



Direct and indirect links between parenting styles, self-concealment (secrets), impaired control over drinking and alcohol-related outcomes



Jessica D. Hartman^a, Julie A. Patock-Peckham^{a,*}, William R. Corbin^a, Jonathan R. Gates^a, Robert F. Leeman^b, Jeremy W. Luk^c, Kevin M. King^c

^a Arizona State University, 950 S. McAllister, Tempe, AZ 85287, USA

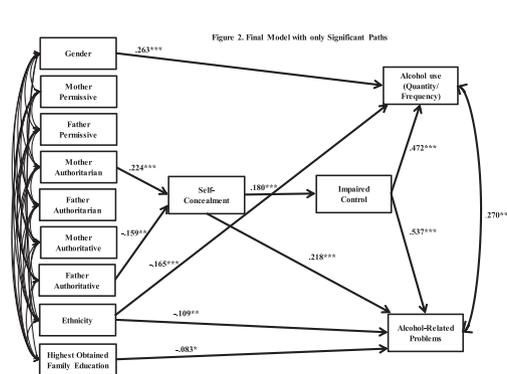
^b Yale School of Medicine, 333 Cedar St, New Haven, CT 06510, USA

^c University of Washington, 119A, Guthrie Hall UW Box 351525, Seattle, WA 98195, USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- Parenting was related to both risk and protection against self-concealment/secrets.
- Authoritarian mothering was associated with *greater* self-concealment/secrets.
- Authoritative fathering was associated with *less* self-concealment/secrets.
- Greater self-concealment (secrets) was linked to impaired control over drinking.
- Impaired control mediated the indirect link between secrets and alcohol problems.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Self-concealment reflects uncomfortable feelings, thoughts, and information people have about themselves that they avoid telling others (Larson & Chastain, 1990). According to Larson and Chastain (1990) these secrets range from the slightly embarrassing to the very distressing with an individual's most traumatic experiences often concealed. Parental attitudes including those involving self-disclosure are thought to be expressed in their choice of parenting style (Brand, Hatzinger, Beck, & Holsboer-Trachslar, 2009). The specific aim of this investigation was to examine the direct and indirect influences of parenting styles on self-concealment, impaired control over drinking (i.e. the inability to stop drinking when intended), alcohol use (quantity/frequency), and alcohol-related problems.

Methods: A structural equation model with 419 (223 men, 196 women) university students was examined. Two and three path mediated effects were examined with the bias corrected bootstrap technique in Mplus.

Results: Having an authoritarian mother was directly linked to more self-concealment, while having an authoritative father was directly linked to less self-concealment. Higher levels of mother authoritarianism were indirectly linked to both increased alcohol use and alcohol-related problems through more self-concealment and more impaired control over drinking. Moreover, higher levels of father authoritativeness were indirectly linked to less alcohol use and alcohol-related problems through less self-concealment and less impaired control over drinking.

Conclusions: These findings suggest that parenting styles influence vulnerabilities such as self-concealment in the impaired control over the drinking pathway to alcohol use and alcohol-related problems.

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Julie.Patock@asu.edu (J.A. Patock-Peckham).

1. Introduction

Self-concealment reflects “a predisposition to actively conceal from others personal information one perceives as distressing or negative” (Larson & Chastain, 1990, p. 440). Secrets can range from slightly embarrassing to very distressing with an individual’s most traumatic experiences often concealed. The act of self-concealment has been shown to have a negative impact on mental and physical health resulting in increased levels of shyness, negative self-esteem, anxiety, depression, muscle soreness, and headaches (Almas, Grusec, & Tackett, 2011; Ichiyama et al., 1993). Kahn and Garrison (2009) found that individuals who had higher symptoms of anxiety and depression were less likely to disclose their emotions. This is troubling because individuals who are high in self-concealment are also three times less likely to seek professional help (Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998).

Although there is clear evidence for links between self-concealment and both psychological and physical health, we know little about developmental influences that give rise to self-concealment. Parson (1955) characterized family relationships as the “factory where personality is made” arguing that parental attitudes are expressed in their choice of parenting style (Brand, Hatzinger, Beck, & Holsboer-Trachsler, 2009). Presumably, disclosing information in a healthy way with others is something we learn from adult figures in the home. Yet, there is limited research on the relationship between parenting and self-concealment. In one rare study on this topic, Frijns, Keijsers, Branje, and Meeus (2010) found that children’s self-concealment from parents was a longitudinal predictor of both delinquency and depression from early to middle adolescence. Similarly, Almas et al. (2011) found that mothers who were more dispositionally angry had children who were more secretive and coped more negatively with stress.

Although extant research suggests a link between authoritarian mothering and self-concealment (Almas et al., 2011), prior studies have not examined the full range of parenting styles. For example, Buri (1991) conceptualized three styles of parenting (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) regarding decision-making and communication styles based on Baumrind’s ideas. Baumrind (1971) described authoritative parents as providing clear direction while still being warm, reasonable, and flexible. In contrast, authoritarian parents provide firm direction without the flexibility and warmth of authoritative parents. Permissive parents, on the other hand, are non-controlling, provide little direction, and use the bare minimum punishment.

Historically, studies regarding the parenting styles of mothers and of parents as an aggregate unit have been common (Turrisi, Wiersma, & Hughes, 2000; Walls, Fairlie, & Wood, 2009; Wood, Read, Mitchell, & Brand, 2004). Wolfradt, Hempel, and Miles (2003) found that authoritative and permissive parenting by both parents was associated with better active coping and negatively associated with depersonalization and trait anxiety in offspring. Others have found negative parenting styles of both parents to be associated with low sleep quality and negative attitudes toward life (Brand et al., 2009). Yet, a growing body of literature suggests that measuring parenting variables in aggregate form is not sufficient (Abar, 2012; Abar & Turrisi, 2008; Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2006). For instance, authoritarian fathering and rejection (but not authoritarian mothering) have been positively associated with internalizing traits such as neuroticism and depression (Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2007, 2009). Moreover, differential effects of maternal and paternal parenting on behavioral under-control have been found for male and female offspring (Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2006). Thus, relationships between parenting and personality are highly complex (Chassin & Handley, 2006; Fromme, 2006). To date, no study has simultaneously examined the parenting styles of the mother and father in relation to self-concealment.

It may be particularly important to examine unique effects of mothers and fathers on self-concealment as mothers spend more time

communicating with and caring for adolescents (Craig, 2006; Noller & Bagi, 1985), and may therefore serve as the primary source for sharing personal information. Thus, we hypothesized that authoritarian mothering may be uniquely related to higher levels of self-concealment, whereas authoritative mothering may be uniquely protective. Although mothers may be the key person to whom secrets are revealed, in the context of mothers who are either authoritarian or permissive, offspring may turn to fathers to discuss personal issues. Thus, we hypothesized that authoritative fathering may be particularly protective when controlling for authoritarian or permissive mothering. Although we had no specific hypotheses regarding permissive parenting, we included this aspect of parenting given its relation to behavioral control variables (Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2006).

In addition to understanding the etiology of self-concealment, there is a need to broaden the range of outcomes that may result from self-concealment. Whereas prior research has demonstrated that self-concealment is related to internalizing problems (Ichiyama et al., 1993), little attention has been given to externalizing problems. Conceptually, impaired control over drinking might be expected to result from high levels of self-concealment. Impaired control over drinking (IC) is defined as “a breakdown of an intention to limit consumption in a particular situation” (Heather, Tebbutt, Mattick, & Zamir, 1993, p. 701). Prior research suggests that self-concealment might deplete the ego resources necessary to regulate behavior (Baumeister, Muraven, & Tice, 2000). The ego-depletion model posits that many acts of self-regulation and volition including restraining impulses, decision making, and thought suppression draw from a single resource that is both limited and renewable. When this resource is expended it leads to depletion, making it more difficult to control one’s behavior. Consistent with this model, Muraven, Collins, and Neinhaus (2002) found that individuals who completed a self-depleting task of thought suppression were less able to control their drinking and consumed more beer than those who did not complete the self-depleting task. To the extent that efforts to conceal secrets serve to deplete ego resources, self-concealment may indirectly contribute to heavier drinking through IC.

Although IC is one possible mechanism through which self-concealment may impact alcohol use, there are a variety of other plausible mechanisms. As indicated previously, self-concealment is related to internalizing problems like anxiety and depression (Ichiyama et al., 1993), which are known predictors of alcohol-related problems (Holahan, Moos, Holahan, Cronkie, & Randall, 2003; Kassel, Jackson, & Unrod, 2000; Weitzman, 2004). Thus, we anticipated direct effects of self-concealment on drinking outcomes in addition to indirect effects through IC. In summary, we anticipated that parenting variables would contribute to self-concealment which, in turn, would contribute to heavier drinking and alcohol-related problems both directly and indirectly through IC. Although these particular indirect paths from parenting to negative drinking outcomes have not been previously established, there is an extensive literature linking parenting styles to alcohol use among offspring (Jackson, 2002; Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2006, 2009; Patock-Peckham, Cheong, Balhorn, & Nagoshi, 2001). Further, Patock-Peckham and Morgan-Lopez (2006) found that parenting styles have both direct and indirect influences on control processes (i.e. level of impulsiveness and perceived control over drinking) that are related to drinking outcomes. Thus, we explored distinct influences of maternal and paternal parenting styles in both men and women, and the extent to which these parental influences on drinking outcomes operated through self-concealment and IC.

In Fig. 1, we hypothesized that authoritarian parenting would be associated with higher self-concealment, whereas authoritative parenting would be associated with less-self concealment. Further, we expected that higher levels of self-concealment would be associated with more impaired control, which in turn, would be related to heavier alcohol use and more related problems.

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