

Personality Traits and Lying Behaviour in Indian Young Adults: The Primacy of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness Over Self-Esteem

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Abstract— Deception is a pervasive social behaviour with complex underlying factors. While extensive research on lying exists in Western populations, studies examining personality factors and self-esteem as predictors of lying in Indian youth remain limited. This correlational study examined the relationship between the Big Five personality traits, self-esteem, and lying behaviour among young adults ($N = 155$, $M_{age} = 20.30$, $SD = 1.60$) in India. Participants completed the Lying in Everyday Situations (LiES) Scale, the Big Five Inventory (BFI), and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) via online survey. Results indicated significant negative correlations between lying and Agreeableness ($r = -.327, p < .001$), Conscientiousness ($r = -.174, p < .05$), and Openness ($r = -.167, p < .05$). Contrary to the Sociometer Theory, self-esteem showed no significant correlation with lying ($r = .009, p > .05$). These findings suggest that in the Indian cultural context, deceptive behaviour is more strongly linked to social orientation and self-discipline than to self-perception. The implications of these results for understanding deception in collectivist cultures are discussed.

Index Terms— Big Five personality, lying, deception, self-esteem, young adults, India,

I. INTRODUCTION

Deception is a ubiquitous feature of human social interaction, functioning as a complex mechanism for impression management, conflict avoidance, and resource acquisition [1]. While frequently categorized as a moral transgression [2], lying behaviour varies significantly across individuals, prompting researchers to investigate the psychological architecture that supports or inhibits dishonesty. Two primary theoretical frameworks offer insight into this

variability: the Cognitive Theory of Lying and the Sociometer Theory of self-esteem.

The Cognitive Theory of Lying posits that deception is cognitively more demanding than truth-telling. While honesty is considered the dominant, intuitive response ("telling it like it is"), lying requires the inhibition of the truth, the fabrication of a plausible alternative, and the monitoring of behavioural leakage [3, 4]. Consequently, individual differences in cognitive control and behavioural regulation, constructs closely aligned with personality traits such as Conscientiousness, may determine an individual's propensity to lie. Conversely, the Sociometer Theory [5, 6] conceptualizes self-esteem not as a static self-evaluation, but as an internal monitor of social acceptance. According to this view, individuals with low self-esteem may resort to deceptive self-presentation to prevent social exclusion or to artificially boost their status [7], while those with high self-esteem may feel less pressure to fabricate information.

The Big Five model of personality, comprising Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness, serves as the dominant paradigm for understanding these individual differences [8]. Recent empirical work has begun to map these traits onto deceptive behaviour, though findings remain mixed. For instance, Hart et al. (2020) found that high Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were consistently associated with reduced lying [9], while Neuroticism was positively correlated with deception. Similarly, Weber et al. (2017) reported that

Conscientiousness was a robust predictor of honesty, likely due to the trait's association with rule-adherence and impulse control [10]. However, the relationship between Openness and lying is less clear; while some studies suggest open individuals may be better liars due to creativity [11], others find them more honest due to a preference for authenticity.

The relationship between self-esteem and lying is equally complex. Jaeger et al. (2021) demonstrated that lying, particularly for self-centered reasons, can lower an individual's self-esteem, creating a feedback loop of negative affect [12]. Grant et al. (2019) further identified that "daily liars" (those lying frequently) reported significantly lower self-esteem and poorer mental health outcomes compared to non-daily liars [13]. However, much of this literature relies on Western samples, where individual autonomy and authenticity are paramount values. In collectivist cultures like India, where social harmony often supersedes individual expression [14], the dynamics of deception may differ. "Pro-social lying", i.e., deception intended to benefit others or maintain group cohesion, may be more normative and less psychologically taxing in such contexts.

Despite the rich global literature, there is a paucity of research examining these relationships specifically within the Indian young adult population (aged 18–25). This demographic is particularly critical as it represents a transitional developmental stage characterized by identity formation and navigating complex social hierarchies in educational and professional settings. Existing Indian studies have largely focused on broad personality profiles or clinical populations, leaving a gap in understanding how normative personality traits and self-esteem interact to predict everyday lying behaviour in youth.

Objectives and Hypotheses

The present study aimed to address these gaps by examining the relationship between the Big Five personality factors, self-esteem, and the habit of lying among Indian young adults. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Investigate whether self-esteem predicts the frequency of lying behaviour.

2. Determine the direction and strength of the relationship between Big Five traits and lying.
3. Assess whether findings from Western literature replicate in an Indian cultural context.

Based on the Cognitive Theory and prior empirical evidence [9, 10], the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Extraversion and Neuroticism will be positively correlated with lying behaviour.

H2: Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness, and Self-Esteem will be negatively correlated with lying behaviour.

II. METHOD

A. Participants and Sampling

A sample of 155 young adults ($N = 155$; 60.0% female, 38.7% male, 1.3% preferred not to specify) aged 18–25 years ($M = 20.30$, $SD = 1.60$) participated in this study. Participants were primarily undergraduate ($n = 98$) and postgraduate ($n = 57$) students recruited through convenience sampling from urban (80.0%) and semi-urban (13.5%) areas across India. The age distribution was as follows: 18 years ($n = 19$, 12.3%), 19 years ($n = 28$, 18.1%), 20 years ($n = 47$, 30.3%), 21 years ($n = 36$, 23.2%), 22–25 years ($n = 25$, 16.1%).

Inclusion criteria comprised: (a) age between 18–25 years, (b) current enrollment in undergraduate or postgraduate programs, (c) access to technology for online survey completion, (d) sufficient English proficiency to complete questionnaires, and (e) absence of severe psychological disorders.

Exclusion criteria were: (a) current enrolment in distance education or online courses, and (b) non-Indian population to control for variability.

B. Measures

i. Lying in Everyday Situations (LiES) Scale: The LiES is a 14-item self-report measure assessing the frequency of various forms of lying, including protective lying, image enhancement, saving face, avoiding punishment, vindictiveness, privacy, entertainment, and relationship maintenance. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*). Higher scores indicate greater lying frequency. The

scale demonstrates good internal consistency and construct validity across diverse samples.

ii. *The Big Five Inventory (BFI)*: The BFI is a 44-item multidimensional personality inventory measuring the five major personality dimensions: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *disagree strongly*, 5 = *agree strongly*). The inventory demonstrates strong psychometric properties, with average reliability coefficients of .88 across the five factors (John et al., 1991).

iii. *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)*: The RSES is a 10-item self-report measure of global self-esteem comprising five positively and five negatively worded items, rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). The RSES demonstrates good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$) and test-retest reliability, with strong predictive validity for psychological outcomes.

C. Procedure

Data were collected via an online survey administered through Google Forms. Participants accessed the survey link and provided informed consent on the initial page. The survey comprised: (a) a sociodemographic information sheet, (b) the LiES Scale, (c) the Big Five Inventory, and (d) the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Question order was randomized to minimize response bias. All data were collected confidentially, with anonymity maintained throughout. Ethical guidelines regarding informed consent, voluntary participation, and data security were strictly adhered to.

D. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness, and the Shapiro–Wilk test) were computed for all variables to assess normality of distribution. Given that most variables showed non-normal distributions ($p < .05$ on Shapiro–Wilk tests), Spearman rank-order correlations were calculated to examine bivariate relationships between personality traits, self-esteem, and lying behaviour. Pearson correlations are also reported for comparison with existing literature. All analyses were conducted using Jamovi Version 2.2.5 and were confirmed on RStudio 2023.12.1 Build 402. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

III. RESULTS

A. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all study variables. The mean LiES score was 35.81 ($SD = 10.47$), indicating moderate self-reported lying frequency among participants. Mean scores on the Big Five dimensions were: Extraversion ($M = 29.52, SD = 7.94$), Agreeableness ($M = 36.48, SD = 5.52$), Conscientiousness ($M = 33.19, SD = 7.14$), Neuroticism ($M = 24.51, SD = 8.23$), and Openness ($M = 33.26, SD = 6.81$). The mean RSES score was 22.34 ($SD = 5.03$), indicating moderate self-esteem. Shapiro–Wilk tests revealed that most variables deviated significantly from normality, justifying the use of non-parametric tests.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	Shapiro–Wilk W	p
Lying (LiES)	35.81	10.47	0.97	.041
Extraversion	29.52	7.94	0.98	.143
Agreeableness	36.48	5.52	0.96	.007
Conscientiousness	33.19	7.14	0.97	.089
Neuroticism	24.51	8.23	0.98	.152
Openness	33.26	6.81	0.97	.063
Self-Esteem (RSES)	22.34	5.03	0.98	.297

B. Correlational Analysis

Pearson and Spearman correlations between personality factors, self-esteem, and lying are presented in Table 2. Three significant negative correlations emerged between lying and personality factors.

A strong negative correlation was found between Agreeableness and lying ($r = -.327, p < .001$), indicating that individuals scoring higher on agreeableness reported significantly lower lying frequencies. A weaker but significant negative correlation was observed between Conscientiousness and lying ($r = -.174, p < .05$), suggesting that individuals with greater self-discipline and impulse control engage in less deceptive behaviour. A significant negative correlation emerged between Openness and lying ($r = -.167, p < .05$), indicating that individuals more open to experience report lower lying frequencies.

No significant correlations were found between lying and Extraversion ($r = -.016, p = .861$), Neuroticism ($r = .034, p = .677$), or Self-Esteem ($r = .009, p = .914$). The absence of a relationship between self-

esteem and lying is particularly noteworthy given theoretical predictions.

wherein the potential damage to trusted relationships outweighs any short-term benefits of deception.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix: Personality Factors, Self-Esteem, and Lying

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Extraversion	—					
(2) Agreeableness	.267**	—				
(3) Conscientiousness	.083	.232**	—			
(4) Neuroticism	-.262**	-.279***	-.171*	—		
(5) Openness	.247**	.052	.013	.071	—	
(6) Self-Esteem	-.085	.148	.216**	-.359***	.062	—
(7) Lying	-.016	-.327***	-.174*	.034	-.167*	.009

Note. N = 155. Pearson r values reported. $p < .05$, $p < .01$, $**p < .001$.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between the Big Five personality traits, self-esteem, and lying behaviour among Indian young adults, aiming to clarify whether Western personality-deception models generalize to collectivist cultural contexts. Three significant findings emerged, each with important theoretical and practical implications.

A. Agreeableness as the Primary Psychological Barrier to Deception

The strongest predictor of reduced lying was Agreeableness ($r = -.327$, $p < .001$), a finding that aligns with and extends existing literature while illuminating a crucial psychological mechanism. Agreeableness, characterized by prosocial orientation, empathy, trust, and altruism [8], appears to create a fundamental psychological barrier to deceptive behaviour. Individuals high in agreeableness prioritize harmonious relationships and are motivated by concern for others' well-being. This prosocial orientation creates at least three mechanisms that inhibit lying: (a) empathic inhibition, wherein the ability to perspective-take and recognize the harm caused by deception reduces the likelihood of dishonest behaviour; (b) moral alignment, wherein agreeableness is associated with internalized values of honesty and integrity; and (c) relational concern,

This finding is consistent with Hart et al. (2020), who identified Agreeableness as the most robust negative correlate of lying across multiple lie categories [9]. It is also congruent with Weber et al. (2017), who found that Agreeableness was the only trait significantly associated with perceived lying ability; more agreeable individuals believed themselves to be worse liars, a metacognitive awareness reflecting their actual reduced tendency toward deception [10]. Moreover, the strength of the Agreeableness-lying correlation in the present study ($r = -.327$) is comparable to, or exceeds, correlations found in Western samples, suggesting that the relationship between empathic concern and honesty may be a pancultural psychological principle.

However, the Indian cultural context adds nuance to this interpretation. In collectivist societies emphasizing social harmony and interdependence [14], agreeableness may serve not only individual moral values but also collective cultural imperatives. The strong agreeableness-honesty link in India may reflect both personality-level empathy and cultural socialization toward maintaining group cohesion. Consequently, highly agreeable Indian youth may be doubly motivated to avoid deception: both from individual moral convictions and from internalized cultural norms valuing communal harmony over personal advantage. This dual motivation may amplify

the agreeableness effect in the Indian context relative to individualistic Western cultures.

B. Conscientiousness and Cognitive-Moral Mechanisms of Impulse Control

The negative correlation between Conscientiousness and lying ($r = -.174, p < .05$) provides support for the Cognitive Theory of Lying [15] while suggesting that conscientiousness operates through both cognitive and moral mechanisms. Conscientiousness encompasses multiple facets: self-discipline, goal-directedness, deliberation, and rule-adherence [16]. These facets converge on a fundamental capacity for behavioural regulation and impulse control. In the context of deception, conscientiousness may reduce lying through several pathways.

First, cognitive complexity reduction. The Cognitive Theory posits that lying requires greater cognitive effort than truth-telling: the individual must suppress the truth, generate a plausible falsehood, maintain consistency across multiple contexts, and monitor for behavioural leakage [15]. Individuals low in conscientiousness, characterized by impulsivity and difficulty with long-term planning, may find these demands excessive and resort to spontaneous, often ill-conceived deceptions. Conversely, conscientious individuals, accustomed to self-monitoring and planning, are better equipped to manage the cognitive load of maintaining deception, *but this capacity may reduce appeal rather than increase deployment*. That is, conscientious individuals may avoid deception not despite their cognitive abilities, but because they recognize its complexity and preferentially adopt straightforward, honest approaches requiring no additional mental resource taxation.

Second, moral internalization. Conscientiousness is strongly linked to moral development and the internalization of ethical standards [17]. Conscientious individuals have typically internalized societal rules and norms, viewing them not as external constraints but as personally endorsed values. Lying, viewed as a violation of internalized ethical principles, generates cognitive dissonance and anticipated guilt— affective states that conscientious individuals are particularly motivated to avoid. Thus, conscientiousness predicts honesty not merely through competence but through moral commitment.

Third, temporal perspective and deferred gratification. The facet of deliberation within conscientiousness reflects the capacity to consider long-term consequences. Deception, while offering immediate benefits (avoiding punishment, achieving goals), typically incurs long-term costs (relationship damage, reputation loss, anxiety over discovery). Conscientious individuals, with their extended time horizons and weighing of delayed consequences, are more likely to recognize that the long-term costs of deception exceed short-term gains. This temporal calculus may override situational pressures toward dishonesty.

The present correlation ($r = -.174$) is modest in magnitude but robust in significance. This modest effect size suggests that conscientiousness is a meaningful but not dominant factor in predicting lying. This is consistent with Weber et al. (2017), who found conscientiousness to be consistently related to honesty but rarely as strong as agreeableness [10]. The implication is that while conscientiousness provides a protective factor against deception, other personality factors and situational contexts substantially modulate lying behaviour.

C. Openness and the Authenticity-Creativity Paradox

The significant negative correlation between Openness and lying ($r = -.167, p < .05$) was unexpected based on initial hypotheses and warrants careful interpretation. Openness to Experience comprises multiple facets: intellectual curiosity, appreciation of aesthetics, imagination, and willingness to engage with novel ideas and perspectives [17]. One might hypothesize that high openness, reflected in creativity and cognitive flexibility, would be associated with skilled deception and prolific lying. Indeed, some literature suggests that creative individuals are better liars [11]. Conversely, the present data indicate that openness is associated with *reduced* lying, suggesting a counter-intuitive mechanism.

A parsimonious interpretation is that openness, particularly the facet of values and openness to diverse perspectives, is associated with a preference for authenticity and genuine self-expression. Open individuals, characterized by introspection and willingness to explore internal experience, may resist

self-deception and external deception as barriers to authentic functioning. Lying creates a gap between internal experience and external presentation, precisely the kind of cognitive dissonance that open individuals, valuing coherence between thought and action, find aversive. This mechanism echoes existential and humanistic psychology, wherein authentic self-presentation is linked to psychological well-being and personal growth.

Alternatively, openness, particularly the intellectual curiosity facet, may enhance the ability to perspective-take and recognize how deception affects others. Open individuals, who seek to understand diverse viewpoints and contexts, may be better positioned to recognize the impact of their dishonesty on relationship partners. This expanded perspective may reduce lying frequency through enhanced empathic understanding, creating an indirect pathway whereby openness reduces deception through perspective-taking mechanisms similar to those operating in agreeableness.

The apparent paradox between openness (creativity) and lying (often requiring cognitive flexibility) may be resolved by distinguishing between creative ability and creative motivation. Open individuals possess the cognitive capacity for skillful deception but may lack the motivation to employ it. This is consistent with person-situation interactionist perspectives: personality traits predict behaviour most strongly when situational pressures are weak or ambiguous, but situational imperatives override personality effects when strong. In educational contexts emphasizing academic integrity, or social contexts valuing authenticity, open individuals' reduced lying may reflect alignment between personality dispositions and contextual values. However, in high-pressure environments where deception offers substantial advantages, even open individuals may resort to dishonesty.

D. The Self-Esteem Anomaly: Cultural Reconfiguration of the Self-Esteem–Deception Link

The most theoretically significant finding was the absence of a significant correlation between self-esteem and lying ($r = .009, p > .05$). This non-finding contradicts both the Sociometer Theory and substantial prior empirical research [12, 13], yet offers

profound insights into how cultural context reshapes psychological mechanisms.

According to Leary's Sociometer Theory [5, 6], self-esteem functions as an internal monitor of relational value and social acceptance. Threats to social inclusion trigger reductions in self-esteem, motivating corrective social behaviour. From this perspective, individuals with low self-esteem, experiencing chronic perceptions of low relational value, should be more likely to resort to deception as a compensatory strategy, either to artificially boost their status (impression management) or to protect themselves from further social injury (defensive lying). Conversely, individuals with high self-esteem, secure in their relational value, should have less need for deceptive self-presentation.

Jaeger et al. (2021) conducted an experimental study demonstrating that engaging in self-centered lying (lies intended to benefit the self) reduced subsequent self-esteem and increased negative affect [12], a finding consistent with the self-esteem depletion model. Grant et al. (2019) observed that "daily liars" reported significantly lower self-esteem and worse mental health compared to non-daily liars [13], suggesting a bidirectional link where low self-esteem predicts increased lying, which further reduces self-esteem in a negative feedback loop. Feldman et al. (2017) similarly found that individuals exhibiting high lying frequency were perceived as, and likely perceived themselves as, less honest and less valued [18].

E. The Present Non-Significant Finding: A Cultural Interpretation

The absence of a self-esteem–lying relationship in the present Indian sample is not a statistical artifact (the correlation is precisely .009, with 95% confidence interval including zero). Rather, it suggests a fundamental disruption in the Western personality-deception model when applied to collectivist contexts. Several interconnected mechanisms may explain this disruption:

i) Cultural Normativity of Prosocial Deception: In Western individualistic cultures, lying is primarily conceptualized as a violation of personal authenticity and moral integrity: core components of the autonomous self. An individual who lies experiences

an identity-threatening inconsistency between internal values (honesty) and external behaviour (deception), generating guilt, shame, and self-esteem reduction. However, in Indian collectivist cultures, where interdependence supersedes autonomy and where maintaining social harmony is valued alongside individual authenticity [14], certain forms of deception are culturally normative and sanctioned.

Specifically, "prosocial lying", i.e., deception intended to benefit others or preserve relationships, is often viewed as a marker of consideration and social responsibility rather than moral failure. A young adult in India who tells a "white lie" to spare a parent's feelings, to maintain a friend's dignity, or to preserve group harmony is engaging in culturally-endorsed behaviour. Importantly, such prosocial lies do not threaten core identity or relational value; they affirm one's commitment to others and to collective well-being. Therefore, engaging in prosocial lying would not precipitate the self-esteem reduction observed in Western samples.

ii) Separation of Behaviour from Self-Evaluation: In collectivist cultures, the self is conceptualized as fundamentally relational rather than autonomous [19]. An individual's self-worth is derived not solely from internal moral consistency but from relational competence, fulfillment of role obligations, and contribution to group well-being. Lying in service of these collective ends may be dissociated from global self-evaluation. That is, an Indian young adult might engage in contextual deception without updating their global self-esteem because the deception is viewed as situational, role-appropriate, and other-benefiting rather than as a revelation of core self-incompetence. In contrast, Western individuals with high autonomy-orientation view each dishonest act as a reflection of stable character, triggering global self-esteem reduction.

iii) Reduced Psychological Reactance to Deception: The Western self-esteem–lying link partially reflects psychological reactance: individuals who lie often experience emotional distress (guilt, anxiety, shame) when their dishonesty is or might be discovered. This distress is fed by individualistic concerns about reputation damage and identity threat. However, in collectivist contexts where in-group trust is presumed robust and where moral standards are

flexible when in-group solidarity is at stake, individuals may experience reduced anxiety about deception discovery. If a young person confesses a minor lie to a parent or peer within a collectivist framework, the relational fabric is typically strong enough to weather the disclosure without global rejection. Consequently, the anxiety-mediated self-esteem reduction may not occur.

iv) Developmental Considerations: The age range of the present sample (18–25) is particularly important. Erikson (1968) characterized young adulthood as a period wherein identity consolidation and intimacy formation are central developmental tasks [20]. In Western contexts, this often involves resolving identity through autonomous decision-making and authentic self-presentation. However, in Indian contexts, identity during young adulthood remains embedded within family and community structures, with emphasis on role fulfillment and relational development. Young adults in India are simultaneously navigating educational achievement, family expectations, and peer relationships, contexts in which strategic self-presentation (including occasional deception) is developmentally normative. The constellation of social demands may render occasional dishonesty unremarkable to self-esteem, as lying is not viewed as exceptional or indicative of global inadequacy but as a situational adjustment.

The self-esteem–lying non-correlation does not mean that self-esteem is irrelevant to Indian adolescent behaviour. Rather, it suggests that the *mechanisms* linking self-esteem to behaviour differ from those described in Western personality psychology. Future research might investigate whether self-esteem in Indian samples predicts not lying frequency per se, but rather specific *types* of deception (e.g., self-serving vs. prosocial) or *contexts* of deception (e.g., family vs. peer contexts). Additionally, measures of collective self-esteem (one's sense of value within the group) might prove more predictive of lying behaviour than individual self-esteem measures, reflecting the primacy of relational identity in collectivist cultures.

F. Non-Significant Findings: Neuroticism and Extraversion

Neither Neuroticism ($r = .034, p > .05$) nor Extraversion ($r = -.016, p > .05$) demonstrated

significant associations with lying, despite prior research suggesting these relationships. These null findings warrant discussion.

Hart et al. (2020) found a positive correlation between Neuroticism and lying [9], interpreting this through an emotional dysregulation lens: individuals high in neuroticism, experiencing anxiety and emotional instability, may resort to deception as a coping mechanism or act impulsively on fabrications due to poor emotion regulation. However, the present study found no such relationship. One explanation is that in collectivist societies with interdependent social structures and strong cultural norms for emotion regulation, emotionally unstable individuals may be *socialized* toward conformity and behavioural constraint rather than acting out emotional reactivity through lying. Additionally, in educational settings with clear behavioural expectations and strong institutional structures (as would characterize the student-heavy sample), situational constraints may override personality effects. Highly neurotic individuals, while internally dysregulated, may comply with institutional norms that require honesty.

Similarly, the non-significant Extraversion finding contradicts some prior work. Extraverts are characterized by sociability, dominance-seeking, and approach motivation. One might hypothesize that extraverts' status-seeking and desire for social dominance would motivate strategic deception. However, the present data suggest no such relationship. This may reflect the primacy of in-group harmony over status-seeking in collectivist contexts. An extravert in an individualistic Western context might lie to enhance their status relative to peers; an extravert in collectivist India might channel approach motivation toward gaining influence *within* the group through prosocial means rather than through deceptive status enhancement that could damage relational harmony.

G. Theoretical Synthesis: A Culturally-Situated Model of Personality and Deception

The pattern of findings suggests that personality-deception relationships are not universal but rather culturally contingent. In Western individualistic contexts, the primary drivers of deception avoidance are: (a) individual moral values and identity consistency (conscientiousness, agreeableness), and

(b) threat to individual self-esteem and social status (self-esteem effects). In Indian collectivist contexts, the primary drivers appear to be: (a) empathic concern for others and maintenance of relational harmony (agreeableness), (b) self-discipline and behavioural regulation supporting role fulfillment (conscientiousness), and (c) preference for authentic self-expression within relational contexts (openness).

Notably absent from the Indian pattern are the individual-level self-esteem effects prominent in Western models. This absence likely reflects the collectivist reorganization of self-conception: self-worth is derived from relational competence and group contribution rather than from individual moral consistency, making self-esteem a less potent regulator of deceptive behaviour. This reconceptualization aligns with cross-cultural psychological theory [14, 19], and should inform future research on personality and ethics.

IV. LIMITATIONS

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment and guide future research directions:

(i) *Methodological Limitations:* The convenience sampling approach limits generalizability beyond student populations in urban/semi-urban India. Rural populations, non-student young adults, and individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds remain understudied. Additionally, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference or investigation of temporal dynamics. Correlations observed here may reflect reverse causality (lying may lead to lower agreeableness-related outcomes if dishonesty damages relationships) or third-variable confounding (both personality traits and lying behaviour may be influenced by unmeasured factors such as moral disengagement, family moral climate, or school academic pressure).

(ii) *Self-Report Bias:* All measures relied on self-report, introducing social desirability bias. Participants may underreport lying frequency, particularly in a context where deception is culturally stigmatized at the level of explicit values, even if contextually accepted in practice. The LiES scale attempts to minimize this through specific, contextually-embedded items, but bias remains a concern. Future research employing behavioural observation, peer-

reports, or experimental deception tasks could address this.

(iii) *Measurement Validity in Cross-Cultural Context:* Although the BFI and RSES are widely used internationally, their validity in Indian populations remains incompletely established. Personality dimensions may have somewhat different meanings or manifestations across cultures. Agreeableness in an Indian context may emphasize family duty and filial piety more than in Western samples; conscientiousness may emphasize role fulfillment within hierarchical structures. Further validation studies using confirmatory factor analysis and measurement invariance testing would strengthen cross-cultural interpretation.

(iv) *Cultural Homogeneity Assumption:* India is not culturally homogeneous. The sample comprised primarily urban/semi-urban, educated, college-bound youth—a population increasingly exposed to Western values through globalization and media. Whether findings would replicate among more traditional, rural, or religiously-observant populations remains unknown. Future research should deliberately sample across cultural subgroups within India to assess generalizability.

(v) *Restricted Range of Variables:* The modest to moderate effect sizes suggest that personality factors, while significant, account for only a modest proportion of lying behaviour variance. The unexplained variance likely reflects situational factors (academic pressure, peer norms, family expectations), moral/ethical reasoning, and individual differences in temptation and opportunity for deception. Multilevel models integrating personality, situational, moral, and contextual factors would provide more comprehensive understanding.

V. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings offer actionable insights for practitioners working with Indian youth. In educational settings, teachers and administrators seeking to reduce academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism) might consider interventions targeting agreeableness and conscientiousness rather than or in addition to self-esteem enhancement. Fostering peer-to-peer accountability and collaborative learning environments that emphasize relational responsibility

may be more effective than individual honour codes. Additionally, creating opportunities for students to understand how academic dishonesty affects their peers (enhancing perspective-taking) could leverage agreeableness mechanisms.

In organizational and workplace contexts, human resources professionals selecting candidates for positions requiring high integrity might prioritize agreeableness and conscientiousness in personality assessments or interviews. Additionally, creating organizational cultures emphasizing group cohesion, relational responsibility, and clarity of ethical role expectations may be more effective in reducing workplace deception than policies primarily focused on individual reputation or self-esteem.

In family and developmental contexts, parents and counsellors working with Indian young adults might acknowledge that occasional prosocial dishonesty is culturally normative and developmentally appropriate, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of honesty in maintaining trust. Teaching youth to distinguish between socially-expedient lies and deeply dishonest character development may prevent excessive self-criticism while cultivating ethical maturity.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that lying behaviour in Indian young adults is more strongly linked to social orientation (Agreeableness) and self-discipline (Conscientiousness) than to self-esteem. The absence of a self-esteem–lying relationship reflects cultural differences in self-concept and moral reasoning: collectivist norms may normalize prosocial lying without self-esteem costs. These findings extend personality-deception literature by demonstrating cultural specificity in relationships previously assumed universal, highlighting the importance of conducting personality research within diverse cultural contexts and of considering cultural frameworks in interpreting psychological phenomena.

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