

# Healthy Skepticism: Liars, Cheats, and Lovers

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**S**keptics love truth and fear error. We are sometimes mistaken for cynics, who do not love and who seek to justify that. Skepticism is the foundation of science which, as a matter of principle, knows nothing for certain. Skepticism is also an essential adaptation to the competition for resources in a social species like ours, because lying and cheating can be profitable and fun. Consider Lehman Brothers, Bernie Madoff, the predatory dining strategy of the sea anemone, and poker. We must stay alert.

Naïve or predatory deception is central to courtship and to most social choreography, in which we hope to be loved unconditionally but still strive to be seen in the most attractive possible light, or better. Who would deny that they might spin their autobiography a bit in the course of an interview, an audit, or a confirmation hearing? Even honest autobiography is historical fiction. This is not a problem as long as our story does not get too crossed up with the world and its population. When it does, we may need to challenge some of our most cherished assumptions, beliefs, and delusions. Productive self examination requires a courageous skepticism about who we think we are and what we think we know.

But skepticism must be balanced with acceptance or it degrades to paranoia. That everything is susceptible to challenge does not mean that everything must be challenged. Enlightened skeptics exercise aesthetic judgment and submit themselves selectively to the beautiful and the good. Enlightened skeptics lean intentionally away from the dark side. There is nothing wrong with a sojourn in Strawberry Fields as long as you don't get lost in the weeds.

Skeptics love other skeptics and they fear cynics, who do not love and who seek to justify that. Healthy skepticism is essential to personal satisfaction, to effective counseling, and to psychotherapy. Call me.



## ***Relief, Recovery, Resolution***

*Primarily for men and adolescent males in transition and in crisis,  
and for women who want to understand them better*

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