

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS
FOR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

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This volume is dedicated to *Maureen* and *Brian*, my most important personal relationships (RE); to *MC* and the *menagerie* (RG); and to *George Levinger* whose life-long contributions to the area of personal relationships make it possible for both of us to be here today.

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Secret Relationships: The Back Alley to Love

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Vows are exchanged, parents blubber, rice is thrown . . . and the newly wedded couple lives happily ever after. Sigh, this must be love. If we are asked to draw a mental picture of a close relationship, many of us would visualize something along the lines of the traditional public ceremony of marriage. In our culture, this is the essence of togetherness, the front door to a lifelong loving relationship. As much as these images warm our hearts, however, face it—this is an unabashedly idealistic view of how an intimate relationship begins.

In reality, couples may often follow a very different pathway to intimacy, one that is hidden from public view and discussed only in whispers. Romantic partners must sometimes find a back alley to love, one devoid of public commitment, a partnership forged instead through secret meetings and concealed communication. Instead of the solid foundation of a marriage known to all, partners in secret relationships establish their connections without the social support that comes with the consent of their families or friends, without acknowledgment, and without ceremony or ritual. They are strikingly alone in their togetherness, isolated from all the usual accompaniments of conventional romance. However, although the clandestine route they travel is unorthodox, partners in a secret romantic relationship experience emotions and interdependencies that are no less real than those felt by members of a traditional public couple.

Ironically, keeping a close relationship under wraps can even increase the overall intensity of feelings and introduce aspects of obsession to the attraction. Secrecy's power to enhance a relationship derives from the fact that the maintenance of secrecy can become deeply absorbing for the relationship partners.

The main focus of this chapter is detailing just how this back alley—the secret relationship—may work in reaching the goal of intimacy. Like a public ceremony of marriage, secrecy has the power to bond people together in ways that transcend simple togetherness. Partners involved in secret romantic liaisons must use mental control strategies such as suppression of thoughts of the secret and inhibition of relationship-appropriate emotions to prevent themselves from revealing the relationship to outsiders (see Wegner, 1989; Wegner & Schneider, 1989). Even as they are trying to think about their secret on some level to keep track of what must be hidden, they must also try not to think about it, lest these thoughts guide behavior. The drives toward these conflicting mental states can throw the mind of a secret relationship partner into a state of obsessive preoccupation with thoughts of the secret.

To examine how secrecy can intensify a close relationship, it is important to consider the psychology of secrecy in some depth. To begin with, we review the status of secrecy in current psychological theory. Then, we discuss the characteristics that distinguish a secret from a nonsecret relationship. We argue that, due to special constraints of their union, secret relationship partners construct a much different reality than do partners in nonsecret relationships, a reality that is marked by diligent attempts at management of secret thoughts. The chapter then describes the specific cognitive processes that undergird the maintenance of secret relationships, and explores their operation in several studies. Finally, the chapter turns to an examination of the forms of close relationship that secrecy can promote, as distinct from those that arise from more traditional relationship beginnings.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SECRECY

Secrecy has often been recognized as the fundamental factor in the division of the individual from the social group. In essence, once a person finds it necessary to hold something secret from others, the secret detaches the person from others, setting individual thoughts and feelings apart from those that are freely communicated among people. Freud (1913/1953) portrayed this schism between person and society in his writings on social taboos—those behaviors that cannot be performed, and sometimes cannot even be discussed. He argued that taboos reflect societal outrage at the impulses that arise instinctually from individuals, and implied in this that the real or imagined prohibitions that keep a person from telling others about some private thought or deed are the beginning of the person's own individuality.

It is in this sense that secrecy is an important skill required for the healthy mental development of an individual. Prior to the development of a capacity for secrecy, the person is in what Szajnberg (1988) called a symbiotic relationship with the social world, not really separate from others in thought or emo-

tion. Hence, maturation entails the development of an ability to hold information away from the social milieu and to imagine oneself as a repository of information that can be kept from others. Thus, secrecy lets people achieve a sense of their own identity apart from the larger society to which they belong. Tournier (1963/1965) suggested that “to have secrets, to know how to keep them to one's self, to give them up only willingly, constitutes the first action in the formation of the individual” (p. 9), and also proposed that secrets are “indispensable instruments of this emancipation” (p. 8). Secrecy frees people from the confines of total social control and represents the beginning of self-control.

Thus, a secret social relationship is a stepping-off point for many individuals, the beginning of autonomy from family or prior relationships and the path to the development of a new identity. With newfound individuality and isolation from past social connections, however, comes a certain degree of autonomous mental control (Wegner & Erber, 1993). The individual who is capable of secrets from others becomes concerned with controlling his or her thoughts and feelings. Romantic thoughts or emotions that were once uncontrolled and freely expressed become sources of personal concern, aspects of self that must be hidden and dealt with privately. So, although secrecy is critical for creating the beginnings of individuality, it is problematic as well. Secrecy creates the self and at the same time carries the implication that the self is socially undesirable. Things that are secret are often assumed to be disapproved.

Not all secrets are created equally. There are some secrets that are merely interesting and a bit embarrassing. For instance, a friend recently discovered she was related to Vice President Dan Quayle (although quite distantly), and she is very selective about who knows about it. If everyone found out this little tidbit, however, she would not be overly mortified. On the other side of the coin, there are Secrets. This capital S brand includes those that may make others drool upon hearing. The item leading the list of most kept secrets is pretty easy to guess. Yes, it is sex (Hillix, Harari, & Mohr, 1979; Norton, Feldman, & Tafoya, 1974). It is odd that the most common theme of people's secrets is also the subject that most piques others' interest in people's lives. People are mesmerized by the secret sex lives of others. Countless books expound on the subject. Pick a president of the United States, for example—almost any president—and you can probably find some information incriminating him in the improper conduct of his sex life (Giglio, 1991; Morgan, 1976; Ross, 1988).

Even if the secret is not particularly interesting, the very fact that it is secret seems to imbue it with a fascinating and sordid quality. Simmel (1908/1950) explained that, although a secret is neutral and it “has no immediate connection with evil, evil has an immediate connection with secrecy” (p. 331). People assume that whatever is being held from them must be sordid because most of the sordid stories they have heard throughout life have been kept hidden at one time. It is no wonder that there is so much pressure on people who

attempt to keep a romantic relationship a secret. They must feel that if they slip and reveal an inkling of their relationship, outsiders will be waiting to pounce to hear all the dirty details.

Everyone knows that people enjoy unraveling other people's secrets, but there are certain benefits that also can befall the secret bearer. Secret keepers can experience considerable excitement and pleasure at maintaining a secret. Ekman (1985) found that when people conceal something from others, as is the case in secrecy, they experience a thrill. He called this feeling "duping delight." He classified three conditions that contribute to the total amount of duping delight experienced: the challenge of the target, the challenge of the lie, and the presence of an appreciative audience. The more that each of these factors is true, the greater will be duping delight.

In instances in which partners decide to keep their relationship with each other a secret, they may unknowingly endow it with an air of mystery and intrigue. Bok (1982) remarked that "... secrecy is the carrier of texture and variety. Without it, and without the suspense and wit and unexpectedness it allows, communication would be oppressively dull—lifeless in its own right" (p. 24). Along the same vein, Linquist (1989) explained that for secret adulterous lovers, being discreet becomes a high priority, yet at the same time it increases the excitement. The partners she interviewed who were involved in adulterous liaisons found difficulty in maintaining secrecy, and thus felt intense inner tension even though they appeared calm outwardly.

Why should secrecy in a relationship increase excitement? There is something qualitatively different about secret romantic relationships that distinguishes them from close nonsecret relationships. It is by examining this distinctiveness that the mystery of secrecy's relationship-enhancing effects can be understood.

THE UNIQUENESS OF SECRET RELATIONSHIPS

There are some fundamental differences in structure between secret and nonsecret relationships. Reality for secret relationship partners is different in many ways. Tefft (1980) observed that the very nature of a relationship and its members are affected by secrecy. Simmel (1950) explained that secrecy expands people's horizons, allowing them to construct two or more realities at any given time. Both partners in secret relationships are responsible for socially constructing and maintaining this aura of secrecy.

The unique reality that partners in secret relationships form creates a psychological boundary between themselves and others (Bok, 1982). The "us" and "them" constructs of secret relationships are distinct from those of nonsecret relationships. In nonsecret relationships, the "us" and "them" groups have full knowledge of each other's existence, or theoretically could without resistance, whereas in secret relationships the awareness among the two groups

is inequitable; the "them" group is left unaware of the very essence of the "us." Extra effort must be expended inside the relationship to maintain the "us" in this circumstance.

The conscious separation of "us" and "them" through secrecy implies that if the "them" group knew what the "us" group was hiding, a resulting tension or clash would ensue (Bok, 1982). Thus, secrecy results in a dynamic process between insiders and outsiders (Tefft, 1980). Warren and Laslett (1980) explained that secrecy is distinguished from privacy in that the imposition of the former occurs when it is believed that those excluded from the secret would find the hidden behaviors or thoughts to be insulting or damaging. Partners in covert relationships keep their union a secret to avoid negative repercussions from others. In turn, the valence of a secret actually increases by virtue of the secret keeper disallowing outsiders to glimpse this hidden reality (Richardson, 1988; Simmel, 1908/1950; Tournier, 1963/1965). Just as the value of the secret increases as it is hidden, so does the closeness of the emotional bond between two people who keep a secret from outsiders (Tefft, 1980; Tournier, 1963/1965).

Another distinctive characteristic of secret liaisons is their effortful, nonautomatic nature. Compared with nonsecret relationships, secret relationships require the exertion of additional cognitive energy to control relationship- and partner-related thoughts and actions. This conclusion follows from Gilbert's (1993) observation that it takes work to depart from the truth. He noted that understanding something and believing it are the same thing, and that effortful thought and conscious cognitive adjustment are needed if people are to attach a value of "false" to those propositions they wish to deny or falsify. The things people understand to be true will normally come to mind automatically and effortlessly when situations call them forth. People must then apply extra work to adjust these truths toward whatever social impression they wish them to make. Secret information that people wish to keep from others does not come to mind readily in its denied form (Wegner, Wenzlaff, Kerker, & Beattie, 1981), and wells up instead in forms that must be translated or simply suppressed for social consumption. The same rule can be applied to relationships. People's automatic thoughts about a secret romantic relationship are the uncensored truth, so added work is required each time they think them on the way toward speaking or acting.

This additional exertion required of secret liaison partners is particularly evident whenever the partners are in each others' presence with people from whom they are hiding their relationship. Partners in a hidden relationship sometimes become acutely aware of their shared secret and their separateness from others as a result of the social presence of the clandestine partner (Wegner & Erber, 1993). While the partner is near, the mind goes into overdrive, and concentration on anything else but the partner or the relationship becomes almost impossible. The attempt to control information sometimes takes on a life of

its own and gets out of hand. The security measures that the partners establish to prevent their relationship from being discovered become obsessive (Tefft, 1980). This situation definitely contrasts with what occurs when partners in a nonsecret relationship come into contact with each other in a social setting. Nonsecret partners simply see each other approach and then they greet. They do not experience this presence as an intrusive triggering event that suddenly requires massive calculation and subterfuge.

For example, imagine the maneuverings in which two co-workers have to engage to see each other when intracompany dating is strictly forbidden. It is hard enough for the lovers outside of work, always having to look over their shoulders to make sure they do not recognize anyone from the office, but it is the workplace that offers the toughest challenge. When they interact in the presence of others, it takes everything in their willpower to appear calm and collected. Beads of perspiration may form on their brows, their cheeks blaze red, and all the while countless thoughts spin in their minds: "Am I standing too close? . . . Be sure not to smile too broadly. . . . Don't look now. . . . Include others in the conversation. . . . Don't say anything about last night's dinner. . . . Just act normal and try to think of something else."

All this turmoil suggests that the end of a secret relationship could be a relief. If the relationship becomes nonsecret and continues in the public sphere, the need for calculated management of thoughts and emotions would come to an end, and the obsessive preoccupation with the partner and the relationship should wane. Because secrecy is no longer, its cognitive consequences should not endure. Attention can be shifted instead to concentrating on, or at least not avoiding, thoughts of the relationship and this shift results in a reduced level of obsessive preoccupation. A much different scenario can be imagined when secrecy is removed from a relationship because the relationship comes to an end. Partners who have exited secret relationships but maintain continuing secrecy run the risk of being bombarded with thoughts of their old flame for a long, uncomfortable time.

Thus, secrecy is more than a simple social circumstance. It is a complicated endeavor whose dangers introduce lasting intrigues and contingencies. It requires intensive thought, and therefore should be understood as a circumstance that creates a special state of mind. We turn now to the psychological characteristics of this unusual state.

COGNITIVE EFFECTS OF SECRECY

If people had complete control over their minds, they could have a secret and that would be that. They would have no fear whatsoever of leaking it. However, such perfection remains far from people's grasp. It is not clear whether the mind can operate to keep a secret indefinitely. People cannot keep secrets,

including secret relationships, without experiencing some cognitive consequences of that secrecy.

The problem with secrecy is that people try to control their secret-relevant behavior by directing their minds. When the behavior to be controlled is keeping a secret, people attempt to accomplish this by engaging in a mental control strategy, namely thought suppression. Thought suppression is used to keep the ideas of the secret out of mind so that its keeper will not accidentally reveal it. This strategy is enlisted as an aid to inhibiting states of mind that are incompatible with the unwanted behavior (Wegner, 1992). At the same time, however, the secret keeper must retain the secret in mind at some level to make sure that it is not revealed. The maintenance of a secret relationship requires both concentration on appropriate thoughts and suppression of inappropriate ones.

This set of strategies is often used to smooth people's daily interactions with others. One line of evidence for the claim that people use thought suppression in this way when trying to keep a secret comes from a study by Carr and Axson (1992). Subjects in this study talked with a disabled person who was seated in a wheelchair. Some subjects were instructed specifically not to think of the handicap when they interacted with the disabled person, another group was instructed to allow themselves to think about the handicap during the interaction, and another group was not given a mental control strategy to use.

Those people given the suppression instructions looked much like the no-instruction control group on the dependent measures, in that both groups appeared quite comfortable with the interaction. In contrast, the group asked to think about the handicap showed signs of significant discomfort during the interaction and reported afterward that it was not pleasant. This suggests that the no-instruction control group was naturally using a strategy much like thought suppression to cope with the potentially uncomfortable social encounter. On a postinteraction questionnaire, these two experimental groups compared with the think-about-it group also reported a higher ratio of positive thoughts regarding the disability to total thoughts. Apparently, most people would be quite troubled if they were not allowed to use thought suppression to keep unwanted secret thoughts at bay during an interaction.

Although keeping a secret can sometimes provide temporary relief, as evidenced from the previous study, it is not at all apparent that this inclination works to people's benefit in the long run. People who can truly keep secrets (those people who keep secrets well because they have no one to tell do not count) are a dying breed, almost literally. When people manage to keep a secret from others successfully, they often find resulting, harmful complications such as psychological burnout (Larson, 1985). In Pennebaker and Chew's (1985) research, subjects who tried not to tell a secret also displayed high physiological arousal as indexed by skin conductance level (SCL), which may have serious health consequences over an extended period of time. Letting go of secrets,

especially in cases where the secrets are of a traumatic nature, can benefit a person's health outcomes (Pennebaker, Barger, & Tiebout, 1989; Pennebaker & Susman, 1988). This information should help lessen any guilt someone may have about ruining a surprise party or prematurely revealing any gift contents. The next time you slip and tell something you aren't supposed to tell, you now have a justification on health grounds.

It is easy to understand why people who keep secrets experience so much stress. Simmel (1908/1950) aptly described this constant pressure to tell: "The secret puts a barrier between men but, at the same time, it creates the tempting challenge to break through it, by gossip or confession—and this challenge accompanies its psychology like a constant overtone" (p. 334). DePaulo's (1992) work indicated in this vein that keeping secrets places a heavy mental load on a person. She found that it is extremely difficult for people to suppress the nonverbal behavior associated with a particular emotion they are feeling. The secret bearer must concentrate on keeping these nonverbal communication channels from leaking.

Besides controlling nonverbal behavior, secret keepers are faced with the added burden of keeping a tight rein on their mental processes. When the secret bearers are in the presence of those people from whom they want to keep the secret, two simultaneous cognitive maneuvers are at work. The secret keepers must vigilantly hold the secret idea at the back of their minds, and at the same time they try not to think of the secret so they do not act in such a way or say things that will expose the outsider to the secret. Additionally, when a person keeps a secret, much mental baggage becomes attached (Wegner, 1989). A secret bearer has to remember who does and who does not know the secret, as well as what cover story has been simulated for this particular person to hide the secret. As long as secret keepers are in the presence of someone from whom they are intent on keeping the secret, their minds will try to push the secret thought and all related thoughts from consciousness.

Think back to the previously mentioned wheelchair study, in which subjects who were not supplied any strategy to use for interacting with a disabled person and those who suppressed the handicap showed less discomforting thoughts during and after the interactions than subjects who thought about the disability (Carr & Axsom, 1992). However well the suppression strategy worked at decreasing uncomfortable feelings about the handicap during and after the interaction, subjects using this strategy paid for it, in a sense, later. In a subsequent period, they became preoccupied with the thought of that person's disability. Although the suppression and control groups indicated more predominantly positive thoughts compared with those of the nonsuppression group, they indicated a significantly higher level of overall preoccupation with the handicap following the interaction: They could not stop thinking about it.

This study is a choice example that the effects of keeping secrets do not end with thought suppression. There is an interesting phenomenon known as

thought rebound that accompanies trying not to think of something (Wegner, Schneider, Carter, & White, 1987). The harder a person tries to suppress thoughts of something, the more these suppressed thoughts may return to consciousness when suppression is subsequently terminated and the thought is invited to mind. A vicious cycle created by thought rebound may perpetuate itself and can eventually create an obsession-like pattern of thoughts. The person tries not to think of the unwanted thought and, later on relaxing the suppression, finds the thought returns to mind. However, it does so intrusively, and therefore engenders yet another attempt at suppression.

This obsessive preoccupation with unwanted thoughts may be a key factor responsible for the difficulty in keeping a secret. As mentioned earlier, secret keepers (in this instance, relationship partners) attempt to suppress thoughts of the secret item so that their behavior does not betray them by inadvertently revealing the secret. Simultaneously, they must actively think about the secret so they know what they should not let slip. People are virtually unable to carry on these dual processes. They find the secret thought returns repeatedly, sometimes in the most inopportune circumstances, and they must put it out of mind again. Over time, they find the thought is recurring at a nightmarish pace, and they must suppress it over and over. They end up deeply preoccupied with thoughts of each other and with the relationship, and they wonder how they have become so obsessed.

This reasoning suggests that people holding a secret will show many of the same cognitive symptoms as people suppressing a thought. For example, both groups should show high levels of cognitive accessibility of the unwanted or secret thought. When these people are placed under some cognitive load, the thought should still be so automatically accessible that it is easily brought to mind. Wegner and Erber (1992) showed this in the case of suppression. In their first study, these researchers had subjects either suppress thoughts of a target word (e.g., *car*) or concentrate on that word. Subjects under these instructions were then asked to make word associates to a series of different word prompts. Subjects under high cognitive load (time pressure to respond) who suppressed the target word responded more often with the target word when supplied with target-related prompts (e.g., *wheel*) than did subjects who concentrated on the target word.

In a second study, Wegner and Erber (1992) had subjects either think or not think about a target word for 5 minutes, and then asked them to perform a computerized Stroop-type color-naming task. Subjects saw words appearing on the screen and were asked to respond with key presses to indicate the color in which the words were printed. During this task, the subjects were asked either to suppress or think about the target word, all the while rehearsing a two-digit number (low load) or a nine-digit number (high load). The study found that subjects who attempted to suppress thoughts under high load as compared with those under low load or those who consciously concentrated

on the thought showed slower reaction times on the color-naming task when confronted with the target. Apparently, suppressing a thought increased the likelihood that the cognitive access to the thought interfered with color naming. In sum, suppressing a thought under a cognitive load increases the accessibility of this unwanted thought to consciousness.

These studies were used as a basis for a study by Wegner and Lane (1993), which looked at the extent to which secrecy instigates similar cognitive effects. If people actively suppress thoughts of the secrets when keeping secrets, similar results to the previous hyperaccessibility study should be found. Secret keepers under high cognitive load should show an increased access to and preoccupation with the secret thoughts. Subjects in this study read instructions indicating that the experimenter either knew or did not know their target word (e.g., *mountain*). Subjects who thought the experimenter did not know the target word were instructed to keep it secret from her during the entire experiment. They were told that during the computer task the experimenter would be standing over their shoulder and watching their reactions to guess their target word. Subjects in the secret condition were also told that following the computer task the experimenter would ask them questions to guess the target word. Nonsecret subjects were simply told that the experimenter would be standing over their shoulder during the computer task, and that afterward she would be asking the subject questions about the target word.

Subjects were then given either a two-digit number (low cognitive load) or a nine-digit number (high cognitive load) to rehearse during the computer task. All subjects performed a two-color Stroop reaction time (RT) task on the computer. For each of a series of words appearing on a computer monitor, subjects pressed either a red key or a blue key corresponding to the color in which the word was printed. The words included administrations of the target word, nontarget words, and target-related words. In accord with the prediction, subjects who kept a word secret from the experimenter under high cognitive load showed higher color-naming reaction times for the target word and target-related words than subjects in the other conditions (see Fig. 4.1). Apparently, keeping a secret works to make the secret thought highly accessible to consciousness. The finding that suppression and secrecy both have this effect suggests that secrecy may produce this result by prompting people to suppress the secret thoughts.

The cognitive accessibility of secret thoughts is also likely to influence emotional reactions to the thoughts. For example, Wegner, Shortt, Blake, and Page (1990) discovered that suppressing exciting thoughts resulted in increased sympathetic arousal. Subjects who suppressed the thought of sex compared with thoughts of more neutral topics showed increased SCL. Although this effect waned after a few minutes, for suppression subjects SCL continued to surge whenever subjects reported that the exciting thought intruded on their consciousness. It would seem that keeping a relationship secret, which involves

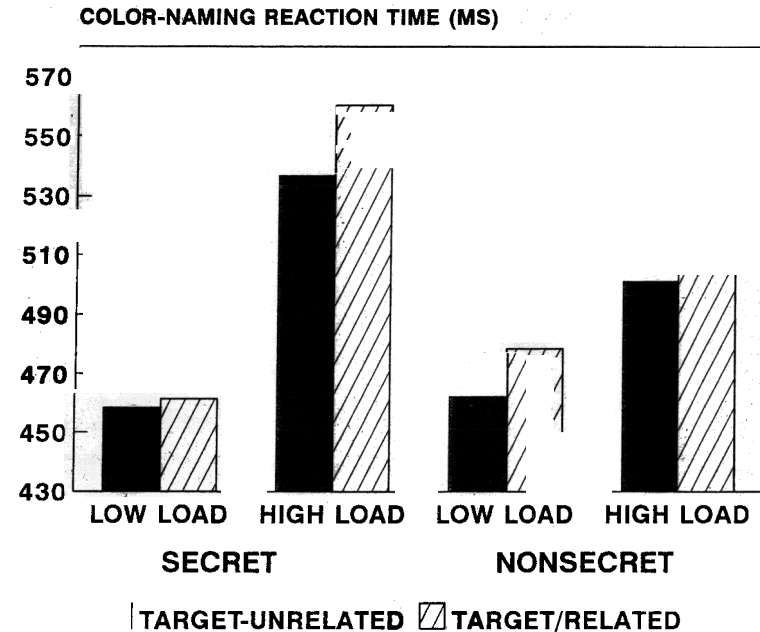


FIG. 4.1. Mean color-naming reaction times. Subjects who were either keeping a target word secret or not made keypress responses to name the colors of target-unrelated versus target words and target-related words under high or low cognitive load. Based on data from Wegner and Lane (1992).

suppression of a potentially very exciting thought, might result in sustained emotional responses to thoughts of the partners.

Research by Wegner and Gold (1993) was also pertinent to this conclusion, because it examined the physiological reactions people experience when trying to suppress thoughts of an old romantic flame. Subjects were instructed to think about a past romantic partner who either was still desired or not, and then they either suppressed thoughts of this old flame or of the Statue of Liberty. Following this period, they were asked to think about the old flame again. It was found that subjects who suppressed thoughts of the still-desired partner showed higher SCL in this final thought period than subjects who suppressed thoughts of the Statue of Liberty or of the undesired old flame. Subjects who suppressed thoughts of an undesired flame talked more about that person in the final period than subjects in the other two conditions, and yet their SCL did not increase to the levels of subjects who suppressed their still-desired relationship. Contrary to common advice to not think about problems, these findings suggest that suppressing an emotional unwanted thought sensitizes people to its recurrence. When these thoughts return after being suppressed for so long, they "shock the system" and create an exaggerated physiological response.

These research findings lead to the general conclusion that secrecy influences the state of mind of the secret keeper. Secret knowledge becomes highly accessible to consciousness, apparently as a result of attempts to suppress it. If the secret is about an emotional topic, the suppression process may introduce the further complication of a chronic emotional reaction to the information. Secrets are the foci of strong cognitive and emotional activity.

JOINING SECRECY AND ATTRACTION

So far the cognitive and physiological consequences of secrecy have been discussed, but there remains a missing link in the chain leading from secrecy to attraction. We suspect that obsessive preoccupation is the central factor in this relationship. Thoughts of the secret are suppressed and then rebound until partners become preoccupied with the secret relationship and with their secret partner. Tesser's (1978) work tied together these mental processes to partner attraction. He found that thought preoccupation with a particular topic can create an intensification of emotion toward that object. Hence, increased thinking about an originally positive stimulus should result in even higher levels of liking for that stimulus. In fact, Tesser and Paulhus (1978) discovered that partners in romantic relationships reported more love toward each other the more they thought about each other. Applying this research to the secrecy/attraction issue at hand, when partners in a secret relationship experience the components of obsessive preoccupation—cyclical suppression and thought intrusions—with their relationship or partner, this should result in attitude polarization or, in other words, increased attraction.

There are several examples of such effects in the prior research literature. For instance, if secrecy leads to increased attraction between romantic relationship partners, this result should be found in relationships with a simpler format (Wegner, 1989). When a person keeps his or her relationship to the other and his or her feelings secret from that person, as in the case of crushes and fantasies, obsession and attraction should result. Olson, Barefoot, and Strickland (1976) sought to determine if introducing secrecy to a one-sided relationship could increase attraction to the unknowing partner. Subjects who covertly followed around a confederate indicated increased pleasurable excitement and more favorable impressions of the confederate than did subjects who kept surveillance openly, and than did subjects who just watched a videotape of the confederate.

A related effect was observed by Driscoll, Davis, and Lipetz (1972) in their analysis of the influence of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966) on attraction. From questionnaire measures gathered from couples, they discovered that more parental interference in a love relationship increased the feelings of love between relationship partners. In accord with reactance theory, when partners in a relationship feel that they are being forced to hide their relationship and experience negative pressure toward this relationship from the outside,

they will act in such a way to restore their freedom. The more that outside forces attempt to quell the relationship, the more positive feelings and attitudes toward the relationship will become. This "Romeo and Juliet" effect would only seem to be relevant to the secrecy-to-attraction connection in cases in which the forbidden couple uses secrecy to deal with opposing external forces. We suspect that instead of partners' reactance to relationship-opposing forces, it is the secrecy they must use—and its cognitive consequences—that create the heightening of attraction.

Yet another instance of secrecy yielding attraction appeared in research by Baumeister, Wotman, and Stillwell (1993) on the phenomenon of one-sided or unrequited love. In this study, when people looked back on the crush situation, rejecters were more negative in their accounts than were would-be lovers. Although this finding is partially explained in terms of the rejecters being confronted with a no-win situation, there could be more at work. It is also possible that the would-be lovers kept their infatuation somewhat secret, whereas rejecters had no motivation to do this. This secrecy could have led to increased preoccupation with and attraction to the object of their affection.

Past unrequited crushes as well as past relationships were examined more directly in two survey studies by Wegner, Lane, and Dimitri (in press). Subjects answered questions about actual past relationships that they thought about most and least and about unfulfilled past crushes they thought about most and least. They then indicated the degree to which each of these relationships had been secret at the time. Predictions were that the past relationships and crushes still thought about most often would be the ones that had been secret while they were ongoing. In fact, subjects indicated that past relationships and crushes they currently thought about were more likely to have been secret than those past love interests on which they no longer ruminated. This finding supports the notion that secrecy promotes romantic preoccupations or obsessions. The second study (Wegner et al., in press) examined how much individuals' reports of the secrecy of past relationships covaried with their reports of current preoccupation with those relationships. Results showed that current obsessive preoccupation did indeed significantly help predict which relationships had been secret.

Although these studies lend credence to the argument that secrecy leads to thought preoccupation of relationship partners, no firm causal connection can be established. To test experimentally the idea that secrecy of a relationship causes partners to become preoccupied with each other and the relationship, which then leads to their further attraction toward each other, a touching study was conducted.

THE FOOTsie STUDY

The essence of the dynamic interplay between secrecy and attraction is best displayed in a surreptitious game of footsie under the table. Many a flame has been sparked in such a sneaky (or sneakerless) manner. Footsie-playing partners

who are at a table with other people are in close proximity and must be careful not to reveal their secret touchings. Maintaining this covert relationship requires every move and word to be guarded. Everyone who plays footsie, ticklish and nonticklish alike, must face the challenge of devising a strategy to keep their secret relationship from becoming public during interactions with others. It is possible that keeping this involvement a secret can lead the partners to grow preoccupied with thoughts of each other, thereby increasing their attraction.

The purpose of our footsie study (Wegner et al., in press, Study 3) was to examine whether mixed-gender laboratory pairs who kept their physical foot contact a secret had increased thought preoccupation with and attraction toward each other. Predictions were that subjects who kept covert foot contact would indicate greater attraction to their partners, due to obsessive preoccupation with partner and relationship-related thoughts, than subjects who did not keep foot contact secret or who did not make foot contact at all.

Unacquainted subjects were assembled in groups of four, with same-gender subjects sitting diagonally from each other. They were then told that they were going to be teammates in a card game called the "Communication Game" with the person across from them, thus forming two mixed-gender pairs. Team members then received identical instructions from the experimenter. Subjects in the contact condition read that their job was to play the game using a method of natural nonverbal communication: They were to keep their feet in contact with their partner's feet the entire time. The contact pairs in the secret condition were also told that they were not to inform the other team of their foot contact. Contact subjects in the nonsecret condition read that it was acceptable for them to let the other team know what they were doing. Noncontact teams read instructions saying that the other team would be communicating nonverbally and that all they needed to do was to play the game. After showing everyone how to play the card game, the experimenter left the room and allowed the teams to play the game for 10 minutes. When she returned, she split up the males and females into different rooms and had them complete two questionnaires assessing their attraction for their partner versus the opposite-gender member of the other team and the degree to which they were preoccupied with thoughts about their partner versus the other.

Analyses on a composite measure of attraction revealed that subjects who kept their foot contact secret reported greater attraction toward their partner than subjects who did not play footsie. In line with our expectations on the power of secrecy, subjects who played footsie secretly also indicated more attraction to their partners than subjects who played footsie in the open. Quite a different pattern of results was found for subjects who did not make foot contact. Among these no-contact bystander couples, subjects who were aware of the other team's nonsecret touching reported greater attraction than did those noncontact subjects who did not know the other team was touching.

A behavioroid measure that asked the subjects how much they wanted to be in a future study with their partner versus the opposite-gender member of the other team was also examined as a potential indicator of attraction. Analyses from this measure were consistent with those from the attraction measure. Subjects who kept their physical relationship a secret had higher average scores on this measure than subjects who had no foot contact or than those who had contact but did not keep it secret.

The mechanism underlying the secrecy-to-attraction process is hypothesized to be the obsessive preoccupation with thoughts of the relationship or partner. As a measure of this, thought preoccupation was assessed by a single questionnaire item asking how much thoughts of the partner kept popping to mind. In the secret condition, teams that made foot contact reported higher preoccupation with their partner than teams that did not. There was a trend in the data for teams that made foot contact secretly to indicate greater preoccupation than those teams that did so openly, although this was not significant. When thought preoccupation was covaried out of the analyses on attraction and behavioroid measures, there was no significant interaction of secrecy and foot contact for the attraction or behavioroid measures. Thus, obsessive preoccupation seemed to be a key element for the influence of secret contact on attraction. These results support the idea that secret relationships are indeed a back alley to love.

Mood and misattribution of arousal were tested as possible mediators of secrecy's influence on partner attraction. Subjects' self-reports of good mood, bad mood, and nervousness did not show patterned increases or decreases in the secret contact condition. From these findings, mood and misattribution of arousal alternatives were not given any support. It seems that of all explanations of the secrecy/attraction connection proffered as of yet, obsessive preoccupation stands out as the most likely mechanism.

Although the thrust of this chapter has been on the positive emotions that secrecy can bring to partners in secret relationships, there is another side to secrecy's effects, one that may bring forward some of the more unseemly behaviors in relationships. Compared with the ceremony of marriage, the ordeal of secrecy can have some unexpected influences on the form the relationship may take. In the next section, we describe how imposing secrecy on a relationship can pave the way for deviant behaviors and thought processes to take shape in these relationships.

SECRECY'S EMPOWERMENT OF DEVIANCE

There are two effects of secrecy that abet the creation of abnormal patterns of behavior and thinking in close relationships: Secrecy isolates relationship partners from external others, and it promotes obsessive thinking about the

relationship. In nature, when a particular species of animal or plant is isolated from others of its kind, the wheels of evolution can turn to concoct eventually quite a different form of what originally was. Isolation can work in a similar manner with relationships. Secrecy allows aberrant behaviors or thoughts in relationships to occur unbridled and untouched by outsiders. Secret relationships give the appearance that their partners are wrapped up in a warm, dry cocoon, safely secluded from the realities of the outside world. In this unchecked hideaway, a strange new relationship can evolve, one in which any oddity that arises can mushroom into full-fledged deviance.

It maintains a sense of rightness with the world to think that those people engaged in relationships characterized by kinky and perverse behavior belong to subcultures far removed from the more respectable society. However, secrecy enables these deviant patterns of behavior in close relationships to develop, due to isolation from disapproving others, in the home or the office right next to yours. For example, in many seemingly happy and "normal" families, incestuous relations are maintained and perpetuated by a conspiracy of silence (Christiansen & Blake, 1990). Partners in physically and mentally abusive relationships also hide themselves behind the shield of secrecy (Meares & Orlay, 1988). Even the abused party keeps this unhealthy relationship secret from outsiders due to reasons such as fear of the abuser, embarrassment, and so on. By keeping this relationship secret, the abusing and the abused partners are not allowing external forces to intervene and discredit the structure of the relationship (Ferraro & Johnson, 1989).

Sheltered as they are from the scrutiny of the outside world, roles and interaction routines within the relationship can be constructed without regard to socially normal conventions. Quirks in the relationship can be nurtured in the hothouse atmosphere of secrecy and grow into bizarre patterns. Like the minor oddities or socially disapproved activities that may be kept secret by an individual, and that therefore can develop privately into serious obsessions and perversions, activities of the secret couple that begin on caprice can develop into truly eccentric interaction practices. For example, in her interview study of single women involved in secret affairs with married men, Richardson (1988) discovered that secret relationship partners form their own realities by creating unique rituals and symbolic objects.

The predilection toward obsessive thought is the other effect of secrecy that empowers development of deviance in close relationships. Many lovers are obsessed with partners during the relationship, but for secret lovers the thought preoccupation has a tendency to be that much more intense. Thus, obsessive thinking about the partner and the relationship might continue for a long time. Secrecy in these cases may be imposed on the aspects of the relationship relating to the abusive or socially disapproved behavior, rather than the relationship. The victim may be ashamed and keep the abuse from others, and the abuser may insist on secrecy as a way to maintain the inequitable relation-

ship. But both victim and abuser may find themselves cognitively preoccupied with the relationship because of the secrecy that has been imposed on this aspect of it. Even if their thoughts about each other have little resemblance to love or attachment in the usual senses, their thoughts may become so intrusive and uncontrollable that they invite the self-perception of obsession. Victim, abuser, or both may be caught up in a remarkably persistent fascination with their destructive relationship for the very reason that they have kept it from public view.

Perhaps secrecy magnifies the qualities of whatever relationship it touches. If it is used to hide a healthy relationship, it may enhance it by adding more zing. But if it is used to hide an unhealthy relationship, its secluding effect and the tendency toward obsessive thought that it produces can form a strange new creature or, in the worst case, a monster.

CONCLUSION

On the topic of romance, 17th-century English writer Behn (1686) held that "Love ceases to be a pleasure when it ceases to be a secret." Our analysis of the role of secrecy in close relationships concurs with this observation—at least in the general suggestion that keeping a relationship secret can promote partners' psychological attachment. We do not really know that secrecy is a key ingredient for love. For that matter, it is not clear at all that secrecy enhances partners' interdependence, that it yields greater compatibility, or that it promotes greater satisfaction or ease of interaction. In other words, we are not in a position to argue that secrecy influences relationship quality, structure, or degree of satisfaction.

Rather, secrecy has personal effects on the psychology of each partner. It increases each partner's tendency to try at times to suppress thoughts of the other and the relationship, it increases the degree to which partners experience thoughts of the relationship in an intrusive manner, and it intensifies the emotions that the partner feels about the relationship. When there is reason for love, all this concentration may make love bloom. But in this sense, it may be that secrecy forms a false attachment, a connection that is forged in each person's mental turmoil rather than in the crucible of relationship development. When the secret is revealed and the confusion following a "coming out" subsides, there may be little that remains on which a successful partnership can be built. This fate is not inevitable, of course, because the intense attention and emotion focused on the relationship during its secret phase could also lead to the discovery of lasting interaction patterns and valued partner traits that could form the foundation for a new life in the open. Whether people enter a relationship from the back alley or the front door, it may make no difference once they are inside.

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