

Effects of Parent-Child Communication and Parental Solicitation on Adolescent Secrecy

Family Social Science

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
+ HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION & STUDY AIM

- Secrecy (i.e. intentionally withholding information; Solis et al., 2015) is common in adolescence as youth desire privacy from parents (Petronio, 2010); it is also a source of conflict (Smetana, 2011).
- According to Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory, individuals have a right to control their personal information (e.g. secrets) by setting boundaries, which adolescents and parents often negotiate (Petronio, 2010).
- While some research has found that solicitation leads to increased secrecy, other studies have found that parental solicitation, when combined with high levels of communication, relates to decreased adolescent secrecy (Hawk et al., 2013; Keijsers & Poulin, 2013).

Aim

- Building on previous research and grounded in the CPM theory, the aim of this study was to examine the relationships between parent-child communication, parental solicitation, secret sharing and secret keeping.

METHOD

Participants

- 403 parent-child dyads (parents: 62% female, mean age = 43.37 years, 68% white; children: 51% male, 48% female, 1% transgender, mean age = 15.32, 66% white).
- Qualtrics recruitment services were used to recruit parent participants, who referred their youngest adolescent child (13-18 years) to take an online survey.

Measures

- **Parent report of parent-child communication.** Six item (e.g. "I am interested in talking with my child") five-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always) ($\alpha = .84$).
- **Parent report of solicitation.** One item: "During the past month, how often have you started a conversation with [child] about their free time" Five-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always).
- **Child report of parent-child communication.** Nine items (e.g. "How often do you talk with your parent about what is on your mind?") on a five-point Likert scale ($\alpha = .91$).
- **Child report of parental solicitation.** Reported how frequently their parent solicited information with three items on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) ($\alpha = .83$).
- **Secrecy.** Adolescent *secret sharing* included one item (i.e. "How often do you tell your parent secrets?") reported on a 4-point Likert scale. *Secret keeping* included two items on a 5-point Likert scale ($r = .748, p < .01$).

CORRELATIONS

Table 1

Parent Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1.Communication	-					
2.Solicitation	.20***	-				
Child Variables						
3.Communication	.40***	.22***	-			
4.Solicitation	.18***	.33***	.51***	-		
5.Secret telling	.15**	.27***	.58***	.34***	-	
6.Secret keeping	-.16**	-.06	-.13*	.01	.02	-

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Table 2

Associations Between Parental Communication, Parental Solicitation, and Secret Sharing

	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
C Gender	.12*	.09	.08	.07	.08	.07
C Age	-.13	.03	.03	.03	.04	.03
P Age	-.10	.01	-.13**	.00	-.13**	.00
P Communication			-.08	.09	-.10*	.09
C Communication			.60***	.26	.57***	.29
P Solicit					.13**	.04
C Solicit					.03	.05
R ²	.03		.35		.37	

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 3

Associations Between Parental Communication, Parental Solicitation, and Secret Keeping

	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
C Gender	-.12*	.12	-.10*	.13	-.10*	.13
C Age	-.03	.05	-.04	.04	-.04	.05
P Age	-.10	.01	-.09	.01	-.08	.01
P Communication			-.15**	.16	-.14*	.16
C Communication			-.05	.45	-.08	.52
P Solicit					-.06	.07
C Solicit					-.07	.10
R ²	.03		.06		.06	

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

RESULTS

- Correlations for all study variables are included in Table 1. The first model examined secret sharing as the outcome variable, and the second examined secret keeping as the outcome variable. In the first model (see Table 2), parent report of communication was negatively associated ($\beta = -.10, p = .030$) and child report of communication was positively associated with adolescent secret sharing ($\beta = .57, p < .001$). Parent report of parental solicitation was positively associated with secret sharing ($\beta = .13, p = .004$).
- In the second model (see Table 3), parent report of parent-child communication was negatively associated with adolescent secret keeping ($\beta = -.14, p = .015$). No other variables were significant.

DISCUSSION

- The current study fills a gap in the literature by examining how parental communication and solicitation influence adolescent secret keeping and secret sharing differently.
- Parents' reports of parental solicitation and adolescents' reports of parent-child communication were positively associated with adolescent secret sharing.
- These findings suggest that both parental intentions to communicate and the frequency of parent-child communication relate to both dimensions of secrecy.
 - Parent report of communication focused on intentions to communicate (e.g. "I am interested in talking with my child"), while child report of communication included how frequently communication occurred
- Both intending to communicate and frequently communicating with adolescents are key to creating open dialogue in which adolescents feel comfortable sharing more information and keep fewer secrets from their parents.
- These findings inform both prevention efforts and parent education.
- One limitation of this study is that it used cross-sectional data. Future research should explore how adolescent secret keeping and secret sharing change over time.
- Future research should continue to explore adolescent secret keeping and secret sharing and the effect that it can have on parent-adolescent relationships and parent-adolescent conflict.