

Despite the widespread acknowledgement that keeping secrets is associated with a variety of negative personal and interpersonal health outcomes, a consensus has not yet been reached as to how this common behaviour might precipitate the breadth of physiological, psychological, and social dysfunction to which it has been linked. This is partly because secret-keeping by its very nature presents a serious challenge for scientific study. It is at once a concealed and complex phenomenon, with both *inter*- and *intra*-personal facets, consisting of myriad behavioural, cognitive, and emotional processes. Although leading theories differ importantly in their details, each proposes a type of unhealthy preoccupation that is triggered by social or psychological forces, that is manifest at some layer or another of one's cognitive-behavioural-emotional strata, and that leads to interpersonal or intrapersonal health dysregulation. While much empirical support for these proposed preoccupation mechanisms has been generated, it remains unclear which among their variety (e.g., active concealment behaviours, rumination, conflicting urges, fear of discovery) are most relevant, in what ways, under what circumstances, and if they are not in fact superseded or accompanied by any other unidentified mechanisms. Therefore, while quantitative methodology continues to substantiate and refine leading theories with promising results, this research sought to qualify these theories by evaluating the extent to which they were consistent with atheoretically-derived observations of the secret-keeping experience. By conducting structured interviews with open-ended questions, this study appealed to the self-awareness of active secret-keepers themselves in order to further understand the context, content, and consequences of the preoccupying behaviours, thoughts, and emotions that accompany the secret-keeping enterprise. The main purpose of this research was to summarize and aggregate the common themes that emerged across these interviews using a hybrid qualitative-quantitative methodology known as numerological phenomenology. However, low participant turnout precluded the application of this analysis. Perhaps due to high levels of perceived vulnerability (and understandably so), only two participants signed up to engage in a recorded Skype interview. In order to provide an analysis of the resulting data, the original methodology had to be changed to adhere to a strictly qualitative paradigm. Content analysis of these interviews demonstrated that even though both secret-keepers were holding a secret that fell under the same categories, for comparable lengths of time, and at the same developmental stage in life, there were significant differences in the underlying details that propose various contextual insights for the aforementioned suite of preoccupation mechanisms. For instance, active concealment behaviours were not discussed by either participant as being a source of bothersome preoccupation. Although this does not negate these behaviours' relevance to secret-keeping, this finding is consistent with recent research demonstrating that active concealment is not nearly as common – nor as bothersome – as mere rumination (Slepian, Chun, & Mason, 2017). And whereas both participants cited rumination as a significant source of preoccupation, “Sarah” found social engagement to be a source of relief from it, whereas “Tom” found it to be exacerbatory. Not surprisingly, rumination triggers were peculiar to personal context, but so too was the extent to which participants feared discovery. In fact, Sarah was not afraid at all of the secret being discovered, whereas Tom was afraid of this possibility, even though Tom's secret was virtually undiscoverable, whereas Sarah's secret presented a high risk of discovery. Finally, although both participants experienced simultaneous and conflicting urges to conceal and reveal their secret, Tom did not perceive this to be a source of strain, whereas Sarah very much suffered under this tension. Indeed, secrets are complicated, and this research suggests that quantitative methodology must be complimented by qualitative methodology if vital contextual nuances are to be adequately captured by future theory.