

True lies and white lies

by Francis Bennion

The Times Weekend (16 June 2012) devotes a lot of space to a piece of American research on truth-telling. Weekend's front page sums this up with the header 'Let's be honest. Why we need to stop lying to our children, our partners . . . and ourselves'.

This is completely vitiated by its muddling up of what are properly called lies with innocent departures from the truth sometimes known as white lies.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* says that in modern use the word 'lie' is 'normally a violent expression of moral reprobation, which in polite conversation tends to be avoided, the synonyms falsehood and untruth being often substituted as relatively euphemistic'. It describes 'white lie' as 'a falsehood rendered venial or praiseworthy by its motive'.

Is *The Times* really trying to stop us using the socially necessary white lie?

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Doc. No. 2012.014

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References:

None