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Big and Small Lies

Diogo Geraldés¹

Franziska Heinicke²

Duk Gyoo Kim²

¹Utrecht School of Economics Utrecht University
²Department of Economics, University of Mannheim

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Abstract

Lying involves many decisions yielding big or small benefits. Are big and small lies complementary or supplementary? In a laboratory experiment where the participants could simultaneously tell a big and a small lie, our study finds that lies are complementary. The participants who lie more in the big lie, also do so in the small lie and vice versa. Our study also finds that although replacing one dimension of the lying opportunities with a randomly determined prize does not affect the overall lying behavior, repeatedly being lucky on a high-stakes prize leads to less lying on the report of a low-stakes outcome.