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LIARS-IN- MAKING - Small lies tune your brain to be dishonest

Erica Goode

NYT NEWS SERVICE

People who tell small, self serving lies are likely to progress to bigger falsehoods, and over time, the brain appears to adapt to the dishonesty, according to a new study .The finding, the researchers said, provides evidence for the "slippery slope" sometimes described by wayward politicians, corrupt financiers, unfaithful spouses and others in explaining their misconduct.

"They usually tell a story where they started small and got larger and larger, and then they suddenly found themselves committing quite severe acts," said Tali Sharot, an associate professor of cognitive neuroscience at University College London. She was a senior author of the study , published on Monday in the journal Nature Neuroscience. Everyone lies once in a while, if only to make a friend feel better ("That dress looks great on you!") or explain why an email went unanswered ("I never got it!"). Some



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colleagues devised a situation that offered participants the chance to lie of their own free will, and gave them an incentive to do so. The researchers concentrated on the amygdala, an area associated with emotional response.

Participants in the study were asked to advise a partner in another room about how many pennies were in a jar. When the subjects believed that lying about the amount of money was to their benefit, they were more inclined to dishonesty and their lies escalated over time. As lying increased, the response in the amygdala decreased. And the size of the decline from one trial to another predicted how much bigger a subject's next lie would be. These findings suggested that the negative emotional signals initially associated with lying decrease as the brain becomes desensitised, Dr Sharot said.

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