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## **Experience of Shame in Service Failure Context Among Restaurant Frontline Employees: Does Industry Tenure Matter?**

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to integrate tenets from the appraisal-based model of self-conscious emotions and the compass of shame theory to examine restaurant frontline employees' experience of shame following service failures, and how shame influences employees' job attitude and behaviors. In addition, employees' industry tenure is identified as an individual factor influencing the impacts of shame in resorting to literature on aging in emotion regulation.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Using a survey methodology, 217 restaurant frontline employees and their supervisors in Turkey provided survey data. Partial least squares (PLS) method using SmartPLS 3.3.3 was used for data analysis.

**Findings:** The results indicated the maladaptive nature of shame following service failures as a salient self-conscious emotion, as it was negatively related to employee outcomes. Moreover, employees' industry tenure played a moderating role that influences the impacts of shame on commitment to customer service.

**Practical implications:** Managers should attend to frontline employees' shame experience depending on their industry experience, and adopt appropriate emotion intervention (e.g., cognitive reappraisal) or create error management culture to eliminate the negative effects of shame.

**Originality:** This study advances our understanding of a powerful but understudied emotional experience, shame, in a typical shame-eliciting hospitality work setting (e.g., service failures). Shame has been linked with commitment to customer service and error reporting. In addition, industry tenure has been identified as a boundary condition to help clarify previous inconsistent findings in regard to the adaptive/maladaptive nature of shame.

**Key words:** Shame, Commitment to customer service, Organizational citizenship behavior, Error reporting

## **Introduction**

The social interaction model depicts that emotions have social functions thus are often flowed and interactive among individuals (Côté et al., 2013). Service delivery in the hospitality setting, for this reason, unfolds a typical scene of social interactions between employees and customers during which various emotions are generated and exchanged (e.g., Woo and Chan, 2020). Of particular note, service delivery presents a typical context for the development of individuals' self-conscious emotions. Unlike basic emotions (e.g., anger, fear, disgust, sadness, happiness, and surprise) that are universal, recognizable through facial expressions, and physiology-oriented, self-conscious emotions (e.g., gratitude, shame, pride, elevation, embarrassment) are socially based and require the activation of self-representation (Harter, 2015). In spite of the wide range of implications associated with self-conscious emotions and the contextual relevance of the hospitality work setting, there is surprisingly little research on hospitality employees' experiences of their self-conscious emotions and subsequent attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. For instance, Ferika and Nazli (2013) revealed the influence of pride on career choice among college students majoring in hospitality management. Wang et al. (2020a) examined hospitality employees' gratitude toward the organization and its impacts on service recovery performance. Considering the characteristics of productive process of hospitality products, which include co-production, long production chains, and a people orientation, service delivery is not always a smooth process (Wang et al., 2020b; Bowen and Ford, 2002); in fact, it is subject to service

failure. Most research regarding emotions' role in service failure emphasizes examining customers' emotional experiences during service failure and recovery situations (e.g., Gelbrich, 2010; Kuo and Wu, 2012). In comparison, a major research gap emerges as to the understanding of discrete self-conscious emotions experienced by hospitality employees following service failure. Drawing upon the appraisal-based model of self-conscious emotions (Tracy and Robins, 2004, 2006), the current study identifies shame as a typical emotional experience of hospitality frontline employees triggered by situations such as service failures. Across sociocultural contexts, shame is a fundamental emotional experience that spans all life stages, but has been studied much less by researchers compared to other discrete emotions. One reason for which shame has been overlooked in emotion research is the tendency of individuals to regulate both the expression and experience of shame due to its intimate and negative nature (Daniels and Robinson, 2019). This tendency is referred to as "bypassed shame," an experience of shame that is redirected into other emotions via emotional regulation (Scheff, 2014). Bypassed shame may be even more salient in the competitive work context where employees are often required to regulate their emotions. Given this information, a richer understanding of the impacts of shame elicited by service failures on hospitality employees' job attitudes and behaviors, as well as the boundary conditions of these impacts, is necessary.

Existing literature on shame is inconsistent as to whether shame leads to maladaptive responses such as attacks on self/others, avoidance, and withdrawal or adaptive responses such as empathy, apology, and reparative behavior (e.g., Kim et al., 2020). These inconsistent findings with regard to the maladaptive versus adaptive outcomes of shame suggest (1) the need for more investigations into the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of shame, especially in the hospitality context; and (2) the importance of investigating the boundary conditions under which the

experience of shame may result in particular outcomes. Hospitality organizations have come to adopt service-centered and customer-oriented paradigms (Jalilvand et al., 2018), making an understanding of frontline employees' attitudes toward customers and service quality of great importance for organizational competitiveness. This study identifies commitment to customer service as one key job attitude that can be significantly affected by employees' experience of shame triggered by service failure situations. Different from commitment to the organization, commitment to customer service depicts employees' involvement in high-standard service to meet customer requirements, thus becomes a particularly relevant job attitude for hospitality frontline employees (Jeon, 2016).

The current study identifies two particular work behaviors especially related to service failure handling, that have never been associated with experience of shame: organizational citizenship behavior-organization (OCB-O) and error reporting. OCB refers to a discretionary effort to take on duties that fall outside one's own work with the intention to improve work outcomes (Ma and Qu, 2011). Moreover, the error-prone hospitality industry implies the value of error reporting as it serves as the most effective way to handle errors in a timely manner (Wang et al., 2020b).

Taken together, understanding OCB-O and error reporting as a function of shame experience via the commitment to customer service will extend the comprehension of these two constructs from the emotional viewpoint.

In addition, considering existing research that calls for exploration of individual boundary conditions of the impacts of shame (e.g., Kim, 2016; Bagozzi et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2020), this study also takes the perspective of emotional aging literature and posits that industry tenure moderates the relationship between emotional experience of shame and subsequent job attitudes. Given that emotion regulation is a work skill which is clearly required for hospitality frontline

jobs, industry tenure becomes a more relevant and precise aging indicator that better reflects one's aging related to coping with emotions compared to one's age. Moreover, job tenure may only reflect work experience in one hospitality organization, and overlooks one's overall work experience in the hospitality industry, knowing that emotion regulation is widely required in all hospitality frontline jobs. Therefore, industry tenure better captures one's accumulated experience of emotional aging through different jobs held in the hospitality sector, compared to the job tenure that only focuses on the current experience.

Taken together, the current research draws upon the appraisal-based model of self-conscious emotions and compass of shame theory to establish a framework by which to evaluate frontline employees' experiences of shame following service failure situations and attitudinal as well as behavioral outcomes. The study (1) examines how the experience of shame influences employees' commitment to customer service and work behaviors (error reporting and OCB-O); (2) identifies hospitality industry tenure as an explanation for variation in the the relationship between shame and commitment to customer service; and (3) investigates the mediating role of commitment to customer service on the relationship between the experience of shame and work behaviors. The results expand the literature on self-conscious emotions in the hospitality context, especially shame. First, given the ubiquity of service failures in the hospitality work setting (Komunda and Osarenkhoe, 2012), shame is a typical but understudied emotional response. This study responds to the call for further empirical investigation into hospitality employees' emotional experiences following service failures (Wang et al., 2020b). Second, there is little empirical evidence showing how work-related shame influences hospitality employees' job attitudes and behaviors. The findings that do exist are inconsistent regarding the reparative and maladaptive nature of shame. Therefore, this study captures two behavioral outcomes that have

not been empirically linked with shame: OCB-O and error reporting at work. This study predicts that shame induces maladaptive behaviors; in other words, shame negatively influences these behavioral outcomes via the underlying mechanism of commitment to customer service. Third, for the first time, industry tenure is identified as a moderator pertaining to employees' sociodemographic characteristics that influences the impacts of shame on job attitudes. Industry tenure helps reveal for whom the experience of shame is most maladaptive. In addition, the culture-specific affordance of emotions is considered by conducting this study in the Turkish cultural context (Boiger et al., 2014). Emotional experience is in part a function of culture in that the accordance between particular emotions and cultural characteristics will increase the experience of these emotions (De Leersnyder et al., 2013). As experience of shame is highly subject to closeness of human relations, Turkish culture that values collectivism and interdependence thus "up-regulate" experience of shame, rendering its occurrence salient and frequent (Grey et al., 2018). Last but not least, a dyadic supervisor-follower rating is adopted to reduce the common method bias. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model.

## **Literature review and hypothesis development**

### *Self-conscious emotions and the experience of shame*

Self-conscious emotions represent a family of emotions that are distinct from other basic emotions. First, self-conscious emotions are more complex than basic emotions, as they are shaped culturally and socially in addition to biologically. Namely, the experience of self-conscious emotions is subject to social norms and moral codes that are internalized as a barometer for self-reflection (Sznycer, 2019). Second, self-conscious emotions are subjective feeling states that are evoked through an individualized process that is characterized by self-

awareness, self-reflection, and self-evaluation (Tangney and Tracy, 2012; Tracy and Robins, 2006). Third, facial expressions do not necessarily reflect the experience of self-conscious emotions. Fourth, self-conscious emotions are subsumed under the umbrella of moral emotions, which are emotions that motivate one to behave for the benefit of their society or others (Sheikh and Janoff-Bulman, 2010). Although less studied than other self-conscious emotions, shame is one powerful self-conscious emotion that individuals regularly experience. Scheff (2014) posited that individuals, generally speaking, are at all times experiencing either shame or pride.

Shame refers to aversive feelings elicited from one's internal, stable, uncontrollable attribution of cause to such negative events, such as a perceived violation of moral standards or failure to achieve expectations and goals (Tangney et al., 2007; Kim, 2016). This study holds that the hospitality setting, especially the service delivery process, functions as a shame-eliciting affective setting for the following reasons. First, service failure directs frontline employees' attention inward (i.e., self-focused attention), which in turn activates the assessment of self-identity (Higgs et al., 2020). Second, service failures are thought to have impacts on self-identity in the workplace, because an employee's approach to service failure is an important indicator of overall job performance. Third, service failure implies an incongruence between one's identity goal and the implications of service failure situations. In other words, service failure creates a self-identity of someone who has failed a service delivery. This self-representation is incongruent with one's normal self-representation as a competent employee. Fourth, service failure activates the appraisal of service failures' causal locus, and employees generally attribute service failures to internal causes; namely, themselves. Lastly, service failure is ubiquitous and unavoidable due to the nature of service production; thus, this emotion-eliciting event is



considered to become stable and unchanging factors that trigger experience of shame from time to time.

Researchers have explored how individuals respond to the experience of shame in terms of work attitudes and behaviors. On the one hand, some researchers have believed that a person is likely to take reparative and prosocial actions to eliminate the negative feelings associated with shame. The experience of shame initiates a desire to change one's image or reputation within a group in a proactive way (e.g., Bonner et al., 2017). Empirically, shame has been found to be positively associated with approach and prosocial behaviors (Kim et al., 2020; De Hooge et al., 2010). On the other hand, some researchers have revealed the maladaptive nature of shame and suggested that shame is expected to be linked with social withdrawal (De Hooge et al., 2018). Ashamed feelings that stem from the perception that one's entire self is flawed may lead to higher stress and withdrawal behaviors. For instance, Miranda et al. (2020) revealed that perceived responsibility for coworkers experiencing workplace incivility induced shame, which in turn led to target and instigator avoidance.

#### *The experience of shame and commitment to customer service*

Hospitality employees make two commitments: one to their organization, and another to customers (Jeon, 2016). As customers are the end-users and final judges of service products, employees' commitment to customer service is thought to predict employees' job behaviors relevant to the achievement of customers' goals (Yoo and Arnold, 2016). Rooted in the literature on customer orientation, commitment to customer service refers to one's concern to meet customer demands via individualized service of high quality (Peccei and Rosenthal, 1997). Zhang et al. (2021) found that the impacts of customers' engagement behaviors on customer loyalty is contingent on the service failure. Given customers' increased expectations for service

quality and common service failures in the hospitality industry, frontline employees take on the primary responsibility for and possess the utmost flexibility to provide high-quality service when they are committed to customer service (e.g., Wang and Tseng, 2019).

Previous research has found that commitment to customer service motivates employees to continually improve their job performance, make extra effort for the benefit of customers (Vandenberghe et al., 2007), engage in deep instead of surface acting (Yoo and Arnold, 2016), and produce more creative service (Tang, 2014). Existing studies have identified organizational factors and practices that enhance employees' commitment to customer service, such as knowledge sharing (Reychav and Weisberg, 2009), internal marketing orientation (Chow et al., 2015), and leadership styles (Shah et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the influence of employees' emotional experiences, and particularly their discrete self-conscious emotions, on employees' commitment to customer service has rarely been examined. Based on compass of shame theory (Nathanson, 1992; Elison et al., 2014), this study posits that employees' commitment to customer service declines in response to the experience of shame. Shame following service failure signals that the employee attributes the failure to their lack of competence and sees it as a negative reflection of their identity. The employee might not be motivated to repair the service failure due to a fear of being hurt again. The avoidance tendency suggests that an ashamed employee is not motivated to work on behalf of customers' interests and instead tries to escape from the shame-inducing service failure situation. As Tangney et al. (2007, p. 350) indicated, shame triggers "defensiveness, interpersonal separation, and distance." The motivational features of shame such as hiding and escaping may discourage employees to have a resilient, enthusiastic, and robust commitment to customer service. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formed:

**H1:** The experience of shame is negatively related to employees' commitment to customer service.

*Hospitality industry tenure as moderator*

Building on the literature on emotion regulation, this study posits that the way employees respond to the experience of shame is contingent on their ability to modulate experienced emotions (Gross and John, 2003). The practice of emotion regulation focuses on cultivating positive and useful emotions (e.g., pride, gratitude) and managing harmful emotions (e.g., anger, shame). Emotion regulation is especially important in the hospitality industry, where employees' emotional expressions must conform to certain standards and requirements, a task often referred to as emotional labor (Wang, 2019). Without appropriate emotion regulation strategies in place, employees may find that their negative emotions (and shame in particular) lead to destructive attitudes and behaviors at work (e.g., hostility, aggression). There is an age-related improvement in emotion regulation competence (Urry and Gross, 2010). For example, Thornton and Herndon (2016) found that shorter-tenured police officers had more difficulty with emotion regulation and lower levels of well-being compared to more experienced officers who had had greater exposure to critical incidents. This study focuses on response-focused emotion regulation; namely, the strategies by which individuals modulate emotions after the emotions have been generated (Trougakos et al., 2020). The process model of emotion regulation emphasizes consideration of the role individual differences play in individuals' reactions to emotional experiences (Gross, 2015). Therefore, we hypothesize that the negative impact of experiencing shame following service failures on commitment to customer service is greater for employees with less work experience in the hospitality industry than it is for employees with more experience.

**H2:** The relationship between the experience of shame and commitment to customer service is moderated by employees' tenure in the hospitality industry. In particular, the negative relationship is weaker when employees' tenure is longer.

### *OCB-O*

OCB refers to discretionary work-related behaviors that fall outside of the scope of employees' job requirements but are believed to improve organizational effectiveness (e.g., Zeinabadi, 2010). OCB has been found to enhance customer service quality, job performance, and organizational effectiveness in hospitality organizations (e.g., Kwak and Kim, 2015). As a multi-dimensional construct, OCB in the service context can be categorized based on the behavioral target of a particular approach (e.g., Lin and Lin, 2011). Ma and Qu (2011) developed a three-dimensional framework for OCB by identifying three targets of hospitality employees' citizenship behavior: the organization (OCB-O), peers (OCB-I) and customers (OCB-C). Of the three dimensions, OCB-O is considered to be the most representative indicator of employees' citizenship behavior; it has also been found to contribute consistently to organizational performance (Gilbert et al., 2010). OCB-C focuses on customer repurchasing behavior, whereas OCB-I involves employee relationships (e.g., Tang and Tsaur, 2016). In spite of prescribed service delivery procedures, service encounters often involve unpredictable and novel situations when customers co-create the service product. Accordingly, successful service delivery often requires employees to go the "extra mile" by engaging in different tasks that are "above and beyond" their job requirements (Özduran and Tanova, 2017).

The experience of shame is a reflection of self-oriented internal attribution that implies one's self-awareness of behaviors that deviate from social norms. This self-awareness often leads to personal distress that further motivates one to withdraw from the shame-eliciting situation. By

doing so, one manages to restrain from further damage of self-image (Orth et al., 2006). For example, Bagozzi et al. (2003) found that shame results in reduced in-role performance (e.g., sales volume, communication effectiveness, and relationship-building) among Dutch employees. Tangney (1991) revealed negative associations between shame and other-oriented empathic responsiveness. In addition, employees' commitment to an organization or service is a key determinant of citizenship behavior (e.g., Supriyanto, 2013). Given the avoidance behavioral tendencies resulted from shame, this study proposes that employees' experience of shame negatively impacts OCB-O via the mediating role of commitment to customer service.

### *Error reporting*

Error reporting describes the act of employees communicating their errors to their managers or supervisors, either verbally or through formal error reporting systems (Zhao and Oliver, 2006). Error reporting takes the decisive step of error handling as to why error occurs, how error can be timely solved, and learn from errors (Anderson and Webster, 2001). Error reporting is often the only way for organizations to become aware of errors and the circumstances leading up to them since customers tend to feel reluctant to complain about service failures, leaving frontline employees as the only source of firsthand knowledge about what went wrong (Guchait et al., 2016). Although previous research has acknowledged the role error reporting plays in organizational learning and performance, there is limited research explaining why employees choose or decline to report errors. For example, researchers have found that leaders' behavioral integrity (i.e., the extent to which leaders practice what they preach) leads to more error reporting (Leroy et al., 2012). That is, when employees notice that their supervisors "walk the talk" (e.g., when supervisors encourage employees to report errors and also report errors themselves), they are more likely to trust their supervisors and feel psychologically safe (i.e., employees believe

that they will not be punished or blamed for disclosing their errors), which consequently leads them to report their own errors. Although not empirically tested, scholars have noted that when errors are associated with negative emotions such as shame, employees tend to avoid reporting the errors (Rausch et al., 2017). The theory of affect infusion states that emotions intervene in cognitive processing, and cognition determines the formation of attitudes (Mao et al., 2018). Negative emotions such as the experience of shame following a service failure intensify employees' cognitive attention to potential threat and risk prevention (Soydemir et al., 2017), which results in the employees' greater focus on avoidance and defensiveness than on their commitment to customer service. Such negative attitudes subsequently lead to the behavioral tendency of failing to report errors (Loewenstein et al., 2001). Therefore, this study proposes a mediation effect of employees' commitment to customer service between the experience of shame and error reporting.

**Hypothesis 3a:** Employees' commitment to customer service mediates the relationship between the experience of shame and OCB-O.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Employees' commitment to customer service mediates the relationship between the experience of shame and error reporting.

## **Method**

### *Participants and procedure*

The participants included restaurant frontline employees and their managers located in Istanbul, Turkey. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Turkey was ranked as the sixth most visited destination by international tourist arrivals, with 51.2 million international visitors in 2019, and Istanbul being one of the most visited cities (UNWTO, 2020).

In 2018, 1.74 million Turkish people worked in the hospitality industry, constituting more than 6% of the total workforce in Turkey (ANTALYA, 2018). Using non-probability convenience sampling, one co-author personally talked to the restaurant managers and explained the research purpose. The data were collected during breaks in working hours, resulting in 217 valid questionnaires with the response rate of 94%. Specifically, frontline employees were asked to assess their experience of shame, commitment to customer service and error reporting. In addition, to reduce the social desirability bias, the restaurant manager for each restaurant was asked to rate frontline employees' OCB-O. This is an effective and commonly-adopted approach to eliminate the bias of social desirability caused by self-reports (e.g., Bolino et al., 2006). Taken together, 217 frontline employees and their managers participated in the study.

Of the 217 valid respondents, 65.4% of the sample were males. 40.1% of the sample was in the age range of 21-25. In terms of tenure in the restaurant, 29.5% had worked between 6 months and 1 year. In terms of tenure in the hospitality industry, 26.7 % had worked from 2 to 4 years. 21.2% of the respondents had a university degree diploma. Overall, our sample was mainly represented by relatively young restaurant workers who had various work experience in the hospitality sector and the majority had not received higher education given the nature of their frontline job.

### *Measures*

Following previous studies on shame (e.g., Bonner et al., 2017; Bagozzi et al., 2003), a typical shame-eliciting situation relevant to the hospitality context: service failures, was introduced as environmental stimuli to trigger shame. Followed by this description, participants were asked to rate experience of shame which is measured by a fifteen-item scale developed by Bagozzi et al. (2003). One sample item is "I think the customer watches all my body movements, gestures, and

reactions”. Commitment to customer service is measured with four items from Bell and Luddington (2006). One sample item is “I am always working to improve the quality of service I give to customers”. Error reporting was measured in using the one-item scale developed by Wang et al. (2020). The item is “When I make an error, I \_\_\_\_\_ (1=never; 7=always) report it to an appropriate responsible person and/or record it through the record keeping protocol”. OCB-O was measured with six items from Ma and Qu (2011). One sample item is “This employee’s attendance at work is above the required level”. In particular, while some citizenship behaviors are directed toward either coworkers (OCB-I) or customers (OCB-C), OCB-O reflects citizenship behaviors holistically and thus can better capture employees’ OCB. In addition, Gilbert et al. (2010) indicated that OCB-O is more contingent on employees’ perceptions of work characteristics than either OCB-I or OCB-C. Therefore, OCB-O is considered one behavioral outcome of the experience of shame following service failures. Employees with greater OCB-O tend to be on time for work, take fewer breaks, and defend and speak favorably of the organization (Turnipseed, 2018). In addition, employee gender and level of education were treated as control variables. First, gender differences exist in terms of emotion processing and regulation, which may further influence one’s attitudinal and behavioral responses following the experience of shame (McRae et al., 2008). As to the educational level, Smrtnik and Prosen (2016) found that individuals with different levels of education adopt different emotional regulation and coping strategies. Those with lower level of education adopted more confrontational and distracting emotional coping, which implies the potential impacts of educational level on employees’ attitudes and behaviors following the experience of shame. Second, previous literature has identified gender or educational level as control variables when studying employees’ OCB (Cohen et al., 2012).



## Results

### *Common-method bias*

Several procedural criteria were executed to reduce the common-method bias. First, our constructs were measured by different Likert scale formats (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Second, our data came from multiple sources, namely both frontline employees and leaders (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). For the statistical examination, we initially entered all the items into an overall exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in order to identify the number of necessary unrotated factors that would explain the variance of our data (i.e. Harman's one-factor, Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Results indicated that there was no single factor emerged from EFA. Instead, we revealed that our data contained at least five factors with eigenvalue of above 1.0 and that the largest single factor could not account for the majority of the covariance among our items (it only explained roughly 29.6%). With a growing concern about Harman's single-factor test (Hulland *et al.*, 2018), we further utilized the Amos 20 to check a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which linked all our items to a single factor (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), and this model yielded remarkably decreased factor loadings and unacceptable fit ( $\chi^2 = 1513.275$ ,  $df = 275$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 5.503 > 3$ , CFI = 0.566, IFI = 0.574, RMSEA = 0.144). We additionally took a single-method-factor approach by allowing our items to load upon their respective construct and a new common first-order factor simultaneously (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). As expected, the ratio of sum of squared item-loadings to the total number of items illustrated that the common factor only explained 13.9% of total variance (see Ray *et al.*, 2014). Overall, the threat of common-method bias seemed not to exist in this study.

### *Measurement model*

To better understand the factor structure and dimensionality of our constructs, we preliminarily conducted independent EFA for each of our multiple-item scales on the SPSS 26, using principal components extraction method. We unveiled that two separate dimensions emerged from running EFA on the experience of shame construct: self-related perception that contains six items and physiological manifestation that contains nine items. Next, we employed partial least squares (PLS) method, using SmartPLS 3, to formally evaluate our measurement and structural models. The use of PLS-SEM in our research can be justified by the fact that since our model included error reporting being measured with a single instrument, using PLS is preferred (Cheah *et al.*, 2018; Hair *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, PLS-SEM is considered appropriate for running our model.

The measurement model showed that one item of experience of shame had factor loading below 0.50 (Costello and Osborne, 2005), we thus eliminated this indicator from further analyses. We then checked the reliability and validity of our measurement scales. Accordingly, coefficient omega ( $\omega$ ) and composite reliability (CR) for all constructs exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), our scales thus appeared internally consistent. With the recent criticism of Cronbach alpha, we alternatively reported coefficient omega as a better index for estimating scale reliability (Deng and Chan, 2016; Hayes and Coutts, 2020). Meanwhile, the average variance extraction (AVE) for most of constructs was larger than the minimum level of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), except for experience of shame with AVE of 0.46, which is still accepted in organizational research (e.g. Lam, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2020b) as long as the corresponding composite reliability is larger than 0.6 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). This indicated acceptable convergent validity. Furthermore, the square root of AVE for each variable was greater than that variable's inter-correlations with other variables, providing evidence for discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Also, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTTM),

as a relatively new and rigorous criterion to detect the discriminant validity (Franke and Sarstedt, 2019; Hair *et al.*, 2017), were consistently below the suggested 0.85 cut-off (see Table 1 and 2, Voorhees *et al.*, 2015). This supplemented the good discriminant validity of our scales. Moreover, the variance inflation factor (VIF) for all cases was smaller than the benchmark of 10 (Petter *et al.*, 2007; see Table 2), hence the potential of multicollinearity can be ruled out in our model.

### *Structural model analysis*

We adopted the two-stage approach rather than the repeated indicators approach to deal with the problem of unequal number of items between the two dimensions when building the second-order construct of experience of shame (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019; Schuberth *et al.*, 2020). Bootstrapping results with 5,000 iterations showed that the relationship between experience of shame and commitment to customer service was statistically significant and negative ( $\beta = -0.308, p < 0.001$ ), thus H1 was supported. Also, the moderation effect of tenure on the relationship between experience of shame and commitment was also statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.131, p < 0.05$ ). To better interpret this moderating effect, an interaction plot was graphically illustrated following the simple slopes procedure (Aiken and West, 1991). The difference between the two lines (see Figure 3) demonstrates how the impact of experience of shame on commitment is moderated by employee's tenure. When industry tenure is low ( $\beta = -0.050, p > 0.05$ ), the slope of the linear regression line between experience of shame and commitment is flat. When industry tenure is longer ( $\beta = -0.302, p < 0.01$ ), this slope becomes steeper. This means that the negative effect of experience of shame on commitment to customer service is actually stronger for employees with longer tenure in the hospitality industry and vice versa. H2 was therefore not supported. Meanwhile, significant indirect effect should be the only condition to establish the mediation (Zhao *et al.*, 2010). Thereby, the indirect effect of experience of shame on OCB-O via commitment

to customer service was statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.107$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) whereas the indirect effect of experience of shame on error reporting via commitment to customer service was also statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.061$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), lending the support to both H3a and H3b (see Figure 2 for the results of structural model). Moreover, as a controlled factor, education had a significantly positive impact on OCB-O ( $\beta = 0.168$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## **Discussion and conclusion**

### *Discussion*

Unlike basic emotions (e.g., delight, joy, anxiety), self-conscious emotions are triggered by and constructed during social interactions (Tangney et al., 2007; Schaumberg and Tracey, 2020). Drawing on the appraisal-based model and compass of shame theory, the current study identified shame as a typical emotional experience following service failures and examined the relationship between the experience of shame and employees' attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. The results of the current study reveal that the experience of shame elicited by service failure situations is damaging to employees, leading to a reduced commitment to customer service, OCB-O and error reporting. This is aligned with some existing literature indicating the maladaptive-nature of shame (Orth et al., 2006). For example, Kim (2016) indicated that the experience of shame causes individuals to focus more on the self-distress resulting from shame-inducing situations (e.g., service failure, public scolding) than on reparative behaviors. Therefore, the experience of shame stemming from individuals' appraisals that they have been evaluated negatively enables those individuals to demonstrate avoidance behaviors rather than reparative behaviors (Elison et al., 2006, 2014). In particular, the experience of shame in the service failure context and its negative impacts may be more salient than common shame experience in that service failures occur publically, and are often detected and judged by the

keymen (e.g., customers, coworkers and supervisors) who play key roles in shaping frontline employees' self-identity and self-representation. As a result, a frustrated self-identity and self-representation, with the addition of strong internal attribution, leads to frontline employees' experience of shame following service failure and avoidance-oriented emotional responses.

In addition, the current results should be interpreted in the cultural context. Turkey's national culture is more collectivistic and less masculine, and highlight the role social interactions play in define individuals, thereby facilitating the development of self-conscious emotions (Ersoy et al., 2011). Therefore, the sample of this research is representative and pertinent in this regard.

Moreover, as Turkish culture is characterized by the tendency to avoid uncertainty, people may in general have lower level of error reporting given the less tolerance of errors. Nevertheless, the results indicate the significant positive relationship between commitment to customer service and error reporting. Finally, this study found that the sociodemographic factor of industry tenure moderates the impacts of shame of failure on commitment to customer service. Against our prediction, we found that employees with less industry experience are less negatively affected by the experience of shame following service failures. Three possible reasons may explain this unexpected finding. First, Shiota and Levenson (2009) suggested that adults varying in age are similarly successful in modulating expressions of negative emotion. This implies that although younger employees typically have been exposed to fewer shame-eliciting events than senior employees, they are able to regulate their shame and behave in ways that are aligned with the job requirements (e.g., commitment to customer service). Second, compared to younger employees, senior employees may experience more frustration, anger, and self-accusation in service failure situations as they are experienced workers and believe that they should not make mistakes. As a result, their responses to the experience of shame are more withdrawal-oriented than those of

younger employees. Third, the dissonance between experienced emotions (shame) and required job behaviors (commitment to customer service) has been found to result in emotional exhaustion (Tepeci and Pala, 2016). It is possible that senior employees are less willing to fake their emotional responses and thus demonstrate more withdrawal-oriented behaviors than younger employees. Ultimately, the current research suggests that generally speaking, hospitality employees' experiences of shame following service failure situations are negatively associated with key job attitudes and behaviors but that industry tenure influences employees' responses to such experiences of shame.

### *Theoretical implications*

Given the social interactions involved in hospitality service production and delivery, it is important to understand the self-conscious emotions of hospitality frontline employees (Côté et al., 2013). These emotions serve primarily social needs in terms of their impacts on individuals' job attitudes and behaviors. In spite of their industry relevance, self-conscious emotions (e.g., shame, pride, elevation, gratitude) have not garnered sufficient attention among hospitality researchers. Therefore, the first theoretical contribution of this study is thus its extension of the nomological network of shame as a salient self-conscious emotion. Previous studies have examined situations that trigger the experience of shame, including unethical behavior (Bonner et al., 2017), and abusive supervision (Kim et al., 2020), but have not particularly considered the characteristics of hospitality contexts yet. Among the various antecedents of shame, failing to achieve the expected results is one of the most prominent (Daniels and Robinson, 2019).

Therefore, service failure is identified as a common trigger of shame that has negative implications for the self, including the experience of shame following cognitive appraisal (Tracy and Robins, 2004). As to outcomes, existing studies have linked the experience of shame with

exemplification (Kim et al., 2020), job performance (Bagozzi et al., 2003), and creativity (González-Gómez and Richter, 2015). In spite of these findings, relationships between shame and other job attitudes and work behaviors still remain unclear. For the first time, this study identifies commitment to customer service, OCB-O, and error reporting as attitudinal and behavioral outcomes following the experience of shame in the context of service failures. In particular, commitment to customer service implies an internalized customer-centered service orientation that is a key job attitude for frontline employees. Previous research has called for exploration of the emotional antecedent of commitment to customer service (Jeon, 2016). In addition, error reporting has been linked with organizational contextual factors (error tolerance, safety climate) and employees' work-related cognitions (perceived barriers and benefits), but has rarely been understood from employees' emotional mechanism (e.g., Samsiah et al., 2016). Zhao and Olivera (2006) posited that emotions (e.g., fear) may play a role in influencing error reporting attitudes and behaviors, thus the current study identifies shame as an affective antecedent that significantly influences error reporting behavior.

Second, the inconsistent findings regarding the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of shame have raised a fundamental question: is it a good or bad thing for employees to experience shame at work (e.g., Tracy et al., 2007; Kim, 2016)? Service failure situations occur from time to time, and these situations induce experiences of shame. These recurring emotional experiences are an important influence on employees' job attitudes and behaviors over time. For example, Wang et al. (2020a) indicated that organizational error management culture can shape employees' persistent gratitude toward an organization and influence their service recovery performance. In a similar vein, experiences of shame triggered by recurring service failures can exert impacts on employees' job attitudes and behaviors in a persistent and stable way. There is a longstanding

debate about whether shame is adaptive or maladaptive based on existing empirical findings (e.g., Kim, 2016; Bonner et al., 2017). Confirming the compass of shame theory and shame resilience theory, the current research reveals the negative impacts of shame on employees' work attitudes and behaviors, elucidating the maladaptive nature of shame.

Third, the existing literature on both emotion regulation and self-conscious emotions recognizes the necessity of understanding how sociodemographic factors influence emotional experiences and thereby attitudinal and behavioral responses. In particular, previous research has linked emotion regulation with aging by mostly resorting to individuals' actual age, and revealed an improved tendency of emotion regulation with age. The current research identified industry tenure as another embodiment of individual aging in the hospitality work context and examined how industry tenure influences employees' behavioral responses to shame, thereby extending the emotional aging literature (e.g., Thornton and Herndon, 2016). According to the selection, optimization, and compensation with emotion regulation (SOC-ER) framework (Thornton and Herndon, 2016), individuals' adoption of emotion regulation strategies is contingent on their resources and ability to make emotion regulation changes over time. Specifically, the skills involved in coping with negative emotions improve with more exposure to the affective events that trigger these negative emotions (e.g., Urry and Gross, 2010). Therefore, those with more industry experience are expected to have experienced more shame-eliciting service failures and thus be better able to handle shame. Thus, the current finding provides unique insights into the emotional aging literature in that the maladaptive tendency of shame is not alleviated as one's industry tenure increases. As this suggests, age-related improvement of emotion regulation may not be universally applied, and the influence of age-related factors on emotion regulation is emotion-specific.



### *Practical implications*

This study sheds light on a previously unexplored aspect of ubiquitous service failure in the hospitality industry: frontline employees' experiences of shame. The current study helps explain how hospitality employees emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally react to shame-inducing situations (i.e., service failures) given that maintaining one's self-image is critical. First, service failures cause the emotional experience of shame among frontline employees, regardless of the length of their industry tenure. Just as an employee who feels ashamed of being excluded by colleagues at work prefers to work at home to avoid socializing, a frontline employee who experiences a service failure may tend to avoid a shame-inducing situation via withdrawal-oriented behavior. While previous research has focused on employees' emotional labor and its impacts on employees' job attitudes and performance, this study provides insight into frontline employees' genuine emotional experiences following service failures. Managers may think it less important to care about employees' actual negative emotions than those of customers, as the former of these emotions are expected to be hidden via emotion regulation. However, ignoring employees' true feelings can exacerbate the harm of emotion regulation, and in particular, emotion suppression can do to employees' productivity and well-being. Therefore, it is important to understand frontline employees' emotional experiences that precede emotion regulation (e.g., emotional labor) following service failures.

The findings also reveal that without appropriate emotion regulation or intervention, shame discourages employees' commitment to customer service, which in turn exerts negative effects on error reporting and OCB-O. The current study focused on the impacts of the experience of shame on employees' attitudes and behaviors, which assumes that the emotion of shame has already been generated. Given the maladaptive nature of shame, we suggest managers adopt

antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategies that help eliminate the generation of shame following service failures (Gross, 2015). The simplest and convenient strategy is the cognitive reappraisal approach in which employees are asked to re-interpret an event via cognitive efforts. In particular, we suggest the cultivation of an organizational error management culture that facilitates this cognitive reappraisal (Wang et al., 2018). In organizations with strong error management cultures, error occurrence is not stigmatized but is instead considered a unique learning opportunity. Consequently, employees are neither afraid of making errors nor ashamed when errors occur. To create a strong error management culture, managers should take the lead in openly discussing errors and encouraging learning from errors; they should likewise change policies to reward those who report errors. Moreover, enhancing frontline employees' warmth and competence is also effective in facilitate service recovery process via customers' cooperation (Huang et al., 2020).

#### *Limitations and future research*

The current study has limitations that future studies may wish to address. First, while the current study identified a sociodemographic factor that influences the impacts of experiencing shame, the findings are not in line with arguments on age-related improvement in emotion regulation, future research should continue investigating industry tenure and other individual or organizational factors that can cause shame to be either adaptive or maladaptive. On the individual level, those who have high levels of self-efficacy or strong customer orientations may react to experience of shame by engaging in reparative behaviors. In terms of organizational factors, a climate tolerant of failure may alleviate the negative impact of shame on self-evaluation, resulting in less maladaptive behavior. Second, the current study provides empirical evidence that service failure situations, in general, elicit moderate levels of shame. Future

research can examine how self-conscious emotional experiences are influenced by other individuals' emotional expressions. For example, the reactions of customers or supervisors following a service failure may influence the appraisal process by which the employee in question understands the experience of shame. Third, the experience of shame and general attitude toward errors have been found to vary across cultural contexts. Bagozzi et al. (2003) found that although both Dutch and Filipino employees experienced shame in the sales context, they adopted different self-regulation approaches in response. The current results are based on data collected from employees in Turkey. According to the Hofstede model of six dimensions of national cultures (Hofstede, 2011), Turkey is low in individualism and masculinity, and high in uncertainty avoidance, and all these dimensions may have impacts on the constructs studied in this research. Specifically, both collectivistic culture and feminine culture underline the interpersonal relationships through which individuals define themselves and understand their roles in the society, thereby creating a shame-prone cultural context in which experience of shame is salient (Ersoy et al., 2011). In addition, the high level of uncertainty avoidance implies lower acceptability of error occurrence, possibly rendering error reporting an infrequent behavior. Future research should seek to replicate or compare the current research findings in cultures low in uncertainty avoidance, and high in individualism as well as masculinity, such as the United Kingdom and Ireland. Finally, although the sample size in this research was appropriate for PLS-SEM (Hair *et al.*, 2016), this relatively small size of sample, which was collected through non-probability sampling, might reduce this study's generalizability. As such, future research can consider implementing probability sampling techniques (e.g., stratification associated with industry type) on a larger scale to gather a more representative sample.

## **Conclusion**

Our findings reveal that experience of shame is a salient emotional experience for hospitality frontline employees following service failure situations. Experience of shame triggered by service failures generates attitudinal and behavioral responses that are characterized by avoidance and withdrawal. In particular, shame of failure impaired employees' commitment to customer service, which in turn, associated with OCB-O and error reporting. Moreover, industry tenure significantly influenced employees' attitudinal response to experience of shame, in that those with shorter industry tenure demonstrated less decrease of commitment to customer service compared to those with longer industry tenure. These findings highlight the power of shame as a self-conscious emotion after service failures, and the importance of service failure handling as well as coping of negative emotions in hospitality organizations.

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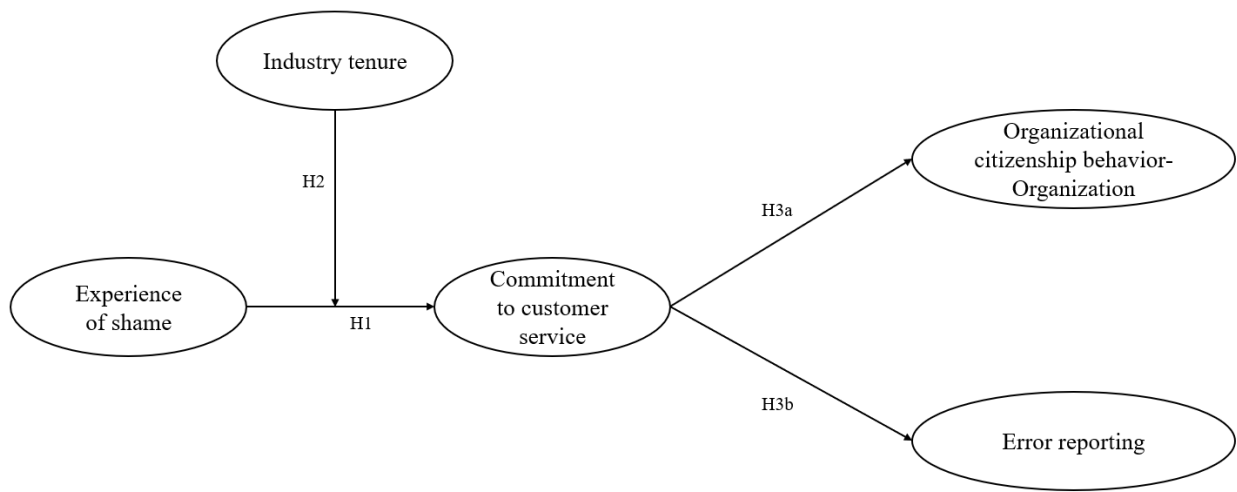
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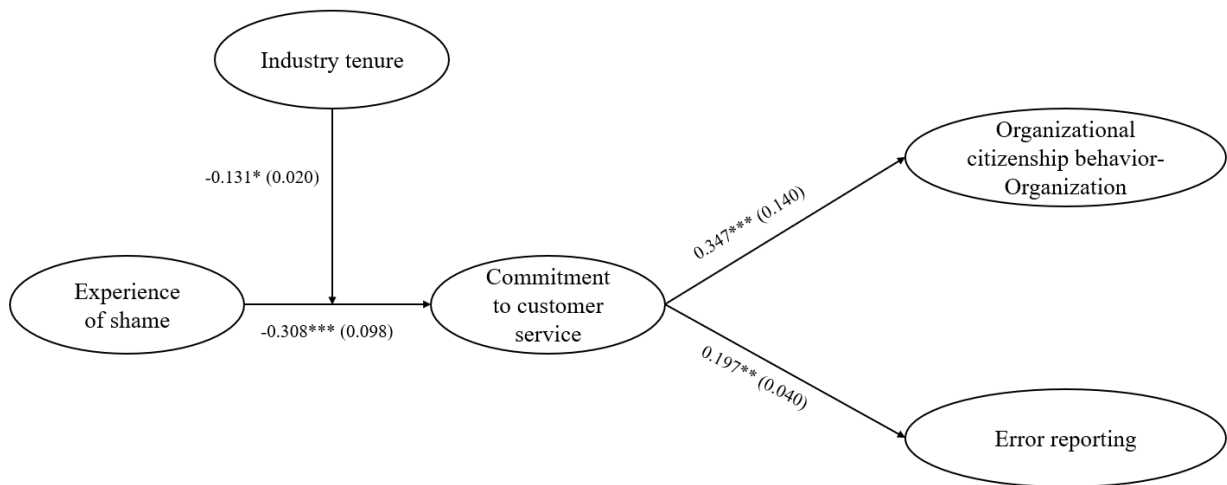
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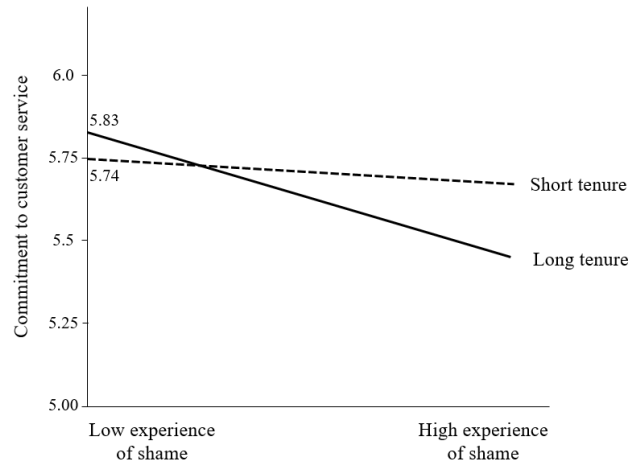


**Figure 1.** Conceptual model



Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; f-square is inside parentheses; gender and education used as controlled variables in this model

**Figure 2.** Structural model results



**Figure 3.** Interaction effect of experience of shame and industry tenure on commitment to customer service

**Table 1.** Statistical results for reliability and validity

	M	SD	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	AVE	$\omega$	CR	Q <sup>2</sup>	a.R <sup>2</sup>
Experience of shame (X1)	2.83	1.11	<b>.67</b>	.47	.36	.10	.05	.46	.88	.91	n/a	n/a
Commitment to customer service (X2)	5.78	1.10	-.17	<b>.78</b>	.39	.23	.09	.61	.79	.86	.077	.097
Organizational citizenship behavior-organization (X3)	5.87	.95	-.20	.30	<b>.74</b>	.08	.07	.54	.82	.88	.115	.140
Error reporting (X4)	4.72	1.39	.01	.20	.06	<b>n/a</b>	.05	n/a	n/a	n/a	.017	.027
Industry tenure (X5)	2.82	1.50	.01	.05	-.04	.05	<b>n/a</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

*Note: M = mean, SD = standard deviation, AVE = average variance extracted,  $\omega$  = omega coefficient, CR = composite reliability, a.R<sup>2</sup> = adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, HTTM: heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations; square root of AVE is on the diagonal, inter-correlations are below the diagonal, HTTMs are above the diagonal, n/a: not available.*

**Table 2.** Factor loadings and VIF values

Construct	Dimension	Item	Factor loading	VIF
Experience of shame	Self-related perception	ES1	0.685	1.458
		ES2	0.676	1.745
		ES3	0.765	2.074
		ES4	0.741	1.597
		ES5	0.602	1.221
		ES6	0.752	2.586
		ES7	0.749	2.580
	Physiological manifestation	ES8	0.745	2.013
		ES9	0.851	3.044
		ES10	0.828	2.901
		ES11	0.865	3.619
		ES12	0.907	4.723
		ES13	0.874	3.867
		ES14	0.829	2.736
Commitment to customer service	CCS1	0.873	2.242	
	CCS2	0.689	1.370	
	CCS3	0.895	2.467	
	CCS4	0.642	1.331	
Organizational citizenship behavior-organization	OCBO1	0.749	1.527	
	OCBO2	0.666	1.453	
	OCBO3	0.791	1.766	
	OCBO4	0.825	2.210	
	OCBO5	0.801	2.137	
	OCBO6	0.553	1.422	