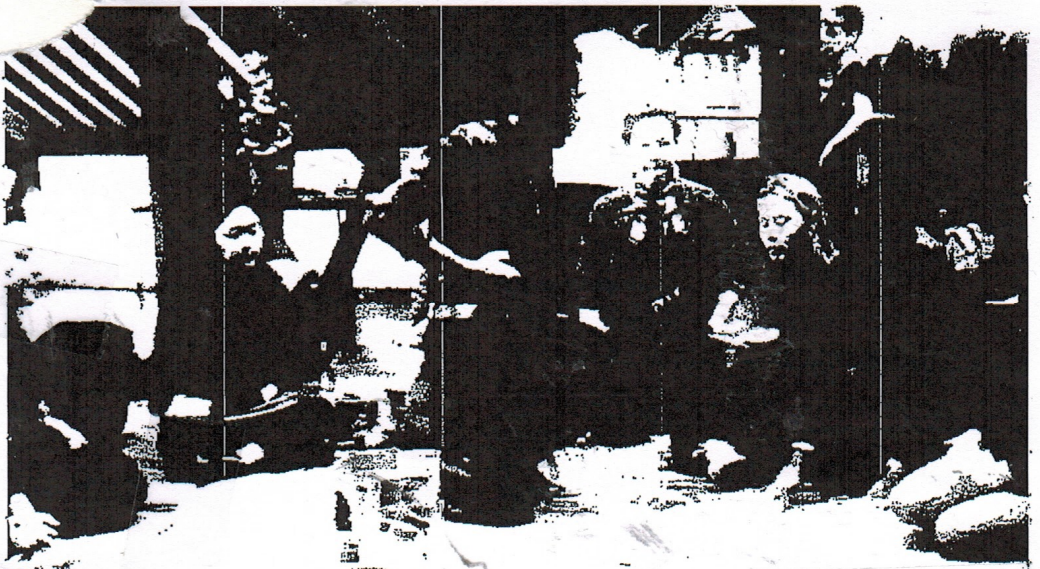
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Lies are told about the most insignificant aspects of daily life. When many of us are asked basic questions, like How are you today? a lie is substituted for the truth. Much of the lying people do in everyday life is done either to avoid conflict or to spare someone's feelings. Hence, if you are asked to come to dinner with someone whom you do not particularly like, you do not tell the truth or simply decline, you make up a story. You tell a lie. In such a situation it should be appropriate to simply decline if stating one's reasons for declining might unnecessarily hurt someone.



Lots of people learn how to lie in childhood. Usually they begin to lie to avoid punishment or to avoid disappointing or hurting an adult. How many of us can vividly recall childhood moments where we courageously practiced the honesty we had been taught to value by our parents, only to find that they did not really mean for us to tell the truth all the time. In far too many cases children are punished in circumstances where they respond with honesty to a question posed by an adult authority figure. It is impressed on their consciousness early on, then, that telling the truth will cause pain. And so they learn that lying is a way to avoid being hurt and hurting others.

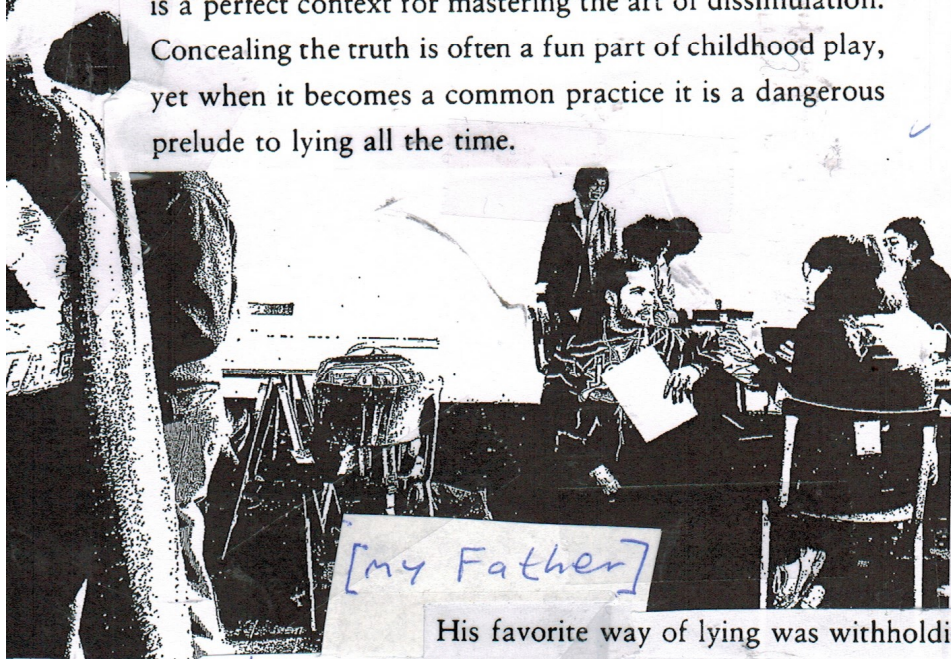


Lots of children are confused by the insistence that they simultaneously be honest and yet also learn how to practice convenient duplicity. As they mature they begin to see how often grown-ups lie. They begin to see that few people around them tell the truth. I was raised in a world where children were taught to tell the truth, but it did not take long for us to figure out that adults did not practice what they preached. Among my siblings, those who learned how to tell polite lies or say what grown-ups wanted to hear were always more popular and more rewarded than those of us who told the truth.

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Among any group of kids it is never clear why some quickly learn the fine art of dissimulation (that is, taking on whatever appearance is needed to manipulate a situation) while others find it hard to mask true feeling. Since pretense is such an expected aspect of childhood play, it is a perfect context for mastering the art of dissimulation. Concealing the truth is often a fun part of childhood play, yet when it becomes a common practice it is a dangerous prelude to lying all the time.

7



[my Father]

His favorite way of lying was withholding.

His motto was “just remain silent” when asked questions, then you will not get “caught in a lie.”

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The men I have loved have always lied to avoid confrontation or take responsibility for inappropriate behavior. In Dorothy Dinnerstein’s groundbreaking book *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*, she shares the insight that when a little boy learns that his powerful mother, who controls his life, really has no power within a patriarchy, it confuses him and causes rage. Lying becomes one of the strategic ways he can “act out” and render his mother powerless. Lying enables him to manipulate the mother even as he exposes her lack of power. This makes him feel more powerful.



Males learn to lie as a way of obtaining power, and females not only do the same but they also lie to pretend powerlessness. In her work Harriet Lerner talks about the way in which patriarchy upholds deception, encouraging women to present a false self to men and vice versa. In Dory Hollander's *101 Lies Men Tell Women*, she confirms that while both women and men lie, her data and the findings of other researchers indicate that "men tend to lie more and with more devastating consequences." For many young males the earliest experience of power over others comes from the thrill of lying to more powerful adults and getting away with it. Lots of men shared with me that it was difficult for them to tell the truth if they saw that it would hurt a loved one. Significantly, the lying many boys learn to do to avoid hurting Mom or whomever becomes so habitual that it becomes hard for them to distinguish a lie from the truth. This behavior carries over into adulthood.

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Often, men who would never think of lying in the workplace lie constantly in intimate relationships. This seems to be especially the case for heterosexual men who see women as gullible. Many men confess that they lie because they can get away with it; their lies are forgiven. To understand why male lying is more accepted in our lives we have to understand the way in which power and privilege are accorded men simply because they are males within a patriarchal culture. The very concept of "being a man"

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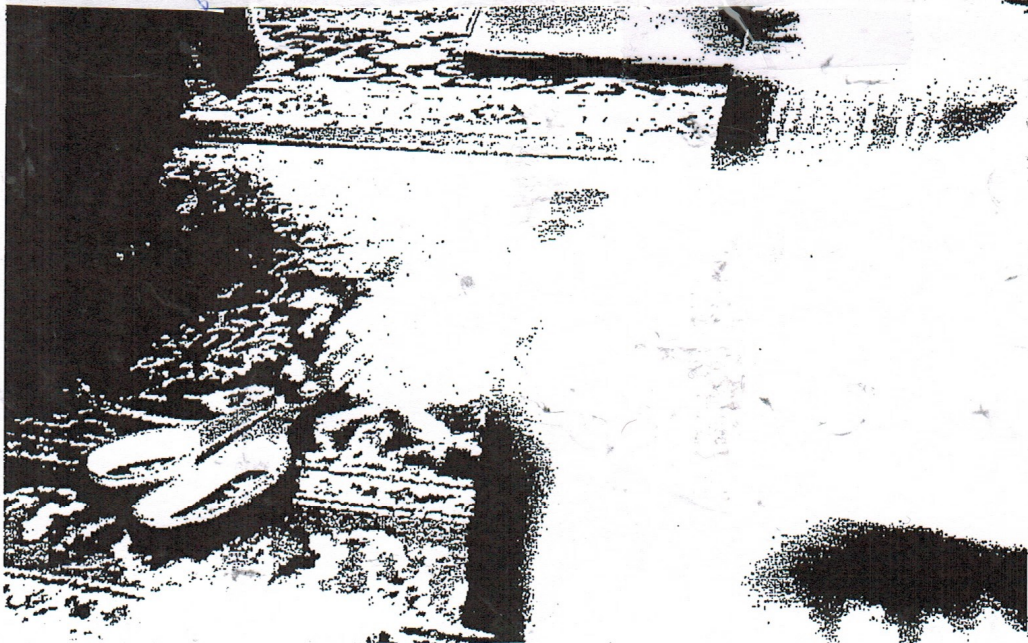
and a "real man" has always implied that when necessary men can take action that breaks the rules, that is above the law. Patriarchy tells us daily through movies, television, and magazines that men of power can do whatever they want, that it's this freedom that makes them men. The message given males is that to be honest is to be "soft." The ability to be dishonest and indifferent to the consequences makes a male hard, separates the men from the boys.

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John Stoltenberg's book *The End of Manhood: A Book for Men of Conscience* analyzes the extent to which the masculine identity offered men as the ideal in patriarchal culture is one that requires all males to invent and invest in a false self. From the moment little boys are taught they should not cry or express hurt, feelings of loneliness, or pain, that they must be tough, they are learning how to mask true feelings. In worst-case scenarios they are learning how to not feel anything ever. These lessons are usually taught to males by other males and sexist mothers. Even boys raised in the most progressive, loving households, where parents encourage them to express emotions, learn a different understanding about masculinity and feelings on the playground, in the classroom, playing sports, or watching television. They may end up choosing patriarchal masculinity to be accepted by other boys and affirmed by male authority figures.

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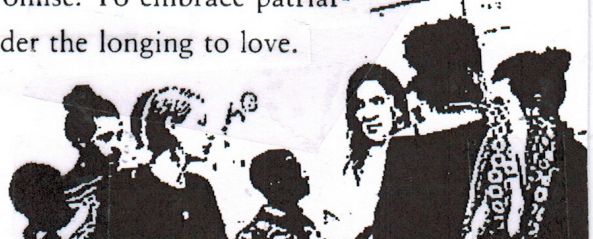


In his important work *Rediscovering Masculinity*, Victor Seidler stresses: "When we learn to use language as boys, we very quickly learn how to conceal ourselves through language. We learn to 'master' language so that we can control the world around us. . . . Even though we learn to blame others for our unhappiness and misery in relationships we also know at some unspoken level how our masculinity has been limited and injured as we touch the hurt and pain of realizing how little we seem to feel about anything. . . ." Estrangement from feelings makes it easier for men to lie because they are often in a trance state, utilizing survival strategies of asserting manhood that they learned as boys. This inability to connect with others carries with it an inability to assume responsibility for causing pain. This denial is most evident in cases where men seek to justify extreme violence toward those less powerful, usually women, by suggesting they are the ones who are really victimized by females.

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Regardless of the intensity of the male masquerade, inwardly many men see themselves as the victims of lovelessness. Like everyone, they learned as children to believe that love would be present in their lives. Although so many boys are taught to behave as though love does not matter, in their hearts they yearn for it. That yearning does not go away simply because they become men. Lying, as one form of acting out, is a way they articulate ongoing rage at the failure of love's promise. To embrace patriarchy, they must actively surrender the longing to love.

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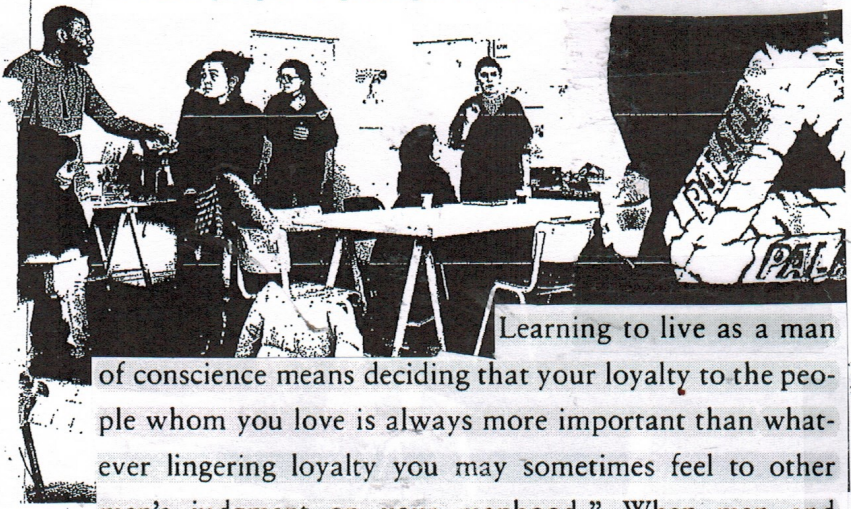


(14) Patriarchal masculinity requires of boys and men not only that they see themselves as more powerful and superior to women but that they do whatever it takes to maintain their controlling position. This is one of the reasons men, more so than women, use lying as a means of gaining power in relationships. A commonly accepted assumption in a patriarchal culture is that love can be present in a situation where one group or individual dominates another. Many people believe men can dominate women and children yet still be loving. Psychoanalyst Carl Jung insightfully emphasized the truism that "where the will to power is paramount love will be lacking." Talk to any group of women about their relationships with men, no matter their race or class, and you will hear stories about the will to power, about the way men use lying, and that includes withholding information, as a way to control and subordinate.



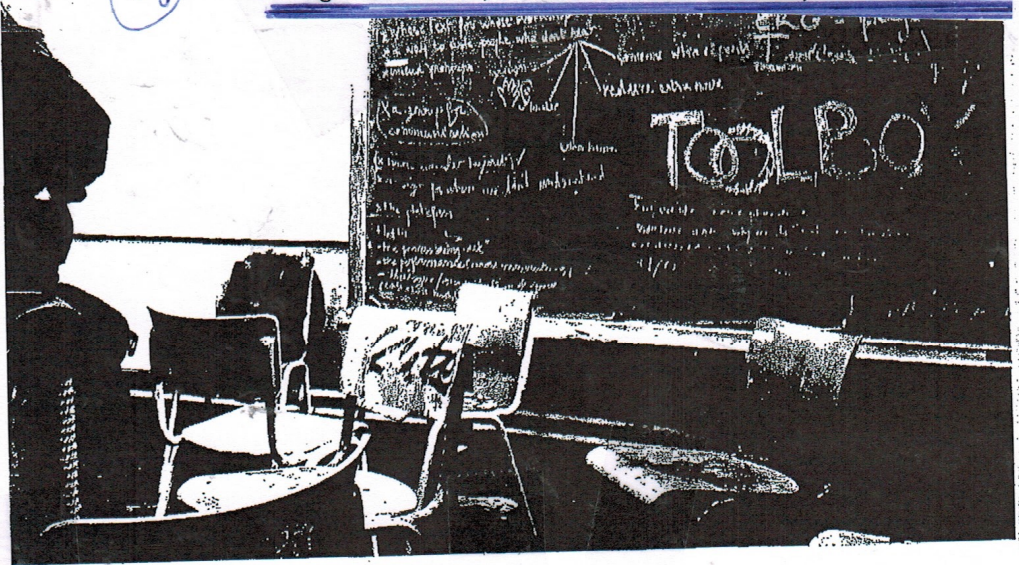
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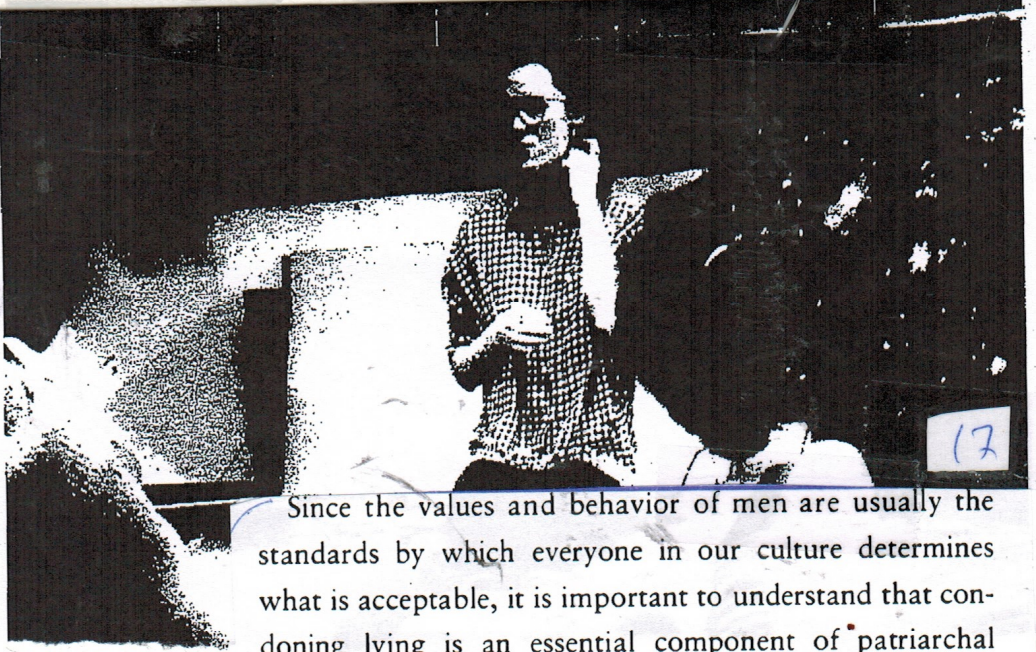
All visionary male thinkers challenging male domination insist that men can return to love only by repudiating the will to dominate. In *The End of Manhood*, Stoltenberg continually emphasizes that men can honor their own selfhood only through loving justice. He asserts: "Justice between people is perhaps the most important connection



Learning to live as a man of conscience means deciding that your loyalty to the people whom you love is always more important than whatever lingering loyalty you may sometimes feel to other men's judgment on your manhood." When men and women are loyal to ourselves and others, when we love justice, we understand fully the myriad ways in which lying diminishes and erodes the possibility of meaningful, caring connection, that it stands in the way of love.

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Since the values and behavior of men are usually the standards by which everyone in our culture determines what is acceptable, it is important to understand that condoning lying is an essential component of patriarchal thinking for everyone. Men are by no means the only group who use lies as a way of gaining power over others. Indeed, if patriarchal masculinity estranges men from their selfhood, it is equally true that women who embrace patriarchal femininity, the insistence that females should act as though they are weak, incapable of rational thought, dumb, silly, are also socialized to wear a mask—to lie.

This is one of the primary themes in Lerner's *The Dance of Deception*. With shrewd insight she calls women to account for our participation in structures of pretense and lies—particularly within family life. Women are often comfortable lying to men in order to manipulate them to give us things we feel we want or deserve. We may lie to bolster a male's self-esteem. These lies may take the form of pretending to feel emotions we do not feel to pretending levels of emotional vulnerability and neediness that are false.

ALL ABOUT

Harriet Lerner

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ner reminds readers that honesty is only one aspect of truth telling—that it is equated with “moral excellence: an absence of deception or fraud.” The mask of patriarchal “femininity” often renders women’s deceptions acceptable. However, when women lie we lend credence to age-old sexist stereotypes that suggest women are inherently, by virtue of being female, less capable of truth telling. The origins of this sexist stereotype extend back to ancient stories of Adam and Eve, of Eve’s willingness to lie even to God.



Often, when information is withheld by women and

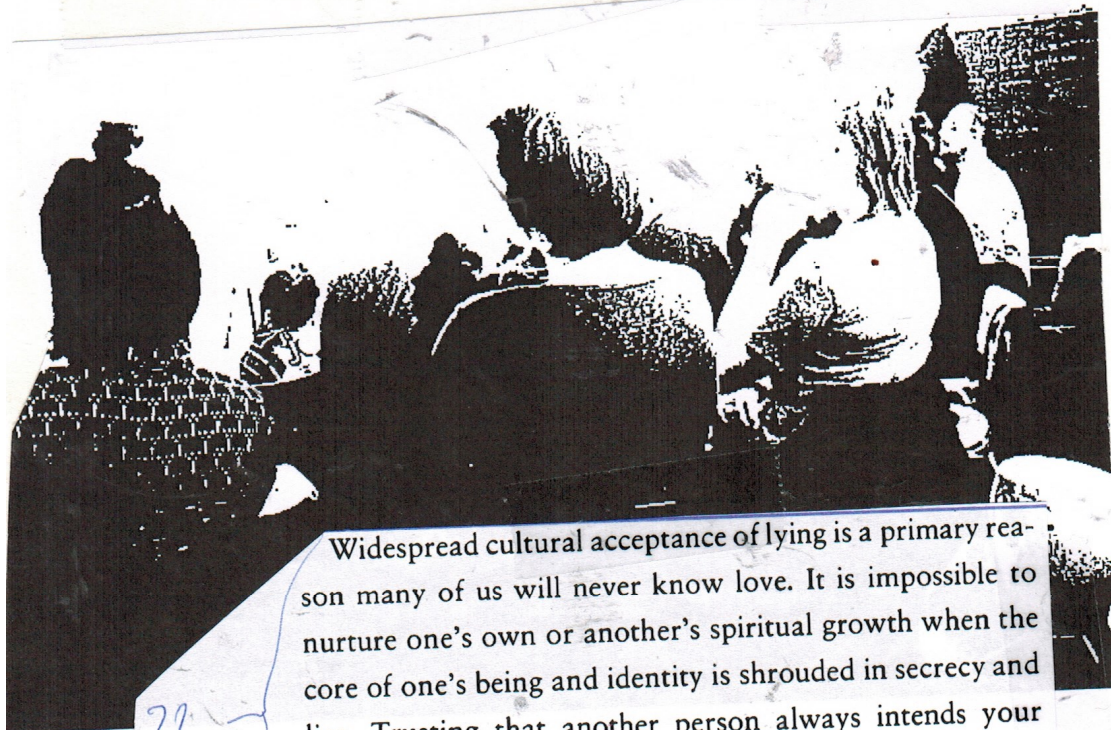
men, protection of privacy is the justification. In our culture privacy is often confused with secrecy. Open, honest, truth-telling individuals value privacy. We all need spaces where we can be alone with thoughts and feelings—where we can experience healthy psychological autonomy and can choose to share when we want to. Keeping secrets is usually about power, about hiding and concealing information. Hence, many recovery programs stress that “you are only as sick as your secrets.” When a former boyfriend’s sister shared with me a carefully guarded family secret regarding incest, which he did not know about, I responded by requesting that she tell him. If she didn’t, I would. I felt that keeping this information a secret from him would violate the commitment we had made as a couple to be open and honest with each other. By withholding this information from him, joining his mother and sisters.



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While privacy strengthens all our bonds, secrecy weakens and damages connection. Lerner points out that we do not usually "know the emotional costs of keeping a secret" until the truth is disclosed. Usually, secrecy involves lying. And lying is always the setting for potential betrayal and violation of trust.



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Widespread cultural acceptance of lying is a primary reason many of us will never know love. It is impossible to nurture one's own or another's spiritual growth when the core of one's being and identity is shrouded in secrecy and lies. Trusting that another person always intends your good, having a core foundation of loving practice, cannot exist within a context of deception. It is this truism that makes all acts of judicious withholding major moral dilemmas. More than ever before we, as a society, need to renew a commitment to truth telling. Such a commitment is difficult when lying is deemed more acceptable than telling the truth. Lying has become so much the accepted norm that people lie even when it would be simpler to tell the truth.

Practically every mental health care practitioner, from the most erudite psychoanalysts to untrained self-help gurus, tell us that it is infinitely more fulfilling and we are all saner if we tell the truth, yet most of us are not rushing to stand up and be counted among the truth tellers. Indeed, as someone committed to being honest in daily life I experience the constant drag of being seen as a "freak" for telling the truth, even when I speak truthfully about simple matters.

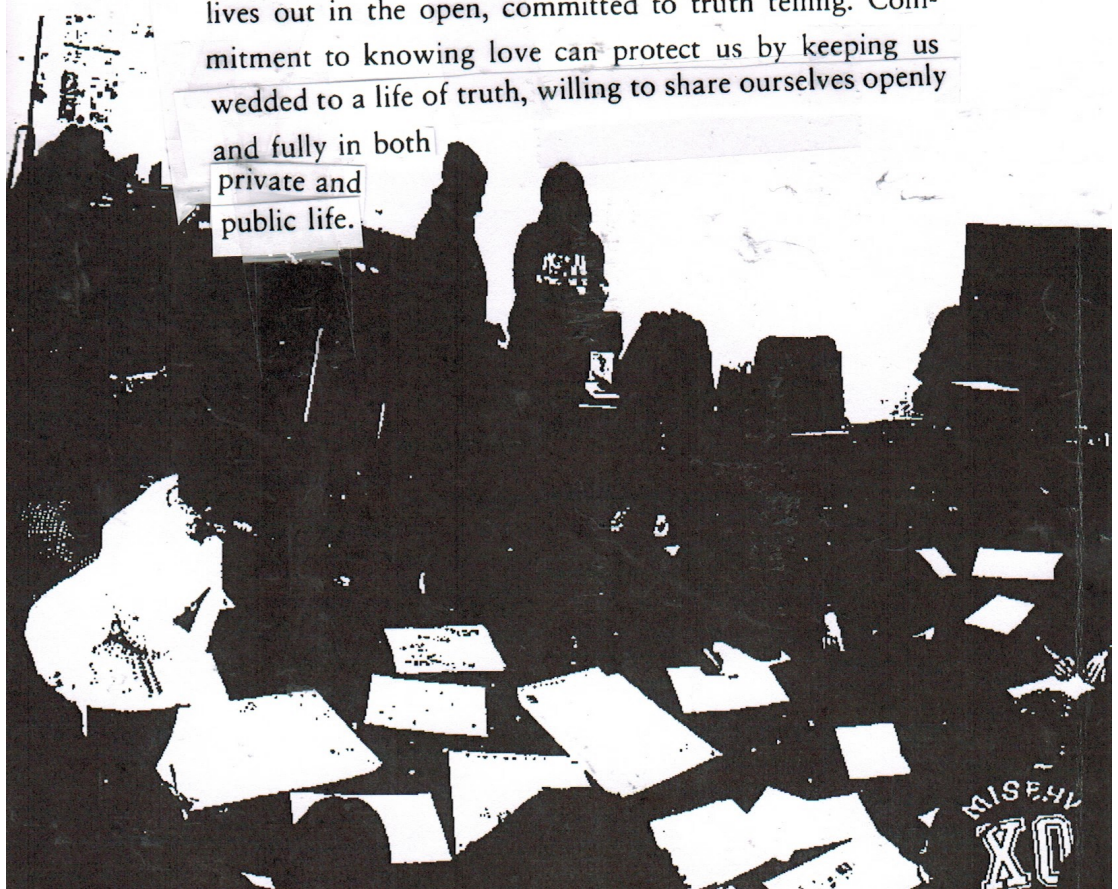
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In today's world we are taught to fear the truth, to believe it always hurts. We are encouraged to see honest people as naive, as potential losers. Bombarded with cultural propaganda ready to instill in all of us the notion that lies are more important, that truth does not matter, we are all potential victims. Consumer culture in particular encourages lies. Advertising is one of the cultural mediums that has most sanctioned lying. Keeping people in a constant state of lack, in perpetual desire, strengthens the marketplace economy. Lovelessness is a boon to consumerism. And lies strengthen the world of predatory advertising. Our passive acceptance of lies in public life, particularly via the mass media, upholds and perpetuates lying in our private lives. In our public life there would be nothing for tabloid journalism to expose if we lived our lives out in the open, committed to truth telling. Commitment to knowing love can protect us by keeping us wedded to a life of truth, willing to share ourselves openly

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and fully in both
private and
public life.



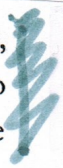


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To know love we have to tell the truth to ourselves and to others. Creating a false self to mask fears and insecurities has become so common that many of us forget who we are and what we feel underneath the pretense. Breaking through this denial is always the first step in uncovering our longing to be honest and clear. Lies and secrets burden us and cause stress. When an individual has always lied, he has no awareness that truth telling can take away this heavy burden. To know this he must let the lies go.

(26 removed)

When we hear another person's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, it is more difficult to project on to them our perceptions of who they are. It is harder to be manipulative. At times women find it difficult to hear what many men have to say when what they tell us does not conform to our fantasies of who they are or who we want them to be.



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When people punish each other for truth telling we reinforce the notion that lies are better. To be loving we willingly hear each other's truth and, most important, we affirm the value of truth telling. Lies may make people feel better, but they do not help them to know love.

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