




Exploring the Impact of Secrecy on Marital Happiness: Relationship Authenticity as a Mediator

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<p>Submitted: 2024-02-16</p> <p>Revised: 2024-02-24</p> <p>Accepted: 2024-03-12</p> <p>Keywords: marital satisfaction; married couples; relationship authenticity; tendency to keep secrets</p> <p>Copyright holder: © Bimantara, M., & Karel Karsten, H. (2024)</p> <p>This article is under: </p> <p>How to cite: Bimantara, M., & Karel Karsten, H. (2024). Exploring the Impact of Secrecy on Marital Happiness: Relationship Authenticity as a Mediator. <i>Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy</i>, 6(1). https://doi.org/10.51214/00202406806000</p> <p>Published by: Kuras Institute</p> <p>E-ISSN: 2656-1050</p>	<p>ABSTRACT: Studies investigating the correlation between secret-keeping tendencies and partner satisfaction are still relatively scarce. This research seeks to identify the extent to which the inclination to keep secrets can influence marital satisfaction, with the role of relationship authenticity in unravelling the complexity of such interactions. This study explores the relationship between secret-keeping tendencies and marital satisfaction, with relationship authenticity as a mediator. The research employed a quantitative, cross-sectional methodology utilizing The Five-Item Preoccupation Scale, Authenticity in Relationships Scale, and Relationship Assessment Scale. The study involved 2,184 individuals (76.1% female) aged 25 years and above, all married. The finding reveals that relationship authenticity partially mediates the relationship between secret-keeping tendencies and marital satisfaction. The results of this study can serve as a reference for enhancing marital satisfaction by reducing the inclination to keep secrets and thereby strengthening the perception of relationship authenticity.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Keeping information secret that is considered to have the potential to cause conflict or dislike from a partner is often used as a strategy for some people to maintain their marital relationship (Slepian, 2022). Some couples tend to avoid or keep secret information that is considered to cause conflict. Conflict is a natural dynamic in every marital relationship (Feeney & Collins, 2015). People generally keep things secret from their partners because they feel embarrassed, humiliated, or afraid that their honesty could harm the harmony of their relationship (Davis & Tabri, 2023). This loss can take the form of losing trust and respect from the partner, leading to abandonment by the partner (Davis & Tabri, 2023).

Even though keeping secrets is done to avoid conflict and maintain relationship harmony, several studies show a link between the tendency to keep secrets and decreased marital satisfaction (Zhang & Dailey, 2018). This happens because keeping secrets can create emotional distance and reduce trust between partners. Unrevealed secrets can increase anxiety and tension in romantic relationships (Pangaribuan, 2016). Afifi & Olson (2009) found that someone who keeps secrets in a romantic relationship is likelier to feel lonely and less satisfied. Similar results were also articulated by a study conducted in Indonesia by Wardani et al. (2019), that couples who lacked communication skills often harboured information that they thought would bring conflict, which ultimately reduced their marital satisfaction. Therefore, improving interpersonal communication is considered important to minimize this. Good interpersonal communication can help couples express their feelings,

thoughts and needs to each other honestly and openly, thereby increasing the authenticity of the relationship (Gravett & Winstone, 2020; Lynch & Sheldon, 2017).

Research shows a tendency for the relationship between keeping secrets and marital satisfaction to be mediated by the individual's perception of the authenticity of their relationship (Davis & Tabri, 2023). The results show that individuals who harbour secrets in a relationship can reduce their romantic relationship quality. The findings of this study indicate that when couples feel that their relationship is not based on honesty, authenticity, and trust, they are more likely to rate their relationship quality negatively. Aspects of honesty, authenticity, and trust are components of the definition of authenticity (Wickham, 2013). Empirical evidence also links authenticity to romantic relationship satisfaction in a study involving 62 heterosexual couples (Brunell et al., 2010). Study results show that people who are more authentic and honest in their relationships tend to have healthier relationships and greater personal well-being.

Although the role of relationship authenticity as a mediator in explaining the relationship between the tendency to keep secrets and marital satisfaction has been researched internationally (Davis & Tabri, 2023), Indonesian society's unique culture reflected in marital values may provide unique variations. For example, solid patriarchal views for some Indonesian people Himawan (2022) may create psychological distance between husband and wife. Therefore, this study wants explicitly to explore the role of relationship authenticity as a mediator in explaining the relationship between keeping secrets and marital satisfaction.

Cultural Uniquenesses Underlying Variations in Types of Secrets in Men and Women

The population of this study is married couples in Indonesia. The cultural context in Indonesia, which prioritizes religious values and traditions, provides an essential background for this study (Kartini & Maulana, 2019). Cultural uniqueness is manifested in Indonesian society's expectations, demands and lifestyle towards men and women. Related to this expectation, there are still high social expectations for women to act as housewives and care for children, so access to education and work tends to be limited (Himawan et al., 2018; Pamungkas et al., 2018). On the other hand, men also often experience social pressure to be substantial figures, so displaying emotional nuances that show vulnerability (such as crying) is usually considered inconsistent with cultural demands (Himawan, 2022).

Apart from that, the demand to maintain family honour and maintain traditions that are considered necessary by society Arquisola & Rentschler (2023) also influences differences in lifestyle between men and women, including in terms of information shared in various social situations (Puspitawati, 2013). For men, dressing that reflects assertiveness and authority is often considered a social norm that must be followed. They may need to maintain a traditional image of masculinity in a certain way of looking, speaking, and behaving in various social situations (Arquisola & Rentschler, 2023). In contrast, women may face the demands of maintaining family honour and tradition in different ways. For example, women may need to speak softly, politely, and carefully as a form of respect for traditional values that emphasize elegance and gentleness in communication (Pamungkas et al., 2018). In addition, some women may also experience social pressure to comply with social action norms that follow traditional gender roles, such as being a family caregiver and maintaining household harmony (Panjaitan & Purba, 2020).

These differences in cultural expectations based on gender may influence the types of secrets men and women keep, where women may keep secrets related to personal feelings and experiences, such as problems in marriage or family relationships. Women who keep secrets about interpersonal or emotional problems can feel isolated and lonely if they cannot share secrets with their partners (Davis & Brazeau, 2021). Meanwhile, men may be more likely to keep secrets related to work, the

image of masculinity, or social demands for their assertiveness and authority in various social situations. Men who more often keep secrets about their mistakes or failures tend to have higher levels of anxiety in relationships because they worry about being judged by their partners if their secrets are revealed (Boentoro & Murwani, 2018).

Perceptions of Marriage and Marital Satisfaction from an Indonesian Cultural Perspective

In Indonesian culture, which is rich in family values and traditions, marriage is considered a strong and respected foundation (Widodo, 2021). Marital satisfaction is an essential aspect of Indonesian culture because marriage is considered to contribute positively to social stability and societal sustainability (Widodo, 2021). Related to this view, indicators of marital satisfaction in Indonesia can vary. Some aspects that are generally considered necessary are harmony in the husband and wife relationship (Muslimah, 2014), support and friendship in marriage (Ardhianita & Andayani, 2005), the ability to carry out marital role tasks such as children's education (Larasati, 2013), as well as support from family and the wider community (Herawati et al., 2018). In addition, in Indonesia's diverse culture, indicators of marital satisfaction can also be influenced by factors such as religious beliefs, customs and social norms that apply in various regions (Ardhani, 2014; Maharti & Mansoer, 2018).

Some couples may keep secrets as part of their perception of gender mandates in marriage to maintain marital satisfaction (Ajrin, 2017). Individuals who feel they have to cover up problems or keep secrets may think this is a way to maintain a positive self-image in their marriage, thereby increasing their marital satisfaction (Mulyati, 2013). But on the other hand, keeping secrets can also harm marriage. The existence of dishonesty between partners can create distrust and tension (Suryani & Nurwidawati, 2016). The feeling that individuals cannot talk openly about their feelings or problems can become a barrier to communication that makes them feel dissatisfied with their marriage (Yuniariandini, 2016). Therefore, although some partners may see keeping secrets as part of gender roles in marriage, too many secrets or dishonesty may also interfere with marital satisfaction (Angie & T, 2015).

Keeping secrets may be perceived as part of their responsibilities as husband or wife (Ajrin, 2017). This can be seen as an attempt to protect the marital relationship and maintain harmony. Couples who feel that they have to cover up problems or secrets may think this is a way to keep a positive image in their marriage, thereby increasing their marital satisfaction (Mulyati, 2013).

Rationale of Study

Based on the explanation above, it is predicted that relationship authenticity can act as a mediator that explains the influence between the tendency to keep secrets and marital satisfaction. Keeping secrets may influence perceptions of relationship authenticity, influencing relationship satisfaction. The tendency to keep secrets can vary in each country due to differences in cultural context and traditions (Kaufmann, 2021). Therefore, this study examines the influence of the tendency to keep secrets on marital satisfaction, which is mediated by relationship authenticity.

In the context of the Indonesian study population, there may be variations based on gender in the results of this study. Therefore, this study also aims to explore gender differences in the types of secrets among married couples in Indonesia. At the international level, the role of relationship authenticity and the tendency to keep secrets on marital satisfaction has been established (Davis & Tabri, 2023; Rasco & Warner, 2017). A study in the United States, for example, shows that relationship authenticity plays a mediating role with significant positive results for increasing marital satisfaction (Rasco & Warner, 2017). Research on types of secrets has also generally been carried out, one of which is in Canada (Davis & Tabri, 2023). Considering Indonesia's diverse and unique

culture and traditions, especially regarding marriage, this study can enrich the perspective in explaining the interaction between perceptions of relationship authenticity, the tendency to keep secrets and marital satisfaction.

Aims and Hypotheses

This study looks at the influence of the tendency to keep secrets with relationship authenticity as a mediator on marital satisfaction. I hope this study can add theoretical insight into how keeping secrets impacts a couple's perception of satisfaction and authenticity in their marriage, primarily through a perspective sensitive to Indonesian culture. This study is also expected to provide practical benefits in the form of better understanding, improved relationships, and individual empowerment in Indonesia's marriage context. In this way, couples can work together to build a stronger and more authentic relationship, avoiding the negative influence of hidden secrets. This study has two hypotheses:

H1: Relationship authenticity mediates the relationship between the tendency to keep secrets and marital satisfaction.

H2: Men have a pattern of types of secrets significantly different from women.

METHODS

Design

This research uses quantitative methods with a cross-sectional research design. Data was collected using an online survey distributed to married individuals. The data obtained was then analyzed using regression analysis techniques to test the hypothesis about the relationship between the independent and dependent variables with the mediator variable as an intermediary. Considering the different nature of the hypothesis between hypotheses one and two, two data groups are needed to analyze it. To test hypothesis 1, a smaller amount of data is required compared to the data to test hypothesis two. The minimum sample size for each hypothesis is discussed in the following subsection.

Population and Sample

This research uses purposive sampling techniques to get participants. The characteristics of the participants are as follows: 1) male or female, 2) aged 25 years or over, 3) married, 4) minimum marriage age of two years, 5) first marriage, and 6) domiciled in Indonesia. Determination of the minimum age of 25 years was carried out by referring to data from the Central Statistics Agency (2020) showing that the average marriage age in Indonesia is 23 years for women and 26 years for men. In addition, a minimum marriage age of two years was chosen to anticipate bias that might arise during the adjustment period at the beginning of marriage (honeymoon phase) (Indah, 2021). Researchers limited the research subjects to couples who had only been married once to eliminate

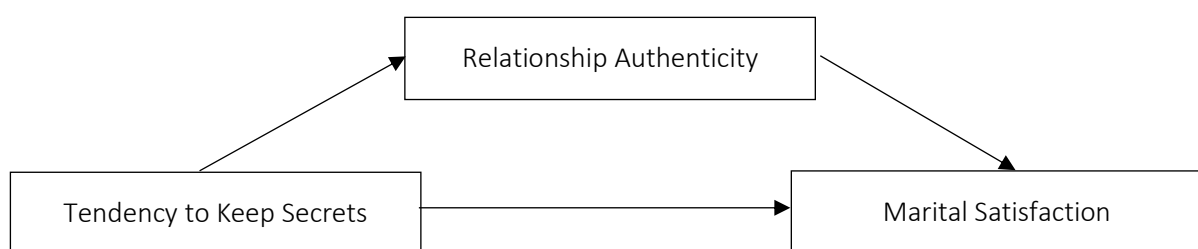


Figure 1. Study Framework (Mediation Model of Study Variables)

other variables that might influence marital satisfaction, such as previous experience of divorce, children from a previous marriage, or conflict with a former partner.

In determining the number of samples needed to test the first hypothesis, researchers used the G*Power 3.1 program with parameter effect size F20.15, alpha .5, and the number of predictors is three. Based on this program, researchers obtained the results that the minimum sample size in this study was 119 (Faul & Erdfelder, 2017). To test the second hypothesis, considering that there are 13 secret categories and a column that allows participants to add types of secrets outside the existing categories, the researcher did not limit the number of samples collected. In the end, this research obtained a total of 2,184 respondents.

Procedure

Although this study wanted to test two hypotheses with different minimum sample sizes, data collection was carried out jointly, with each participant answering the same questions. The data used to analyze hypothesis one is 119 data that were first received. This research questionnaire consists of six parts. The first part is a statement of informed consent, which participants must agree to if they are willing to participate voluntarily and without coercion. The second part is participant demographic data. The third part is descriptive data regarding the types of respondents' secrets. The fourth part is the Five-item Preoccupation Scale. The fifth part is the Authenticity in the Relationship Scale. The sixth part is the relationship Assessment Scale.

Each section is given on section A different Google Form to make it neater and easier for participants to understand. In each section, the researcher provides work instructions, an explanation of the measurement scale, and work examples. Participants were asked to answer with an estimated 7-10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Researchers also provide information on counseling centers for participants who have trauma or problems related to married life.

Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the form of participation, the purpose of the study, and possible risks. Participants are also informed about data confidentiality, data use, and the voluntary nature of participation, and explained that there are no sanctions if participants want to stop participating. Participants can also receive Rp.100,000.00 Electronic money compensation. for thirty participants from the lottery as a form of appreciation for their participation. Participants who are interested in taking part in the lottery can provide a personal number that can be contacted. Before completing the questionnaire, participant consent is also sought by ticking the “checkbox”. Participants were also allowed to access the study results via the Relasi laboratory publication page (<https://relasi-lab.uph.edu>), also listed in the study information sheet. To access a wide community, this study uses non-random sampling surveys. This method allows researchers to obtain data from participants spread across various regions in Indonesia through online questionnaires. The questionnaire was distributed via social media with assistance from Facebook ads, and help was asked from friends, family, and colleagues to distribute the questionnaire for five days (7–11 October 2023). The third step is to collect data from participants who have completed the questionnaire online and check the incoming data.

All information collected is kept confidential, with no disclosure to other parties without permission from the participant. Researchers also do not use research data for purposes other than academic purposes. The ethical aspects of this study have been evaluated and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology, Pelita Harapan University, number: 01121200067.

Variables

The independent variable of this research is the tendency to keep secrets. The tendency to keep secrets in romantic relationships refers to information or knowledge that is intentionally kept

from a partner or not disclosed to a partner (Davis & Brazeau, 2021). The Five-Item Preoccupation Scale measured the tendency to keep secrets (Davis & Brazeau, 2021). The higher the score, the higher a person's tendency or level of preoccupation with keeping secrets (Davis & Brazeau, 2021).

The dependent variable of this research includes marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction refers to feelings of joy, satisfaction, and happiness in a relationship with a partner (Józefacka et al., 2023). Marital satisfaction was measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick et al., 2016). Relationship Assessment Scale shows that the higher the score, the more satisfied they are with their marital relationship (Hendrick et al., 2016).

The mediator variable of this research is relationship authenticity. Relationship authenticity refers to a couple's ability to express themselves honestly, transparently, and consistently with each other (Rasco & Warner, 2017). Relationship authenticity is measured by the Authenticity in Relationships Scale (Wickham, 2013). The Authenticity in Relationships Scale (AIRS) shows that the higher the score, the more authentic the individual is in romantic relationships (Wickham et al., 2015).

Instruments

The instrument used to measure the tendency to keep secrets is the Five-Item Preoccupation Scale designed by Davis & Brazeau (2021), with Cronbach's alpha of 0.920. This measuring instrument contains five items which indicate how often a person thought about a secret he or she kept during the past week and how impactful these thoughts were on his or her well-being in that period (Example item: To what extent did thoughts about that secret occur to you during the past week?). Respondents were asked to rate their tendency to keep secrets on a five-point scale (1 = never; 5 = almost always).

The instrument used to measure relationship authenticity is the Authenticity in Relationships Scale (AIRS) developed by Wickham et al. (2015) with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.937. This measuring instrument consists of 12 items which ask about how authentic a person feels in their romantic relationships (Example item: I feel free to express my true self to my partner). Respondents are asked to answer each statement using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = do not agree; 7 = strongly agree). In this measuring instrument, six statements (numbers 7-12) using inverse scoring.

The instrument used to measure marital satisfaction is the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) designed by Hendrick et al. (2016) and adapted again by Himawan (2017) with a score of Cronbach's Alpha 0.779. This measuring instrument contains seven items which ask about general relationship satisfaction (Sample item: In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?). Respondents were asked to rate how satisfied they were with their marital relationship on a five-point scale (1 = very low satisfaction; 5 = very high satisfaction). Two items in this measuring instrument use inverse scoring, i.e. items 4 and 7.

Data Analysis

This research uses a program Jeffreys's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) version 0.15.1 and SmartPLS version 3.3.3 to process data. Researchers conducted reliability tests and validity tests. Researchers also tested the normality of the data with the Shapiro-Wilk Test. The data obtained was not normally distributed, so this research used non-parametric tests. After that, the researcher used the difference test Mann Whitney Test to see differences between genders in the variables to be studied. There are two stages for hypothesis testing in this research. The first stage was to test hypothesis one using a mediation regression test with the SmartPLS program using 119 data from the first respondents who entered (according to the minimum G*Power sample). The second stage was conducted to test hypothesis two by manually coding using Microsoft Excel and TestChi-Square using a total of 2,184 respondents.

Table.1 Descriptive Characteristics of Participants (N = 2184)

Characteristics		N	%
Gender	Man	523	23.9%
	Woman	1,661	76.1%
Age	25 – 35 years	1,592	72.9%
	36 – 45 years old	338	15.5%
	46 – 55 years old	124	5.7%
	56 – 65 years old	75	3.4%
	>66 years	55	2.5%
Domicile	Java	1,622	74.3%
	Kalimantan	99	4.5%
	Nusa Tenggara Islands	68	3.1%
	Maluku	49	2.2%
	Papua	51	2.3%
	Sulawesi	84	3.8%
	Sumatra	211	9.7%

Table.2 Descriptive Characteristics of Participants (N = 119)

Characteristics		B	%
Gender	Man	46	38.6%
	Woman	73	61.3%
Age	25 – 35 years	89	74.7%
	36 – 45 years old	30	25.2%
	46 – 55 years old	0	0%
	56 – 65 years old	0	0%
	>66 years	0	0%
Domicile	Java	17	14.2%
	Kalimantan	13	10.9%
	Nusa Tenggara Islands	63	52.9%
	Maluku	12	10.0%
	Papua	5	4.2%
	Sulawesi	4	3.3%
	Sumatra	5	4.2%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Participants Descriptive Profile

There were a total of 2,184 respondents who participated in this research. The majority of respondents were female (76.5%), aged 25–35 years (72.9%), and lived in Java (74.3%). Attached in Tables 1 and 2 are the overall demographic data of the respondents.

Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

Normality test Shapiro-Wilk shows that data distribution is not generally distributed on the variables of a tendency to keep secrets, relationship authenticity, and marital satisfaction ($p < .0001$). Thus, non-parametric statistical techniques are carried out.

Table.3 Correlation between Study Variables (N = 2184)

		1	2	3	4
1	Age	–			
2	Tendency to Keep Secrets	.325***	–		
3	Relationship Authenticity	-.497***	-.602***	–	
4	Marital Satisfaction	-.479***	-.534***	.692***	–

***: Correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed).

Table.4 Correlation between Study Variables for Men (Upper Diagonal) and Women (Lower Diagonal) (N = 2184)

	1 (M=2.37;SD=1.39)	2 (M=3.49;SD=1.22)	3 (M=3.30;SD=1.08)	4 (M=2.81;SD=1.10)
1 Age (M=1.19; SD=4.48)		.415**	-0.559**	-0.570**
2 Tendency to Keep Secrets(M=2.34; SD=1.26)	-0.021		-0.705**	-0.663**
3 Relationship Authenticity (M=4.53; SD=0.86)	-0.081**	-0.437**		.870**
4 Marital Satisfaction (M=3.71; SD=0.80)	-0.101**	-0.375**	.525**	

** : Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 summarizes the correlations between study variables, while Table 4 summarizes the correlation matrix divided by gender (N = 2184). It is known that the variables of tendency to keep secrets, relationship authenticity, and marital satisfaction are correlated. Relationship authenticity and marital satisfaction are generally positively correlated ($r = .692$; $p < .001$). The decrease in scores on the tendency to keep secrets is correlated with an increase in relationship authenticity ($r = -.602$; $p < .001$). It is also known that increasing age is significantly correlated with decreasing relationship authenticity and decreasing marital satisfaction in men ($r = -.559$; $r = -.570$) and women ($r = -0.081$; $r = -0.101$). However, in men but not in women, the tendency to keep secrets significantly increased ($r = .415$).

The Mediating Role of Relationship Authenticity in Relationships. The Tendency to Keep Secrets on Marital Satisfaction

The MarkVariance Inflation Factor (VIF) for each construct variable in the analysis is less than 5.0 (N = 119). This shows that there are no signs of multicollinearity between these variables. Therefore, these variables can be used in subsequent analyses without multicollinearity problems that could affect the analysis results.

Direct Effects Test

The results of the direct influence hypothesis test (N = 119) show significant support between research variables. Relationship authenticity (AR) is known to increase marital satisfaction (KP), $O = .775$, $p < .001$. The tendency to keep secrets (KR) is also known to reduce relationship authenticity (AR), $O = -.681$, $p < .001$, and marital satisfaction (KP), $O = -.134$, $p = .047$. Table 5 summarizes the results of the direct effect test, see table 5.

Indirect Effect Test

Indirect influence test results (N = 119) show a significant negative influence between the tendency to keep secrets (KR), relationship authenticity (AR), and marital satisfaction (KP) (see Table 6). Thus, a decrease in the score on the tendency to keep secrets (KR) will cause an increase in the relationship authenticity (AR) score, which will then increase marital satisfaction (KP). It can be concluded that relationship authenticity (AR) partially mediates the influence of the tendency to keep secrets (KR) on marital satisfaction (KP). Figure 2 below visualizes the relationship between variables, see table 6.

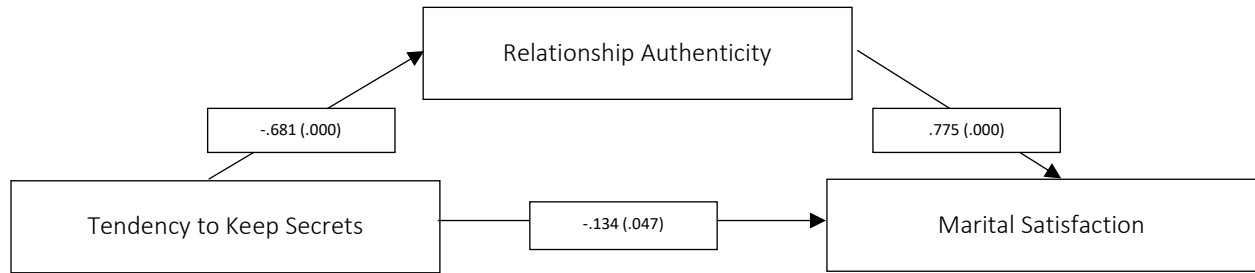


Figure 2. Mediation Model of Study Variables

Table.5 Hypothesis Testing Direct Effect of Research Model

Path Coefficient	Original Sample O	t O/STDEV	p
AR → CP	.775	12.541	.000
KR → AR	-0.681	11.681	.000
KR → KP	-0.134	1.989	.047

Table.6 Indirect Influence Hypothesis Testing Research Model

Path Coefficient	Original Sample O	t O/STDEV	p
KR → AR → KP	-0.528	10.300	.000

Information: AR = Relationship Authenticity, KR = Tendency to Keep Secrets, KP = Marital Satisfaction

Test of Direct and Indirect Effects Based on Gender

It is known that there are no significant differences in the direct or indirect influence path coefficients between male and female respondents (see Tables 7 and 8).

Gender Differences in the Three Study Variables

Based on the results of different tests using Mann-Whitney U Test, it was found that the differences in total scores of tendency to keep secrets (KR), authenticity of relationships (AR), and marital satisfaction (KP) between the two genders were not significant ($p = .000 < .001$). This indicates no significant differences between men and women regarding these variables in this research sample.

Next, a different distribution test was carried out for each secret category based on gender. Test results Chi-Square, as shown in Table 9, indicate significant differences ($p < .05$) between male and female participants regarding the distribution of responses in almost all secret categories, see table 9.

Table. 7 Multigroup Analysis (PLS-MGA) Direct effect

Path Coefficient	Path Coefficients-diff (Male-Female)	p-Value original 1-tailed (Male vs Female)	p-Value new (Male vs Female)
AR → CP	-0.030	.605	.790
KR → AR	.067	.295	.590
KR → KP	-0.178	.924	.152

Table. 8 Multigroup Analysis (PLS-MGA) Indirect Effects

Path Coefficient	Specific Indirect Effects-diff (Male-Female)	p-Value original 1-tailed (Male vs Female)	p-Value new (Male vs Female)
KR → AR → KP	.073	.239	.478

Information: AR = Relationship Authenticity, KR = Tendency to Keep Secrets, KP = Marital Satisfaction

Table. 9 Distribution of Secret Categories Based on Gender (Male and Female) (N = 2184)

No	Information	Men	Woman	h2
1	Things that some people might find demeaning or demeaning	10.9%	21.5%	29,061**
2	Affair	35.6%	5.8%	313,792**
3	Secret love or attraction	7.6%	15.6%	21,248**
4	Addiction	43.4%	1.6%	675,502**
5	The most embarrassing thing I ever did as a child	7.8%	21.9%	51,821**
6	Feeling isolated	43.0%	9.2%	319,487**
7	Work-related problems	71.3%	7.8%	907,539**
8	Breaking the law	2.5%	1.3%	3,401**
9	Friendship	3.8%	7.8%	9,725**
10	A certain incident happened to me when I was a child	2.3%	9.7%	29,851**
11	Victim of Crime	1.5%	4.6%	9,978**
12	Sexual identity	1.9%	3.6%	3,497**
13	Money	0.2%	1.3%	4,593**
14	Family	0.0%	0.6%	3,163
15	Others	0.0%	0.8%	4,437**

Description: Category 15, with other information, includes secrets related to the problem *hygiene* partner and the partner's daily routine that they dislike.

Based on the table above, it is known that male individuals have three secrets that significantly dominate in terms of harbouring secrets towards their partners. These three aspects include issues surrounding work (71.3%), followed by addiction (43.4%), and feeling isolated (43.0%). Meanwhile, the three categories of women's secrets that significantly dominate involve secrets related to embarrassing experiences as children (21.9%), secrets about things that some people might consider lowly or demeaning (21.5%), and secrets about feelings of love. And interest (15.6%). Figure 4, which is attached, shows the distribution of secret categories based on gender using a bar chart.

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the mediating role of relationship authenticity in understanding the influence of the tendency to keep secrets on marital satisfaction in Indonesia. The direct effect mediation test results show that the tendency to keep secrets (KR) on marital satisfaction (KP) is negative and significant. This indicates that relationship authenticity (AR) directly impacts marital satisfaction (KP), although it is not that big. However, when observing the indirect effect through the mediator of relationship authenticity (AR), the results show that this effect is negative and significant. Indirect influence mediation is known to have a loading greater than the direct effect. In general, these results are in accordance with the researchers' initial assumption that relationship authenticity can mediate the relationship between the tendency to keep secrets and marital satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has shown that relationship authenticity plays an important role in increasing an individual's level of subjective happiness, which in turn positively impacts the level of life satisfaction ([Saricam, 2015](#)). Evidence from previous research also confirms the important role of authenticity as a mediator in the context of secret-keeping tendencies and marital satisfaction ([Davis & Tabri, 2023](#); [Rasco & Warner, 2017](#)).

These findings emphasize the importance of open communication and honesty for maintaining satisfaction in a marital relationship. This is in line with the concept of the Triangular Love Theory by Robert Sternberg, which emphasizes the importance of intimacy as one of the main elements in a romantic relationship. In this context, authenticity is very relevant to the concept of intimacy. Intimacy, in this theory, refers to intimacy or emotional closeness in romantic relationships ([Sternberg, 1986](#)). This includes feelings of openness, honesty, and mutual support between partners. This concept is in line with relationship authenticity. When people are authentic, they tend

to be more open in sharing their feelings, thoughts, and experiences, creating a sense of emotional connection between partners (Ferreira et al., 2013). In other words, authenticity facilitates intimacy and becomes the basis that allows couples to achieve higher levels of satisfaction in the marital relationship. In this essence, authenticity is the key to forming and maintaining a satisfying relationship in marriage.

The results of this study reveal interesting age-related patterns in romantic relationships, especially in the context of relationship authenticity and marital satisfaction. For both men and women, it was found that the older a person gets in Indonesia, the more likely they are to lose authenticity and satisfaction in their marriage. Most previous studies show the opposite: with increasing age, the level of authenticity tends to increase (Ito et al., 2009; Tanzer, 2019). However, it is important to note that the authenticity measurement tools used in this research are rooted in Western cultural contexts (Wickham, 2013). Therefore, it is likely that there are significant differences in the interpretation of authenticity between research participants who come from Indonesian culture. Authenticity measurement tools originating from Western culture, such as those used in this study, may have items that emphasize individualistic and expressive values.

Many of these items emphasize openness without concealment as a sign of relationship authenticity. In Western culture, assertiveness and honesty are the leading indicators of authenticity (Gelfand & Denison, 2020). For example, item Four of the relationship authenticity measurement tools include: "I consistently tell my partner the real reasons and motivations behind the actions I take." However, in Indonesian culture, the tendency to avoid confrontation and maintain social harmony may be more emphasized. Therefore, some items in this measuring tool may only partially reflect the way individuals in Indonesia express authenticity in relationships. The concept of "Allowing" or "Maintaining Harmony" may become more relevant and considered a wise form of authenticity in marital relationships in Indonesia.

Additionally, factors that can influence authenticity and emotional closeness in romantic relationships, such as cultural factors, personal experiences, gender differences, personality characteristics, and levels of self-esteem, also played a key role in this change (Miller, 2015). As people experience changes as they age, their roles and responsibilities in their marriage can also shift significantly. In the context of these changes, the couple's ability to communicate and adapt plays an important role. If couples cannot effectively cope with these changes, the quality of communication in their relationship may decline. As a result, connectivity between partners is disrupted, which can ultimately affect the authenticity of relationships in their relationships. Therefore, changes in marriage with age require good communication and adjustment skills to maintain relationship authenticity and marital satisfaction.

This study also explored differences in types of secrets based on gender. The research analysis revealed interesting differences in the kinds of secrets kept by men and women. Men are more likely to keep secrets related to work problems, addiction, and feelings of isolation. Meanwhile, women are more likely to keep secrets related to embarrassing experiences, secrets that may be considered demeaning or reproachful, and feelings of love/attraction. The types of secrets men and women choose reflect the social pressures and gender expectations both face.

Gender expectations and society's demands on the image of masculinity can have a significant influence on the types of secrets men keep in their relationships. Traditionally, men are considered the family's economic foundation and are expected to be successful in their careers (Linggosiswojo, 2016). In cultures prioritizing achievement and success at work, men may feel pressure to maintain a strong professional image and not expose uncertainty or problems in their careers (Saputro & Yuwanti, 2016). Additionally, research shows that men tend to have lower levels of emotional communication than women, which may impact their ability to talk about personal issues (Saguni,

2014). This problem is exacerbated by the strong gender stigma against men related to addiction or feelings of isolation. This stigma can further encourage men to hold back in disclosing or seeking help, which in turn can make the problem worse (Saguni, 2014).

On the other hand, the dominant secrets women choose also reflect social pressure related to stereotypes of femininity (Rokhimah, 2014). For example, secrets about embarrassing experiences as children can be the result of expectations placed on women always to maintain the impression of being kind, polite, and submissive (Maulida, 2021). To meet these expectations, women may need to hide their embarrassing experiences so as not to tarnish their social image. Additionally, secrets related to feelings of love and attraction can also be a consequence of gender expectations. The expectation of maintaining harmonious social relationships and civility often leads to feelings of love or attraction that may have to be kept under wraps or kept secret. This can also be related to concerns about how these feelings will be received by society or their friends. Then, secrets related to things some people find demeaning or disreputable reflect social pressure and external judgment. Women may need to hide aspects of themselves that others consider negative or reprehensible to meet society's expectations about how women should behave (Maryadi & Yuningsih, 2020).

Implications

These findings illustrate differences in communication needs and levels of openness in marital relationships, which are influenced by gender factors. This suggests a different approach to understanding and supporting marital satisfaction based on gender. The differences in the types of secrets revealed by men and women indicate that communication in marital relationships is influenced by individual characteristics and gender dynamics in society (Widodo, 2021). Gender expectations, stereotypes, and social norms are important in how men and women feel comfortable discussing personal experiences, including secrets.

Recognizing differences is the first step in creating a safe and supportive space within the marriage relationship. Couples and marriage professionals must realize that men and women may have different communication needs and must learn to understand and respect those needs. This also encourages the importance of deconstructing gender norms that limit openness in marital relationships and encouraging more profound closeness based on transparency and honesty (Widodo, 2021).

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Despite all the results of this study, the research has several limitations. First, limitations related to the unequal distribution of male and female participants can affect data representation. Second, abnormalities in data distribution. Third, there needs to be more descriptive data about respondent characteristics such as age at marriage, religion, presence of children, and other factors that might influence research results. These limitations may impact the interpretation of the results and the generalisability of the study findings.

It is hoped that future studies will pay more attention to the number of characteristics of each group of respondents participating in maintaining a representative balance of research respondents. This is important to ensure that the dominance of specific group characteristics does not influence research results. The next suggestion is that future researchers pay attention to filling in more complete demographic data in the questionnaire to enrich research information when conducting descriptive analysis (additional examples: information about religion, age, and years of marriage). Then, it is hoped that future researchers can conduct further studies to analyze individual motivations/reasons for keeping secrets.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals important findings indicating that relationship authenticity partially mediates the relationship between secret-keeping tendencies and marital satisfaction. Apart from that, a unique finding in this study is the role of age which can reduce relationship authenticity and marital satisfaction in marital relationships in Indonesia. Furthermore, gender wars and societal expectations also influence patterns of the types of secrets men and women tend to keep. The results of this study highlight the importance of considering social and cultural factors to understand secret-keeping behaviour in the context of marital relationships. The results of this study highlight the importance of open communication in marriage. Therefore, it is important for married couples to prioritize honest and open communication to reduce the tendency to keep secrets that can harm the relationship. Apart from that, the results of this study can also provide useful insights for therapists or marriage counselors in their treatment of clients who harbour secrets.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The first author contributed to developing the research idea, collecting and analyzing data, and preparing the research report. The second author contributed to initiating the research idea, provided input in the development of the research idea, monitored data collection and analysis, prepared the research report, and was the corresponding author in publishing the study results.

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