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# Parenting by Lying and Children's Lying to Parents: The Moderating Role of Children's Beliefs

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Parenting by Lying

Parenting by lying is a practice in which parents lie to their children for parenting purposes (Heyman et al., 2009, 2013).

#### Instrumental Lies

Parental lies for behavioural compliance. e.g., "If you don't behave, I'll call the police!"

#### White Lies

Parental lies for eliciting positive emotions. e.g., "What a lovely painting!" (though it is not)

#### Belief in Parental Lies

Children's belief in parental lies they hear has not been studied to date (Setoh et al., 2023).

### Children's Lying to Parents

Lying to parents serves as an early indicator of behavioral problems and lower quality parent-child relationship (Darling et al., 2006; Stattin & Kerr, 2000).

How children are socialized about lying from exposure to parental lies is not well understood (Setoh et al., 2023).

#### Research Gaps

- No studies have examined perceptions of or belief in parental lies during childhood (Setoh et al., 2023).
- Few studies have examined different types of parental lies.



### Research Question

How are children's exposure to and belief in different types of parental lies associated with their lying to their parents?

## 2. METHOD

### Participants

564 Singaporean parent-child dyads (children aged 11-12 years; 48% female) from the Growing Up in Singapore Towards healthy Outcomes birth cohort were recruited (Soh et al., 2014).

Exposure to Parental Lies	Belief in Parental Lies	Lying to Parents
Parent- and child-report (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree)	Child-report (1 = Very untrue; 5 = Very true)	Parent- and child-report (1 = Never; 5 = Very often)
Singapore Parental Lying Scale (Setoh et al., 2022)		Lying to Parents Questionnaire (Engels et al., 2006)
<b>Instrumental Lies</b> (16 items; $\alpha > .86$ )		<b>Lying to Parents</b> (12 items; $\alpha > .87$ )
• E.g., "Finish all your food, or you'll grow up to be short."		• Activity lies
<b>White Lies</b> (4 items; $\alpha > .69$ )		• Exaggerations
• E.g., "Good job!" (even though child/you didn't actually do a good job)		• White lies

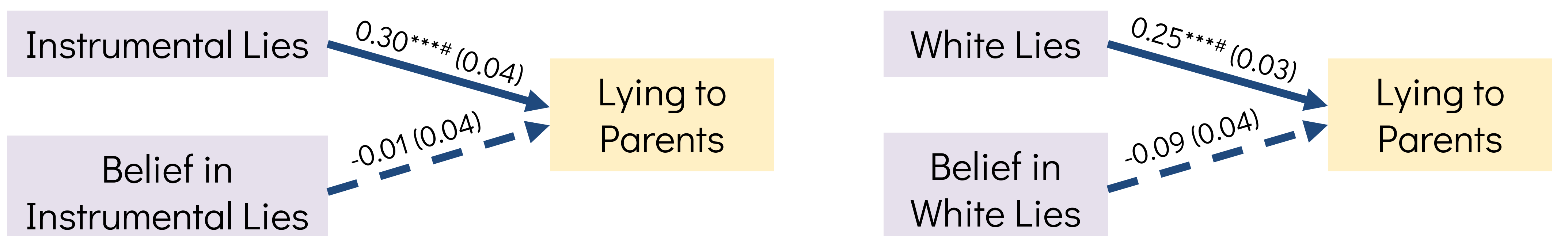
### Analyses

- Regression analyses were conducted for 1) the relationship between each type of parental lie with children's lying to parents and 2) the moderating role of belief in this relationship.
- Child gender and parent education were controlled for, and the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure was used to account for multiple testing.

## 3. RESULTS

**Result 1:** Both instrumental and white lies were significantly related to more children's lying to parents ( $p < .001$ ).

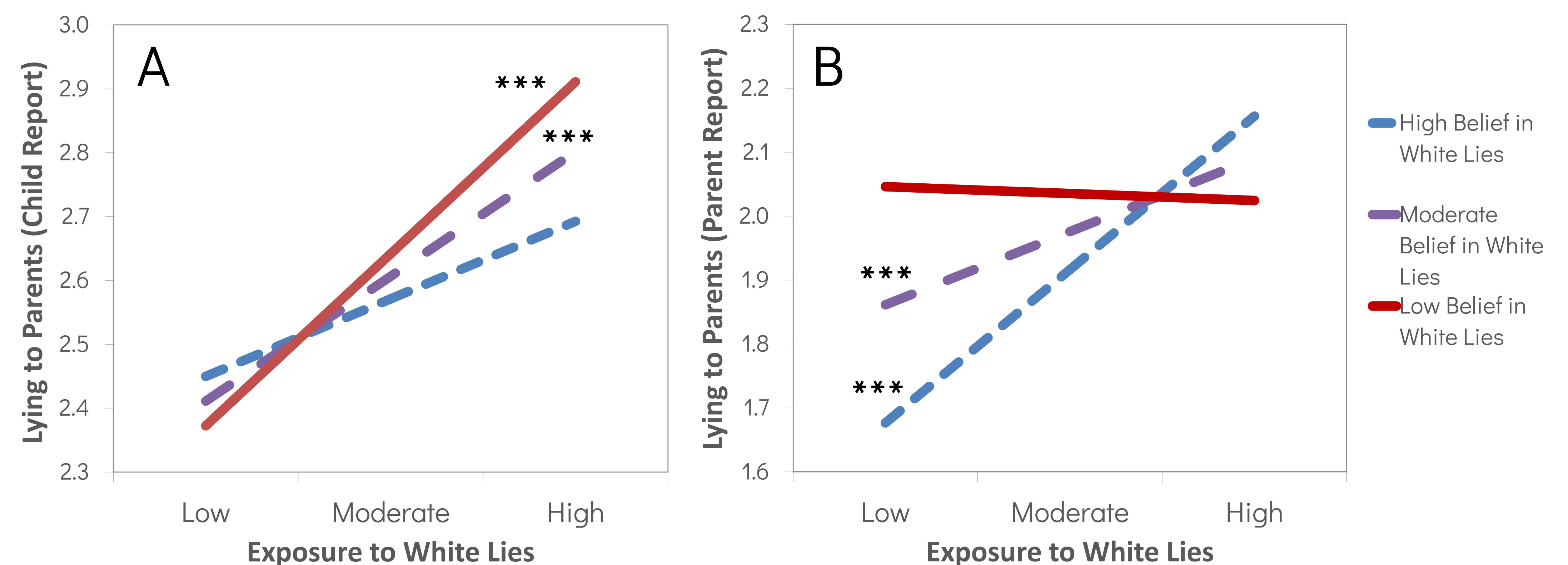
- Greater exposure to instrumental lies predicted more lying to parents reported by both parents and children.
- Greater exposure to white lies predicted more lying to parents reported by children only.



**Figure 1.** Pictorial representation of regression analyses conducted for child-reported parental lies and lying to parents. Similar results were found for parent-reported lying to parents (not shown). Solid arrows and asterisks indicate significant relationship, \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; dotted lines indicate nonsignificant relationship; hashtag (#) indicates coefficients that remained significant after multiple testing correction.

**Result 2:** Children's belief in white lies significantly moderated the relationship between exposure to white lies and lying to parents ( $p < .01$ ).

- Greater exposure to white lies predicted more child-reported lying to parents when belief was low ( $B = 0.28$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but predicted more parent-reported lying to parents when belief was high ( $B = 0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
- There was no significant moderation for instrumental lies and lying to parents.



**Figure 2.** Simple slopes for the interaction between exposure and belief in white lies on child-reported lying to parents (Panel A) and parent-reported lying to parents (Panel B). High slope indicates 1 SD above, moderate indicates mean level, and low indicates 1 SD below. Asterisks indicate statistically significant slopes, \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## 4. DISCUSSION

### Children's Perceptions of and Belief in Parental Lies Play a Significant Role in Their Socialization of Lying

Children's exposure to instrumental lies was associated with more lying to parents.

- Instrumental lies may lead to more lying behavior in children through modelling or communicating the effectiveness of lying (Allen & Kara, 2023).

Children's exposure to white lies was associated with more lying to parents, but this relationship was moderated by children's belief.

- Exposure to white lies may lead to more lying behavior in children, only when coupled with awareness that they have been lied to.
- Differences in the direction of associations between parent- and child-reported lying to parents suggest that we should differentiate between reporters for lying research (e.g., Dykstra et al., 2020).

### Limitations and Future Directions

- Study is cross-sectional and correlational, so we cannot infer causation. The measures used have not been validated and have a varying structure across subscales, so more robust measures of parental and child lying need to be developed.
- Future studies may examine other facets of children's perceptions of parental lies, such as their moral evaluations of parental lie types.



## PAPER



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