Why the Secrets You Keep Are Hurting You

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It hurts to keep secrets. Secrecy is associated with lower well-being, worse health, and less satisfying relationships. Research has linked secrecy to increased anxiety, depression, symptoms of poor health, and even the more rapid progression of disease. There is a seemingly obvious explanation for these harms: Hiding secrets is hard work. You have to watch what you say. If asked about something related to the secret, you must be careful not to slip up. This could require evasion or even deception. Constant vigilance and concealment can be exhausting.

New research, however, suggests that the harm of secrets doesn’t really come from the hiding after all. The real problem with keeping a secret is not that you have to hide it, but that you have to live with it, and think about it.