Exploring the role of self- and customer-provoked embarrassment in personal selling

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Abstract

We investigate the role that embarrassment, a self-conscious emotion, plays within a selling context. First, we consider what SC-emotions in general are and whether embarrassment might have positive as well as negative impacts on selling behavior. Next, we examine how embarrassment differs from sales call anxiety (SCA). The results show that embarrassment is manifest as an awkward, abashed chagrin provoked either by what a salesperson does that is inappropriate (self-provoked embarrassment) or what a customer does that is inappropriate or offensive to a salesperson (customer-provoked embarrassment). Self- and customer-provoked embarrassment each induce distinct coping responses and both diminish adaptive resource utilization during interactions with customers; this in turn promotes avoidance of future contact with the customer (especially for customer-provoked embarrassment). Implications of the research for practitioners are discussed.
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1. Introduction

. . .Although it is consequential, fear of embarrassment is substantially misplaced. No one likes to feel mortified and abashed, but embarrassment usually motivates conciliatory behavior that produces desirable results, and we would all be worse off without it.

(Miller, 1996, p. 199)

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Imagine that you are customer and during a sales conversation the salesperson makes a blunder, but the salesperson ignores this and remains completely cold and unemotional. Would you like this person? Would you trust him/her? Normally, when a person in our presence makes a blunder or *faux pas*, we expect him or her to be embarrassed and we sympathize with the person expressing this very human emotion. But the failure to respond appropriately with embarrassment makes us suspicious and uncomfortable, and we feel distant from the person and wonder whether he or she cares about us or respects us as a person.

Ongoing professional sales interactions between customers and salespersons have been characterized as "boundary open" transactions and resemble in one

sense relationships between friends wherein each person expects the other to be actively involved and to share their true feelings to a certain extent (Price & Arnould, 1999; Siehl, Bowen, & Pearson, 1992, p. 541). Thus, although sales conversations with customers are to a certain degree scripted and are characterized by ''face-work'' (i.e., maintenance of personal demeanor and self-esteem), the sharing of feelings often occurs through ''emotional leaking'' (Ekman, 1984). In daily life, embarrassment frequently happens in such situations (e.g., Miller, 1996), and at times people even intentionally embarrass other people to make them conform to social expectations and to convey status differences (Sharkey, 1997). However, not much is known about how embarrassment functions within selling.

The literature on personal selling mentions that, despite the fact that selling can be fun and challenging, salespeople have to deal with customers who frequently display arrogance or make insulting remarks (e.g., Fine, Shepherd, & Josephs, 1994), and this serves to embarrass salespeople. Salespeople who are habitually the target of embarrassment by certain customers become deeply ambivalent towards these customers. They feel the need and pressure to contact these customers, yet they desire to avoid them whenever possible or to cut short contact once it begins.

In addition to experiencing embarrassment as a consequence of customers' actions, salespeople themselves often make social blunders, errors in etiquette, tactless remarks, sudden mistakes, or offensive acts (e.g., passing gas) that put them at the center of negative attention from customers. As with customer-provoked embarrassment, self-induced embarrassment can affect on-going relationships and anticipated encounters as well. The goal of this article is to explore in more depth this seemingly innocuous and common emotion within selling.

An overview of the literature on embarrassment reveals that embarrassment is a multifaceted emotion. First, it is a self-conscious emotion having fuzzy boundaries with anxiety and shame (Miller, 1996, p. 27). Second, embarrassment is less intense and enduring than guilt and shame, yet it is more visible and immediately unpleasant (Miller, 1996, pp. 10–11). Third, it is an emotion that quickly impels people to engage in one or more coping strategies, but these

coping strategies might not always be the result of the smartest choices from the viewpoint of the firm (Feldman-Barret & Gross, 2001; Miller, 1996). Fourth, embarrassment has a dark side to it because, if people avoid embarrassing situations, misunderstandings and lost opportunities can occur (Leith & Baumeister, 1996). Fifth, the ability to experience embarrassment is an important human quality (Crozier, 1990), as it reflects people's sensitivity to others, signals something about their character (Sabini & Silver, 1998), and functions as a social mechanism for regulating interpersonal behavior in a civil manner. Finally, embarrassment frequently has a pacifying effect on relationships between people (Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Keltner, Young, & Buswell, 1997).

It is important to study embarrassment within selling, because the experience of embarrassment allows salespeople to be aware of the existence of, and respond appropriately to, social norms, as well as maintain one's own dignity and show respect to others. Yet, because embarrassment can produce avoidance behaviors, it can be dysfunctional. In fact, embarrassment has consequences similar to stress: some role stress is necessary in work situations because it can be energizing, yet if role stress becomes too intense and/or persists over time, it leads to burnout and negatively affects selling (e.g., Singh, Goolsby, & Rhoads, 1994).

To better scrutinize this peculiar emotion, we provide an introduction to SC-emotions within selling; indeed, SC-emotions have not been elaborated upon much within the selling literature, compared to goal-oriented emotions (Brown, Cron & Slocum, 1997) and sales call anxiety (SCA) (Verbeke & Bagozzi, 2002). Second, we define embarrassment more fully and describe two specific forms of this emotion: self- versus customer-provoked embarrassment (Crozier & Metts, 1994). Consistent with Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure's (1989) broad theory of emotions, our third objective is to operationalize embarrassment as a four-dimensional response consisting of subjective experiences, coping strategies, loss of adaptive resources, and the tendency to avoid future contact. Fourth, because SCA is known to share similarities with embarrassment at the phenomenological level (Miller, 1996), we focus on how SCA differs from embarrassment. An underlying theme we develop later is that embarrassment can be functional or

dysfunctional, depending on the situation and one's appraisals, and a number of steps can be taken to manage embarrassment effectively.

2. Self-conscious emotions within selling

Fundamentally, SC-emotions function as people's situational sensors to scrutinize whether *they* or *their behaviors* fit a significant social group or particular social setting based upon evaluative signals from members of the target group or setting (Fischer & Tangney, 1995).[1] Baumeister (1995) suggests that people constantly have a need to monitor and assess whether they belong to and are accepted by members of their significant social group. The need to belong causes people to pay attention to positive and negative evaluations from others and to learn about the values and norms that are typical for a particular group. Depending on the nature of the evaluations and their importance, salespeople will be motivated to change their behaviors. Doing so implies that the salespersons find it prudent to match group norms. During sales interactions, there are many circumstances where salespeople might experience SC-emotions. For example, salespeople may feel inadequate after an inept presentation, a customer may ask a question that the salesperson feels unable to answer, or either party might clumsily spill coffee on the other's papers.

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[1] As one reviewer has suggested within the psychological literature, there is a debate as to whether embarrassment is a SC-emotion or whether it is a social emotion. Social emotions are emotions that emerge as a result of the implicit or explicit presence of others (e.g., sales call anxiety could be conceived as a social emotion), whereas the SC-emotions are emotions that carry an evaluation of the self. Lewis (2000, p. 624) conceives of embarrassment as a type of SC-emotion but also tends to view embarrassment (especially embarrassment as exposure) as a social emotion. Other researchers view embarrassment clearly as SC-emotions (e.g., Fischer & Tangney, 1995; Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 2000; Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Miller, 1996). The authors of this paper follow the latter point of view and conceive embarrassment as a SC-emotion. But to be clear, all SC-emotions are social emotions, but not all social emotions are self-conscious (Keltner, 2001, personal communication). As Fischer and Tangney (1995, p. 3) note: "...the self-conscious-emotions...are especially social. Emotions such as shame, guilt, pride, and embarrassment are founded in social relationships..."

Fischer and Tangney (1995) suggest that SC-emotions emerge according to well-defined and predictable patterns. SC-emotions begin with an initial failure (or special achievement) during, for example, a sales interaction where the salesperson says something that is wrong or offensive (or receives congratulations from customers). If the action or outcome is perceived as being inappropriate (appropriate) within the selling context and does not match (matches) the person's expectations, SC-emotional processes may be triggered. Initially, the event will be processed for affective meaning, and the salesperson will make an appraisal from the perspective of "the self as significant others perceive it." Responding to the precipitating event could lead to a negative evaluation such as shame or a positive evaluation in regard to self-standards such as pride. The appraisals then incite specific coping responses or action-tendencies (i.e., organized plans or predispositions to act in relation to the appraised events; see Frijda et al., 1989). Each emotion occurs in response to self-appraisals made of distinct events.

SC-emotions are not only important from the perspective of the person experiencing them, but are also important for the person who witnesses the person having them. The person who witnesses another's SC-emotions might come to infer that the other person considers him/her a "significant other" (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995). For instance, when a salesperson shows remorse after a transgression that is in some way disadvantageous for the customer, the customer might come to feel that s/he matters to the salesperson. Conversely, when a salesperson fails to experience SC-emotions after a negative evaluation by the customer, the customer might conclude that the salesperson does not consider him/her a worthy person or a valued business partner. The occurrence of such inter-subjective signals evoked by SC-emotions has led researchers to suggest that SC-emotions play a crucial social information function (see Keltner & Haidt, 1999, for an overview).

To the extent that such experiences become publicly emphasized, the self-conscious salesperson realizes that others observe him/her exhibiting the SC response. This in turn makes one feel *at the center of attention*. Indeed, there is something paradoxical about SC-emotions, because, although they are social, they are at the same time self-centered. That is, the

person takes the behaviors that have placed him/her at the center of attention as evidence that another person believes he/she has either offended or transgressed against the person (thereby provoking such feelings as guilt or shame in the salesperson) or else has exceeded a sense of "the true self" (and thus exhibited excessive pride; Tangney & Salovey, 1999). Whether to avoid, or to seek to be in, situations that place one at the center of attention, salespeople might develop protective actions or coping strategies that are either correspondingly evasive or advancing. These coping strategies include activation of situation-specific thoughts and behaviors aimed at either changing one's behavior to conform to the requirements of the situation or feeling energized and seeking to attain better performance (Barret, 1995; Thoits, 1990). For instance in the case of shame, a salesperson might develop "avoidance" coping strategies as a consequence of intense SC-emotions (e.g., putting off contact with the customer or procrastinating). But in other cases, like excessive pride, salespeople might feel highly confident, and might show off during encounters with customers, at times making customers feel uneasy.

Because we focus in this article on one SC-emotion, namely embarrassment, we first consider how salespeople experience this specific emotion, compared to other SC-emotions. Because embarrassment has not been studied in the personal selling context before, we conducted a pre-study to ascertain the frequency and intensity of negative SC-emotions, specifically shame, embarrassment, guilt, and envy, as salespeople experience these in front of customers. We asked 107 salespeople to rate each of these emotions on seven-point scales on frequency of occurrence (1 = "never" to 7 = "always") and intensity (1 = "not at all intense" to 7 = "very intense").[2] The findings showed that guilt (mean = 2.5, S.D. =

0.99) was the most frequently experienced negative emotion, followed quite closely by embarrassment (mean = 2.4, S.D. = 0.80), shame (mean = 2.3, S.D. = 0.68), and envy (mean = 2.1, S.D. = 0.83). In addition, guilt (mean = 3.5, S.D. = 1.69) and shame (mean = 3.5, S.D. = 1.52) were perceived to be the most intensely felt emotions, followed closely by embarrassment (mean = 3.1, S.D. = 1.38), and finally envy (mean = 2.5, S.D. = 1.16).

These findings in short say that embarrassment is slightly less intensely felt than shame and guilt but occurs as frequently as these emotions (see also Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). Reflecting upon research in the literature on SC-emotions, Miller (1996) asks, if embarrassment is commonly regarded to be less intense than shame, why is it considered to be equally, or even more, important? His answer is as follows. Embarrassment compared to shame occurs more suddenly, it is more difficult to hide because it is more externally expressed, it exposes one's public identity more strongly, and it is more prosocial in its effects. In addition, shame tends to be more self-serving and guilt less immediately adaptive in face-to-face interactions than embarrassment. In sum, Miller (p. 28) maintains that embarrassment "seems to have functions and uses that make it an indispensable ingredient of normal humanity". Let us look deeper into embarrassment as it has been studied by psychologists. This is in contrast to everyday opinions of embarrassment, which tend to see this emotion as a nuisance with little effects of consequence.

3. Embarrassment

Embarrassment is a reactive emotional response arising from seemingly innocuous and sometimes humorous events, which have emerged suddenly (acutely) and with a sense of surprise (Miller, 1996). Different embarrassing situations come to mind: making a conspicuous mistake in front of a customer, being congratulated by colleagues in a public setting, or being present when customers make offensive remarks (e.g., Lewis, 2000). Embarrassment can also occur in response to more offensive incidents, such as when customers point out personal mistakes of the salesperson, thereby questioning the salesperson's competence or professionalism (Keltner & Buswell,

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[2] The 107 salespeople worked at a large bank. The sample can be described as follows: a majority (about 60%) of the salespeople were men, most (about 52%) were younger than 35 years old, and a small number (about 9%) were older than 50 years old. With respect to experience, about 10% of the sample had been with the organization less than 2 years and almost 55% had been with the company between 6 and 20 years. Finally, most salespeople had finished basic and advanced vocational studies. Only 1% had a university or college degree.

1997). In contrast to shame, the incidents provoking embarrassment nearly always occur in public, seldom when alone (e.g., Tangney et al., 1996).

Once embarrassment occurs, people are pushed into "a state of flustered, awkward, abashed chagrin" (Miller, 1996, p. 129). Embarrassment involves a trigger from *both* the sympathetic nervous system (e.g., an urge to hide because one does not like to be perceived as having made a mistake or committed a transgression) and the para-sympathetic nervous system (e.g., the person feels frozen, confused, ambivalent and foolish; Buss, 1984, 2001; Leary & Meadows, 1991; Lewis, 2000, p. 631; Miller, 1996, p. 16). These two processes, first the active or flight response (governed by the sympathetic nervous system and marked by gaze aversion and the like), followed by the passive response (governed by the para-sympathetic nervous system and marked by such reactions as blushing), are termed "on–off reactions", are conspicuous to others, and make a person appear less confident. Furthermore, these physiological responses highlight one's seemingly inflexible interactive style at that moment of expression within the sales conversation (e.g., Keltner & Buswell, 1997), and they threaten salespeople's identity (i.e., the way a person wants to be perceived by significant others) because they are so public. These symptoms of embarrassment are especially crucial during social interactions because they function as a sincere nonverbal apology for possible misbehavior that informs others of one's contrition and desire to avoid rejection (Semin & Manstead, 1982) and help to "placate potential critics of one's behavior and forestall social rejection" (Miller, 1996, p. 146). Blushing especially is perceived as a signal to make amends (Miller, 1996, p. 145). In this regard, embarrassment reactions create what Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990) call "reciprocal affective reactions". Embarrassment thus reminds salespeople and customers of their interdependence and shared humanity.

The psychology literature also suggests that some people are more prone to experience embarrassment than others, with a connection between embarrassment, the state, and the personality traits fear of negative evaluation and embarrassibility (see Miller, 1996, for an overview). The personality traits fear of negative evaluation and embarrassibility have these effects because they are rooted in an awareness and concern for what others think of oneself and so allow a person, via embarrassment, to adapt to the social environment when called upon. Of course, excessive sensitivity can be dysfunctional, as manifest for example in hyper-embarrassibility.

After experiencing embarrassment, people engage in coping responses (i.e., activation of action tendencies). These occur typically automatically but are subject to some self-control. Miller (1996) describes several coping techniques that might unfold. In many cases coping serves several implicit functions, ranging from trying to save face to showing that one desires to remedy the situation. As such, embarrassment functions to assure adherence to social norms, as well as convey that one will attempt to endure the incident with grace (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Leary, Landel, & Patton, 1996). Thus, embarrassment also maintains a sense of harmony in relationships (Miller, 1996, p. 133). In this regard, Keltner and Buswell (1997) also suggest that embarrassment has an appeasement function within groups and relationships.

Psychologists have attempted to systematically classify embarrassing predicaments (e.g., Buss, 1980; Miller, 1996; Sattler, 1965). According to Crozier and Metts (1994), embarrassing predicaments can be grouped into two main categories: (1) responses caused by oneself and that threaten one's "presented-self" (e.g., personal accidents or mistakes) and (2) responses caused by another person that embarrass oneself (e.g., rudeness on the part of another person with whom one is interacting). The latter is sometimes called "empathic embarrassment" (e.g., Miller, 1996, p. 34; Crozier & Metts, 1994).

Psychologists warn, as well, that embarrassment can have a *dark side*. For example, the self-realization that one is experiencing an awkward situation in front of others may on a subsequent visit cause a salesperson to be overly sensitive to the past happening and avoid certain topics or selling tactics, so as to escape reminding the customer of his or her blunder and being the center of attention (see Leith & Baumeister, 1996). Thus, the anticipation of possible embarrassment may affect subsequent behavior and make one anxious about upcoming encounters. Some authors call this "the fear of embarrassment" (Leary & Kowalski, 1995, p. 99), which in our study may be manifest in the avoidance of future contact with customers or procrastination. In sum, embarrassment

can have real-time disruptive effects and also anticipatory functions with delayed consequences.

4. Embarrassment within the selling context

At first glance, embarrassment may seem to be indistinguishable from SCA, an emotion recently studied by Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000) in a salesforce.[3] Miller (1996, pp. 18–19) believes that social anxiety, an emotion subsuming SCA, is similar to embarrassment, although he clearly regards the two as distinct emotions (see also Keltner & Buswell, 1997).

SCA is a pervasive anticipatory emotion that occurs when people *foresee* a specific selling situation (such as visiting new customers or closing a deal) as potentially damaging to their self-image and performance. Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000) conceived of SCA responses as "anxiety programs", which can best be defined as self-reinforcing systems of cognitive, somatic, affective, and behavioral changes that are designed to protect a person from harm in objectively dangerous environments. Once triggered, anxiety programs amplify the perceived danger during a social situation. More specifically, Verbeke and Bagozzi (p. 89) argued that when salespeople experience SCA, they desire "to convey a particular favorable impression of themselves to others, yet they have a marked insecurity about their ability to do so". This mindset, in turn, causes salespeople to allow small failures or setbacks during a conversation to provoke negative thoughts or portend larger failures. The negative thoughts, in turn, unearth heightened physiological responses, especially in the sympathetic nervous system, such as manifest in increased heart rate or speaking too fast. This causes people to become self-focused, thus making the salesperson aware of his/her own physiological responses, which, in turn,

draw attention away from the customer and the sales encounter. Needless to say, such protective actions threaten to damage interpersonal communication and performance. Verbeke and Bagozzi showed that SCA can function as an anticipatory emotion that is persistent (once awakened, it proceeds almost automatically), involves especially the sympathetic nervous system, and finally causes a salesperson either to flee or lose adaptive resources that potentially disrupt the flow of the sales conversation, and this in turn affects the salesperson's sales performance.

Some psychologists regard embarrassment as "a special type of social anxiety that occurs *after* a self-presentational predicament..." (Leary & Kowalski, 1995, p. 83, emphasis added; see also Izard, 1971; Sharkey, 1997, p. 58). Indeed, embarrassment and SCA show commonalties, yet also differences, as identified below.

The following parallels are salient:

(1) Crozier (1999) and Buss (1984) maintain that social fear and SC-emotions are both likely to be present in certain situations. We believe that this occurs in many selling encounters and moreover in a particular pattern or sequence. For example, once a salesperson or customer does something to induce embarrassment in the salesperson, salespeople might develop fear-related or avoidant responses.

(2) Social anxiety and embarrassment both share a common antecedent, in that both stem from awareness of, and concern for, what others think of oneself (Miller, 1996, p. 20). For instance, fear of negative evaluation as a trait has been found to correlate with experienced embarrassment and social anxiety as states (Miller, 1996).

(3) Both embarrassment and anxiety have similar physiological symptoms, such as the felt urge to hide or feeling tongue-tied (Crozier, 1999).

Yet, the following differences should also be pointed out:

(1) SCA is primarily an *anticipatory* emotion that involves the sympathetic nervous system, which is needed to prepare for flight responses. Embarrassment is most often a *reactive* emotion and has a substantial para-sympathetic (or

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[3] At a surface level, both SCA and embarrassment share communalities by the sheer notion that a seemingly similar etiology unfolds for each: situations trigger appraisals and feelings, which in turn affect physiological responses, and this then evokes action tendencies. This common outlook, inspired by Frijda (Frijda et al., 1989), is not what makes these two emotions similar or dissimilar because the particular situations, physiological responses, appraisals, and action tendencies underlying each can often differ in kind or degree.

passive) component, in addition to a sympathetic (or active) component, causing a person to feel temporarily confused, startled, and mortified (Miller, 1996, pp. 16 and 19). When embarrassment is forward looking, it possesses anxiety and comes to resemble SCA, but this occurs only after the experience of embarrassment, and with respect to the specific embarrassing incident, not in general or in regard to broader anxieties covered by SCA.

(2) Embarrassment is an SC-emotion and has evolved over the millennia as people developed greater cognitive and social complexity (Lazarus, 1991, p. 81). As Johnson-Laird and Oatley (2000, p. 466) point out, embarrassment is a higher level emotion built on a layer above fear and includes evaluations of the self and others' attention to the self. SCA is conceived as a basic (as opposed to SC-) emotion, but involves less cognitive complexity (e.g., Miller, 1996, p. 20) and emerges at a younger age in development than SC-emotions (Crozier, 1999). Further, Keltner and Haidt (2001) suggest that anxiety reflects survival functions of people, whereas embarrassment is an emotion that regulates social problems of dominance or pride.

(3) The occasional confusion of SCA with embarrassment by lay people probably arises because both are negative emotions and both are typically positively correlated in surveys, yet the observed correlations are generally typically low enough to demonstrate discriminant validity (e.g., Fischer & Tangney, 1995).

(4) SCA leads especially to flight coping, whereas embarrassment incites, besides flight responses, coping strategies intended to rectify the transgression and to conform to one's social relationships.

(5) Most importantly, both emotions have different social functions: SCA is an emotion that signals danger and protects the self even at the expense of others, whereas embarrassment regulates social interactions among people and helps people fit in with others (Keltner & Haidt, 2001). Thus, anxiety leads to avoidance, whereas embarrassment normally makes people submissive or accommodative and open to reconciliation in relationships. Nevertheless, strongly felt embarrassment can also lead to avoidance, especially when a person excessively ruminates or obsessively dwells upon it.

5. Study 1: embarrassment and SCA are distinct emotions

Abrupt or unexpected social transgressions, such as when one commits a clumsy act or becomes the center of attention, provoke embarrassment (Miller, 1996), while situations that arouse fear or portend failure bring forth SCA (Verbeke & Bagozzi, 2000). We use an experimental design to discover whether embarrassment (caused by self or customer) and SCA (in canvassing and closing situations) emerge as a consequence of anxiety-arousing and/or embarrassment-provoking situations. In addition, we control for different characteristics of selling situations: namely, we focus on the effects that bystanders (especially colleagues of the salesperson) have on the emergence of either embarrassment or SCA.

To experimentally study these emotions, we used the scenario approach pioneered by psychologists (e.g., Roseman, 1991; Tangney, 1995). Because it is both very difficult and unethical to directly manipulate emotions on the job, we had to find a method that does this indirectly and within the bounds of contemporary ethical practice. We adapted the use of scenarios in this regard, wherein salespeople are presented with stories of sales encounters and are asked to put themselves in the place of a protagonist in the stories and then express how they would feel or act in the circumstances. The scenarios are used to manipulate embarrassment and SCA generating situations. This approach has been found to provide an effective and acceptable way to study emotions in psychology and was adapted to the selling situations investigated herein.

Experiment 1: We evaluate whether self- and customer-provoked embarrassing situations and SCA-inducing situations elicit embarrassment and anxiety, respectively, as theory would predict, and do so in a way supporting discriminant validity.

Experiment 2: We also explore whether the presence of the salesperson's colleagues affects the experience of embarrassment and SCA.

Psychologists speculate that bystanders will amplify felt embarrassment in *self-provoked* embarrassing contexts (see Miller, 1996, pp. 38–45, for an overview). As Miller (1996, p. 43) notes, when in front of acquaintances, people try harder to appear competent and influence the judgments of the acquaintances present, because acceptance and approval are important for them to achieve (Miller, 1996, p. 43). Hence, based upon this logic and research by Brown and Garland (1971), we predict that when colleagues are present during a customer-salesperson exchange, the salesperson's felt embarrassment will be more intense.

With regard to *customer-provoked* embarrassment, the effect of the presence of colleagues of the salesperson on embarrassment might also amplify the response but for a different reason. When the customer makes a transgression, the salesperson likely knows that his/her colleagues witness the offensive behavior of the customer, and because the colleagues' approval is important (Miller, 1996), the salesperson should feel greater embarrassment than had the colleagues been absent.

In a similar vein, we also expect that SCA will become more intense when colleagues are present. Indeed, the presence of others heightens people's consciousness about possible failures, causing people to become more self-aware about their potential future failures (Clark & Wells, 1995).

In short, we hypothesize the following convergent and discriminant validity predictions:

Hypothesis 1: Embarrassing situations (self-provoked and customer-provoked) will stir more felt embarrassment than SCA. Situations that are threatening (under canvassing and closing) will trigger more SCA than embarrassment. Embarrassing situations will produce significantly greater embarrassment than SCA; threatening situations will produce significantly greater SCA than embarrassment.

The above are within sample comparisons of scores across embarrassment and SCA. We also wish to test for the effect of colleagues as the level of felt embarrassment and the level of felt SCA.

Hypothesis 2: When colleagues are present versus absent during embarrassing situations, embarrassment will become more intense; when colleagues are present versus absent during anxiety aggravating situations, SCA will become more intense.

These are across sample comparisons between scores from Experiments 1 and 2.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Respondents and procedure

For Experiment 1, 83 sales professionals were recruited from an executive sales program and were given a gift worth 25 guilders (about US$12) in exchange for their participation. The sample has three salient characteristics: (1) the majority of salespersons were male (77%), (2) the ages of the salespeople were spread differently across the age groups: younger than 30 (18.8%), 31–40 (66.6%), and older than 40 (14.6%), and (3) the average sales experience was 5.8 years (S.D. = 5.55). The salespeople sell products and services for industrial, financial, and fast moving consumer goods firms.

For Experiment 2, 50 sales professionals participated from another executive sales program in exchange for a gift worth 25 Dutch Guilders (or about US$12). The sample has three salient characteristics: (1) the majority of salespersons were male (88%), (2) the ages of the salespeople were spread differently across the age groups: younger than 30 (16%), 31–40 (64%), and older than 40 (20%), and (3) the average sales experience was 6.7 years (S.D. = 6.98). The salespeople sell products and services for industrial, financial, and fast moving consumer goods firms.

In both experiments, all participants read four scenarios: two embarrassment scenarios and two SCA scenarios. The scenarios contained typical embarrassing and anxiety provoking situations. The self-provoked embarrassing situation exposed a mistake made by the salesperson in his/her presentation to the customer. The customer-provoked embarrassing situations contained an episode where the customer belittled his/her own colleague in front of the salesperson. After reading each scenario, the participants indicated the intensity that they felt embarrassed and SCA. For instance, the following instructions were given for SCA during closing:

> You have been with a customer and with much difficulty you finally are able to propose an offer. You thus reach the point where you attempt to close the deal. The deal is important to you, and you told your colleagues earlier that you are about

to reach your quota and you also know that other competitors may match the price of your of-fer…You put forth your offer to the customer to close the deal…Please indicate how you feel during such situations…

Likewise, the following instructions were given for customer provoked-embarrassment:

During a sales conversation a customer whom you already know for a long time suddenly makes denigrating comments about his colleagues who also are present during the conversation. Please indicate how you feel in such uneasy situations…

Note that the questionnaires were randomized in the following way. For each experiment, we used eight different designs in which the orders of the four scenarios within each experiment were interchanged between embarrassment and SCA items.

5.1.2. Development of scales

In order to construct a pool of items for the embarrassment scales for Study 1, we selected four items according to the following procedure. Focus-group interviews were organized within the firms with salespeople who did not participate in the main study, and several tests were administered in stages, as suggested by DeVellis (1991). First, definitions for the dimensions of embarrassment were created and used as a discussion framework in the focus-group interviews. During the focus-group interviews, sales-people were asked to imagine what takes place in a

sales encounter when they experience embarrassment. The resulting items were collected in a pool, screened once more, and refined. Besides using focus groups to select items, we scrutinized scales from the psychology literature and compared items with the ones generated in the focus groups for consistency, comprehensiveness, and comprehensibility (e.g., Miller & Tangney, 1994). From the larger pool of items, we selected two items that reflect the active component of embarrassment ("I forcefully pull my eyes away from the customer" and "I suddenly look away or skyward") and two items that represent the passive component of embarrassment ("I feel I look like a fool" and "I suddenly blush"). These four items also were adapted for use in the customer-provoked embarrassment scales. In order to estimate SCA (during canvassing and closing), we used six items from the SCA scale (Verbeke & Bagozzi, 2000). For instance, "I am afraid to look the customer in the eyes" or "my hands start to tremble." Table 1 summarizes the means, standard deviations, and reliabilities for all measures used in Study 1. All reliabilities are satisfactory except for embarrassment in Experiment 1 under the closing condition where $\alpha = 0.67$. As with the embarrassment items, eight different orderings of SCA items were used so as to avoid biases. All items used in Study 1 are available from the authors on request.

5.2. Results

As can be seen in Table 1 for Experiment 1 and Hypothesis 1, self-provoked embarrassing behaviors

Table 1
Study 1: Felt embarrassment and SCA during embarrassing- and anxiety-provoking situations

Condition	Embarrassment		SCA		Test of difference
	M	S.D. (α)	M	S.D. (α)	
Experiment 1 (n = 83)					
Embarrassment (self-provoked)	3.25	1.23 (0.79)	2.51	1.05 (0.80)	$t = 6.50, p < 0.001$
Embarrassment (customer-provoked)	2.39	1.15 (0.79)	2.13	1.00 (0.83)	$t = 3.44, p < 0.01$
SCA (canvassing)	1.77	0.80 (0.70)	2.05	0.80 (0.83)	$t = -0.4.22, p < 0.01$
SCA (closing)	1.88	0.82 (0.67)	1.97	0.79 (0.82)	$t = -1.74, p < 0.09$
Experiment 2 (n = 50)					
Embarrassment (self-provoked)	3.45	1.26 (0.72)	2.55	1.08 (0.82)	$t = 7.06, p < 0.001$
Embarrassment (customer-provoked)	2.32	1.15 (0.80)	2.08	0.97 (0.97)	$t = 2.50, p < 0.05$
SCA (canvassing)	2.30	1.19 (0.81)	2.22	1.02 (0.89)	$t = 0.72$, ns
SCA (closing)	1.91	0.94 (0.80)	2.11	1.06 (0.87)	$t = -2.84, p < 0.01$

lead to higher levels of felt embarrassment than SCA ($M_e = 3.25$ vs. $M_a = 2.51$, $t = 6.50$, $p < 0.001$), and customer-provoked behaviors lead to higher levels of felt embarrassment than SCA ($M_e = 2.39$ vs. $M_a = 2.13$, $t = 3.44$, $p < 0.01$). Likewise, SCA during canvassing lead to greater levels of felt SCA than embarrassment ($M_a = 2.05$ vs. $M_e = 1.77$, $t = 4.22$, $p < 0.01$), and SCA during closing lead to marginally greater levels of felt SCA than embarrassment ($M_a = 1.97$ vs. $M_e = 1.88$, $t = 1.74$, $p < 0.09$). Hypothesis 1 is therefore supported.

Looking next at Table 1, Experiment 2 and Hypothesis 1, we see the effects on the differences between manipulated embarrassment and SCA when colleagues are copresent. Self-provoked embarrassing behaviors made in the presence of colleagues produce greater felt embarrassment than SCA ($M_e = 3.45$ vs. $M_a = 2.55$, $t = 7.06$, $p < 0.001$), while customer-provoked embarrassing behaviors made in the presence of colleagues also produce greater felt embarrassment than SCA ($M_e = 2.32$ vs. $M_a = 2.08$, $t = 2.50$, $p < 0.05$). SCA during canvassing and experienced in the presence of colleagues fails to produce differences in felt levels of SCA and embarrassment ($M_a = 2.22$ vs. $M_e = 2.30$, $t = 0.72$, ns), while SCA during closing in the presence of colleagues yields greater SCA than embarrassment ($M_a = 2.11$ vs. $M_e = 1.91$, $t = 2.84$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported for embarrassment but only partially supported for SCA when colleagues are present in the salesperson-customer interaction.

The effects of inclusion of colleagues as observers on emotional intensity can be seen further by comparing means for embarrassment and SCA across Experiments 1 and 2. Overall, with one exception, the presence of colleagues does not intensify felt embarrassment or SCA. The exception occurred for felt embarrassment under the SCA-canvassing scenario; here, the presence of colleagues intensified felt embarrassment ($M_e = 1.77$ in Experiment 1 and $M_e = 2.30$ in Experiment 2, $t = 3.10$, $p < 01$). In sum, Hypothesis 2 was largely unsupported.

5.3. Discussion

In this study, we found that it is possible to manipulate different conditions producing embarrassment and SCA. The former occurs suddenly in response to unexpected situations that threaten the self-

concept. The latter is forward looking and reflects worry in response to anticipated failure. Thus, convergent and discriminant validity of measures of embarrassment and SCA have been demonstrated in our field study of salespeople. Moreover, the findings were replicated in a second independent sample of salespeople. However, the hypothesized augmenting effect of the presence of colleagues during the customer-salesperson interaction did not receive much support (only one of eight pairs of means differed; test not shown in Table 1). It was probably the case that embarrassment and SCA, while low to moderate in absolute levels on the scales, are still salient and impactful because of their nature and implications, and the mere addition of colleagues is not sufficient to increase these effects further. Now that we established the distinction between embarrassment and SCA, we turn to a deeper exploration of the nature of embarrassment in personal selling.

6. Study 2: embarrassment as a fourfold syndrome of responses and the effects of embarrassment and SCA on coping, adaptive resource utilization, and avoidance behavior

The goal of this second study is to investigate embarrassment as a syndrome of responses. Based upon our earlier description of embarrassment, we propose the following:

Proposition 1: Embarrassment consists of a four-fold syndrome: (1) an awareness both that one has committed a transgression and the customer perceives this, accompanied by passive responses such as blushing and awkward feelings, as well as active responses such as looking away, (2) engagement in coping responses in order to repair one's transgression (e.g., reconciliation) or making the transgression by the customer look less awful (e.g., engaging in face-work), (3) loss of adaptive resources, and finally, (4) generation of avoidant behaviors in relation to future contact with the customer, by the salesperson who has witnessed the customer commit the embarrassing incident or else perpetrated it him- or herself.

We first turn to hypotheses concerning what coping strategies salespeople can use as a consequence of *self-provoked* embarrassment (customer-provoked

embarrassment is considered later). Based in part upon the work of Miller (1996), we propose a range of possible coping strategies that unfolds after an embarrassing incident. First, salespeople might wish to *flee* the situation, but this could make the situation worse, because it would stigmatize the salesperson as unprofessional. Next, salespeople might display acquiescence or subservience towards customers (Keltner & Buswell, 1997). For example, salespeople might choose to *apologize* or engage in *remediation*. However, the psychology literature (e.g., Miller, 1996) alerts us to a disadvantage with this strategy: excessive subservience can make the customer feel uneasy, and thus promote embarrassment on the part of the customer (these have been termed "negative contagion effects"). In addition, it is likely that salespeople will engage also in face-saving work, which is intended to convey that one recognizes that he/she made a transgression, and at the same time permitting the salesperson some semblance of control (Miller, 1996, p. 170). In such cases, salespeople might seek to *evade or ignore* the situation, engage in *justifications*, or make *humorous* comments. Finally, salespeople might cope by *blaming* others (a face-saving response). However, we expect that most salespeople would resist doing this because of its unprofessional character and likely long-run negative effects on the relationship. We empirically test all the coping responses mentioned above.

We next consider *customer-provoked* embarrassment. Customer-provoked embarrassment places the salesperson in a different social situation. More specifically, whereas self-provoked embarrassment emerges from one's own transgression, in the case of customer-provoked embarrassment, the salesperson becomes embarrassed as a result of the customer's actions. However, the transgression here places the customer in a disadvantageous position, because if the salesperson were to show that he or she is embarrassed by the customer's actions, the customer might in turn become uncomfortable and this therefore could interfere with the functional character of the transaction. Needless to say, this is not a situation that salespeople desire, and therefore the most appropriate response is often to *evade* the situation. In addition, salespeople also might seek to engage in *justification* (e.g., saying to themselves, "it is not as bad as it appears") or *apologize*, because these

responses provide support for the customer who finds him or herself in an undesirable situation. Thus, evasion and justification maintain the salesperson's demeanor of respect and keep the relationship in balance. The other coping strategies identified by Miller (1996) (i.e., *fleeing* the situation and *making light or fun* of the situation) might happen but are potentially damaging to sales relationships for customer-provoked embarrassment. All these possibilities will be empirically tested.

Next, recalling that embarrassment (self- and customer-provoked) leaves people temporarily confused and vulnerable, putting them in a compromising position and threatening their poise and rapport (Lewittes & Simmons, 1975). In addition to inducing the above coping responses, feelings of embarrassment might adversely affect *adaptive resource utilization* (e.g., Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Weitz, 1981). This could occur in loss of flexibility, inability to switch from formal topics to informal topics when needed, becoming less assertive, and finally avoiding asking for a commitment and closing deals altogether.

Lastly, and consistent with research in psychology (e.g., Miller, 1996), we expect that salespeople will seek to avoid the customer who has witnessed his/her past transgression, which will be reflected in procrastination with issues concerning the customer and a tendency toward outright neglect to return messages or meet regularly in extreme cases. We hypothesize that *avoidance* of future contact will not be directly affected by embarrassment *per se* but will be a consequence of both coping and loss of adaptive resources in response to embarrassment. Significantly, loss of adaptive resources is itself likely to be an unpleasant experience and therefore lead to fear of future contact. In other words, loss of adaptive resources is hypothesized to mediate the effects of embarrassment on avoidance behaviors. We expect this to be especially true for customer- versus self-provoked embarrassment. Under the former, the salesperson harbors considerable uncertainty as to how the customer will react because he or she (i.e., the customer) perpetrated the embarrassing act and the salesperson has little control over the customer's responses. But for self-provoked embarrassment, the salesperson committed the offensive act and is in control of how to act him- or herself subsequently, and therefore he/she experiences little uncertainty as a

consequence of the above arguments. Three hypotheses are made:

Hypothesis 3a: Self-provoked embarrassment will induce coping responses. Which particular coping response will occur is left as an empirical question.

Hypothesis 3b: Customer-provoked embarrassment will induce coping responses. Which particular responses will occur is left as an empirical question.

Hypotheses 4a: Self-provoked embarrassment will negatively affect adaptive resource utilization. Which particular adaptive response will be affected is left as an empirical question.

Hypothesis 4b: Customer-provoked embarrassment will negatively affect adaptive resource utilization. Which particular adaptive resource will be affected is left as an empirical question.

Hypotheses 5a: Both coping and adaptive resource utilization will mediate the effects of self-provoked embarrassment on avoidance.

Hypotheses 5b: Both coping and adaptive resource utilization will mediate the effects of customer-provoked embarrassment on avoidance.

In order to compare SCA with embarrassment, we also take a closer look at SCA. In accordance with Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000), we focus on SCA during canvassing and closing. Thus, we conceive SCA as a response (consisting of negative self-evaluation, perceived negative self-evaluation from customer, and physiological symptoms), which provokes a loss of adaptive resources (or protective actions as Verbeke & Bagozzi, 2000, called it). We therefore hypothesize:

Hypothesis 6a (6b): As a consequence of SCA during canvassing (closing), salespeople will experience flexibility loss and avoidance of formal/informal behaviors; further, SCA will lead to loss of assertiveness during canvassing, and inability to close during closing situations.

Hypothesis 7a (7b): As a consequence of SCA during canvassing (closing), salespeople will feel an urge to avoid future contact with the customer.

Psychologists have also proposed two personality variables that might predict why some people experience embarrassment more than others. First, people with an intense fear of negative evaluations have been found to more likely experience embarrassment in these situations than people less afraid of negative evaluations (Leary & Kowalski, 1995, p. 85; Miller, 1996, p. 125). Second, the higher a person scores on the trait of embarrassibility (Miller, 1996, p. 98), the more likely they are to develop embarrassment in specific awkward situations (see also Modigliani, 1971). The fact that these personality variables correlate with embarrassment is consistent with the observation that embarrassment reflects a person's "continual social monitoring of the self which motivates individuals to conform, avoid social exclusion, and restore relations that have been disrupted by social transgressions" (Keltner & Buswell, 1997, p. 260). In line with Leary and Kowalski (1995) and Miller (1996), we also suggest that individual differences in fear of negative evaluation and embarrassibility will predict salespeople's embarrassment. In addition, based upon Verbeke and Bagozzi's (2000) findings, we anticipate that fear of negative evaluation will predict SCA. And because people who are prone to experience embarrassment also report heightened concern for other's evaluations (Miller, 1996), we expect that embarrassibility will predict SCA (see also Keltner & Buswell, 1997, for an overview).

Hypothesis 8a (8b): Fear of negative evaluation and embarrassibility will affect self-(customer) provoked embarrassment.

Hypothesis 9a (9b): Fear of negative evaluation and embarrassibility will affect SCA during canvassing (closing).

Note that hypotheses 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6, and 7 examine the effect of embarrassing and anxiety-provoking situations on coping, adaptive resource utilization, and avoidance tendencies. Therefore, inclusion of the individual difference variables (fear of negative evaluation and embarrassibility) allows us to examine the effects of the situations while holding constant personality traits.

Finally, we wish to test two models where embarrassment and SCA are simultaneously considered. The first model specifies: personality control variables → (embarrassment and SCA) → loss adaptive resources → avoidance of future contact; whereas the second model stipulates: personality control variables → (embarrassment and SCA) → coping → avoid-

avoidance of future contact. We predict that embarrassment (self- and customer-provoked) and SCA (during canvassing and closing) each will influence their corresponding adaptive resource utilization outcomes and *not* the non-corresponding outcomes associated with the other emotional reaction. We investigate two separate models for two reasons. First, one large model would be too complex with too many parameters to estimate and introduce too much multicollinearity. Second, and related to the above issue, the sample size of 96 is too small to accommodate one large model in our study.

6.1. Methodology

6.1.1. Sampling

Salespeople working in three different firms (two delivering financial services and one selling healthcare related products) were asked to participate in Study 2. These salespeople participated in a training program intended to improve their selling skills. Before the training started, salespeople were asked to fill in the questionnaire and in exchange they received a gift worth 25 Dutch Guilders (or about US$12). A total of 96 salespeople filled in the questionnaire, which was printed in four different versions corresponding to different orderings for the four scenarios to avoid carryover effects (Bickart, 1993).

The sample has three salient characteristics: (1) the majority of salespersons are male (79%); this composition is typical of business in Holland (e.g., Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohavy, & Sanders, 1990; Verbeke & Bagozzi, 2000), (2) the ages of salespeople are spread across the age groups as follows: younger than 30 (14.6%), 30–40 (35.4%), and older than 41 (50%), and (3) the average sales experience was 14.2 years (S.D. = 11.86).

6.1.2. Development of the scales

For the embarrassment scale, we used the same items as in Study 1. The coping scale items were constructed based upon the above-mentioned coping dimensions developed by Miller (1996). It should be noted that the coping strategies for self-provoked and customer-provoked embarrassment differ from one another. In the case of customer-provoked embarrassment, we did not include remediation or blame coping, because we felt they do not fit well the

selling situation and represent inappropriate actions unlikely to be done by most professional salespersons. Similarly, items for loss of adaptive resources from embarrassment and SCA were adapted from Verbeke and Bagozzi (2000). Those scales included such dimensions as loss of flexibility, inability to switch from formal to informal conversation topics, loss of assertiveness, and loss of closing resources. It should be noted that for SCA during canvassing, we did not use the closing items, and in the case of closing, we did not measure the loss of assertiveness, in order to maintain the proper fit and correspondence between measures and the situation at hand. Finally, we constructed avoidance items for both embarrassment and SCA. The means and standard deviations and the reliabilities of measures for the two embarrassment scales and two SCA scales in each of the four conditions were assessed by means of Cronbach α and are presented in Table 2. Of the 36 scales, 33 show satisfactory reliabilities and 3 show low reliabilities (i.e., α was only 0.44 for apology coping under self-provoked embarrassment, 0.59 for loss of assertiveness under self-provoked embarrassment, and 0.60 for inability to close under self-provoked embarrassment).

All participants read four scenarios: two embarrassment scenarios and two SCA scenarios.[4] Next, for each scenario, participants indicated the intensity of embarrassment provoked by oneself or by a customer, coping responses, loss of adaptive resources, and finally urges to avoid future contact. The following instruction, for instance, was used for self-provoked embarrassment:

> During a sales conversation with the customer's buying team, you are presenting a profit-prognosis showing that if the customer buys the product or service from you, future earnings are guaranteed for that customer. All of a sudden one of the buyers shows that you have made a fundamental mistake in your computation, and that if the customer buys your product or service, it will result in a loss for the customer... Please indicate how weak or intense the feelings mentioned here

---

[4] All instructions and questions used in the study are rough translations in English of the original questionnaire, which was in Dutch.

Table 2
Study 2: Means, standard deviations, and reliabilities of measures

	Mean	Standard deviations	α's
Fear of negative evaluation	3.47	1.05	0.89
Embarrassibility	3.07	0.81	0.75
Embarrassment experience	3.74[a], 2.69[b]	1.16[a], 1.23[b]	0.72[a], 0.71[b]
Flight coping	3.20, 2.78	1.77, 1.63	0.89, 0.92
Evasion coping	2.27, 3.92	1.31, 1.70	0.88, 0.93
Humor coping	3.07, 2.65	1.51, 1.44	0.71, 0.70
Justification coping	1.97, 2.32	1.22, 1.40	0.87, 0.85
Remediation coping	5.47	1.40	0.80
Apology coping	5.52, 2.65	1.28, 1.55	0.44, 0.75
Blame coping	1.86	1.23	0.90
Loss of flexibility	3.01, 2.65	1.47, 1.26	0.80, 0.79
Inability to switch from formal to informal	2.86, 2.80	1.69, 1.51	0.96, 0.92
Loss of assertiveness	2.51, 2.50	1.13, 1.19	0.59, 0.64
Inability to close	3.32, 2.47	1.49, 1.20	0.60, 0.74
Avoidance	2.52, 2.42	1.38, 1.30	0.88, 0.96
SCA	2.40[c], 2.49[d]	87[c], 0.89[d]	0.90[c], 0.91[d]
Loss of assertiveness	2.79, 3.06	1.13, 1.18	0.80, 0.83
Loss of flexibility	2.95, 2.88	1.33, 1.38	0.72, 0.80
Inability to switch from formal to informal	2.38, 2.27	1.37, 1.27	0.87, 0.92
Avoidance	2.47, 2.32	1.21, 1.05	0.82, 0.87

[a] Self-provoked embarrassment case.
[b] Customer-provoked embarrassment case.
[c] Canvassing.
[d] Closing.

emerge when such uneasy situations occur to you...?

To test hypotheses, LISREL was used (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). The goodness of fit of the models was assessed with chi-square tests and the comparative fit index (CFI). Discussion of these indices may be found in Bentler (1990). Satisfactory model fits are indicated by non-significant chi-square tests and CFI values greater than or equal to 0.90. To test for mediation, we investigated whether paths from exogenous variables to downstream endogenous variables were non-significant or not. We compared the chi-square for the model with direct effects to the chi-square for the model with fully mediated effects. Because the fully mediated model was the theoretical model entailed by our hypotheses, we used this as our baseline model and compared it to the model with direct paths. We thank a reviewer for recommending this test. Note that our tests refer to the model where coping and loss of adaptive resources mediate the effects of felt embarrassment on avoidance and to the model where coping mediates the effects of SCA on avoidance. In all models, social anxiety and embarrassibility are personality covariates controlled for in tests of hypotheses and all variables are sums of items.

7. Results

The findings show that the *self-provoked* embarrassment model fits well overall: $\chi^2(1) = 1.56$, $p = 0.21$, and CFI = 1.00. To test for mediation of the effects of embarrassment by coping responses, we added a direct path from embarrassment to avoidance. This path was non-significant ($\beta = 0.11$, ns) and the chi-square difference test thus supports the conclusion that coping responses fully mediate the effects of embarrassment on avoidance ($\chi^2_d(1) = 1.56$, $p > 0.21$). Table 3 presents the results for parameter estimates and explained variances for *self-provoked* embarrassment. It can be seen that desire to flee the situation ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$) and apology coping ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$) are the only significant coping responses to felt embarrassment (Hypothesis 3a). Next, it can be seen that self-provoked embarrassment causes the

Table 3
The self-provoked embarrassment model (standardized parameter estimates)

Dependent variable	Independent variables														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	R^2
Personality controls															
1. Fear of negative evaluation															
2. Embarrassibility															
Embarrassment															
3. Experience of embarrassment	0.38***	0.10													0.18
Coping															
4. Flight coping	0.07	0.16	0.33**												0.19
5. Evasion coping	0.20	0.06	− 0.05												0.04
6. Humor coping	0.12	0.12	− 0.01												0.04
7. Justification coping	0.06	0.04	0.08												0.02
8. Remediation coping	0.09	− 0.17	0.07												0.03
9. Apology coping	− 0.14	0.03	0.30**												0.08
10. Blame coping	0.22	0.11	− 0.08												0.06
Loss of adaptive resources															
11. Loss of flexibility	0.19	0.09	0.24*												0.16
12. Inability formal/informal	0.20*	0.09	0.33**												0.23
13. Loss assertiveness	0.22*	0.13	0.27**												0.22
14. Inability to close	0.23*	0.06	0.30**												0.22
Avoidance future contact															
15. Avoidance	0.03	0.03		0.13	− 0.03	0.02	− 0.05	0.00	− 0.07	0.24	0.23	0.14	0.09	0.24	0.57

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

salesperson to lose adaptive resources: namely, loss of flexibility ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$), inability to switch from formal to informal conversation topics ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$), loss of assertiveness ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$), and finally inability to close ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$) are all significantly affected by embarrassment (Hypothesis 4a). It should be noted as well that, in addition to being mediated by embarrassment and coping (Hypothesis 8a), fear of negative evaluations directly affect adaptive resource utilization: namely formal/informal ($\gamma = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$), loss of assertiveness ($\gamma = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$), and inability to close ($\gamma = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$) are all significantly affected by fear of negative evaluation. These results were not expected. Avoidance of future contact with the customers was not affected by personality control variables, coping responses, or loss of adaptive resources, as hypothesized for self-provoked embarrassment (thus Hypothesis 5a did not receive support).

The findings also show that the *customer-provoked* embarrassment model fits well: $\chi^2(1) = 0.08$, $p = 0.77$, and CFI = 1.00. To test for the nature of mediation of the effects of embarrassment by coping responses, we added a direct path from embarrassment to avoidance. The chi-square difference test shows that the direct path must be rejected: ($\chi^2_d(1) = 0.08$, $p > 0.77$). The path from embarrassment to avoidance is non-significant ($\beta = 0.03$, ns), Thus, coping responses fully mediate the effect of embarrassment on avoidance. Table 4 presents the parameter estimates and explained variance for the customer-provoked embarrassment model. It can be seen that a somewhat different pattern results than for self-provoked embarrassment. Justification coping ($\beta = 0.35$) is now the dominant coping strategy when one feels embarrassed (Hypothesis 3b). In addition, the salespeople's ability to remain poised (loss of adaptive resources) is also affected, but to a lesser extent than under self-provoked embarrassment:

Table 4
The customer-provoked embarrassment model (standardized parameter estimates)

Dependent variable	Independent variables												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	R^2
Personality controls													
1. Fear of negative evaluation													
2. Embarrassibility													
Embarrassment													
3. Experience of embarrassment	0.29**		0.25*										0.19
Coping													
4. Flight coping	0.09	0.14	0.18										0.10
5. Evasion coping	0.28*	− 0.02	− 0.11										0.07
6. Humor coping	0.21*	0.19	0.06										0.12
7. Justification coping	0.31**	− 0.08	0.35***										0.27
8. Apology coping	0.07	0.04	0.17										0.05
Loss of adaptive resources													
9. Loss flexibility	0.33**	− 0.14	0.24*										0.19
10. Inability formal/informal	0.28**	0.20*	0.09										0.19
11. Loss assertiveness	0.25*	0.15	0.28**										0.26
12. Inability to close	0.22*	0.10	0.11										0.11
Avoidance future contact													
13. Avoidance	0.04	0.11		0.21*	0.06	− 0.19	0.04	− 0.18*	0.30**	0.10	0.04	0.25*	0.44

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

loss of flexibility ($\beta = 0.24$) and loss of assertiveness ($\beta = 0.28$) are significantly affected by embarrassment (Hypothesis 4b). Salespeople also tend to avoid future contact with the customer as a consequence of flight coping ($\beta = 0.21$) (even though this coping strategy was not a function of embarrassment), loss of flexibility ($\beta = 0.30$), and inability to close ($\beta = 0.25$) (Hypothesis 5b). However, when the salesperson apologized to the customer, s/he tended to increase contact ($\beta = − 0.18$), which was not predicted. Finally, felt embarrassment was affected significantly by both fear of negative evaluation ($\beta = 0.29$) and embarrassibility ($\beta = 0.25$) (Hypothesis 8b). Table 3 also reveals significant direct effects of fear of negative evaluation on coping tendencies (i.e., on evasion $\beta = 0.28$, humor $\beta = 0.21$, and on justification $\beta = 0.31$), as well as on the loss of adaptive resources (i.e., flexibility $\beta = 0.33$, formal/informal conversation $\beta = 0.28$, assertiveness $\beta = 0.25$, and closing $\beta = 0.22$). These results were not expected.

Next, we scrutinize whether salespeople's SCA affects their adaptive resources. The overall fit of the model for SCA under *canvassing* was satisfactory: $\chi^2(1) = 3.26$, $p = 0.07$, and CFI = 0.99. The chi-square difference test of the hypothesis that loss of adaptive resources mediates all the effects of SCA on avoidance cannot be rejected ($\chi^2_d(1) = 3.26$, $p > 0.07$). The direct path from SCA to avoidance is non-significant ($\beta = 0.23$, ns). Therefore, given the findings for paths discussed below, we can conclude that loss of adaptive resources fully mediates the effects of SCA on avoidance. As shown in Table 5, SCA causes loss of adaptive resources: namely loss of assertiveness ($\beta = 0.60$), loss of flexibility ($\beta = 0.45$), and inability to switch formal/informal conversation topics ($\beta = 0.49$) are all significantly affected by SCA. Avoidance responses are found to be significant functions of sales call anxiety ($\beta = 0.23$) and loss of assertiveness ($\beta = 0.20$). SCA is significantly affected by fear of negative evaluation ($\beta = 0.44$) and embar-

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Table 5
The SCA model under canvassing (standardized parameter estimates)

Dependent variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	R^2
Personality controls							
1. Fear of negative evaluation							
2. Embarrassibility							
Sales call anxiety							
3. Sales call anxiety	0.44***	0.28**					0.34
Loss of adaptive resources							
4. Loss of flexibility	0.20*	0.05	0.60**				0.57
5. Inability formal/informal	0.18	− 0.16	0.45**				0.27
6. Loss assertiveness	0.12	− 0.09	0.49***				0.29
Avoidance future contact							
7. Avoidance	0.04	0.11	0.23*	0.05	0.20	0.20*	0.36

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

rassibility (0.28). Therefore, Hypotheses 6a, 7a, and 9a are supported.

The overall fit of the model for SCA under *closing* was satisfactory: $\chi^2(1) = 4.88$, $p \cong 0.03$, and CFI = 0.98. However, a chi-square difference test of the hypothesis that loss of adaptive resources mediates all the effects of SCA on avoidance must be rejected ($\chi^2_d(1) = 4.88$, $p < 0.03$). The direct path from SCA to avoidance is significant ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$). Since

SCA influences loss of adaptive resources significantly, and loss of adaptive resources influences avoidance significantly (as discussed below), we see that loss of adaptive resources partially mediates the effects of SCA on avoidance. As presented in Table 6, SCA significantly influences inability to close ($\beta = 0.56$), loss of flexibility ($\beta = 0.50$), and inability to switch formal/informal conversation topics ($\beta = 0.52$). Avoidance responses were found to be direct functions of

Table 6
The SCA model under closing (standardizes parameter estimates)

Dependent variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	R^2
Personality controls							
1. Fear of negative evaluation							
2. Embarrassibility							
Sales call anxiety							
3. Sales call anxiety	0.54***	0.16					0.37
Loss of adaptive resources							
4. Loss of flexibility	0.18*	0.12	0.56***				0.54
5. Inability formal/informal	0.10	− 0.22*	0.50***				0.28
6. Loss assertiveness	0.08	− 0.04	0.52***				0.32
Avoidance future contact							
7. Avoidance	0.02	0.07	0.26*	0.16	0.18*	0.24**	0.51

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

SCA ($\beta = 0.26$), inability to switch formal/informal conversation topics ($\beta = 0.18$), and loss of assertiveness ($\beta = 0.24$). In addition, SCA is significantly affected by fear of negative evaluation ($\beta = 0.54$) but not by embarrassment. Thus, Hypothesis 6b and 7b are supported, but Hypothesis 9b is only partially supported.

Looking back at Tables 3–6, the R^2's reveal information on how embarrassment affects coping and loss of adaptive resources and how the latter, in turn, affect avoidance. First, as shown in Tables 3 and 4, neither self-provoked nor customer-provoked embarrassment generates high R^2's on coping (the range is between 0.02 and 0.19 for self-provoked embarrassment and between 0.05 and 0.27 for customer provoked embarrassment). Second, notice in Tables 3 and 4 that both self-provoked embarrassment and customer provoked embarrassment generate high

R^2's for loss of adaptive resources (the range is between 0.16 and 0.23 for the former and between 0.11 and 0.26 for the latter). Third, notice in Tables 5 and 6 that the R^2's for loss of adaptive resource utilization under SCA are substantial (the range is between 0.27 and 0.57 for canvassing, and between 0.28 and 0.54 for closing). Fourth, the amount of explained variance is substantial for avoidance under the self- and customer-provoked embarrassment and under SCA for canvassing and closing (the range is between 0.36 and 0.57).

Table 7 presents the results for the model where personality control variables → (embarrassment and SCA) → loss of adaptive resources → avoidance of future contact. Here we found that the model fits well: $\chi^2(18) = 16.85$, $p \cong 0.57$, and CFI = 1.00). The chi-square difference test of the hypothesis that loss of adaptive resources mediates all the effects of experi-

Table 7
Combined model with embarrassment and SCA, resource utilization, and avoidance of future contact, with personality covariates (standardized parameter estimates)

Dependent variable	Independent variables										R^2
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Personality controls											
1. Fear of negative evaluation											
2. Embarrassibility											
Embarrassment											
3. Self-provoked	0.38***	0.10									0.18
4. Customer-provoked	0.29**	0.25*									0.19
Sales call anxiety											
5. Canvassing	0.44***	0.28**									0.34
6. Closing	0.54***	0.16									0.37
Loss of adaptive resources											
7. Self-provoked	0.15	0.06	0.38***	− 0.07	0.20	0.06					0.35
8. Customer-provoked	0.16	0.03	0.19	0.12	0.25	0.06					0.36
9. SCA canvassing	0.04	− 0.08	− 0.02	0.14	0.16	0.57***					0.57
10. SCA closing	0.11	− 0.13	0.14	− 0.02	0.36	0.36***					0.59
Avoidance future contact											
11. Self-provoked	0.03	0.04					0.67***	0.05	0.42	− 0.28	0.55
12. Customer-provoked	0.01	0.05					0.09	0.50***	− 0.26	0.25	0.39
13. SCA canvassing	0.05	0.17*					0.07	− 0.22	0.34*	0.32*	0.40
14. SCA closing	0.09	0.10					0.14	− 0.17	0.22	0.44**	0.50

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

enced embarrassment on avoidance cannot be rejected ($\chi_d^2(16) = 16.85$, $p > 0.40$). Recall that the primary predictions in this model call for embarrassment and SCA to each influence their corresponding adaptive resource utilization outcomes and *not* the non-corresponding outcomes associated with the other emotional reactions. The relevant findings here can be seen in the 16 entries in Table 7 produced by crossing rows 7–10 with columns 3–6. Here, we find that self-provoked embarrassment indeed significantly predicts loss of adaptive resources ($\beta = 0.38$) in the self-provoked case and does not significantly predict any of the other three adaptive resource utilization outcomes, as hypothesized. Customer-provoked embarrassment does not significantly predict loss of adaptive resource utilization in the customer-provoked case, contrary to hypotheses, and also does not predict any of the other three adaptive resource utilization outcomes in the other cases, as forecast. SCA for canvassing does not predict adaptive resource utilization under canvassing, contrary to hypotheses, and does not predict any of the other three adaptive resource utilization outcomes, as expected. SCA for closing predicts adaptive resource utilization under closing ($\beta = 0.36$), as hypothesized, and does not predict two of the remaining adaptive resource utilization outcomes, as hypothesized (it does predict adaptive resource utilization under canvassing ($\beta = 0.57$), however, contrary to forecasts). In sum, 13 of the 16 hypotheses are borne out for the prediction of adaptive resource utilization by embarrassment and SCA. This suggests that embarrassment and SCA supply distinct contributions to adaptive resource utilization and their measures achieve discriminant validity (in Study 1, we established discriminant validity by use of experimental designs).

The secondary results displayed in Table 7 concern the predictions of avoidance responses by response utilization. The relevant findings here can be seen in the coefficients formed by crossing rows 11–14 with columns 7–10: self-provoked adaptive resource utilization loss significantly predicts future avoidance (self provoked) ($\beta = 0.67$); customer-provoked adaptive resource utilization loss significantly predicts avoidance (customer provoked) ($\beta = 0.50$); SCA canvassing predicts avoidance (SCA canvassing) ($\beta = 0.34$); and SCA closing significantly predicts avoidance (SCA closing) ($\beta = 0.44$). Of the 16

possible predictions, it can be seen that the hypotheses are fully borne out in 15 cases. The lone exception occurs when adaptive resource utilization under SCA closing is found to significantly predict avoidance of future contact under SCA canvassing ($\beta = 0.32$). These findings suggest that the measures of the four adaptive resource utilization variables achieve discriminant validity.

Table 8 shows the findings for the models where personality control variables $\rightarrow$ (embarrassment and SCA) $\rightarrow$ coping reactions $\rightarrow$ avoidance of future contact. Here, we found that the model fits satisfactorily: $\chi^2(18) = 49.19$, $p \cong 0.00$, and CFI $= 0.97$. The chi-square difference test of the hypothesis that coping mediates all the effects of experienced embarrassment and SCA on avoidance must be rejected ($\chi_d^2(16) = 49.19$, $p < 0.001$). Two of 16 direct effects were significant: embarrassment on self-provoked avoidance ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 2.58$) and on customer-provoked avoidance ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 2.40$). Again, recall that the primary predictions in this model call for embarrassment and SCA to each influence their corresponding coping outcomes and *not* the non-corresponding outcomes associated with the other emotional reactions. The relevant findings here can be seen in the entries in Table 8 formed by crossing rows 7–18 with columns 3–6. Notice first that self-provoked embarrassment influences two coping reactions significantly: flight coping ($\beta = 0.26$) and apology coping ($\beta = 0.27$). These are consistent with hypotheses. Notice next that self-provoked embarrassment does not significantly predict any of the five coping reactions concerning the customer as source, as anticipated. Next, it can be seen that customer-provoked embarrassment does not significantly impact any of the seven coping reactions concerning the self as source, as forecast. Customer-provoked embarrassment does significantly influence justification coping ($\beta = 0.24$) for the case where the customer is the source, which is consistent with predictions.

We would expect that SCA (canvassing and closing) would not significantly affect coping. Indeed, this is the case in 21 of the 24 cases. The only exceptions occur for justification coping ($\beta = 0.69$) and blame coping ($\beta = 0.37$), where SCA canvassing is the source and for justification coping ($\beta = -0.41$, where SCA closing is the source).

Table 8
Combined model with embarrassment and SCA, coping, and avoidance of future contact, with personality covariates (standardized parameter estimates)

Dependent variable	Independent variables																		R^2
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
Personality controls																			
1. Fear of negative evaluation																			
2. Embarrassibility																			
Embarrassment																			
3. Self-provoked	0.38***	0.13																	0.19
4. Customer-provoked	0.31**	0.27**																	0.20
Sales call anxiety																			
5. Canvassing	0.35***	0.34***																	0.29
6. Closing	0.55***	0.21*																	0.39
Coping (self)																			
7. Flight coping	0.05	0.14	0.26*	0.12	− 0.04	0.07													0.20
8. Evasion coping	0.23	0.07	0.03	− 0.16	0.22	− 0.16													0.07
9. Humor coping	− 0.03	0.08	− 0.01	− 0.14	0.05	0.33													0.13
10. Justification coping	0.03	− 0.10	0.15	− 0.07	0.69***	− 0.41*													0.17
11. Remediation coping	0.10	− 0.16	0.05	0.09	− 0.01	− 0.08													0.04
12. Apology coping	− 0.09	0.00	0.27*	0.14	0.03	− 0.15													0.10
13. Blame coping	0.19	0.01	− 0.15	0.21	0.37*	− 0.24													0.15
Coping (customer)																			
14. Flight coping	0.08	0.08	0.12	0.11	0.36	− 0.22													0.14
15. Evasion coping	0.31*	0.05	0.09	− 0.14	− 0.11	− 0.05													0.09
16. Humor coping	0.14	0.21	0.11	− 0.01	− 0.13	0.21													0.16
17. Justification coping	0.17	− 0.12	0.18	0.24*	0.15	0.07													0.31
18. Apology coping	0.06	0.02	0.09	0.13	0.19	− 0.15													0.06
Avoidance future contact																			
19. Self-provoked	0.15	0.12					0.40***	− 0.14	0.18	− 0.02	0.00	− 0.11	0.26**	0.04	0.15	− 0.31**	0.19	0.02	0.44
20. Customer-provoked	0.19*	0.07					0.40***	− 0.22	0.31**	− 0.01	0.02	− 0.02	0.12	0.12	− 0.05	− 0.28*	0.02	− 0.12	0.38
21. Canvassing	0.23*	0.19					0.17	− 0.01	0.22*	− 0.14	0.05	− 0.17	0.06	0.08	− 0.09	− 0.16	0.19	− 0.07	0.29
22. Closing	0.33	0.12					0.26*	− 0.05	0.19	− 0.05	0.00	− 0.10	0.09	− 0.03	− 0.18	− 0.14	0.18	− 0.01	0.34

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

8. General discussion

Taking the lead from psychology, we interpreted the *experience of embarrassment* as an on–off response (Buss, 2001; Miller, 1996), which emerges when either salespeople suddenly violate social conventions and expectations, thus increasing social exposure (self-provoked embarrassment), or when a customer makes insulting remarks in the presence of the salesperson (customer-provoked embarrassment). Both self- and customer-provoked embarrassment elicit characteristic physiological reactions that make salespeople feel confused and disoriented in front of customers. This disorientation is marked by such behaviors as gaze aversion (an active response) as well as feeling foolish and ambivalent (passive responses) and is consistent with recent research in psychology by Keltner and Buswell (1997) who note that, within an embarrassing episode, there is an utterly disorienting moment (manifest in confused feelings and feelings of an awkward self-consciousness) and also a sense that one's very self is being threatened. We found that salespeople with high scores on fear of negative evaluation (and to a lesser extent trait embarrassibility) are especially prone to develop state embarrassment as a consequence of self- and customer-provoked embarrassing moments. Once again, and consistent with the psychology literature (e.g., Keltner & Buswell, 1997), the findings show that embarrassment is an emotion that emerges because of continual self-monitoring in relation to significant others, which is prototypical of SC-emotions. The higher a person's score on fear of negative evaluations the more likely they will experience SCA. We will come back to this issue when we discuss the implications for managers below.

The experience of embarrassment negatively affects people's *adaptive resource utilization*. We found this to occur to a greater extent for the case of self-provoked embarrassment than customer-provoked embarrassment. The loss of adaptive resources shows that embarrassment reactions "are pre-emptive, in that they take top priority in the control of action and thought" (Fischer & Tangney, 1995, p. 8). This finding is consistent also with Keltner and Buswell's (1997) observation that embarrassment has appeasement functions; for the salespeople under study, self-provoked embarrassment interfered with their poise and self-confidence and led them to scale-down their assertive-

ness. From this perspective, we see that embarrassment can have significant negative consequences through its reduction in the case of adaptive resources, which in turn impacts performance negatively. It should be emphasized that that SCA produced greater loss of adaptive resources than did embarrassment.

Perhaps even more interesting is the question of whether embarrassment incites *coping* because, by choosing the right coping strategy, salespeople have the opportunity to shape the way customers respond to them. Our study showed that self- and customer-provoked embarrassment produce distinct coping strategies. In the case of self-provoked embarrassment, salespeople undertake efforts to engage in apology coping, thus underscoring the notion that salespeople perform reconciliatory actions. At the same time, self-provoked embarrassment also triggered flight coping responses, thus underscoring the observation that embarrassment has negative consequences as well. We expected that other coping strategies, such as humor coping, might be activated because they function to pacify difficult situations. But this failed to happen in our study. Customer-provoked embarrassment resulted in justification efforts at coping, probably because the salesperson seeks to bring the customer back into the conversation so as to mollify the feelings of the customer. What also was apparent in our study was that salespeople with a high score on fear of negative evaluations also engaged in evasion, humor, and justification coping (these occurred as direct effects). Differently put, these coping responses are quasi-automatic responses that occur once salespeople find themselves in an embarrassing situation. These responses are what Keltner and Haidt (2001) call replacement emotions: that is, they are signals of embarrassment in which sensitivity to social norms is expressed but without embarrassment actually occurring. A somewhat similar example of displacement occurs when people inappropriately apologize for trivial or even non-existent transgressions. In such cases, the hyper-apologizer and person coping with embarrassment by use of humor proceed from a fear of negative evaluations. But in many cases humor coping is known to potentially have a negative impact on people. Again, the coping strategies we found in our research suggest that embarrassment has positive as well as negative effects.

Finally, embarrassment has the danger of producing dysfunctional avoidance responses. This particularly was the case for customer-provoked embarrassment where the salesperson becomes acutely bothered by the customer's past inappropriate behavior. In short, we found evidence for Keltner and Buswell's (1997, p. 261) claim that "[t]o avoid embarrassment, individuals will sacrifice personal gain...", as well as Miller's (1996, p. 163) assertion that "people sacrifice their own long-term well-being in order to evade temporary, short-term embarrassment." Indeed, avoidance coping is especially likely to have long run negative effects on organizations where high lifetime values are placed on customers.

Our research demonstrates that self- and customer-provoked embarrassment are different emotions, each creating its own effects on selling behaviors.[5] Self-provoked embarrassment leads to specific coping reactions (flight and apology) and also loss of adaptive resources. Customer-provoked embarrassment mainly produces justification coping and triggers avoidance of future contact with the customer.

Our study began with a discussion of embarrassment, which is an emotion sometimes discounted by people and even regarded to be silly or inconsequential. It might be concluded that, salespeople should work to become immune to embarrassment. But such psychologists as Miller (1996) and Keltner and Haidt (1999) claim that this would ultimately be dysfunctional if it were to happen. Indeed, embarrassment has specific functions in social life and is viewed as a gift to humans analogous to the functions of pain. That is, embarrassment is a "social counterpart to physical pain; just as it would be hard to survive if we had no pain to warn us about threats to our physical well-being, we would not last long if we had no...embarrassment to warn us of possible rebuke and rejection" (Miller & Leary, 1992, p. 216). Similarly, we also believe that, although salespeople should engage in face work or emotional labor and thereby inhibit their emotions when necessary, it is important that they also "leak" their emotions

on occasion so as to reveal their true character to others. So we might ask, from what we learned in this study, how should salespeople be trained so as to remain sensitive persons yet manage their embarrassment to their own and the firm's advantage?

A number of points can be made in this regard. First, we agree with Feldman-Barret and Gross (2001) that the ability to manage emotions rests in part on the capability to distinguish among emotions at the verbal level. It should be noted that, as in English, embarrassment and shame often are used synonymously in Dutch, so language and common usage makes it difficult to distinguish among these emotions. Nevertheless, people respond with unique embarrassment and shame reactions because the *social conditions* producing them differ, as developed earlier in the paper. Given particular emotional responses, people also differ in how they cope with these responses, and they can be trained to be better copers. For training and coaching, exercises can be developed heightening how salespeople should conceive of their emotions and become aware of them, what their functions are, and how salespeople should regulate their expression and control of their emotions. We stress that salespeople ought to remain sensitive to the conditions producing their emotions and their specific responses, and that embarrassment in and by itself is not necessarily negative because it enables salespeople to adhere to mutually functional social norms. As a consequence, it would be a mistake to try to make salespeople become immune to embarrassment (see also Miller, 1996, p. 198).

Second, to the extent that salespeople develop fear as a consequence of embarrassment, they must learn special tactics to regulate this fear. One threat of such fear is to one's poise and demeanor during a sales encounter. Specific scripts can be learned to activate at the onset of an embarrassing episode. For example, salespeople should practice and mentally rehearse appropriate statements of apology for different classes of social or professional blunders that frequently occur. Further, immediately following the making of an apology, salespeople need to learn how to quickly channel the conversation back to the selling situation at hand. Miller (1996) proposes that the size of a blunder matters. For truly critical blunders, a quick, sincere apology is typically warranted, but for minor mistakes, ignoring or evading the episode may be best. Likewise,

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[5] Using an experimental design, the authors explored whether different embarrassing situations—specifically, customer makes racist comments, customer makes sexist comments or makes negative comments about the sales profession—would be experienced more or less intensely than the customer who makes negative comments about his colleagues (as is used in the customer provoked embarrassment). No differences in intensity were found.

for customer-provoked embarrassment, it may be wise to develop scripts of support, such that the salesperson responds quickly to such episodes with understanding and sympathy and does not dwell or fawn upon the blunders of the customer. Second, salespeople should be taught, perhaps through role-playing, to consciously struggle to overcome their fear of visiting customers with whom they previously experienced embarrassing episodes. Watching others role-play in training exercises can be an effective way of conveying that one can overcome such fearful events and that others share such problems and even morally support one's efforts in overcoming them.

Third, to the degree that certain kinds of embarrassment might function to pacify relationships, management should explore whether salespeople should be taught to strategically commit acts that embarrass the self or even embarrass the customer. Indeed, people at times intentionally embarrass one another in order to socialize or strengthen relationships (e.g., Sharkey, 1997). This occurs, for example in playful teasing and is a commonly used communicative tactic (e.g., Kowalski, Howerton, & McKenzie, 2000). Self-deprecating revelations of embarrassing incidents serve as rituals to begin conversations or facilitate on-going conversations. Of course, the purposive inducement of embarrassment raises both ethical and practical issues and risks producing negative consequences, such as pressures to procrastinate or avoid the customer, should the embarrassment get out of hand. Research is needed into when and how embarrassment can and should be a tactical ploy.

Fourth, we believe that a program of education about the experience of emotions, the situations that cause them, and their effects, can be productive because, when salespeople come to understand their own and other's embarrassment, they might better communicate with their customers. Recent research by Dawes, Lee, and Dowling (1998), for instance, shows how buyer's anticipated embarrassment causes them to heighten their stakes in the buying center. As salespeople learn more about how their customers become embarrassed, they should become better managers of the selling process.

Finally, training programs need to give consideration to self-esteem and how salespeople should come to think of themselves in healthy ways, especially as a result of the opinions of customers, sales managers,

and respected peers. The excessive fear of negative evaluation is a potentially destructive trait because it exacerbates SCA and the susceptibility to embarrassment. Salespeople need to be taught to overcome their anxieties and to develop realistic interpretations of the evaluations made by others of their work and personal characteristics.

9. Limitations and future research

SC-emotions are important aspects of personal selling. We focused upon one common emotion in this regard, embarrassment, and found that it gives rise to specific behaviors and influences one's adaptability and relationships with customers. There are other SC-emotions, however, that might be relevant for future study and that have not been studied in the sales literature. For example, envy, pride, shame, and guilt are common SC-emotions and may have relevance in personal selling situations. Verbeke and Bagozzi (2002) showed that shame is distinct from embarrassment and both influence performance through coping responses.

As Keltner and Buswell (1997) suggest, embarrassment is an indirect sign that certain rules or expectations have been transgressed. But this appraisal is embedded within specific situations. For instance, when salespeople are embarrassed in an highly unequal customer–salesperson relationship (e.g., when the customer has great power over the salesperson), one and the same transgression might be appraised as less embarrassing when customer and salesperson have known each other a long time or operate in a more or less egalitarian fashion. We studied the latter case, but recognize that the former is worthy of study. Thus, instead of focusing on different embarrassing stimuli, one could study different social situations in which the same embarrassing incident occurs. In addition, these different situations could provoke different coping strategies, which also should be investigated in the future.

We stress that our research used the scenario method to induce emotions. Other approaches such as the case study method and experimentation should be used to complement the present study.

Some research suggests that women regulate their emotions differentially from men (Brody, 1999). It

would be interesting to focus in more depth on whether women (men) are more prone to experiencing embarrassment, particularly when dealing with male (female) customers, supervisors, or other salespeople. Same-gender interactions may also differ between woman-to-woman and man-to-man sales transactions. At the same time, women might interpret and control their feelings better than men, as some research suggests (Pugliesi & Shook, 1997). As more and more women enter the sales force, as is happening in the United States and needs to happen in Europe and elsewhere, this topic will take on more importance.

The culture in which a person functions plays an important role in the emergence of SC-emotions. Whether a person operates in an interdependent- or independent-based culture may make a difference in the experience of and coping with SC-emotions and their effects on performance (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For instance, people who are more interdependent might be more prone to developing embarrassment than independent-minded salespeople. Yet, interdependent-minded salespeople might be better at coping with embarrassment than people in independent-based cultures. Differently put, it could be that Asians, for instance, may lose less adaptive resources in the case of self-provoked embarrassment than Americans or Europeans. Our study only dealt with a single culture and cannot address such issues.

Finally, it is possible that embarrassment could become a strategic tool in interpersonal relationships. By feeling embarrassed, salespeople show indirectly that they are sensitive to the social norms of the social situations in which they find themselves and so indirectly communicate sensitivity to the customer. Salespeople can be taught to engage in proficient coping strategies that will make their customers feel at ease. In this regard, studies are needed into which coping strategies are most productive for customer–salesperson relationships. For instance, in daily life, humor sometimes turns embarrassing moments into less threatening directions. But we do not know to what extent this occurs in commercial relationships. Similarly, some coping strategies might make the relationship between salesperson and customer better, others worse. As salespeople enact coping strategies, they engage in what Hochschild (1983) calls emotional work. But emotional work must be rooted in a sincere sensitivity to what is expected in the social situations, lest salespersons develop personal feelings of inauthenticity or customers come to perceive salespeople as artificial or even phony. We know little about to what extent this occurs in customer–salesperson contexts.

Acknowledgements

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