

Behind the Mask: The Role of Need-Fulfillment in Self-Concealment and Well-Being

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Introduction

- At some point in their lifetime, most people will keep a secret about themselves.
- It may not be a secret from everyone they know; rather, it could be a secret kept from one's employer, one's parents, one's children, one's therapist, one's significant other, and so on.
- This study examines secrecy using a construct called **self-concealment**. (Larson & Chastain, 1990).

Self-Concealment

- According to Larson and Chastain (1990), concealed personal information has **three** characteristics:
 - private and personal
 - consciously accessible
 - actively kept hidden
- Thus, self-concealment is a **conscious** and **active process** to **hide negative aspects** of oneself **from others**.

Problems with Self-Concealment

- Psychological:**
 - depression (Kelly & Achter, 1995)
 - anxiety (Cepada-Benito & Short, 1998)
 - rumination (King, Emmons, & Woodley, 1992)
 - lower self-esteem (Cramer & Lake, 1998)
- Physiological:**
 - headaches and nausea or increased vulnerability to cancer and infectious diseases (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor & Visscher, 1996)
- Social:**
 - social anxiety (Gesell, 1999)
 - lack of social support (Cepada-Benito & Short, 1998; Kelly & Achter, 1995)
 - feelings of loneliness (Cramer & Lake, 1998)
 - difficulty expressing emotions (King & Emmons, 1990)

Presentation Info

This poster was presented by Helen Lee Lin at the biennial meeting of the International Association for Relationship Research, Providence, Rhode Island in July 2008.

Introduction (continued)

Self-Determination Theory

- SDT posits three basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000)
 - Autonomy** refers to feeling choiceful in one's actions and implies engaging in activities that are endorsed by one's true self.
 - Competence** refers to feeling effective and capable, which leads to seeking out optimal challenges.
 - Relatedness** involves feeling connected to others and having a sense of belongingness and meaning.
- These fundamental psychological needs must be satisfied for optimal psychological health and well-being.

SDT and Self-Concealment

- We suggest **high self-concealment is negatively related to the fulfillment of basic needs**, which in turn **leads to negative health outcomes**.
 - Secrecy leads to preoccupation with secrets and less autonomous (or more controlled) behaviors in order to keep one's secrets → unsatisfied **autonomy** needs
 - Keeping negative events secret could result in low self-esteem → unmet **competence** needs
 - Self-concealers are less likely to receive social support and less likely to engage in self-disclosure → thwarted **relatedness** needs

(based on Lane & Wegner, 1995; Derlega et al., 1993; Larson & Chastain, 1990, respectively)

The Current Study

Primary Goals

- Offer an improved explanation for the link between self-concealment and negative well-being outcomes.
- Test SEM model of need satisfaction mediating this relationship between self-concealment and negative well-being.

Method

Participants

- 155 Ps were recruited from undergraduate classes at the University of Houston.
- Age:** 18-59 years old ($M=23.62$, $SD=6.84$)
- Gender:** Female (90%), Male (10%)
- Ethnicity:** African American (23%), Asian (20%), Caucasian (30%), Hispanic (18%), and "Other" (9%)

Procedure

- Ps completed questionnaires on their own time in exchange for extra credit.

Measures

Self-Concealment (Larson & Chastain, 1990)

- Ps rated items such as, "There are lots of things about me that I keep to myself" and "I'm often afraid I'll reveal something I don't want to."

General Need Satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

- Ps rated agreement with statements such as "I feel like I am free to decide for myself how to live my life," "Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment from what I do," and "People in my life care about me."

Well-Being Outcomes (combination of 7 indicators)

- Depression (Mental Health Inventory), Physical Symptoms (Brief Symptom Inventory), Anxiety (STAI-T), Self-Esteem, Perceived Stress, Satisfaction with Life, Subjective Vitality

Discussion

Conclusions

- This research provides an explanation for the established link between self-concealment and negative well-being.
- It also places the construct of self-concealment within the well-validated framework of self-determination theory.
- Findings allow us a better understanding of maladaptive interpersonal relations.

Limitations and Future Directions

- The current study was cross-sectional and did not follow up at future time points to determine further well-being outcomes.
- Future research should examine this model using a longitudinal study design.
- Due to the relational nature of self-concealment (which implies at least two people must be involved), future research should also target various types of dyads.

Select References

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Results

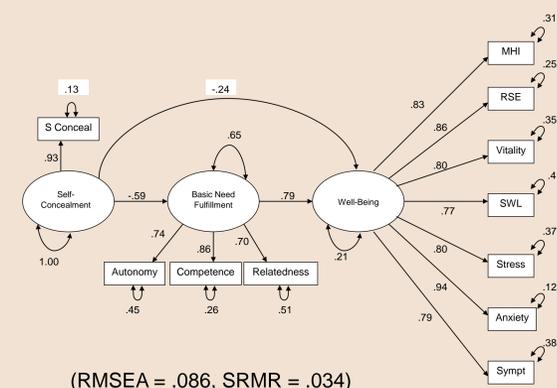


Figure 1. Structural equation model indicating the proposed relationship between self-concealment, general need fulfillment, and well-being outcomes.