

Abstract

Is secret romance (or keeping a relationship secret) good or bad for relationship well-being? There are two competing predictions in the existing literature on this question. The burden theory predicts that keeping a relationship secret is aversive because keeping the relationship secret involves cognitively taxing regulation of thoughts and feelings. The obsessive preoccupation theory, on the other hand predicts that keeping a relationship secret is alluring as the secrecy can elevate obsession with and thus attraction to one's partner. One correlational and one experimental studies are proposed to test these two competing predictions. In Study 1, we constructed a secret intimate behaviours scale and found that the scale is not related to relationship quality. In Study 2, we experimentally manipulated secrecy by asking participants to hide secret intimate behaviours in the presence of confederates, and observed no main effect of secrecy on relationship experiences. However, sense of burden moderates the association, such that secrecy has an effect only when participants experience burden. Although the results across studies are mixed, they are in line with the burden theory.

Keywords: secret relationships, burden theory, obsessive preoccupation theory, relationship quality