

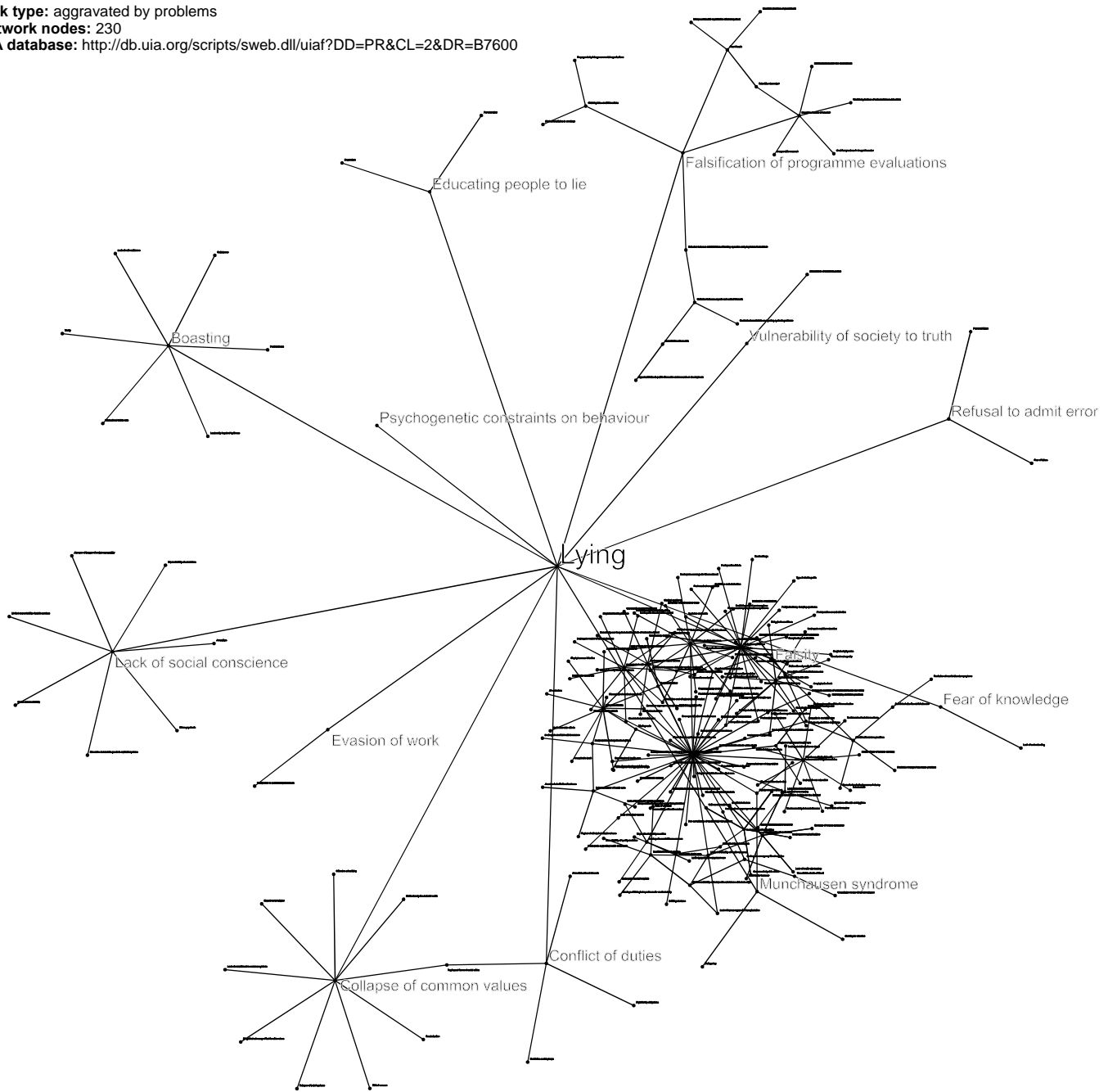
Figure 10.2.7. Lying

Database: World Problems and Issues

Link type: aggravated by problems

Network nodes: 230

UIA database: <http://db.uia.org/scripts/sweb.dll/uiaf?DD=PR&CL=2&DR=B7600>



Whether to lie, equivocate, be silent, or tell the truth in any given situation is often a hard decision. Duplicity can take so many forms and have such different purposes and results. Questions of truth and lying inevitably pervade all that is said or left unspoken in relationships, communities and societies. Sometimes there may be sufficient reason to lie -- but when? The major works of moral philosophy of the last century are silent on the subject. Whilst lying may be excusable or seemingly inconsequential from the viewpoint of the person lying, for the person who is given false information about important choices in their lives, the lie may render them powerless or disadvantaged. Lies may also eliminate or obscure relevant alternatives, or affect the objective appraisal of costs and benefits. St Augustine defined eight kinds of lie, from lies protecting innocence to deadly religious falsehoods. In between come lies which cause injury, white lies for the sake of smooth discourse and lies told for the sheer heck of it. In the past, Jesuits practised the art of equivocation, using the method of "mental reservation" (like crossing our fingers) to justify misleading statements. Herodotus, first branded a liar by Thucydides, was then called the Father of Lies by Oscar Wilde in his 1891 book *The Decay of Lying*. "Scientific" signs of lying are blinking, nose scratching, dry mouth, high-pitched voice, dilated pupils, hesitation and fidgety feet. Folkloric give-aways are biting on your tongue while eating, a blistered or spotty tongue and knocking over a chair when getting up. The polygraph, or lie detector, has been discredited by the Lancet and shown to be more likely to implicate the innocent than catch the guilty. But in the USA it is used by the CIA, Army Intelligence, and the FBI, amongst others. The condition of pathological lying is called *pseudologia phantastica*. Sufferers often pose as authority figures.