

The Influence of Keeping and Disclosing Secrets on Relationships: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

People keep secrets for many reasons. Keeping secrets in relationships, whether from parents, friends, or significant others, considerably diminishes the quality of the relationship, yet disclosing secrets can also establish and maintain healthy relationships by making people feel more connected. However, how individuals feel before, during, and after keeping and disclosing secrets has not been fully explored. Therefore, this study explored the influence that keeping and disclosing secrets has on peoples' relationships and specifically yielded insights into individuals' subjective experiences. 12 semi-structured online interviews were conducted with UCT undergraduate psychology students who had experience in keeping and disclosing secrets. A thematic analysis approach instructed the data analysis process. The study's findings reflect those individuals keep secrets mainly because they are afraid of losing those closest to them. The findings indicate that the relationships that are impacted the most by keeping and disclosing secrets are familial relationships and friendships. The study's findings also depict those individuals liken the process of keeping secrets to an emotional burden, and the process of disclosing secrets to gaining relief from that burden. Keeping secrets was found to create distance between loved ones, and disclosing secrets often did more harm than good in most cases. However, some cases showed a strengthening of the family or friendship bond after disclosure or over time.

Key Words: Disclosing; keeping; relationships; secrets; subjective

Introduction

Researchers have defined secret-keeping as the intentional withholding of information, an active cognitive process that can be experienced as an emotional burden weighing heavily on the mind of the secret-keeper (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). People keep and disclose secrets for a wide range of reasons. The effects they can have are subjective, and for some people, the actual keeping of a secret can hold more importance than the secret itself (Maas et al., 2018). However, little is known about the influence of keeping and disclosing secrets on relationships and the subjective experience that some people may have. Therefore, this literature review will provide an overview of the research on secret-keeping and disclosure, including identifying any key gaps that emerge.

Reasons for Keeping Secrets

Keeping and disclosing secrets are important developmental experiences. It is a part of everyday life, even contributing to human development as evidence of secrets has been found even from the young age of 5 years old (Vrij et al., 2002). There are an infinite number of reasons unique to each individual for why they keep a secret, but concealment seems to be the main goal (Slepian et al., 2017). Some people keep secrets to enforce their boundaries and privacy, whilst others fear negative evaluation and being condemned or stigmatised by society (Vrij et al., 2003). Maas et al (2018) found that older adults likely keep secrets as a coping strategy to protect themselves from the judgement of others. Many people continue to keep secrets in fear of rejection and isolation (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). Some people keep secrets because they feel that they may be unable to communicate their secrets efficiently, whereas others may want to protect their relationships from any disruptions caused by the secret (Caughlin et al., 2005).

Corsano et al (2017) found that adolescents keep secrets to establish a sense of self that is separate from their parents and gain acceptance from their friends.

Outcomes of Secret-Keeping

Research has shown that the process of keeping secrets can be detrimental to one's mental and physical well-being, especially when the secret is serious (Vrij et al., 2002). Keeping a secret requires constant cognitive effort to monitor, manage and hide one's behaviours, feelings, and thoughts to prevent accidentally revealing any information to others. This often leads to obsessive preoccupation, and the person is then unable to escape their secret (Afifi & Caughlin, 2006). Davis et al (2020) suggest that the more one tries to suppress the secret, the more accessible and intrusive it becomes.

Research on the state of relationships due to secret-keeping has shown that keeping a secret from one's partner has been connected with lower relationship well-being and satisfaction and may even lead to the deterioration of romantic relationships over time (Davis et al., 2020). Secrecy from both parents and friends is associated with depression and low relationship quality (Corsano et al., 2017). Slepian et al (2020) conducted one of the first studies to investigate how emotions shape the experience of secret-keeping. The researchers concluded that the most harmful characteristic of secrecy is not the concealment that occurs during social interactions but rather the mind's relentless wandering to the secret. Their studies revealed that the secrets people keep are often experienced as negative and that when secrets induce self-conscious emotions like shame and guilt, the secret was more likely to intrude on one's thoughts at random moments. However, there is evidence that keeping secrets could enhance rather than diminish the quality of life if people do not withhold personal information or constantly think about their secret (Maas et

al., 2012). Therefore, it may be useful to question an individual on how they felt during the secret-keeping process to understand more about the affective or emotional components of their subjective experience.

Outcomes of Disclosing Secrets

Revealing secrets or disclosing information is an inherent part of social interactions and involves a complex decision-making process that evolves over time (Vrij et al., 2002). During this process, the secret-keeper has to consider various factors that could potentially impact their decision to disclose. Some of these factors consist of protecting their privacy and avoiding negative social evaluations by others. In addition, the secret-keeper has to decide who they would like to confide in and how revealing the secret to this person may impact their relationship with them (Caughlin et al., 2005).

In 2018, Slepian and Kirby conducted five studies to identify who is most likely to be disclosed to. They showed that certain personalities are confided in more than others, particularly those who are perceived as compassionate, empathic and assertive with a desire to help, rather than those who are polite and enthusiastic but more concerned with social norms and rules. This confirms the importance of the confidant's character when deciding to disclose. People seem to want a confidant that is discreet, non-judgemental, trustworthy, likeable and able to help (Kelly et al., 2001). Revealing a secret to the right person can be beneficial, but disclosing it to the wrong person can be worse than keeping a secret in the first place (Slepian & Kirby, 2018).

When an individual discloses a secret, depending on how the confidant feels about the disclosed secret and the discloser, it could impact whether they are met with a positive or negative response. If an individual discloses a secret to a person, they place their trust in, and

they turn out to be untrustworthy, the individual runs the risk of their secret being revealed to others (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2018). Therefore, confiding a secret would be beneficial if the individual receives support to better cope with their secret. Often when an individual discloses information by confiding a secret, they may ask for help and trust that the person they are telling their secret to will not disclose it to anyone else. Therefore, if an individual discloses personal information to another without asking them not to reveal it to others, the individual is prone to constantly think about their secret and the consequences that come along with it. Taking this into account, when an individual discloses a secret, they should ask for confidentiality from their confidant to prevent constantly thinking about their secret and its consequences (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2018).

Disclosing secrets can have advantages too. A study conducted by Maas et al (2018) investigated the relationship between secret-keeping and the quality of life in older adults. They found that disclosing secrets has immediate and long-term positive effects on well-being and can foster a sense of personal closeness. Disclosing secrets is also associated with the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships. When an individual discloses personal information to another, it prompts the other individual to then disclose personal information of their own, which establishes a feeling of closeness between the individuals. (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2018). Therefore, it may be useful to question individuals' subjective experiences when disclosing their secrets to other people.

In addition, Kelly et al (2001) found that the most beneficial way to reveal a secret is through the process of gaining insight or meaning making. This strategy refers to developing a more positive affect towards the secret by seeking meaning through disclosing. In contrast, the process of catharsis or venting emotions resulted in a negative affect due to the stirring up of

emotions. These findings indicate that if the secret-keeper can come to terms with their secret by making meaning out of it, they will benefit by gaining closure and a new perspective. It may be useful to investigate whether the stirring up of emotions is seen as negative or positive and why. This notion is grounded in the positive psychology discourse, which views negative emotions as bad and something to be avoided.

In conclusion, research on secrecy is crucial to society as it educates individuals on the advantages and disadvantages of keeping and disclosing secrets. Literature suggests that it could be more beneficial to disclose a secret than keep one. If individuals are made aware of this, it could prompt them to find the courage to disclose their secrets to those they feel safe doing so and, in turn, relieve them of the emotional burden they have been holding onto (Slepian et al., 2015). We know that people keep all kinds of secrets and that the effects of those secrets vary. Research states that keeping secrets in relationships, whether from parents, friends, or significant others, negatively diminishes the quality of the relationship. This and the tendency for an individual to obsessively think about their secret could lead to lower levels of well-being. On the other hand, studies have found that disclosing secrets can be positively associated with well-being by making people feel more connected to one another. However, the subjective experience of keeping and disclosing secrets has not been fully explored. We do not know enough about how individuals feel before, during and after this process. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted to investigate this subjective experience and the resulting perception of the impact on the individual's relationships.

Aims and Research Questions

Aim

The aim of the study was to explore people's experience of the influence of keeping and disclosing secrets on their relationships.

Main Research Question:

The study's aim comprised two main research questions:

- 1) How does the keeping and disclosing of secrets influence peoples' experiences of their relationships?
- 2) What are people's subjective experiences of disclosing a secret: before, during and after this process?

Sub-Questions:

- What influences people to keep and disclose secrets?
- How do people decide when to disclose their secret?
- How do people decide who to disclose their secret to?
- How did peoples' expectations of disclosing differ from reality?
- Would people disclose their secrets differently if they had the chance to?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was located within a social phenomenology paradigm. This is the lens through which we made sense of the data we collected. Social phenomenology takes participants seriously by listening and seeking to understand them (Langdrige, 2008). A perspective such as this sought to better understand the pressing issues participants faced, choosing to focus on the way the world appeared to them. Data was collected

through interviews, where participants were encouraged to provide as much detail about their experiences as possible. Experience was understood as the participant's view of the world. Social phenomenology is also concerned with questions around an individual's subjective experience. Participants were therefore seen as individuals who constructed meaning (Langdrige, 2008). We chose to use this theoretical framework because it allowed us to explore human subjectivity, motives and experiences. This was done through intuitive interviews and authentic encounters with participants. We focused on the social world and the relationships that occurred in that space, which our study ultimately aimed to uncover (Pinto de Jesus et al., 2013).

Methodology

Research Design

This study made use of a qualitative research design. This method was best for taking an exploratory approach and for collecting data concerned with people's subjective experiences. This design emphasised how participants interpreted their own experiences and the meaning they made of these experiences (Wilson & Maclean, 2011).

Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was used for the purposes of this study. This approach was deemed appropriate because it allowed us to rely on our own judgment when choosing who to participate in the study.

Participants were recruited using the Student Research Participation Programme (SRPP) and participants were offered 2 SRPP points as an incentive to participate in the study. The sample consisted of 12 English-speaking individuals who were all 18 years and older and

registered as psychology students at the University of Cape Town with access to the internet and a device that could be used to conduct the interview. These were the inclusion criteria for our study regarding participants. We chose this number of participants because it was an exploratory study; therefore, a smaller sample size made it more manageable.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews (See Appendix C for the interview schedule). We chose the securely encrypted video conferencing platform, Zoom, as it allowed us to communicate effectively online as well as record the meetings. The questions asked in the interviews allowed participants to go off-topic, after which more questions were asked based on participants' answers and if those were relevant to the study. These questions asked the essentials, consisting of the main and sub research questions and more. Still, participants were also free to lead the way, disclosing the information they saw as relevant or important to them. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Procedures

Using the SRPP programme, an email was sent to UCT psychology students, inviting them to participate in our study (See Appendix D). The SRPP is implemented in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town and is used by researchers to recruit participants for their research studies. Undergraduate students registered for psychology courses are required to participate in research studies to earn SRPP points. These points are a requirement to be awarded a duly performed certificate (DP) for writing exams. Students who participated in our study each received 2 SRPP points.

A time was then arranged to conduct the Zoom interview. Students were emailed consent forms which they read and signed before the interview took place. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each. Following the interview, participants were then debriefed. This entailed asking students how they felt the interviews went, if they found any questions offensive and if they required any further care. Students were also asked how they felt sharing their experiences. Interviews were recorded using Zoom and transcribed using Descript and Otter.ai. Once the relevant data had been collected, interviews were deleted.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using thematic analysis, which is known for organising and describing data set in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method works well to both reflect reality and unravel the surface of reality. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a useful and flexible method for qualitative research in psychology. For this same reason, we chose to use thematic analysis due to its advantages of theoretical freedom and flexibility as a useful research tool that can provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

We followed Braun and Clarke's 6 phase guide to conducting thematic analysis. This step-by-step process starts during data collection when the analyst notices patterns of meaning and potential issues of interest in the data. It is important to note that analysis is not a linear process. Instead, it is a recursive process that involves moving back and forth throughout the phases over time (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 1 involved transcribing the verbal data, actively reading and rereading the data, searching for meaning, and noting any initial ideas. This process is why we required a smaller sample size to ensure the collected data was manageable.

Phase 2 used a systematic process across the entire data set to code interesting data features, such as repeated patterns. Coding refers to identifying a feature of the data and organising it into meaningful groups.

Phase 3 began when all the data had been coded. The data was then organised into potential main and sub-themes using tables and mind-maps (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 4 separated themes into levels, generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis or an overall story that these themes tell about the data. This phase involved reworking themes when certain extracts became problematic and fine-tuning the data.

Phase 5 is where the thematic map of the data and the specific of each theme was defined and redefined, creating the overall story the analysis tells. This was done by generating clear definitions and names for each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 6 is where we selected the most vivid and compelling examples which related the analysis to the research question and literature review. Lastly, a scholarly report of the analysis was produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process of data analysis is a subjective one. Themes were identified by the researchers who chose to attend to certain patterns that they identified in the data. Another researcher may have identified other patterns that were just as valid.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations apply to the treatment of participants with regards to the qualitative research in the study. Ethical considerations are paramount in exploring sensitive personal topics,

such as individuals' subjective experience of keeping and disclosing secrets and their impact on their relationships. These ethical considerations are discussed below.

Risks and Benefits

Interviews were conducted in a secure environment. When arranging the interview, we ensured that participants had a safe and private place that they could access for the interview. When conducting the interview, participants were asked if they were in a place that feels secure and private. Participants were not obligated to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable with answering; this was communicated within the informed consent form that participants had to sign before the interview began. In addition, given the sensitivity of the topic, there was the potential for complex emotional content to be raised. If by any chance, a participant became distressed during the interview, they were referred to services, and a list of resources was provided to them where they could access further care (See Appendix B). Participants were also debriefed after the interviews were conducted. At the end of the interview, participants were asked about their thoughts on the interview, allowing us to pick up on any issues that came up and deal with them accordingly. There were no direct benefits in the study besides the 2 SRPP points participants received for volunteering to partake in the study.

Voluntary and Informed Consent

Participants were asked to provide informed consent before interviews took place (see Appendix A). Participants were informed of: (1) what the study was about, (2) what was required of them if they chose to participate, (3) how their data would be used, and (4) the risks of and benefits to participating. Researchers confirmed that participants fully understood these processes and what they entailed before conducting the interviews. We also made participants aware that

they had a right not to participate and were free to withdraw from the study at any time if they would like to.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms. Once the recordings were transcribed, all identifying information was removed, and the recordings were destroyed. Only people directly involved in the study had access to the data collected. We also recorded and transcribed the interviews ourselves and stored the data in password-protected secure laptops to protect the data.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity asks us to be aware of how our positionality and historicity shape the process of meaning-making, both in the data collection and analysis processes. Differences are bound to exist between the researchers and participants. When conducting interviews, these differences could be made even more evident as the positions that the researchers and participants hold in the world are looked at side by side (England, 1944).

Although the researchers and participants were all a part of the UCT community, our life experiences differed significantly. For example, the both of us being two women of colour living in South Africa who are also university students working towards a post-graduate qualification and one white middle-class woman living in South Africa who is also a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist working at the university could differ in life experience to a first-year university student who is of a different gender and does not come from the same background. Differences like these could be regarded as an obstacle preventing the establishment of a sense of mutual

understanding between the researchers and participants and affect how interviews play out (Tang, 2002). It is important to note that if we see differences as obstacles and not just inherent aspects of conducting research and making meaning, we are likely to try and avoid them; or convince ourselves that there is some achievable objectivity, which there is not. The strategy we used for addressing these differences was to adopt an open-minded perspective, whereby participants felt safe enough to share sensitive personal information.

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to explore people's experience of the influence that keeping and disclosing secrets can have on their relationships. Five main themes emerged from the data. The first was the way participants spoke of how keeping their secrets was an emotional burden on them. Secondly, participants felt that keeping secrets led to a loss of trust and a sense of poor well-being. Related to this was the distance participants felt from those closest to them due to keeping their secrets. Fourthly was how although participants initially felt pain when disclosing secrets, it eventually led to something positive. Finally, disclosing their secrets gave participants a sense of relief and a way to connect to those closest to them. Findings were presented along with selected participant quotes from interviews to provide an understanding of the data.

Keeping secrets as an emotional burden

Of all the experiences participants reported, the experience of considering their secrets to be an emotional burden was by far the most common. These experiences resemble those identified by previous studies where the burden of keeping a secret is quite taxing for the secret-keeper (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). Participants felt that over time, keeping their secrets became too much to bear on their own, so they decided to disclose to someone if only to relieve

themselves of the burden their secrets were. They all seemed to reach a breaking point where they had enough of keeping their secret to themselves and felt the need to talk to someone about it and ultimately disclose it to them. Not only did the keeping of their secrets affect participants emotionally, but it also took a toll on their mental and physical health and their various relationships with others. Participant 6's words below depict how taxing the secret he was keeping was:

"I'd say, like, emotionally, it's quite a taxing thing. It's this massive burden like this kind of heaviness that you have on you the entire time, and you're always conscious of maybe something slipping out, or you're telling the wrong person something and then it's, you know, this big, massive, exponential effect that just is like this downward spiral. So, it's taxing in the way that there's something that's hanging over you the entire time, and you have to always be worried about it."

In line with previous research, which suggests that keeping secrets requires one to constantly think about if the manner in which they are behaving will give away what they are hiding (Afifi & Caughlin, 2006; Davis et al., 2020), participant 4 described how taxing his secrets were on him where he felt like he had to constantly check himself in conversations to prevent accidentally revealing his secrets to others:

"So, it's always like a weight. I describe it as a weight on your mind. It's always there, especially if it's a deep secret and it's like everything you do, you feel that maybe others already can read your mind. It's a sort of heaviness that we just want to get out sometimes, but you're not sure if it should, or you should let it weigh on you, but I think it's psychologically taxing."

Part of the reason why participants labelled their secrets emotional burdens was due to the fact that they came to associate feelings of guilt and shame with the keeping of their secrets. This finding corresponds to a previous study by Slepian and colleagues (2020) in which secrets were revealed to be related to such self-conscious emotions. In most cases, participants kept their secrets to protect themselves and preserve their relationships with others. Yet, they also knew that by doing this, they were simultaneously straining their relationships by not being completely honest. Participant 4's words below convey this inner turmoil:

"When you keep a secret, I suppose there's always in your heart, maybe you feel like a sort of guilt so that you're not disclosing because in relationships usually, they're based on openness and trust so perhaps keeping that creates a lot of guilt and maybe also anger because you feel like you should, but you can't disclose whatever so I suppose in your daily reactions, the way you behave in relationships, all of that is affected because you know in your heart like you're not being completely honest, especially if the other person is extremely open with you, shares things and then you don't, I suppose it creates guilt."

Adding to the burden, fear of judgement or stigma surrounding the nature of their secrets also played a role in why participants chose not to disclose their secrets or took a lot of time to build up enough courage before they did so. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Vrij et al., 2003) where individuals continue to keep secrets because they do not wish to be outcasted by society. Many participants spoke about the undesired consequences that would come about if they were to disclose their secrets. Regarding this, we found that participants were often afraid of how the people in their life would look at them differently if they were to learn the truth, especially those closest to them. Participants were fearful that their friends' and families' perceptions of them would change negatively, so they

chose to keep their secrets out of fear of losing their loved ones. Participant 4 described how they did not want to lose their friends or family as a result of disclosing their secret and decided to keep it from them instead:

"I didn't want to speak about it to people that I knew personally, afraid of judgment, but there was a way where I couldn't even articulate like I find it hard to articulate my secrets or just general things about myself, so it has caused a lot of uncertainty like not knowing where to disclose your secret or how to say it or how to put it in words not sure."

When keeping secrets leads to loss of trust and poor well-being

Trust played a significant role after secrets were disclosed; participants realized that their friends and family were not entirely comfortable with what they had been told, even though they acted as if they were. This caused participants to become more careful regarding what they chose to say moving forward and to be wary of what they expected from those closest to them.

Participant 1's words below show how she lost trust in her mother after discovering a massive family secret that had been kept from her for years. These words also demonstrate the strain her familial relationships endured, particularly the relationship she shared with her brother.

"My brother found out before I did, so the day after my brother found out, he told me about it, but then I didn't believe him, so I went and asked my mother, and she was like, no, he's lying, don't listen to him so I feel like that kind of put a strain on our relationship because I didn't believe my brother and we usually, we tell each other mostly everything when we were younger so I should have believed him so I feel like that put a bit of a strain on my relationship with him but also the fact that my mother lied to me, it made me feel like I couldn't trust her with those things that I actually needed the answers to."

Participant 1's experience echoes a study by Maas et al (2018) which suggests that for some people, the actual keeping of a secret can hold more importance than the secret itself. The fact that her own mother had kept a major secret from her for years was what made participant 1 less trusting and not the actual secret that had been disclosed to her.

Aside from not wanting to lose the trust of family members, participants did not want to lose the trust of their friends as well and so chose to keep their secrets instead. An interesting finding was that participants mainly spoke about how their relationships with their family members were impacted the most by the keeping of their secrets, especially those with their parents and siblings, followed by their friendships. Yet we did not find much information on how their romantic relationships were impacted. We did not expect this finding as we anticipated all forms of relationships to be affected equally, with those closest to participants being the most affected. A possible explanation for this could be because all of the participants are young students who are not yet financially able to live alone and so spend most of their time at university with their friends or at home with their family.

Participant 3's words below show how keeping her secret caused her to be less trusting of men even though most of her friendships were with them. This would have strained her relationships with them, as it is very difficult to maintain any relationship when there is no trust.

"It affected my friendships because I am mainly friends with males, and it affected my relationships with those males because it caused me not to trust males."

Alongside this, participants also found that they began moving further and further away from themselves. In line with previous research, participants, as a result, started noticing a decline in their mental health and physical well-being (Vrij et al., 2002). Participant 4's words

below detail the psychological impact that keeping his secret had. He believes that the relationship with himself was the most impacted compared to the relationships he shared with his friends and family.

"I started hating myself sometimes for not being able to talk about the secret, but sometimes I weigh the risks and the benefits to see okay disclosing it will lead to this or not, but I've been feeling, I suppose guilty at myself, angry at myself, a lot of those things, not taking as care of myself as I could have but I suppose it has affected myself the most more than my relationships."

Participant 5 also felt his mental health declining due to keeping his secrets and spoke of the physical impact where his body began showing those around him signs that he was struggling without him even having to say it.

"My body's definitely telling me that something is wrong, I have these blemishes on my back and it looks like psoriasis but it's stress-related, and I lost like considerable amount of weight and my hair is falling out so other people around me are telling me that I look tired, I look stressed, I'm kind of, you know, I am physically showing these signs of that I'm not okay and I am not okay."

Both the experiences of participants 4 and 5 align with existing literature that states secrecy is associated with self-conscious emotions such as guilt and is also associated with low relationship quality (Corsano et al., 2018; Slepian et al., 2020). Both participants believe that the relationships they shared with themselves got severely impacted. Not only did it affect the relationships they shared with others, but it also affected them where they saw their mental and physical health declining as a result of keeping their secrets yet often felt helpless in the face of it.

When keeping and disclosing secrets creates distance between loved ones

The individuals that participants often chose to disclose their secrets to were people that they had known for quite some time, almost their whole lives, such as their parents, siblings, best friends and sometimes their current partners. In line with previous research, which suggests that people want a non-judgmental confidant and that those who are compassionate in nature are more likely to be confided in, participants described the people they disclosed to as being very open, warm, accepting, reliable and trustworthy (Kelly et al., 2001; Slepian & Kirby, 2018).

An individual can either be met with positive or negative responses after disclosing their secret, depending on how their confidant feels towards them and the secret (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2018). Participants took a great deal of time to work up the courage to disclose their secrets. Even though some were met with good responses from their confidants, others had to face an emerging distance within the relationships they shared with those closest to them. These findings are contrary to existing literature which reports that disclosing secrets can foster a sense of personal closeness (Maas et al., 2018). With some participants, the distance was bi-directional where their loved ones could pick up that they were hiding something yet could not figure out the full extent of it. However, when this was not the case, participants did their best to be more present when they felt their secrets interfering with their lives.

Participant's 4's words below indicate his feelings on the distance created by keeping his secret, which was bidirectional. This means that those who knew him could tell he was hiding something from them yet didn't know what it was exactly.

"I think it's very easy to pick up on when someone is keeping something from you, so I think it's been two-sided in a way, but perhaps the people who you are in relationships will make

assumptions, maybe feel that okay, he's carrying something like a much deeper secret and it actually is, meanwhile it's something small but I feel it does affect both ways because if someone knows you then automatically they can see that your reactions, the way you are reacting or behaving in a way is creating distance so I think it's two-sided."

As mentioned previously, although some confidants did initially seem accepting of the secrets they were told, it became apparent that this was not the case when participants began to drift further and further away from those, they considered closest to them. Participant 5's words below tell how his relationship with his family, especially with his parents, became strained once he disclosed his secrets to them.

"It's at a point where I generally do not really speak to them, like in passing, like, you know, hi, bye, how are you, how was work, things like that, in general, other household things but I think I am aware that for them, there's a certain line that I cannot cross, a certain conversation that I cannot have with them and even though it's now at a point where they say that you know if anything is wrong or if you're feeling anything you know come to us, speak to us but I, in the back of my mind, I know that as much as they see, feel that they are able to or is ready to have the conversation or you know dive deeper into the conversation, I know that they are not and it's very sad to an extent because you know these are the people that I love, these are the people that I instinctively am supposed to trust and I feel that I cannot do that like our relationship is very shallow, it's very much just generalized, there's no kind of deep, meaningful connection besides you know me being the offspring and things like that."

Echoing previous research, which suggests that some people keep secrets because they wish to protect their relationships from harm, Participant 4 also spoke of having a similar

experience where he didn't find it easy to keep secrets from his parents, sensing the growing distance. Yet he was still much too afraid that disclosing would mean the end of his relationship with his parents, and ultimately the loss of his loved ones (Caughlin et al., 2005).

"Keeping secrets from my family has always been like I have a very open family where we speak a lot about things but having a secret in the family has maybe caused a lot of tension inside the house because perhaps there's not a lot of trust anymore, because when people ask me like okay, what are you hiding, whatnot, I can't say directly but yes, it creates a lot of distance in family relationships meaning like with parents for example, where they lose trust in you perhaps, don't believe anything you say or whatever because maybe you're hiding things and that I suppose has to do with the nature of the secret that you're keeping where if you disclose it perhaps it would ruin the relationship completely."

Participant 6 also spoke a lot about his experiences with keeping and disclosing his secret to his good friends and how it impacted one of those relationships, particularly in a way he did not expect. He spoke of how it strained his relationship with a close friend, resulting in the distance lasting longer than he had initially expected, especially considering that they had been friends for years.

"So I have disclosed the secret to him so before I would have before he knew about the secret, I had a lot of anxiety towards him like I would just literally distance myself, keep away from him as much as possible and I would say that affected our relationship quite a bit because he'd always like wonder, listen why aren't you spending time with me and all that kind of stuff and that's just because of the fear of the secret coming out or whatever but since then it's I guess time heals so I wouldn't say if I'm around him now I'm like one hundred percent okay, there's still

some sort of like I'm still holding my breath slightly because you know again we were brought up differently, I know he doesn't necessarily approve of the secret or all that kind of stuff but we do try as much as possible to not let that affect like our relationship as much as possible or like the mood in the room or whatever."

The findings from participants 5 and 6, which demonstrate the distance created between them and their loved ones, do not align with existing literature that states disclosing secrets is associated with establishing and maintaining healthy relationships (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2018). Participant 5 felt the distance from his family, mainly his parents, after disclosing his secrets, while participant 6 felt the distance from his best friend after doing the same thing. Nevertheless, these findings are consistent with a study by Corsano et al (2017) which found that secrecy from both parents and friends is associated with low relationship quality.

When keeping and disclosing secrets begins with pain but leads to positive

Throughout our interviews with participants, we found instances where keeping or disclosing a secret led to various advantages and disadvantages. In some cases, the initial impact on participants' relationships was particularly harmful. This can be seen in the experience of Participant 8, who went against their family's religious beliefs by keeping a secret relationship from these family members, as a form of self-protection. Ultimately, when the secret was disclosed, it led to extreme tension and broken trust within the participants' household.

"Yeah. I mean, there was a lot of, um, tension in my family, obviously because my family is in that religion. So, they weren't happy with me leaving, but it took a few months for everyone to kind of come around. I mean, I didn't speak to my sister for almost half a year and my parents were very, very upset with me, you know, but they've all kind of accepted it now." (Participant 8)

The damage to the participant's relationship with their sister and parents was long-lasting and led to issues with communication. This harmful impact on relationships extended further than close relatives, as the participant also experienced a disruption within her friendships, specifically those within the same religion.

“Yeah, I think my sister was definitely the worst one, you know, um, seeing as we weren't on speaking terms or anything. Um, but I also, yeah, I did have friends that were part of the religion and they also kind of just stopped, like speaking to me or engaging with me, you know? Um, obviously probably because they disapproved of my decision. Um, but I think it was definitely my relationship with my sister that was the worst affected.” (Participant 8)

Initially, the consequences of keeping the secret were negative. Therefore, Participant 8 felt that keeping a secret from their family was far less beneficial than disclosing their secret. The keeping of a secret relationship from family and friends led to disruptions within this participant's mental and physical health, such as constant worry and anxiety. This confirms previous research which found that the process of keeping secrets can be detrimental to one's mental and physical well-being, particularly when the secret is serious in nature (Vrij et al., 2002). Our findings continue to support previous research, which found that secrecy from both parents and friends has been associated with low relationship quality and depression (Corsano et al., 2017).

“Yes, I do think that disclosing a secret is always better than keeping one and also emotionally for yourself, you know? It plays on your conscience all the time when you're hiding something, when you're lying about something. And it's so much, you don't have to think about

any of that when you tell the truth. So, if you disclose the secret, you know, you don't have that constant worry on your mind all the time.” (Participant 8)

However, after a significant amount of time passed and through the difficult process of disclosing the secret, the participant succeeded in their efforts to remedy the broken relationship and trust by maintaining honesty. This eventually led to a stronger relationship between the participant, their parents and their sister. This is an interesting finding that demonstrates how the process of disclosing instead of keeping the secret, ended up bringing the family closer together than before by forging a new bond.

“I wasn't close to my parents really at all, because I was constantly, you know, I was living like a whole other life, um, that I couldn't talk to them about it, couldn't tell them about it and had to lie about constantly. So, I didn't have a close relationship with them at all. Um, and whenever they ask questions, I kind of tried to dodge it or ignore it because I couldn't tell them the truth. So, it was like, you know, I had to keep on making up these lies and I didn't enjoy it. So, I just distanced myself. Um, but it's very different now as well, because I can be honest, you know, they know my choices and my decisions. So now that I'm honest, it's like a whole different, different dynamic with them. Um, You know, I feel like I can speak to them, and they've also become much more of a support because I can speak to them, you know?” (Participant 8)

These findings demonstrate how keeping a secret can have a significant negative impact on those closest to the secret-keeper but in some cases, through disclosure and time, these relationships can be built up stronger than before. These effects can be both positive and negative. In this participants case, the impact was initially negative but over time, the relationships began to heal. Participant 9 had a similar experience. In the beginning, there was a

similar negative and harmful impact on their relationships when keeping a secret, this contrasted against the sense of empowerment, understanding, and acceptance the participant experienced after disclosing.

“Um with myself, I think it made me closed, when I was younger, and I was keeping the secrets from everyone. Um, I think it made me feel very disconnected from just people in general. Um, and that made me feel like maybe I had something wrong with me that I wasn't connecting with people as not just everyone else seemed to be. Um, um, And it just, it was quite hard because I felt like maybe I had less worth because I had to keep this secret, or I felt like I had to keep a secret. Um, Yeah. And then, um, once I felt comfortable telling, telling people and like telling my mom, it made me feel a lot better about myself and then hearing from other people's responses to telling them it made me realize that things that happened weren't actually my fault and that it wasn't because there was something wrong with me. There was something wrong with my dad. Um, and that, that was quite sort of empowering. I felt like it made me feel a lot more comfortable to be open about things that happened” (Participant 9)

The overwhelming and harmful experience of keeping a secret was found through the physical, psychological and emotional manifestations of anxiety, guilt and shame that many participants felt whilst keeping a secret. Additionally, for further reference, this can be seen in the experience of Participant 10:

“Um, so actually a fun fact about myself if I get an incredibly guilty conscience. If it's a secret, that side rarely affected, um, someone around me or if it's really affecting me. So, uh, I would actually have to say that often when I keep my own secrets, I confide in, like I said, I confide in certain people, and I just get really uncomfortable in my own skin. And I've already

got like, I'm diagnosed with anxiety. So, my anxiety goes straight through the roof. Um, especially when it's planted in my head. Yeah, I just need to communicate with someone. So, I feel nauseous. Um, I get a lot of anxiety, like a lot of hot flashes as well, like I'm going through menopause. Um, yeah. Yeah. That's pretty much. And it's sometimes quite heavy, depending on what the secret is. There are some things that are very easy to just like brush under the rug, but then there are also other things that. You just keep to yourself because it actually just festers in your mind too much.” (Participant 10)

Disclosing secrets as a sigh of relief and way to connect

Our study found that there was a positive sense of relief associated with disclosing secrets. The benefits of disclosure were found by participants who experienced a positive release. This can be seen in the interview with Participant 9, who after sharing a traumatic experience with a friend, experienced a strengthening effect on their friendship:

“Yeah. I think, I think it did. Because she had been sharing trauma and then suddenly felt really vulnerable about it. She felt really sort of relieved that I had an understanding of how she was feeling. Um, and she gave me a hug, which, you know, made me feel better. Um, She, she just said that, you know, she was really glad that both she and I felt comfortable enough to share things with each other like that. Um, and that she felt really close to me right then. Um, and she knew we were going to be friends for a long time. So, you know, just like that, she was sorry that things had happened. Um, she had no idea because she, from the outside, I seem really strong. Um, and she had no idea that anything had happened to me in my childhood, you know, and I said the same thing to her, whatever.” (Participant 9)

This confirms the findings from the study conducted by Maas et al (2018), which discovered that disclosing secrets can have positive long-term effects on an individual's well-being and foster a sense of closeness in relationships between people. By disclosing a secret or personal information, this prompts the other individual to share information of their own. This helps to create and maintain a healthy relationship and fosters a close relationship (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2018). An unexpected but interesting finding through our research was that many participants felt relieved after their interview with us, almost as if the interview allowed them to vent and unburden themselves, for example, Participant 8 said:

Participant 8: It definitely brings back, um, emotions, you know, when you start and you start thinking about everything and you kind of, as you talk about it, you kind of re-live, re-live what it felt like when it happened, obviously to a lesser extent, but I think that's part of the process of healing is talking.

Interviewer 2: Yeah. I was just going to ask; do you feel like you kind of like also got a chance to unburden yourself by talking to us just a little bit about it.

Participant 8: Yeah, I definitely do. I mean, everyone I've spoken to about it knows me personally, so it's a different, it's a different thing. But when you're talking to someone that doesn't know anything about you, it feels like you. You can just completely be honest about it.

Participant 8 then went on to say how they felt as if a weight had been lifted off their shoulders. There were many participants who shared this experience. This may have been due to the interview being conducted with our cameras turned off, creating a safe and non-judgmental space. Participant 11 had a similar experience of relief where in which they realised that they had used this interview to express themselves and their emotions:

“I guess in a way it was quite relieving, I could vent to someone about it, so yeah, it’s actually quite interesting. I didn’t think that before, until I just realized it now.” (Participant 11)

Relief was found when disclosing a secret to friends or family. This was a positive experience and welcomed by Participant 12:

“Um, I’d say it’s definitely dependent on the situation. Like if it’s my secret and I’m keeping it because, um, I’m scared of kind of just being judged about it or something. Um, there definitely be more of an advantage when I finally do gain the courage to tell someone about it. Uh, cause I guess I feel like a sense of relief.” (Participant 12)

Okay. I think advantages would be if it’s your secret, you get a sense of relief as to who you’re talking to. Like you just get that sense of relief from having to like, having to keep that secret. Um, especially for me, if, if it’s something about me specifically like I have a, I’ve got quite a close relationship with my mom. And so, keeping secrets from her has like, I have to be very, very intentional with what I say and stuff. Cause she knows me really, really well. Um, and so when I finally do disclose a secret to her, um, I tend to feel just like a sense of relief and it’s like, okay, cool. Like I can talk openly about it now. (Participant 12)

Conclusion

Individuals keep all kinds of secrets, ranging from minor to major secrets. The effects of these secrets vary, with secrets of a more serious nature usually having a greater impact. Most research on keeping secrets states that it is detrimental to some relationships and that disclosing secrets can have the exact opposite effect. However, an individual’s subjective experiences of keeping and disclosing secrets have not yet been fully explored. This study, therefore, sought to

address that gap by focusing on individuals' feelings before, during and after keeping and disclosing secrets within the context of their relationships.

Secret-keeping can be defined as an emotional burden weighing heavily on the mind of the secret-keeper (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). Our study found this to be true, as all participants believed keeping secrets to be equal to emotional burdens, which impacted their relationships with others and the relationship that they shared with themselves. Their mental health and physical well-being began to decline, as keeping their secrets slowly took their toll.

Participants shared their experiences of how hard they were on themselves in the midst of keeping their secrets. Participants felt ashamed for wanting to disclose to the people closest to them, yet being unable to do so. Participants also felt guilty for the growing distance between them and their loved ones due to keeping their secrets. These experiences depict how participants' relationships became strained as they drifted further away from their friends and family.

Additionally, many participants expressed how keeping secrets led to a loss of trust. This loss of trust occurred when participants' loved ones disclosed secrets to them, as well as loved ones losing trust in participants' after learning of their secrets. Furthermore, in this study, although some participants initially experienced pain and harm after disclosing their secrets within their closest relationships, over time, it eventually led to something positive. Those same relationships strengthened as a result of bonding over important, shared information. Considering how research states that disclosing secrets should bring individuals closer together, this was not an unexpected finding (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2018).

Therefore, this study revealed that participants keep their secrets for quite some time until they work up the courage to disclose. Some participants proposed that disclosing a secret is more beneficial than keeping one, while other participants tend to disagree. The latter

may be due to the less-than-ideal responses some participants received from their friends and families after choosing to disclose. Those participants expressed regret at ever having said anything in the first place, yet still could not deny the fact that the act of disclosing brought relief from the emotional burden that keeping their secret ultimately was.

Significance of the study

Although there is information on why people keep secrets and the outcomes of keeping and disclosing secrets, little is known about the subjective experience individuals face during this process and its influence on their relationships. Current research states that people keep secrets to avoid being socially isolated and rejected. Additionally, research states that keeping secrets can negatively affect individuals and their relationships, while disclosing secrets is often beneficial. This is because disclosing secrets can establish and maintain healthy relationships by allowing individuals to feel a sense of connection to one another. However, current research has not fully explored how individuals feel before, during and after the process of keeping and disclosing secrets. Conducting such research could generate more information towards an under researched area and make people more aware of the consequences of keeping and disclosing secrets. This study enabled participants to shed light on their own subjective experiences, thus giving them the space to relieve themselves of emotional burdens.

Limitations of the study

A limitation of the research is that the sample was relatively small (12 participants), and each participant was only interviewed once. A larger sample size and repeated interviews could have meant more data to work with, yet it would not have been feasible given the time to complete the project. It could also be said that due to the smaller sample size, individuals in the study did not represent all individuals who keep and disclose secrets. The small sample size may

have limited the robustness of the data, or prevented data saturation, or limited the range of voices. However, generalizability is not an aim of qualitative work.

Another limitation was language, as English-speaking students could likely have different subjective experiences of keeping and disclosing secrets than students who speak other languages. However, this study did not seek to generalize its findings to the general population but rather to explore the subjective experiences of keeping and disclosing secrets of individual participants.

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the subjective experiences of individuals keeping and disclosing secrets in their relationships will be of use to people who find themselves in similar situations, unsure of what to do.

Recommendations for future research

In conclusion, future studies should continue exploring and analysing the influence of keeping and disclosing secrets on relationships and the individual subjective experiences of this. It is mainly the way the individual feels before, during and after this process that should be explored and how they decide to keep and disclose their secrets. Recommendations for a similar study in the future should include the impact of keeping and disclosing secrets on romantic relationships. In doing so, the study will have a better understanding and be able to answer questions like ‘are all forms of relationships impacted equally by the keeping and disclosing of secrets?’

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Appendix A

Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

The Influence of Keeping and Disclosing Secrets on Relationships: A Qualitative Analysis

1. Invitation and Purpose

We are Honours students from the Psychology Department at the University of Cape Town. We invite you to participate in our study, which explores the subjective experience of keeping and disclosing secrets and their influence on relationships. It is important to note that you do not have to tell us what the secret is; we are only interested in what you have experienced.

2. Procedures

- Should you agree to participate, our online interview will take about an hour of your time. We will be asking you questions about your experience of keeping and disclosing a secret and the resulting impact this process has had on your relationships. We will not ask you to tell us what the secret is; we only want to understand more about what your experience was of keeping it and telling someone about it. We are especially interested in how you see the secret.
- If you wish to speak to us for more or less than an hour, that will be fine.
- Participating in this study is voluntary.

3. Risks, Discomforts & Inconveniences

- This study poses minimal risk to you. However, talking about your experiences of keeping and disclosing a secret might raise some difficult feelings and/or memories for you. You do not have to talk about anything you do not feel comfortable talking about. You do not have to answer any questions that make

you feel uncomfortable, and you are free to end the interview at any time, without consequence.

- If by any chance, you become distressed during the interview and feel that you would like to speak to someone about it, you can contact the services and resources on the referral list that we have provided.

4. Benefits

Apart from contributing to an under-researched area, there are no direct benefits to participating in the study. You will receive 2 Student Research Participation Programme (SRPP) points for your participation.

5. Privacy and Confidentiality

- Your data will be protected, and your identity will remain anonymous throughout the research process. All identifying information associated with participants will be removed from the study's findings. You also have the right to request that any information you have shared be removed from the study.
- Interviews will take place in a private meeting over the secure video conferencing platform Zoom. This platform will be used to record the interview. If you would like the recording to be switched off at any time, you have the right to request this. Recordings will be kept safe, and when the interview has been transcribed, the recording will be destroyed.
- Only those involved in the study, two researchers and their supervisor, will have access to the data collected. Your data will be stored on a secure laptop that is password-protected.

6. Contact details

If you have questions about the study or your participation, please contact us at our email addresses, ALWDEM001@myuct.ac.za or GVNCHR007@myuct.ac.za. Our supervisor is Dr Maxine Spedding: maxine.spedding@uct.ac.za.

If you have any questions, comments or complaints about your rights as a study participant, please contact Ms Rosalind Adams at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town: 021 650 3417 or rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za.

7. Signatures

{Subject's name} has been informed of the nature and purpose of the procedures described above including any risks involved in its performance. He or she has been given time to ask any questions and these questions have been answered to the best of the researcher's ability. A signed copy of this consent form will be made available to the subject.

Investigator's Signature: Date:

I have been informed about this research study and understand its purpose, possible benefits, risks, and discomforts. I agree to take part in this research as a subject. I know that I am free to withdraw this consent and quit this project at any time, and that doing so will not cause me any penalty or loss of benefits that I would otherwise be entitled to enjoy.

Subject's Signature: Date:

I agree to give my consent to have the interview recorded for research purposes. I acknowledge that my identity will remain confidential if I so choose it to be.

Subject's Signature: Date:

Appendix B

Debrief- Form and Referral List

At the end of the interview the participants will be asked the following questions:

- How did you feel about the questions we asked you?
- Do you feel that any of the questions we asked offended you in any way? If so, could you please tell us more about this?
- How did you feel about sharing your experiences with us?
- Do you feel like you would want to talk to a professional after this interview with us?

If, by any chance, you become distressed during or after the interview and feel that you require further care, below is a list of services and resources which can be contacted.

Emergency Crisis Lines/Services:

Suicide Crisis Line (8am – 8pm): 0800 567 567 or SMS 31393

LifeLine Western Cape Crisis Line: 021 461 1111

Suicide Crisis: 0800 12 13 14

Anxiety and Depression Support Groups: 021 557 6066

Cape Mental Health Society: 021 447 9040

Groote Schuur Psychiatric Unit: 021 404 2155/1 (Ward G22 / C23)

24/7 Hotline (sexual assault emergency response): 072 393 7824

UCT Services Medical Services

The Student Wellness Service offers a comprehensive outpatient medical service by both medical practitioners and nurses, who are dedicated to helping students to remain healthy, and to make the correct life choices while pursuing their academic goals. Students are encouraged to seek assistance and guidance as early as possible.

Contact Details: Telephone: 021 650 1020

Toll-free numbers to call when you are in distress:

SADAG UCT Student Careline: 0800 24 25 26 free from a Telkom line or SMS 31393 for a call-me-back.

This line offers 24/7 telephonic counselling, advice, referral facilities and general support to students facing any mental health challenges or contemplating suicide. The line is available to offer support and advice to anyone who is concerned about a student who might be in distress. The line is able to advise and refer callers to both internal UCT resources and external (NGO, public and private) mental health resources.

Health Service: Tel: +27 (0)21 650 1020

Counselling Service: Tel: +27 (0)21 650 1017

Some of the problems for which the Counselling service can provide assistance with include:

- adjusting to UCT
- homesickness
- loneliness
- cultural transition
- social skills and self-esteem issues
- confidence building
- individuation from parents
- stress and anxiety
- depression and suicidal feelings
- loss and bereavement
- trauma and crisis intervention
- rape and sexual assault
- HIV/AIDS counselling
- sexual identity issues
- addictions
- academic problems including motivation and concentration
- relationship issues
- family problems
- any other personal, emotional, social or psychological problem

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

Thank you for volunteering to participate in our study. My name is Chryshanthi Govender, and my name is Demi Alwar. Today, we will be asking you a few questions on the subjective experience of keeping and disclosing your secret and how this has influenced your relationships. It is important to note that you do not have to tell us what the secret is; we are only interested in what you have experienced. Okay, let's get started.

Section 1: Participant

- Please tell us more about yourself, what is your name and surname?
- How old are you?

Section 2: Keeping Secrets

- Can you tell us about your secret, why is it a secret?
- What made you want to keep your secret?
- What emotions did you feel while keeping your secret?
- What impact has the keeping of your secret had on your relationships?
- What impact has the keeping of your secret had on your mental health?
- What impact has the keeping of your secret had on your physical well-being?
- Were you keeping your secret because you did not know the right way to disclose it? If

so, can you tell us more about this?

Section 3: Disclosing Secrets

- Who did you choose to disclose to and why?
- How would you describe the person to whom you chose to disclose your secret?
- What did you expect to happen before you chose to disclose your secret?
- What happened after you chose to disclose your secret?
- What made you want to disclose your secret?
- What made you want to disclose your secret at the time that you did?
- Let's say you were given the opportunity to disclose your secret differently, would you and why?
- Are there any advantages or disadvantages to disclosing secrets? If so, can you tell us what they are?
- Would you say that disclosing a secret is more beneficial than keeping one? If so, why?

We have come to the end of our interview. We will now ask you a few questions on how you felt the interview went.

- How did you feel about the questions we asked you?
- Do you feel that any of the questions we asked offended you in any way? If

so, could you please tell us more about this?

- How did you feel about sharing your experiences with us?
- Do you feel like you would want to talk to a professional after this interview with us?

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with us. We really appreciate all that we have learned from you and the time you took out of your day to spend with us.

Appendix D

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

The Influence of Keeping and Disclosing Secrets on Relationships: A Qualitative Analysis

Have you ever kept a secret and then disclosed it to someone?

Are you 18 years and older?

Are you a registered psychology student at the University of Cape Town?

If you answered yes to all the above:

You are invited to participate in our study which explores the influence that keeping and disclosing secrets has on relationships and the individuals' subjective experiences during this process! It is important to note that you do not have to tell us what the secret is, we are only interested in what you have experienced.

Did we mention that participating in this study will also get you 2 Student Research Participation Programme (SRPP) points too!

To learn more please email:

Chryshanthi Govender

(GVNCHR007@myuct.ac.za)

or

Demi Alwar

(demitylaalwar@gmail.com)

We look forward to hearing from you!