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Lying as a compensatory mechanism in adolescents with intellectual disabilities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how adolescents with intellectual disabilities use lying as a compensatory mechanism. We were particularly interested in observing how these adolescents' resort to lying as a social facilitation mechanism. The study involved 33 adolescents with intellectual disabilities aged between 14 and 18 years ($M = 15.88$, $SD = 1.45$), of whom 24 were boys (72.7%) and 9 were girls (27.3%). The results showed that adolescents with intellectual disabilities use lying as a compensatory mechanism to cope with the social challenges they face. These perspectives offer practical implications for supporting adolescents with intellectual disabilities in navigating social environments, meeting relational needs, and adapting to the demands of an ever-changing environment.

Keywords: compensatory mechanism, lying, intellectual disability

Introduction

Adolescents with intellectual disabilities face significant social challenges, which lead to the adoption of compensatory mechanisms aimed at mitigating the gap between their abilities, unmet needs, and environmental demands.

To summarize, we can list a series of deficient compensatory mechanisms adopted by adolescents with intellectual disabilities in an attempt to cope with the challenging social environment. Among these are: increased delinquency, oppositional behavior, hostility, extraversion, antagonism, disinhibition, substance use, lying, confabulation, aggressive behaviors, flattery, envy, and the list could go on (Romero & Alonso, 2019; Abitov, Mikhailova, & Gorodetskaya, 2019).

Adolescents with intellectual disabilities are more inclined to cover up behaviors they do not fully understand by using lying, due to difficulties in recognizing and understanding their aggressive behaviors and the impact of these actions. For example, due to fear of punishment or the inability to recognize the behavior as inappropriate, adolescents with intellectual disabilities might lie about an aggressive incident. In such situations, lying emerges as a defense mechanism to navigate social interactions they perceive as confusing or threatening (Zaigraeva et al., 2021).

Lying is also used by adolescents with intellectual disabilities to cope with bullying situations, which can have a profound impact on them. They may lie to avoid aggression from others or to fit in with their peers. When talking about an episode of physical or emotional abuse, lying becomes a survival strategy to protect themselves from emotional trauma and social exclusion (Zeedyk et al., 2014).

Lying can emerge as a compensatory mechanism to avoid negative consequences and the difficulties of managing emotions and behaviors. These challenges can lead to lying as a way of

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handling situations they find difficult, as adolescents with intellectual disabilities often face significant behavioral and emotional challenges (Marsh & Ng, 2017).

The challenges of everyday life represent a continuous struggle for adolescents with intellectual disabilities, who find themselves needing to adopt compensatory behaviors. Lying can be a reliable tool for exerting some control over their environment or for coping with their dependence on others. This underscores the need for support and guidance in developing independence skills, while also understanding the importance of honesty in social interactions (Tri et al., 2017). The social barriers that adolescents with intellectual disabilities frequently encounter in their attempts to adapt to the external environment and participate in it lead to the reinforcement of lying behaviors as a strategy to navigate social interactions they find challenging or to avoid negative judgments from peers and adults (Phasha, 2009). Furthermore, they try to align their identity with perceived social norms through lying, thus protecting themselves from social exclusion. The fact that they are perceived as different prompts them to adopt compensatory mechanisms to reduce this gap (Jones, 2012).

Another major difficulty faced by adolescents with intellectual disabilities is their limited capacity to manage anxiety, stress, or avoid situations they find overwhelming. In these cases as well, lying is one of the most common strategies used as a coping mechanism, being considered a reliable behavior by adolescents with intellectual disabilities (Young, Dagnan, & Jahoda, 2016). Despite the challenges faced by adolescents with intellectual disabilities, there is a predominant tendency to use lying as a compensatory mechanism. This behavior can be attributed to the relative ease with which it is acquired, especially in contexts where moral development is affected. Specialized literature consistently identifies numerous scenarios in which lying functions as a compensatory strategy among this population, regardless of the underlying motivation for deception.

Method

The aim of the research was to determine how adolescents with intellectual disabilities use lying as a compensatory mechanism. We were particularly interested in observing how adolescents with intellectual disabilities resort to lying as a social facilitation mechanism.

The objectives of the research were as follows:

- Determine the type of lying among adolescents with intellectual disabilities.
- Establish personality traits, including introversion-extroversion traits, in adolescents with intellectual disabilities.
- Establish the type of personal security among adolescents with intellectual disabilities.
- Correlate lying behavior with personality traits, including introversion-extroversion traits, in adolescents with intellectual disabilities.
- Correlate lying behavior with types of personal security among adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

For this research, three hypotheses were formulated:

- *Hypothesis 1: It is assumed that there is a significant correlation between lying used by adolescents with intellectual disabilities as a compensatory mechanism and their traits of combativeness and desire for knowledge.*
- *Hypothesis 2: It is assumed that the age of adolescents with intellectual disabilities significantly influences how personality traits manifest, including introversion, extroversion, sociability, and combativeness.*

- *Hypothesis 3: It is assumed that lying is a compensatory mechanism with a self-preservation role depending on the levels of extroversion and introversion in adolescents with intellectual disabilities.*

A sample of 33 adolescents with intellectual disabilities was selected for the present study. Due to the distinct individual characteristics, we proposed to expand the sample for this study to include all middle school classes within special education, namely grades 5-10.

The inclusion criteria for forming the group of subjects were:

- Age: 14-18 years;
- Type of disability: Intellectual disability.

Therefore, the sampling was carried out using non-probability techniques, and it was an identification-based sampling, as the participants who took part in the study were required to meet the criteria mentioned above (the age range of 14-18 years and the presence of intellectual disability). All the legal guardians of the targeted subjects consented to their participation in the study, and thus no data was excluded from the research.

Data collection was carried out individually with each subject. The evaluator read the questions, and the respondent answered, after which the evaluator marked the given response.

The data obtained was anonymized, and subjects' names or other identifying information were not used in the study. Only individuals directly involved in the development of this study had access to the data.

In this research, the following instruments were used for data collection:

- The Questionnaire for Identifying Types of Deceptive Behavior is a tool specifically designed for this study and includes 15 situations targeting three types of deceptive behavior: lying reflected through delegating responsibility, self-securing, and self-preservation.
- The Questionnaire for Identifying Types of Personal Security is a tool developed for this study, aimed at determining the type of personal security. It consists of 18 items and focuses on three types of personal security: the need for security, the insecure, and the realistic knowledge seeker.
- The Questionnaire for Identifying Personality Dominance on the Extrovert-Introvert Scale is a tool developed for this study, aimed at determining personality traits on the introvert-extrovert scale. This instrument includes 36 items capturing the following variables: independence, sociability, combativeness, and ambition.

To test the hypotheses proposed in this study, a correlational research design was chosen. The correlational design allows for highlighting the relationships and influences that variables may have on each other without requiring manipulation or intervention from the researcher. Thus, it is possible to observe whether there are connections between the variables included in the study and, if influences are observed, what their intensity is and in which direction they manifest. To test the hypotheses, parametric Pearson correlations and multiple linear regression were used for statistical analysis.

Findings and discussion

In the descriptive statistical analysis, the following properties of the variables were highlighted.

Table 1. *The average values obtained from the instrument aimed at identifying types of lying*

	The lie that is reflected through the delegation of responsibility	Self-securing	Self-preservation
Mean	49,00	48,55	50,82
Median	45,00	51,00	53,00
Standard Deviation	11,079	11,353	9,793

We observe that the average values for the three variables defining lying behavior are close. The highest average was recorded by the variable Self-preservation (with a mean result of 50.82). The lowest average was recorded by the variable Self-securing (with a mean result of 48.55). The variable Lying reflected through the delegation of responsibility recorded an average value of 49. The median values close to the mean values indicate a symmetric distribution of the data. For the variable Lying reflected through the delegation of responsibility, the median value is lower compared to the mean, and in this case, we can speak of positive skewness. For the other two variables, Self-securing and Self-preservation, where the median is higher compared to the mean, we can talk about negative skewness. The subject group of the research shows a variation of ~12 around the mean value for the variables. Lying reflected through the delegation of responsibility and Self-securing, and a variation of ~10 around the mean value for the variable Self-preservation.

Table 2. *The average values obtained from the instrument focusing on personal security*

	The need for securing	Insecurity	The realist eager for knowledge
Mean	13,67	17,21	11,18
Median	14,00	17,00	11,00
Standard Deviation	3,313	1,728	2,242

We observe that the average values for the three variables defining personal security are close. The highest average was recorded by the variable Insecurity (with a mean result of 17.21). The lowest average was recorded by the variable The Realist Eager for Knowledge (with a mean result of 11.18). The variable The Need for Security recorded an average value of 13.67. The median values close to the mean values indicate a symmetric distribution of the data. For the variable The Need for Security, the median value is higher compared to the mean, and in this case, we can speak of negative skewness. For the other two variables, Insecurity and The Realist Eager for Knowledge, where the median is lower compared to the mean, we can talk about positive skewness. The subject group of the research shows a variation of ~4 around the mean value for the variable The Need for Security, a variation of ~2 around the mean for the variable Insecurity, and a variation of ~3 around the mean value for the variable The Realist Eager for Knowledge.

Table 3. *The average values obtained from the instrument focusing on the introversion-extroversion scale*

	Independence	Sociability	Combative	Ambition
Mean	10,85	11,33	8,06	9,55
Median	11,00	11,00	7,00	9,00
Standard Deviation	2,386	2,880	3,102	2,774

We observe that the average values for the variables corresponding to the introversion-extroversion axis are close. The highest average was recorded by the variable Sociability (with a mean result of 11.33). The lowest average was recorded by the variable Combative Nature (with a mean result of 8.06). The variable Independence recorded an average value of 10.85, while the

variable Ambition recorded an average value of 9.55. The median values close to the mean values indicate a symmetric distribution of the data. For the variable Independence, the median value is higher compared to the mean, and in this case, we can speak of negative skewness. For the other variables, Sociability, Combative Nature, and Ambition, where the median is lower compared to the mean, we can talk about positive skewness. The subject group of the research shows a variation of ~3 around the mean value for the variables Independence, Sociability, and Ambition, and a variation of ~4 around the mean value for the variable Combative Nature.

In the inferential statistics section, we used statistical procedures that allowed us to test the hypotheses proposed in the research.

To answer the first research question regarding whether there is a significant correlation between the lying used by adolescents with intellectual disabilities as a compensatory mechanism and their traits of combative nature and desire for knowledge, we used Pearson parametric correlations in the SPSS statistical program. Thus, we analyzed the significant and highly significant correlations between the variables included in the hypothesis.

Table 4. *Correlation analysis between types of lying and personality traits*

		Correlations			
		Independence	Sociability	Combative	Ambition
The lie that is reflected through the delegation of responsibility	Pearson Correlation	,007	,085	-,472**	,133
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,969	,637	,006	,460
	N	33	33	33	33
Self-securing	Pearson Correlation	,127	,014	-,281	-,043
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,483	,937	,113	,810
	N	33	33	33	33
Self-preservation	Pearson Correlation	,178	,090	,367*	-,051
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,322	,619	,036	,776
	N	33	33	33	33

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the analysis of the obtained data, it can be observed that there is a significant negative correlation between the variable Lying reflected through the delegation of responsibility and the variable Combative Nature, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.472, and significance $p < 0.01$, indicating a significant association at a 99% confidence level. This correlation reveals that adolescents with intellectual disabilities who exhibit the trait of combative nature tend to use lying through the delegation of responsibility less as a compensatory mechanism.

In contrast, it can be observed that there is a positive correlation between the variable Combative Nature and the variable Self-preservation, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.367, and significance $p < 0.05$, indicating a significant association at a 95% confidence level. Therefore, we can assert that adolescents with intellectual disabilities who predominantly exhibit the trait of competitiveness resort to self-preservation more frequently as a compensatory mechanism through lying. This aspect can also be explained by a desire and intention for self-protection and personal security.

Thus, combative nature as a predominant trait in adolescents with intellectual disabilities has a positive effect on the mechanism of lying through self-preservation but shows an inverse

proportional relationship for the mechanism of lying manifested through the delegation of responsibility.

Table 5. *Correlation analysis between types of lying and personal security*

Correlations				
		The need for securing	Insecurity	The realist eager for knowledge
The lie that is reflected through the delegation of responsibility	Pearson Correlation	-,277	-,188	-,083
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,119	,295	,646
	N	33	33	33
Self-securing	Pearson Correlation	-,231	,137	,477**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,196	,446	,005
	N	33	33	33
Self-preservation	Pearson Correlation	,242	-,212	,164
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,175	,236	,362
	N	33	33	33

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As a result of the analysis of the data in the previous table, we can observe that there is a significant positive correlation between the variable Self-securing and the variable The Realist Eager for Knowledge, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.477, and significance $p < 0.01$, indicating a significant association at a 99% confidence level. Thus, we can assert that adolescents with intellectual disabilities who exhibit curiosity and are in a process of knowledge tend to use lying through self-securing as a compensatory mechanism. This aspect can also be explained by the desire to maintain self-confidence.

Therefore, we can conclude that adolescents with intellectual disabilities tend to adopt different types of lying as a compensatory mechanism depending on their dominant traits. Adolescents with intellectual disabilities who show a dominance of the trait of combative nature tend to use self-preservation more often as a compensatory mechanism, while adolescents with intellectual disabilities who exhibit a desire for knowledge choose to resort to self-securing as a compensatory mechanism. Thus, we can affirm that the first hypothesis of the research, which states that there is a significant correlation between the lying used by adolescents with intellectual disabilities as a compensatory mechanism and their traits of combative nature and desire for knowledge, has been confirmed.

To address the second research question, regarding whether the age of adolescents with intellectual disabilities significantly influences how personality traits manifest, including introversion, extroversion, sociability, and combative nature, we used Pearson parametric correlations in the SPSS statistical program. This allowed us to analyze the significant and highly significant correlations between the variables included in the hypothesis.

Table 6. *Correlation analysis for the second hypothesis*

		Correlations				
		Independence	Sociability	Combative	Introversion	Extroversion
Age	Pearson Correlation	,247	,121	,276	-,581 **	,541 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,166	,501	,120	,000	,001
	N	33	33	33	33	33
Introversion	Pearson Correlation	-,254	-,467**	-,448**	1	-,760**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,154	,006	,009		,000
	N	33	33	33	33	33
Extroversion	Pearson Correlation	,271	,369*	,327	-,760**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,127	,035	,063	,000	
	N	33	33	33	33	33

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

According to the obtained data, there is a moderate negative correlation between the variable Age and the variable Introversion, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.581, and significance $p < 0.01$, indicating a significant association at a 99% confidence level. This correlation suggests that as age increases, the level of introversion tends to decrease among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. At the same time, there is a significant positive correlation between the variable Age and the variable Extroversion, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.541, and significance $p < 0.01$, indicating a significant association at a 99% confidence level. This correlation indicates that as adolescents with intellectual disabilities get older, their levels of extroversion tend to increase. Thus, we can conclude that age positively influences extroverted traits and negatively influences introverted traits.

Additionally, a significant negative correlation was observed between the variable Introversion and the variable Sociability, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.467, and significance $p < 0.01$, indicating a significant association at a 99% confidence level. There is also a moderate negative Pearson correlation with a value of -0.448 and a significance of $p < 0.01$, indicating a 99% confidence level, between the variable Introversion and the variable Combative Nature. These negative correlations suggest that the higher the level of introversion, the more these personality traits tend to diminish among adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

On the other hand, a positive correlation was observed between the variable Extroversion and the variable Sociability, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.369, and significance $p < 0.05$, indicating a significant association at a 95% confidence level. This correlation indicates that adolescents with intellectual disabilities who exhibit predominant extroverted traits are more likely to be sociable.

Thus, we can conclude that age is a factor that positively influences the manifestation of extroverted traits and negatively influences the manifestation of introverted traits. In turn, extroversion and introversion influence certain personality traits such as sociability and combative nature. Through the analysis of this data, we can assert that the second hypothesis of the research, which states that the age of adolescents with intellectual disabilities significantly influences how personality traits manifest, including introversion, extroversion, sociability, and combative nature, has been confirmed.

To address the third research question, regarding whether lying serves as a compensatory mechanism for self-preservation based on levels of extroversion and introversion among adolescents with intellectual disabilities, we used multiple linear regression analysis in the SPSS statistical program. This allowed us to analyze the regression coefficients and the statistical significance of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Table 7. *Summary model of multiple regression analysis*

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,695 ^a	,483	,172	8,910
a. Predictors: (Constant), Ambiția, Realistul dornic de cunoaștere, Vârsta, Sociabilitatea, IQ, Combativitatea, Gen, Nesigur, Independența, Extroversia, Nevoia de securizare, Introversia				

Table 8. *Multiple regression analysis*

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-41,024	44,795		-,916	,371
	Extroversion	,943	,336	,801	2,805	,011
	Introversion	1,475	,614	,839	2,402	,026
	Insecurity	-1,638	1,064	-,289	-1,538	,140
	Sociability	,378	,853	,111	,443	,662
	Need for security	,861	,922	,291	,933	,362
	Combative	1,015	,811	,322	1,251	,225
a. Dependent Variable: Autoconservare						

Analyzing the results from the previously presented tables, we can observe that the standardized coefficients and the associated t-tests for the variables Extroversion and Introversion are as follows:

- Extroversion: Standardized coefficient = 0.801, $t = 2.805$, $p = 0.011$
- Introversion: Standardized coefficient = 0.839, $t = 2.402$, $p = 0.026$

Thus, we anticipate that adolescents with intellectual disabilities who have high levels of introversion, who are more withdrawn and self-oriented, will resort more to lying for self-preservation in order to cope with their social and emotional challenges. At the same time, adolescents with intellectual disabilities who have high levels of extroversion, who are more open and interact more with others, may also use lying as a compensatory mechanism in certain situations to enhance social interactions and assert themselves, although to a lesser extent than those who are introverted. We believe that lying can be a way to manage stress and protect self-image, and that levels of extroversion and introversion can influence how adolescents use this compensatory mechanism in their specific context of development and social adaptation.

In conclusion, based on the data presented above, we can assert that adolescents with intellectual disabilities who predominantly exhibit introverted personality traits are much more likely than those with extroverted traits to adopt lying behaviors for self-preservation. This aspect can be explained by a greater tendency for self-defense and self-protection. Thus, the third hypothesis of the research, which posits that adolescents with intellectual disabilities will use lying for self-preservation as a compensatory mechanism based on their levels of extroversion and introversion, is confirmed.

Discussions

The conclusions of the study support all three research hypotheses, demonstrating that lying functions as a compensatory mechanism among adolescents with intellectual disabilities, influenced by specific personality traits and developmental factors. The first hypothesis confirmed a correlation between lying and traits such as combative nature and desire for knowledge, with more combative and knowledge-seeking adolescents exhibiting higher frequencies of deceptive behavior. This suggests that lying is a strategic tool for social navigation.

The second hypothesis explored the impact of age on personality traits, such as introversion, extroversion, sociability, and combative nature. As adolescents age, introverted traits decline, giving way to extroversion, which in turn influences sociability and combative nature. Introverted adolescents exhibit lower levels of sociability and combative nature, while extroverted adolescents are more socially engaged.

The third hypothesis examined lying as a self-preservation mechanism, revealing that introverted adolescents use lying more frequently to manage social and emotional difficulties, while extroverted adolescents lie less often, using deception to assert themselves and enhance social involvement.

In conclusion, the study highlights lying as an adaptive behavior used to meet social demands, with its use shaped by personality traits and age-related changes. These findings align with theories of self-regulation and adaptive behavior, confirming that adolescents with intellectual disabilities employ lying as a coping strategy in response to environmental pressures. The research aligns with existing literature on compensatory behaviors in this population, emphasizing the role of personality in shaping adaptive mechanisms.

Conclusion

The current research explored how lying is used as a compensatory mechanism to facilitate social needs among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. The confirmation of all hypotheses presented in the research adds valuable perspectives on the adaptive strategies employed by this population.

To ensure the credibility of the obtained data, a robust methodology, well-defined hypotheses, and reliable instruments were utilized in this research. The interpretation of the data provided a deep analysis of how lying is employed as a social compensation mechanism by adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Relevant statistical procedures were used to highlight the relationships and influences that the variables have on each other, marking the directions of evolution of the compensatory mechanism through lying. The current study provided a comprehensive perspective on the compensatory mechanisms of adolescents with intellectual disabilities, revealing the link between lying and various aspects of personality, as well as developmental stages based on age.

For greater consistency of the results, a broader study involving multiple socio-demographic and economic criteria, as well as various levels of intellectual disability, is warranted, along with a longitudinal perspective to specifically reveal the evolution of lying as a social compensatory mechanism among adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

Thus, we can also affirm as limitations of the research the necessity for future studies to include a larger and more diverse sample of subjects to enhance the generalization of the data. This could encompass subjects from diverse geographical, sociological, and economic backgrounds. Additionally, a longitudinal perspective that tracks the evolution of lying as a compensatory mechanism in subjects with intellectual disabilities from the beginning to the end of adolescence

could provide interesting insights into the changes and transformations occurring in this behavior. This way, external factors influencing this compensatory mechanism, such as the role of family, school, and social groups, can be better highlighted.

The practical implications of the study can lead to the development of educational strategies tailored to the individual needs of each adolescent with intellectual disabilities, aimed at strengthening prosocial compensatory mechanisms and guiding them in the social environment. Clinically, specialists can design therapeutic programs focused on the personality traits that shape lying to foster the adoption of effective adaptive mechanisms and to teach management of behaviors in the most constructive way. Policymakers can leverage these results to create inclusive educational and social policies that support the emotional and psychological well-being of adolescents with intellectual disabilities and facilitate their integration into community life.

Reflecting on the conclusions of this study, we can make a series of recommendations that address both the educational process and inclusion policies. Thus, within the education system, programs can be implemented for teachers to develop the necessary skills to understand and appropriately manage compensatory lying behaviors. At the school level, programs aimed at modeling social competence in adolescents with intellectual disabilities and outlining reliable, socially accepted compensatory mechanisms can also be implemented. Inclusive policies should focus on developing educational and social structures that facilitate the inclusion of adolescents with intellectual disabilities. These policies should address their needs and overall development by creating favorable environments.

The general idea of the study, which posits that lying serves as a compensatory mechanism for adolescents with intellectual disabilities, must be further developed and analyzed in future studies that are diverse and comprehensive.

As a general conclusion of this research, the obtained data and their extensive commentary throughout the paper provide significant insights into the use of lying as a compensatory mechanism by adolescents with intellectual disabilities. By understanding these behaviors and the implications that follow, interventions can be made accordingly, supporting adolescents with intellectual disabilities and developing a variety of inclusive environments

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