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An Examination of Consumers’ Awkward Service Experiences (ASEs)

Sokkha Tuy

ABSTRACT

Awkward encounters represent the cringe-inducing scenes of social discomfort, which exist in various facets of our everyday interactions. The significance of awkward encounters in day-to-day life is shown through a recent survey that reported 34% of Millennials (Generation Y), experienced over three awkward-related incidents per week. In social media also, the socially awkward penguin is a character used as a means of sharing social situations surrounding misconduct, and a loss of script about how to respond in a social situation. Given that service researchers have treated the service encounter as a social situation, there is reason to believe that awkward encounters could be pervasive in service contexts also. This will be termed the awkward service encounter.

Awkward service encounters represent a set of negative incidents, which have the potential to damage consumer-company relationships through embarrassment; a strong self-conscious emotion that is highly influential of consumer behaviours. For instance, embarrassment can impact shoplifting behaviours, re-patronage intentions, and negative word of mouth activities. This means that these encounters will have serious implications for a firm’s bottom line profits. Awkward service encounters however, have rarely been focussed on, in the services literature. Existing research that does touch on awkward encounters, taps into different aspects of this situation, for instance the awkward silence, or situations prone to awkwardness such as developmental disorders, stigmatised and non-stigmatised interactions and social awkwardness. Perhaps the most attention awkward encounters have received however, is in the embarrassment domain where an awkward interaction is argued as a primary cause of embarrassment. Nevertheless, even in this research area, there are gaps in understanding the awkward encounter and its experience because embarrassment scholars have only gone as far as providing core descriptions. These descriptions suggest the involvement of disconfirmed expectations, disruptions, discomfort, and uncertainty. Furthermore, by only examining awkward encounters through the lens of embarrassment, results may incorrectly suggest that most (if not all) awkward encounters are embarrassing.

To address this gap, this research views the awkward service encounter as a stressful service situation. Accordingly cognitive appraisal theory is used as the foundation to develop a conceptual model of consumers’ awkward service experience (ASE). In building this model, additional theories and concepts are also integrated including role theory, fundamental human needs, cognitive disequilibrium and mindfulness, to arrive at a complete model of consumers’ ASEs. This model is then examined through three studies. Study One focussed on identifying (using the critical incident technique) the underlying features and common types of awkward service encounters. Study Two focussed on exploring (using semi-structured interviews) the consumers’ ASE, paying particular attention to identifying key components (i.e. cognitions, emotions, and behaviours). Finally Study Three focussed on statistically modelling the relationships between the key components within consumers’ ASEs, and further attempted to differentiate when embarrassment was likely (or unlikely).
The findings from this research suggest that the underlying features of awkward service encounters involve normative violations or non-normative service situations. In terms of the specific types of awkward service encounters, 13 were identified based on the two underlying features and interestingly, only approximately 50% of the awkward service encounters were additionally reported as embarrassing. Moving to the ASE, this research finds that once faced with an awkward service encounter, the experience involves perceived threats (effectance and esteem), cognitive disequilibrium, mindful alertness, and active monologues. In terms of emotions, within ASEs, the customer will feel confused or embarrassed and coping will then take on the form of problem-focussed coping or avoidance coping. Finally, the relationships between these key components of consumers’ ASEs were successfully modelled. This not only captured the nature of these experiences, but also determined when embarrassment was likely to be present in an ASE. Overall, these findings contribute to the services and the embarrassment literature, and further helps managers become more proactive in dealing with awkward service encounters.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I’d like to start off by thanking my supervisor, Dr. Laszlo Sajtos. During my PhD process you were always simply an email away. Your dedication and patience towards this project is greatly appreciated and I am happy to have had you as a supervisor.

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Last but not least, thank you to my family. Thank you mum for being your caring self. When I needed something, I knew I could always count on you. Thank you Dad. Although you aren’t here with us anymore, you showed us early on your love for education and how valuable it was to have one. I will not be the person I am today without the both of you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 CHAPTER ONE OVERVIEW

This first chapter introduces the thesis, presenting the problem orientation, the resulting research objective, and the contributions of the research. Following the introduction, the chapter then outlines a broad overview of the chapters that follow (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Chapter One Overview

1.1 PROBLEM ORIENTATION

There is potential for awkward encounters everywhere. Awkward encounters represent the universal human experience of cringe-inducing scenes of social discomfort, which exist in various facets of our everyday interactions (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). A recent survey based on a representative sample of the United States population found that 34% of Millennials (Generation Y) experienced over three uncomfortable (awkward) social encounters per week (Wakefield Research, 2013). In popular and social media, the significance of awkward encounters are evident in movies, TV programs and phone apps (Bercovici, 2014), as well as in hashtags and memes (Coscia, 2013). The socially awkward penguin for instance, is widely used as a means of describing and sharing social encounters around misconduct and a loss of script for how to respond in a situation. In the mobile applications market also, various apps have emerged on Google Play to assist users in awkward encounters, or to help the user avoid awkward encounters.

Given the prevalence of awkward encounters occurring in various facets of our lives, service encounters, as a form of social interaction, are a potentially rich source of awkwardness. Awkward encounters have been
documented in relation to services, including dining (TripAdvisor, 2013), shopping (Dahl, Manchanda, & Argo, 2001), medical treatment (Epstein et al., 1998), fitness (TODAY Health, 2013), and health and beauty (Elezovic, 2015). Take the following example:

A few weeks ago, I found myself in an extremely awkward situation... [I was] sitting at the hair salon while my stylist blatantly oppressed her assistant...my stylist was perfectly polite to me, asking me what I wanted and making small talk with me then...she'd turn to her hapless assistant and bark orders, sighing loudly and rolling her eyes when she didn't think this poor young woman was fast enough and criticizing her technique in front of me. Then she'd turn back to me like nothing was amiss. It was excruciating to watch, and by the end of it, I felt kind of guilty that I hadn't said anything in the assistant's defence. I slunk out of the salon, leaving the smallest tip I could manage, and vowed never to go back. (Elezovic, 2015)

The incident related above is just one of many reported on the internet, reflecting an awkward encounter occurring in the service context. Other examples showing its pervasiveness in consumer-company interactions include employees following consumers too closely in the store, or overfriendly employees whom disclose unwanted personal information to the consumer. In this research, these encounters will be referred to as awkward service encounters.

Awkward service encounters have been overlooked as a researchable consumer phenomenon, however it is important to understand these encounters because of the potential detrimental effects for firms. First, awkward service encounters represent a significant source of consumer distress (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b), with a close connection to self-conscious emotions such as embarrassment (Keltner & Buswell, 1997). With the exception of Nichols, Raska, and Flint (2015), existing research on consumer embarrassment has demonstrated its capacity to negatively influence aspects of the consumer-firm relationship, resulting in reduced patronage (Grace, 2009; Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007), increased likelihood of negative word of mouth (WOM) intentions (Wu & Mattila, 2013), and store switching due to the associated stress (Aylott & Mitchell, 1999). Such actions may have negative consequences for the firm's bottom line profits in the long-term.

Other evidence also points to the potential for awkward service encounters to shape consumer behaviours in a negative manner. A recent survey showed a third of consumers forfeited their right to return items to a retailer, because they felt that it would be too awkward to do so (Trading Standards Institute, 2010). In another survey conducted by the E-tailing Group, an e-commerce consultancy, 49% of respondents did not shop more on their mobile phones because they found it to be an awkward experience (Freedman, 2011).

Finally, the nature of awkward service encounters provides another urgent justification for this study. Traditional recovery strategies (such as apologies and compensation) that may be effective in other unfavourable encounters, such as service failures, may be less effective because, although consumers can also cause their own awkward service encounter, re-patronage intentions may still be affected. For example, a consumer whose card has been declined may not wish to return (out of sheer embarrassment) to the store despite the issue being no direct fault of the store.
1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To address the gap in research on awkward service encounters (and their experience), the studies reported in this thesis focussed on three objectives in two phases of research. The objectives of the first phase were to obtain a deeper understanding of awkward service encounters with particular emphasis on gaining an understanding of the circumstances that give rise to awkward service encounters, and the nature (determined by the key components) of the experience as perceived by consumers. The second phase objective was to empirically examine a consumer model of the Awkward Service Experience (ASE) through statistical analysis in order to establish the relationships between key constructs.

PHASE ONE:

Objective One: To explore, from the consumer’s perspective, the underlying features and common types of awkward service encounters, and their association to embarrassment (through their co-occurrence in percentage terms).

Objective One was to explore, from the consumer’s perspective, the underlying features and common types of awkward service encounters, and to see how often embarrassment was present in these encounters. To achieve this objective, this research first collected a large sample of critical incidents that were considered awkward by consumers. The sample of incidents was obtained through a crowdsourcing platform called CrowdFlower, and was restricted to respondents from the United States. Once screened to ensure each incident met the criteria for inclusion in the study, in accordance with previous studies that have examined critical incidents (e.g. Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994; Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990), the pool of incidents was systematically analysed using content analysis. This process of content analysis allowed the researcher to identify the underlying features, as well as group similar cases of awkward service encounters, to arrive at a classification of the common types of awkward service encounters. Following this process, the presence of embarrassment within these encounters was calculated to determine the level of its occurrence.

The findings relating to this first objective helped the researcher gain a better understanding of the primary conditions that were necessary to trigger an awkward service encounter, and also how these primary conditions were reflected in the common types of awkward service encounters. Using this knowledge, firms will be able to detect awkward service encounters and develop strategies aimed at better managing service situations.

Objective Two: To explore consumers’ ASEs, in particular by identifying key cognitions, emotions, behaviours and other possible consequences

Objective Two was to explore consumers’ ASEs, in particular by identifying key cognitions, emotions, behaviours and other possible consequences. By exploring the nature of the experience itself, the research objective was to tap into consumers’ inner states whilst undergoing this experience. To achieve this objective, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 consumers. The primary criterion for selection of potential interviewees was that they must have had an ASE (as a customer) which they remembered in sufficient detail.
to enable full discussion. In line with this selection criterion, the semi-structured interviews explored the interviewees’ personal understandings of the term awkward, their general experience of awkward encounters, and finally their personal ASE in detail. The semi-structured approach ensured that discussions covered key issues deemed necessary, whilst also allowing the interviewee freedom to raise additional points of discussion. Next, the interviews were analysed using content analysis to arrive at a general description of consumers’ ASE.

The outcome of Objective Two was a thorough understanding of what consumers undergo in this experience, including what state they are in, the primary cognitive and emotional elements and what it could then mean for the firm involved. The researcher was not only able to understand the particular experience, but also better able to differentiate between consumers’ ASEs and other common experiences in the services context. Furthermore, examining their cognitive and emotional responses in detail gave an initial indication of whether awkward encounters can be distinguished from embarrassing situations; in other words, what is unique to awkward encounters.

**PHASE TWO:**

**Objective Three: To empirically examine consumers’ ASEs, in particular, by modelling the relationship between key components (identified from Objective Two), and additionally distinguish between processes that predict when embarrassment is or is not likely**

Objective Three was to empirically examine consumers’ ASEs, in particular, by modelling the relationship between its key components. To achieve this objective, the researcher built on the knowledge obtained from Objective One and Objective Two (as reflected in the findings from Studies One and Two respectively). Objective One of this research helped to identify the underlying situational features likely to trigger this experience, whilst Objective Two helped to identify and confirm key constructs central to the consumer’s ASE. Using this knowledge, the researcher then developed an empirical model of consumers’ ASEs for testing. Next, the researcher sought existing scale items (or, if needed, created scale items) to reflect the key constructs so that a survey could be created for data collection. As with Study One, respondents were obtained through a crowdsourcing platform called CrowdFlower, and were restricted to respondents from the United States. The survey required each respondent to read a scenario and then complete the scale items as if they were the main customer in the scenario. Once the sample was collected, the data was cleaned and analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM).

The outcome of this research objective was a more thorough understanding of the interrelationships occurring within the ASE. In particular, these interrelationships could help identify the different pathways in which different consequential emotions arise.
1.3 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

There are a number of contributions from this research. These contributions are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Research Contributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Contributions</th>
<th>Managerial Contributions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identifies the underlying features and common types of awkward service encounters</td>
<td>1. Presents managers with common types of awkward service encounters to monitor and hence develop strategies for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explores consumers’ ASEs</td>
<td>2. Allows managers to understand what consumers go through in an ASE, hence allowing strategies to be designed for better intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>- identifies key cognitions and emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- generates a general and complete description of how the consumer’s ASE unfolds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Presents and tests an empirical model of consumers’ ASEs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- helps generate a better understanding of the mechanisms in consumers’ ASEs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Contributes to the embarrassment literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- redefines (and clarifies) the relationship between awkward encounters and embarrassment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- helps to establish an understanding of awkward encounters that can occur independently of embarrassment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Contributes to the services literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- introduces a new, relatively underexplored phenomenon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- details how the consumer’s ASE unfolds</td>
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1.3.1 Academic Contributions

As awkward service encounters are currently an under-studied phenomenon, there is no existing framework that addresses these types of encounters. The first academic contribution therefore lies in the identification of the underlying features that are likely to trigger awkward service encounters, as well as the common types of awkward service encounters. Based on this knowledge, researchers will be able to scrutinise the similarities and differences between awkward service encounters and other types of incidents that are commonly researched in the services literature, such as service failures (Bitner et al., 1990; Kelley, Hoffman, & Davis, 1993).

As a second contribution, by exploring the nature and experience of awkward service encounters (i.e. the ASE) through semi-structured interviews, this research obtained a complete description and understanding of what consumers go through. This is in direct contrast to previous studies that have only referred to the awkward encounter loosely as a loss of script moment, however did not further suggest what the experience meant or what it involved (Miller, 1996; Parrott, Sabini, & Silver, 1988; Silver, Sabini, & Parrott, 1987). Understanding the nature of the experience will enable researchers to know how awkward service encounters impact
consumers psychologically, for instance. Furthermore, researchers will be in a better position to compare and contrast awkward service encounters (and its experience) with other consumer experiences currently examined in the services literature, for instance customer rage episodes (McColl-Kennedy, Patterson, Smith, & Brady, 2009; Surachartkumtonkun, Patterson, & McColl-Kennedy, 2013). If the underlying conditions for awkward service encounters are found to be similar to other types of incidents examined in the service encounter, this could raise future avenues for research in terms of understanding how the same triggers can lead to different experiences (assuming the components within the experience are in fact different). This would reiterate the importance of cognitive appraisal theory in stressful situations (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986; Lazarus, 1991).

A third contribution for this research is that it tests an empirical model of consumers’ ASEs. This means that direct relationships between different components of the ASE will be determined, leading to an understanding of the links between the inner mechanisms of this experience, for instance when embarrassment is more likely (Higuchi & Fukada, 2002; Parrott et al., 1988; Parrott & Smith, 1991).

Another fruitful contribution will be to embarrassment research. Previous research has examined the relationship between the awkward encounter and embarrassment through the lens of embarrassing situations (Miller, 1996; Sharkey & Stafford, 1990). In contrast, this research is the first to adopt a direct approach by examining this relationship through the lens of awkward encounters to then arrive at its emotional consequences, such as embarrassment. In terms of examining the relationship between the awkward encounter and embarrassment, the prior approach was deemed problematic because it failed to account for additional emotional consequences, which may be more closely tied to appraisals of ‘losing the script’, in comparison to appraisals of negative social evaluations. By using, instead, a direct approach which began from an examination of awkward encounters (Babcock, 1988), other emotional consequences could be introduced to better scrutinise the links between different appraisals and embarrassment (amongst other potential emotions). Second, by beginning the examination from the perspective of awkward encounters, it is potentially easier to identify awkward encounters that are uniquely awkward but not embarrassing. With prior approaches, this piece of information would have been overlooked because by examining the relationship through the lens of embarrassing situations only, by default, incidents that are uniquely awkward would be excluded from the analysis as the incidents have already been predetermined as embarrassing (Miller, 1992; Sharkey & Stafford, 1990).

Finally, this research is the first to introduce awkward service encounters as a new, relatively underexplored phenomenon into the services literature. Through the integration of several studies to assess this phenomenon (for example, identifying the causes of awkward service encounters, the core cognitive components of the experience, as well as the emotional consequences), the findings will contribute to a more thorough understanding of the nature of these encounters and consumers’ ASEs. This understanding is crucial because such encounters may serve as a potential, yet overlooked reason for why consumers choose to avoid, or don’t actively engage in, certain types of services (Keaveney, 1995). Consequently, this thesis will also provide the foundation for future research on awkward encounters and consumers’ ASEs.
1.3.2 Managerial Contributions

The first managerial contribution for this research lies with the identification of underlying features and common types of awkward service encounters. When firms know the features that are likely to cause an awkward service encounter, and further possess specific descriptions and examples of common types, they will be better equipped to identify situations that are likely to become awkward. In addition to being able to identify awkward service encounters, firms may also use this knowledge to adopt a preventative approach. A preventative response would involve the firm making use of this knowledge to redesign and improve employee training, to minimise circumstances that are likely to generate (or contribute to) an awkward service encounter.

As a second managerial contribution, this thesis will allow managers to be aware of what consumers are going through in an ASE. This is useful for “in the moment” action because employees can be trained to detect the consumer’s state and immediately respond with actions that quickly put the consumer at ease, hence minimising the subsequent generation of other negative consequences such as embarrassment. This second managerial contribution can also be used to extend current recovery strategies. Traditional service recoveries often emphasise addressing the failure. However by knowing more clearly how these encounters impact consumers, strategies can be designed to help make the consumer feel better about the incident.

As a general outcome, this research will bring to the attention of managers, an additional type of encounter that can have detrimental effects on the firm. By bringing this to their attention, managers will be able to actively allocate resources aimed at addressing these events.

1.4 THESIS OUTLINE

The thesis consists of eight chapters. For illustrative purposes, the eight chapters are presented in Figure 2. Chapter One provides an introduction to the thesis. As a starting point, the introduction covers important aspects to set the foundation for the chapters that follow. These aspects include the problem orientation, the study’s research objectives, and the contributions of the research. Next, a literature review is presented in Chapter Two. The literature review outlines the existing research areas relating to awkward encounters and the experience of them. These research areas are identified as embarrassment research (both in the social psychology and consumer domains), research on the socially awkward situation, and finally service research, specifically in the area of service encounters (or frontline service exchanges).

In Chapter Three, a conceptual model of consumers’ ASE is presented. The chapter first provides background for a number of theories and concepts that are believed to play a role in understanding the ASE. Once this background is established, the chapter then moves to link the concepts into a conceptual model of consumers’ ASE. Using this conceptual model as a base, three studies are conducted. The first two studies are exploratory. The first, described in Chapter Four, focusses on exploring the situational stressors (i.e. the awkward service encounter) that initiate the ASE. The second, described in Chapter Five, focusses on exploring the ASE and in particular identifying the key cognitive, emotional, and coping responses in this experience. Next, based on
the previous chapters, Chapter Six develops an empirical model of consumers’ ASEs and presents a number of hypotheses, which are then tested in Chapter Seven. Finally, in Chapter Eight, the findings of this study are discussed, the contributions outlined, and the limitations and future research opportunities addressed.

Figure 2: Thesis Outline

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Chapter One: Introduction
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Chapter Two: Literature Review
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Chapter Three: Conceptual Model of Consumers’ ASE
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Chapter Four: Exploratory Study One
  ↓
Chapter Five: Exploratory Study Two
  ↓
Chapter Six: Empirical Model and Hypothesis Development
  ↓
Chapter Seven: Study Three
  ↓
Chapter Eight: Discussion
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2.0 CHAPTER TWO OVERVIEW

Because the literature on awkward encounters, and the experience of them, is limited, the focus of Chapter Two is existing research areas that relate to the current topic of interest. The review will set the foundation for this research. The review begins with an introduction to awkward service encounters and their experience (see Figure 3). Next, given that embarrassment has been argued as an emotional consequence of awkward encounters, the review then focuses on embarrassment in the social psychology domain, as well as embarrassment in consumer research, as an indirect lens on the phenomenon of awkwardness. The review then moves on to discuss recent work on the socially awkward situation and ends with an overview of a subset of service research that is believed to overlap with awkward service encounters. Based on this review, the research gap is established and the foundation for the current research set. The chapter then finishes with a brief summary.

Figure 3: Chapter Two Overview
2.1 AN INTRODUCTION TO AWKWARD SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

The service encounter is defined as the moment of goal-oriented social interaction between the customer and the service provider, which may include face-to-face interactions, or those through service elements and technological mediums such as phone calls (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985). Managing this person to person encounter is important because the resulting service experience, defined as "the service encounter and/or service process that creates the customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses which result in a mental mark, a memory" (Edvardsson, 2005, p. 129), can significantly influence consumers’ future behaviours and evaluations. Unfavourable service experiences can lead to a number of negative consumer responses such as decreased loyalty (Sousa & Voss, 2009), satisfaction (Weun, Beatty, & Jones, 2004) and increased exit behaviours (Keaveney, 1995). Such experiences can also involve negative emotions such as anger (Bonifield & Cole, 2007; Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003) which further drive negative responses.

In the current research, a differentiation is made between the awkward service encounter, and the ASE. The awkward service encounter represents the moment of interaction (or the service situation thus the terms encounter and situation will be used interchangeably), whilst the ASE represents the encounter and the service process in its entirety. This means that the experience also captures the cognitive, emotional, and coping responses. The aim of this research is not only to examine the awkward service encounter, in other words, the customer encounters that are labelled as awkward, but also the ASE.

Currently, studies focusing solely on awkward encounters are scarce. The limited existing research taps into different aspects of this encounter or encounters that are latent with awkwardness. Examples are the awkward silence (Dindia, 1986; McLaughlin & Cody, 1982), stigmatised and non-stigmatised interactions (Hebl, Tickle, & Heatherton, 2000), social awkwardness (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b), developmental disorders (e.g. Heavey, Phillips, Baron-Cohen, & Rutter, 2000), and consumer embarrassment (Dahl et al., 2001; Grace, 2009). It is therefore not surprising that formal definitions of what constitutes an awkward experience, or an awkward encounter, are rare. In the context of medical services, Epstein et al. (1998, p. 438) defined an awkward encounter as when a party to the interaction "showed enough uneasiness, embarrassment, distraction, or nervousness to disrupt the flow of conversation." Dictionary entries for the term awkward (Higgleton, Thomson, Allen, & Schwartz, 1999; Landau, 1998; Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2012) as an adjective highlight encounters that are: (a) not smooth and difficult to deal with, (b) uncomfortable, and (c) causing embarrassment or perplexity. These dictionary entries indicate that an awkward encounter is one that is uncomfortable because it is not smooth and so is difficult to deal with, clearly overlapping with Epstein et al.’s (1998) definition. Finally, in the embarrassment literature an awkward encounter is described as involving a loss of script moment (Miller, 1996; Silver et al., 1987), which occurs as a temporary disturbance or incapacitation of the encounter (Goffman, 1967; Manstead & Semin, 1981). Other descriptors used to capture an awkward encounter include being without a course of action, being uncomfortable or confused, and a
botched performance (Miller, 1992, 1996; Sabini, Siepmann, Stein, & Meyerowitz, 2000; Silver et al., 1987; Weinberg, 1968; Withers & Sherblom, 2008). Given these largely fragmented descriptions, existing research on embarrassment (both in social psychology and consumer research), and social awkwardness may be best drawn upon to first gain a preliminary understanding of the awkwardness phenomena. This preliminary understanding will also enable the identification of research gaps to justify the importance of the present research.

2.2 EMBARRASSMENT IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

2.2.1 Awkward Account of Embarrassment

In social psychology, embarrassment is recognised as an unpleasant emotion that has the power to regulate behaviours (Miller, 1996; Tracy et al., 2007). People can go to extremes simply to avoid exposure to or experiencing embarrassment, such as forgoing monetary benefits or sacrificing their health (e.g. Leary & Dobbins, 1983; Lerman, Rimer, Trock, Balshem, & Engstrom, 1990). Given its significant impact on behaviour, social psychologists have argued for the importance of understanding embarrassment and, in particular, the causes of embarrassment. Currently, there are a number of embarrassment explanations (referred to as embarrassment accounts) which each argue for their own primary cause of embarrassment (Keltner & Buswell, 1997). These include the awkward account (Goffman, 1956; Parrott et al., 1988; Silver et al., 1987), the social evaluation account (Edelmann, 1981, 1985; Manstead & Semin, 1981), the situational loss of self-esteem account (Modigliani, 1968, 1971), and the personal standards account (Babcock, 1988).

The primary argument of the awkward account is that for every social situation, there is a specific social script that must be adhered to; failure to act in accordance with the social script results in embarrassment. In contrast, the social evaluation account suggests that it is the presence of others and fear of unwanted social evaluations that causes embarrassment. The situational loss of self-esteem account stresses that it is a circumstantial blow to one’s sense of self-worth that causes embarrassment. Finally, the personal standards account stresses that embarrassment is caused by a concern with upholding certain personal standards, and there is a painful realisation of failing oneself. Of the above embarrassment accounts, the most relevant for the current research is the awkward account as this directly refers to awkward encounters and (to a lesser extent), the social evaluation account because the transgression of a social rule will often result in unwanted evaluations (Edelmann, 1981). The two processes are closely related and the social evaluation account cannot be excluded from an examination of the awkward account.

According to the awkward account, an awkward service encounter is an uncomfortable disruption to a social script where the consumer is at a loss as to what to do or say next. Underlying the awkward interaction account is dramaturgy or the dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1956; Silver et al., 1987), where social interaction is seen as a grand play; people perform specific roles and possess scripts that allow them to know what to expect in different situations (Dahl et al., 2001; Solomon et al., 1985). This perspective stresses the good performance
of a character or, in other words, how well a character or part is projected. If, for instance, a person is playing a bad character, they must perform this bad character well, and vice versa (Silver et al., 1987). In contrast to a good performance, a bad performance reflects a dramaturgical dilemma. When “individuals fail to behave in accordance with socially defined scripts and roles” (Keltner & Buswell, 1997, p. 261), an unexpected breakdown in the social interaction occurs, leaving the interactants puzzled about how to proceed. They lose confidence in their ability as a social agent which incapacitates role performance overall (Gross & Stone, 1964; Miller, 1996). The core characteristic of an awkward interaction then, as identified in the embarrassment literature, stresses an encounter where there is no apparent course of action for at least one participant which then forces the interaction to be disrupted (or it may be anticipated to be disrupted) eliciting amongst other responses, discomfort, confusion, and embarrassment (e.g. Miller, 1996; Sabini et al., 2000; Sharkey & Singelis, 1995; Weinberg, 1968; Withers & Sherblom, 2008). The essence is a breakdown of social interaction because the role or interaction is incapacitated. This is referred to as the loss of script moment.

There are many references to the awkward account in the embarrassment literature. However, the awkward account is limited in its application for understanding awkward service encounters and the experience in its entirety, because: (1) embarrassment scholars do not elaborate on the phenomenon, other than providing basic descriptions such as disconfirmed expectations, disruptions, discomfort, and uncertainty (Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Miller, 1992; Silver et al., 1987); and (2) the current understanding approaches awkward encounters only through the lens of embarrassment. Accordingly, the current understanding of the awkward account is limited to awkward encounters that are directly associated with embarrassment. Ultimately, this narrow, one-sided focus only captures one view of awkward encounters. Additionally, the current treatment of the awkward account by embarrassment researchers can be misleading, because “it equates the flustering immobility for action that accompany embarrassment with the phenomenon of embarrassment itself” (Babcock, 1988, p. 476). This confounding of the experiences of embarrassment and the awkward encounter is particularly evident where, despite being argued as an account (explanatory cause) for embarrassment, various definitions of embarrassment contain in itself this explanatory cause. For instance embarrassment has been defined variously as a self-conscious emotion capturing “the acute state of flustered, awkward, abashed chagrin that follows events that increase the threat of unwanted evaluations from real or imagined audiences” (Miller, 1996, p. 129), and “a self-conscious emotion in which a person feels awkward or flustered in other people’s company or because of the attention of others” (VandenBos, 2006, p. 323). In order to clearly differentiate between embarrassment as an emotional consequence and the antecedent condition reflected by the awkward account, it is imperative that the flustering immobility is not equated to embarrassment because it is not necessary for embarrassment to occur; it merely frequently accompanies embarrassment (Babcock, 1988). Thus, it is necessary to treat the awkward encounter as an antecedent condition, and embarrassment as a consequential emotion that may arise in undergoing an awkward experience.

2.2.2 Embarrassment Typologies

Building on the awkward account of embarrassment, an examination of existing typologies for embarrassing situations may prove fruitful in highlighting potential cases of awkward encounters because the literature
proposes a cause and effect relationship (Miller, 1996). One of the earliest typologies of embarrassing situations was carried out by Gross and Stone (1964) who identified three types of disrupted interactions that cause embarrassment. The first were disruptions involving a loss of identity, or an inability to maintain one’s role-identity. When a social interactant’s role-identity is lost, such as when a distinguished student fails a test, a contradiction then occurs which causes difficulties in continued role performance. Second were disruptions involving a loss of poise where the individual lacks the ability to control the self or the situation that they are in. In order to effectively maintain poise, social spaces must be appropriately maintained (fixed), social props must be orderly, the equipment that is to be manipulated in the interaction must be properly managed, clothing must be appropriate, and the body must be ready to engage. Together, these elements will ensure a smooth interaction. Finally, there were disruptions involving a loss of confidence. This means that the individual does not know what to expect because there is a lack of knowledge about how the interaction should proceed.

Following a different approach, but at the same time building on the work of Gross and Stone (1964), Weinberg (1968) distinguished between behavioural intentions of the act and accuracy in defining/understanding the situation. Based on different combinations of these two dimensions, four basic forms were identified: (1) a faux pas (the combination of intended behaviour but incorrect definition of the situation), for instance dressing too casually for a formal event; (2) unwanted duties (the combination of intended behaviour with a correct definition of the situation), for instance a woman having to go for a sexual health examination; (3) mistakes (the combination of unintended behaviour and an incorrect definition of the situation), for instance a woman believing that she is buttoned up correctly when she isn’t hence leaving herself exposed; or (4) accidents (the combination of unintended behaviour with correct definition of the situation), for instance walking and then tripping over. Weinberg’s (1968) argument was that Gross and Stone’s (1964) categories were all interrelated; hence the two dimensions proposed could underlie all the experiences suggested by Gross and Stone (1964).

Subsequent typologies of encounters causing embarrassment which can be directly linked to awkward encounters, include: (1) other awkward acts (Sharkey & Stafford, 1990) encompassing inappropriate situational acts, taboo topics, and verbal blunders; (2) an explicit loss of script (which is often linked to the awkward silence); (3) guilty knowledge interactions where prior/personal knowledge make a current interaction unsettling (Miller, 1992); and (4) sticky situations such as following up on a loan repayment which threatens another person’s identity (Sabini et al., 2000).

Based on the existing embarrassment typologies, it appears that cases of awkward encounters can be inferred, however given that this inference is made through the lens of embarrassment, this approach only acknowledges awkward encounters that are clearly associated with embarrassment. This then means that the existence of awkward encounters (if any) that are unlikely to be embarrassing is ignored, hence the relationship between awkward encounters and embarrassment is overestimated. In order to rectify this issue, it is important to assess the social circumstances through the lens of an awkward encounter. By framing the focus of the research in this manner, all awkward encounters are able to be assessed and the relationship between awkward encounters and embarrassment better scrutinised. If, however, the resulting types of encounters identified closely mirror the situations identified by embarrassing typologies and, further, there are no
2.3 EMBARRASSMENT IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

To date, studies on consumer embarrassment have been scarce despite its potential to unravel in purchase and usage contexts (Dahl et al., 2001), however more interest in the topic is beginning to emerge. Current research on embarrassment in a business context has been addressed in relation to embarrassing product purchases (Dahl et al., 2001), shopping behaviours (still involving embarrassing products) (Nichols et al., 2015), an individual’s cultural group (Wan, 2013), in the context of personal selling (Verbeke & Bagozzi, 2003), coupon use (Brumbaugh & Rosa, 2009) and embarrassing service interactions (Grace, 2007, 2009; Wu & Mattila, 2013). Similarly to research on embarrassment in social psychology, research on consumer embarrassment also stresses negative consequences such as reduced patronage (Grace, 2009; Tracy et al., 2007) increased negative WOM intentions and boycotting behaviours (Grace, 2007; Wu & Mattila, 2013). Interestingly however, a recent study demonstrated a positive effect of consumer embarrassment for a business (Nichols et al., 2015). Driven by the need to mask embarrassment, the authors found that consumers purchasing embarrassing or sensitive products bought more in order to deter attention from the focal product. Nevertheless, given the significance of consumer embarrassment and its primarily negative consequences, it has been suggested that an improved understanding of its antecedents would prove useful for marketers (Dahl et al., 2001). As mentioned, one antecedent is the awkward encounter (Miller, 1996).

Research on consumer embarrassment that directly refers to the awkward account includes Grace (2007), who created a typology of consumers’ embarrassing situations based on a process of analytical induction of 166 incidents. There was, however, no essential distinction made between the different accounts of embarrassment. Furthermore, despite there being a specific category of awkward acts, the fact that the incidents collected were already predisposed to embarrassment, and that the chosen method for categorisation adopted a framework from research on embarrassment in social psychology (Sharkey & Stafford, 1990), the typology suffers from the same issues as existing embarrassment typologies in social psychology. There was no differentiation between the different accounts of embarrassment when collecting or examining incidents and, further, by collecting cases through the lens of embarrassment, the potential to explore awkward encounters that are not embarrassing was lost.

Turning to ASEs, consumer embarrassment research again offers little clarification. A study by Dahl et al. (2001) examined embarrassment during product purchase, defined as “an aversive and awkward emotional state following events that increase the threat of unwanted evaluation from a real or imagined social audience” (Dahl et al., 2001, p. 474). Based on this definition, it is clear that again awkwardness is treated as being intertwined with embarrassment. Additionally, consistent with their definition of embarrassment, feeling awkward was one of several items used to measure embarrassment. The authors did, however, reflect on the awkward account of embarrassment and appeared to operationalise this account in their experiment through
a lack of experience in purchasing the embarrassing product. The authors found that familiarity with purchasing condoms reduced embarrassment and, further, that the effects of real social presence on embarrassment were reduced with purchase familiarity. In contrast, the effects of purchase familiarity on embarrassment did not change with real social presence. In another study by Wu and Mattila (2013) on consumer embarrassment, the awkward account was also considered. The authors operationalised the awkward account using a situation with a vague service script, similarly to Dahl et al.’s (2001) use of a familiar (or unfamiliar) product purchase setting. Based on these studies, in the consumer context at least, being unfamiliar with a product purchase, or unfamiliar with a service situation (and hence the service script), represents one defining category of the awkward service encounter.

2.4 SOCIALLY AWKWARD SITUATIONS

Recent work on awkward encounters independent of the embarrassment perspective has suggested that awkward encounters are cases of problematic social affiliation, marking social ruptures that signal something is wrong (Clegg, 2012a). This perspective aligns well with the notions behind the awkward account of embarrassment, where the formal properties of the situation are disrupted and there is no character in which one can perform, thus a loss of script is experienced (Goffman, 1956; Silver et al., 1987). Building on this conceptualisation of awkward encounters, Clegg (2012b) draws on the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) to describe a social regulation process that aims at avoiding rejection. In addition to offering a preliminary conceptualisation, the work further examined awkwardness ratings in a group interaction amongst strangers. High awkwardness ratings were associated with: (1) uncertain or non-normative situations (which represent instances where there is a lack of instructions or explicit situation-appropriate norms to guide their behaviour); (2) counter-normative situations such as moral or social transgressions; (3) events involving negative social judgements; and (4) events which make social processes explicit (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). In contrast, low awkwardness ratings were associated with familiarity, and positive evaluations (Clegg, 2012b). Finally, a number of behavioural manifestations associated with the awkward encounter have been identified, such as hesitation, fidgeting, stuttering, fixed stares and avoidance of eye-contact (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). This avoidance of eye contact is said to reflect a lack of composure (Burgoon, Manusov, Mineo, & Hale, 1985).

Together, the insights obtained through the examination of socially awkward situations offer sufficient background for awkward service encounters and the experience of them. However the focus has been more general and its application to consumer contexts is expected to differ in some aspects. For instance, although counter-normative behaviours are a major category causing socially awkward situations, the occurrence and types of counter-normative behaviours specific to the consumer context, may differ to those in everyday social interaction. Additionally, drawing on the dramaturgical perspective, as emphasised in the awkward account, the roles occupied determine social performance. Thus in the consumer context, taking on the role of the consumer will carry different expectations of behaviour relative to those of employees of the service, and this will differ again when compared to expectations relating to the roles of a stranger, a friend, and so forth.
2.5 SERVICE RESEARCH

The current research on services is vast, covering different research areas such as customer relationships (Bitner, 1995; Price & Arnould, 1999), frontline service quality and service management (Bowen, Gilliland, & Folger, 2000; Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001; Brady, Cronin Jr, Fox, & Roehm, 2008), customer experience (Grove & Fisk, 1997; Hui & Bateson, 1991) servicescapes (Bitner, 1992; Johnstone, 2012), and service encounters (Bitner et al., 1994; Bitner et al., 1990). In focusing on the awkward encounter, this research is situated with prior service research on service encounters however, its effect will have implications for perceived frontline service quality and the service experience. In the following section, a brief review of service encounters are presented, focusing particularly on areas that are expected be linked to awkward service encounters.

2.5.1 Service Encounters (or Frontline Service Interactions)

Current research on the service encounter (or frontline service interactions) has focussed on a range of aspects such as satisfying or dissatisfying encounters (as a result of customer and employee actions) (Bitner et al., 1994; Bitner et al., 1990), the impact of other customers behaviours (Grove & Fisk, 1997), events/behaviours that cause customers to switch (Keaveney, 1995), embarrassing service encounters (Grace, 2007), service failure encounters (Hess, Ganesan, & Klein, 2003; Weun et al., 2004), and service incivility and deviation behaviours (Brady, Voorhees, & Brusco, 2012; Porath, MacInnis, & Folkes, 2010). The research emphasis on customer awkwardness in the encounter brings together a range of different service encounter aspects under the same frame, for instance, an awkward encounter can be attributed to the customer, the service provider or other customers. This brings together the approaches taken by Bitner et al. (1994; 1990) and Grove and Fisk (1997). However, in contrast to these studies, awkward service encounters emphasise an uneasy loss of script moment, and are more closely tied to self-conscious emotions (Keltner & Buswell, 1997) which, with the exception of Grace (2007), previous service encounter research has paid little attention to. Nevertheless, perhaps the types of service encounter analyses most relevant to awkward service encounters, is in the area of (1) service failures, and (2) service incivility and deviation behaviours.

2.5.1.1 Service Failures

When faced with a service failure, consumers can exhibit a range of negative responses towards firms such as increased exit behaviours (Keaveney, 1995), negative WOM (Seawright, DeTienne, Bernhisel, & Larson, 2008), and decreased loyalty (DeWitt, Nguyen, & Marshall, 2008), satisfaction, and commitment (Weun et al., 2004). Although the service failure literature does not explicitly refer to awkward service encounters, considering that service failures are often defined with an emphasis on expectations, for instance “situations when the service fails to live up to the customer’s expectations” (Lewis & McCann, 2004, p. 7) and, further, the awkward account of embarrassment emphasises an unexpected breakdown in the interaction and hence disconfirmed expectations (Miller, 1992), it is clear that service failures and awkward service encounters may be linked.
The awkward account however, also emphasises disrupted performance, a loss of confidence, hesitation and uncertainty (Miller, 1996; Silver et al., 1987), characteristics that are not necessarily present in a service failure. This shows that in some cases, service failures and awkward service encounters do coincide, however they do not necessarily represent the same service situation. For instance, based on the definition of service failures presented earlier, a service failure focuses on the service firm’s actions and their failure to meet customers’ expectations. Awkward service encounters however are not limited to customers’ unmet expectations. Take for example, an unfamiliar service situation which was previously used to operationalise the awkward account (Wu & Mattila, 2013). When faced with an unfamiliar service situation, the customer is unlikely to have concrete expectations because they are unsure what to expect. In fact, the customer may be more worried about their own role performance and experience emotions related to anxiety (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b), as opposed to anger, one of the dominant emotions in response to service failures (Bonifield & Cole, 2007). Additionally, based on experimental studies, the treatment of service failures are often attributed to things unrelated to the customer and instead are linked to the service provider, by emphasising something that they have done (e.g. Hess Jr, 2008; Wirtz & Mattila, 2004). Awkward service encounters, however, may involve no direct attribution but arise from the nature of the situation, for instance seeing a gynaecologist.

Despite the differences between service failures and awkward service encounters, the two may overlap in some situations. These service failures include service encounter failures (including recovery failures), and embarrassing service failures. First, service encounter failures represent interaction failures that arise from employee actions such as being rude, inattentive, or unfriendly, which have implications for the customers’ dignity and respect. The interaction failure takes into consideration the nature of the employee-customer encounter (Bitner et al., 1990; Hess, Ganesan, & Klein, 2007; Keaveney, 1995) which exactly reflects the underlying dramaturgical perspective of the awkward account, as interaction failures are likely to incapacitate role performance and disrupt the social interaction (Miller, 1996; Silver et al., 1987). Service encounter failures (and hence these forms of the awkward service encounter) are not only frequent, but have the potential to be damaging for firms, and can lead to customer switching (Keaveney, 1995) and dissatisfaction (Bitner et al., 1990). Closely linked to service encounter failures are recovery failures, such as failing to respond to, or being blatantly rude about, a complaint. Recovery failures are in essence service encounter failures that directly follow a core failure.

Secondly, embarrassment can arise from service failures. This means that any given service failure can be classified as embarrassing or non-embarrassing and, in particular, for those that are embarrassing, will associate itself to the awkward encounter (Miller, 1996). In contrast to non-embarrassing service failures, an embarrassing service failure occurs when not only the core aspects of the service fail but, at the same time, undesirable evaluations of the customer are formed which will then induce embarrassment (Wan, 2013). Embarrassing service failures are also likely to involve a loss of face for the customer, defined as “a loss of his/her social reputation, image or honour in a service encounter experience” (Lee, Sparks, & Butcher, 2013b, p. 384). Although traditionally studied in relation to the Chinese society (Lee et al., 2013b), Western societies do acknowledge face through public self-image, and front versus backstage behaviour, as the concept of face is rooted in social acceptance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brown, 1970; Goffman, 1967; Miller, 1996).
In summary, the types of service failures that do not overlap with awkward service encounters are more likely to be core service failures, non-embarrassing service failures, and non-social failures that are service outcome-related and result in a loss of function or economic benefits, such as time and money. In contrast, those that do overlap with awkward service encounters (service encounter failures and embarrassing service failures) are service process-related which, at its core, is linked to the loss of social/psychological resources (social status and esteem) (Hess et al., 2007; Smith, Bolton, & Wagner, 1999), broadly termed as social failures (Chan, Wan, & Sin, 2009).

2.5.1.2 Service Incivility and Deviant Behaviours

Building on the notion that awkward encounters emphasise a breakdown in interactions (Miller, 1996), behaviours such as service incivility and deviant behaviours are expected to also introduce an awkward disruption. An act of incivility is defined as “insensitive, disrespectful, or rude behaviour directed at another person that displays a lack of regard for that person” (Porath et al., 2010, p. 292). The interpersonal nature of incivility means that it can happen at any time in interaction contexts, and whether nonverbal or verbal, are harmful because they violate norms of mutual respect (Porath et al., 2010). Specifically for awkwardness, incivility has been shown to disrupt cognitive processing (Porath & Erez, 2007), which may represent a cognitive response associated with experiencing a disrupted social encounter. For deviant behaviours, defined as behaviours which “depart from established rules and expectations” (Brady et al., 2012, p. 82), these actions also have the potential to introduce an awkward disruption by destabilising the social interaction (Goffman, 1967).

While both service incivility and deviant behaviours may resemble service failures in the form of service encounter failures (mentioned in the previous section), they are broader in scope. For instance, simply witnessing employee incivility that was directed at another employee, was enough to generate negative effects on consumers, despite their lack of direct involvement in the encounter (Porath et al., 2010). Additionally, employee deviant behaviours will not necessarily result in a service encounter failure as these deviant behaviours can be of benefit to the consumer. This form of employee deviance is referred to as service sweethearting, “an act of employee deviance in which frontline employees give unauthorised free or discounted good or services to friends” (Brady et al., 2012, p. 81). By being acquainted with the employee, the consumer is fully aware of what is going on, and will not experience a social disruption in the encounter.

Finally, in contrast to prior examinations of service incivility and deviant behaviours, and its effects on consumer responses towards the firm, by unpacking what has been simply referred to as “the loss of script moment”, this research further advances an understanding of the cognitive toll on consumers (i.e. by disrupting the cognitive system) (Porath & Erez, 2007), and how these occurrences can momentary disrupt our ability to socially function.
2.6 RESEARCH GAP

It is clear from the above discussion that, despite some examination of awkward encounters and, to a lesser extent, the experience of them, a number of issues are evident. First, the awkward encounter (or experience of awkwardness) has often been treated as a mild form of, a component of, or equivalent to, embarrassment, as evidenced by the definition of embarrassment as “the acute state of flustered, awkward, abashed chagrin that follows events that increases the threat of unwanted evaluations from real or imagined audiences” (Miller, 1996, p. 129), and also empirical examinations of embarrassment (e.g. Higuchi & Fukada, 2002). Treating an awkward encounter (or awkwardness) in this manner has limited attempts to clearly scrutinise the relationship between the two, despite some embarrassment researchers arguing that awkward encounters are a primary cause of embarrassment (Goffman, 1956; Parrott et al., 1988; Silver et al., 1987). This issue was addressed by Babcock (1988, p. 476) who argued that the current treatment of the awkward account can be misleading because “it equates the flustering immobility for action that accompany embarrassment with the phenomenon of embarrassment itself.” Overall, then, there still appears to be confusion over the interrelationship between awkward encounters and embarrassment.

In contrast to previous approaches, this research will reassess the association between awkward encounters and embarrassment through the lens of the awkward encounter. In particular, in establishing typologies or general categories of embarrassing situations, the majority of studies (as expected) have focussed on embarrassment and considered awkward interactions retrospectively, through an analytical induction of embarrassing situations (e.g. Grace, 2007; Sharkey & Stafford, 1990). While insightful, as Edelmann (1981, p. 133) stated “studies which have examined the social function of embarrassment have been interested in the link between embarrassment and rule-governed behaviour rather than vice versa.” Existing approaches, then, have unintentionally yet explicitly excluded the possibility of awkward encounters that are unlikely to lead to embarrassment, which is then taking a one sided analysis of the relationship between awkward encounters and embarrassment.

Finally, not acknowledging (if any) the existence of awkward encounters that may exist independently of embarrassment has inhibited the analysis of whether these instances are also harmful and, if so, how do they impact consumers’ emotional, behavioural, and relational responses to the service provider. Given that awkward encounters are described as a loss of script by embarrassment scholars, it is reasonable to expect that despite occurring independently of embarrassment, they can still generate stress for consumers because the interaction is not smooth.

Second, although embarrassment researchers have consistently described awkward interactions as loss of script situations (Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Miller, 1992; Silver et al., 1987), surprisingly, there has been no further identification of categories or types which may possibly indicate variations in this loss of script situation, or identification of general types that may further ground our understanding of the awkward service encounter. With the exception of Clegg (2012a, 2012b) who gave some insight into the experience of the socially awkward situation, it is difficult to grasp the essence of this experience as the term awkward is commonly used rather colloquially by lay persons. Neither has the embarrassment literature addressed the psychological processes
that occur in awkward encounters (with the exception of eliciting embarrassment). This limits any thorough understanding of the nature of these experiences. Descriptors such as uncomfortable, disrupted, and being without a course of action are used, but the manner in which these come together to form the awkward experience is uncertain.

Third, although existing research does tap into distinct aspects of the awkward encounter including the examination of its emotional consequence of embarrassment (Dahl et al., 2001; Miller, 1996), the awkward silence (Dindia, 1986; McLaughlin & Cody, 1982), in healthcare settings (e.g. HIV) (Epstein et al., 1998), stigmatised and non-stigmatised interactions (Hebl et al., 2000) and more recently social awkwardness in stranger situations (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b), each of the studies represent a distinct and narrow focus. Attempts to successfully apply this existing research to create a unifying framework that adequately captures consumers’ ASE will be limited.

The proposed examination of awkward service encounters and ASEs is unique because, in contrast to previous studies emphasising different aspects of the awkward encounter, the current context is not naturally latent with awkwardness, such as in personal healthcare services (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b; Epstein et al., 1998; Hebl et al., 2000). However, the socially interactive nature of the services context ensures unpredictable and hence heterogeneous outcomes (Berry, 2000) which may provide a breeding ground for awkward service encounters. The proposed examination is also unique in offering a new perspective of unfavourable service encounters. The current emphasis in unfavourable service encounters, such as service failures, is on the primary emotion of anger (e.g. Bonifield & Cole, 2007; Bougie et al., 2003; Casado-Díaz, Más-Ruiz, & Kasper, 2007; Funches, 2011; Gelbrich, 2010). Awkward service encounters, on the other hand, are likely to emphasise embarrassment, a self-conscious emotion that develops later in life as people become conscious of others. Additionally, the awkward service encounter, and the experience of it, broadens the notions of expectations and the service script by integrating the social script. For instance, during service encounters, in addition to the functional benefits, customers can also expect to be treated in an appropriate manner (Goffman, 1956, 1959). However when, for example, a waiter violates expectations and ignores the customer, this may threaten perceived acceptance and belonging, as the customer may think there is something wrong with them. In contrast, when a waiter serves a customer the wrong order, there is no threat to the customer’s level of acceptance or belonging.

2.7 CHAPTER TWO SUMMARY

The purpose of Chapter Two has been to provide a review of the literatures relating to the awkward phenomenon, in order to set the foundation for this research. In the process, awkward service encounters were briefly introduced, along with research addressing their emotional consequence (i.e. embarrassment) in the social psychology and consumer domains, and recent work on the socially awkward situation, and related work in service research, discussed. On the basis of the review, the research gap identified was then summarised as the basis for the development of a conceptual model of consumers’ ASE.
CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF CONSUMERS’ AWKWARD SERVICE EXPERIENCE (ASE)

3.0 CHAPTER THREE OVERVIEW

The focus of Chapter Three is to present a conceptual model of consumers’ ASE (see Figure 4). The basic foundation of the conceptual model is guided by cognitive appraisal theory. However, the model incorporates additional theories and concepts, including role theory, notions around fundamental human needs, cognitive disequilibrium, and mindfulness. This conceptual model sets the foundation for the current research by allowing its examination in a number of consecutive studies, as will be outlined in subsequent chapters. To introduce this model process, the chapter begins with an overview of the relevant theories and concepts. Based on an integration of these ideas, the conceptual model is then broken down into four components to enable discussion of the: (1) situational stressors (i.e. the awkward service encounter); (2) cognitive states and processes; (3) emotional responses; and (4) firm-related outcomes (as driven by customer coping responses). Next, the chapter briefly addresses the proposed examination of the conceptual model by linking the objectives, studies and conceptual model, then the chapter finishes with a summary.

Figure 4: Chapter Three Overview

3.1: Underlying Concepts and Theories
- Cognitive Appraisal Theory
- Role Theory
- Fundamental Human Needs
- Cognitive Disequilibrium
- Mindfulness

3.2: Conceptual Model of Consumers’ ASE
- Situational Stressors
- Cognitive States and Processes
- Emotional Responses
- Firm-related Outcomes

3.3: Proposed Examination of Conceptual Model
3.1 UNDERLYING CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

3.1.1 Cognitive Appraisal Theory

In this research, the ASE is considered a stressful experience. The term ‘stress’ has been used in different ways throughout the literature, referred to at times as a stimulus and, at other times, as a response, or a combination of both a stimulus and a response (Moschis, 2007). According to the response view of stress in relation to the ASE, the customer is described as being under stress, where stress is seen as a subjective state determined by the customer (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Folkman et al., 1986; Moschis, 2007). This essentially means that the way in which an individual views a stress causing stimuli, will have implications for their emotional and behavioural responses. For this reason, the current conceptual model uses cognitive appraisal theory (also sometimes called the cognitive transactional model of stress and coping), as the primary organising framework.

Cognitive appraisal theory is one of the most comprehensive and widely used theories to examine stress, or the cognitive processes in response to stress. The theory argues that how we interpret an event, for instance whether it is positive or negative, or what it was caused by, determines a person’s emotional response and their subsequent behavioural response. This interpretation also takes into account their perceived ability to cope. Different evaluations will lead to different stress responses, so the same situation can elicit differing levels of stress depending on the individual’s perception. The basis for the analysis is the person-environment relationship (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus, 1991), which is the service encounter in the case of this research.

There are three important parts of the individual's assessment: appraisal of the event characteristics, the resulting emotion, and the resulting coping/behavioural response. First, assessment of the event’s characteristics involves primary and secondary appraisals. The primary appraisal is the cognitive process that assesses the significance of the event to well-being by looking at factors such as what is at stake, or what is being threatened. This process can involve an evaluation of goal relevance (i.e. does it matter to my well-being) and congruence (i.e. is it consistent with what I want), and the type of ego-involvement (i.e. what aspect of my ego-identity/commitment is at stake). In contrast to the primary appraisal, secondary appraisal is the cognitive process that evaluates the person’s potential to cope with the situation. In particular, attention is paid to assessments of blame/credit (i.e. attributions of blame as internal, external, or situational), the individual’s coping potential (i.e. the individual’s evaluation of how the current circumstances can be managed), and future expectations (i.e. will things improve, do I have confidence in the future) (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus, 1991).

In accordance with cognitive appraisal theory, emotions are considered the outcome of these appraisal processes. Based on this notion, it holds true that the same situation can result in different emotions for different consumers depending on how the situation is appraised (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Thus it is not the nature of the objective factors surrounding the event (i.e. the physical
characteristics) per se that determines emotions, but the subjective appraisal of the event. This specific notion is of particular relevance to the current research because if, for instance, the analysis does not distinguish awkward encounters from embarrassing situations, then the relationship between an awkward encounter that is either embarrassing or not embarrassing, may lie with the customer’s interpretation of the service encounter. Overall, when an encounter is appraised as irrelevant to well-being, there will be no emotional reaction. In contrast, when the encounter is appraised as relevant to well-being, it may be benign-positive because there is likely to be a good outcome, or stressful because there is likely to be a threat, challenge or harm. The magnitude of what is at stake determines the intensity of the emotion. For instance, appraisals of goal relevance can lead to stronger emotions, and appraisals of congruence versus incongruence can lead to positive and negative emotions respectively (Nyer, 1997). Similarly, if the situation is appraised as positive and manageable, it may also lead to positive emotions such as happiness. Finally, whilst six appraisal-related decisions are outlined above, some emotions will involve fewer appraisal-related decisions than others. It is this unique pattern of primary and secondary appraisals that initiates a subjective experience, action tendencies and physiological responses, which in turn associate with the different types of emotion which form part of the stress response (Lazarus, 1991). For instance, assuming that other characteristics are held constant, appraisals of novelty, complexity and unfamiliarity are said to cause surprise (Silvia, 2009), appraisals of offense with external blame and future expectations of no retaliation are said to cause anger (Lazarus, 1991) and appraisals of uncertainty elicit fear (Tiedens & Linton, 2001).

Following an emotional response, an individual can then engage in coping strategies which are the behavioural and cognitive efforts aimed at managing the stressful situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Coping strategies can be problem-focussed (action-centred and involve directly altering the cause of stress), emotion-focussed (inward coping whereby emotion is regulated internally, i.e. via denial or a change in thinking), and avoidance coping (getting away from the source). Individuals may adopt one (or more) of the three coping styles in response to stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Stephens & Gwinner, 1998). In a consumer oriented framework, Duhachek (2005) proposed three types of coping (which again are treated as being complementary): expressive, active, and denial (or avoidance). Expressive strategies focus on support-seeking behaviours to manage emotions, whilst active strategies mirror problem-focussed coping, and denial/avoidance mirrors emotion-focussed coping by dismissing the issue.

Cognitive appraisal theory has been used in consumer research to examine the antecedents of consumption emotions and their subsequent influence on consumer behaviours and evaluations (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Johnson & Stewart, 2005; McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003; Stephens & Gwinner, 1998; Watson & Spence, 2007). For instance, cognitive appraisal theory has been applied in the context of service recovery to determine how customers assess the firm’s recovery efforts and their emotional responses (DeWitt et al., 2008; Schoefer & Ennew, 2005). In another case using interview data, a model was proposed based on cognitive appraisal theory to predict consumer complaint behaviour (Stephens & Gwinner, 1998). In line with primary appraisals, the authors first proposed that a dissatisfying market experience will be appraised as stressful if it is evaluated as being goal relevant, goal incongruent (i.e. inhibits goals), and ego involving. Once in a stressed state, the customer will assess their coping potential. If the customer is sufficiently able to cope with the situation then it
will no longer be stressful. However, if they possess low coping potential, the stress can remain or worsen. Actual coping strategies may then be pursued directly at the time, or later following their negative emotional response. Examples of coping activities in the consumer context include returns, complaints, and lost patronage.

3.1.2 Role Theory

In order to understand the awkward service encounter as the situational stressor and the starting point for our consumers’ ASE model, this research draws on role theory. Not only has role theory been used on many occasions as the theoretical basis for service encounter analysis (Broderick, 1998; Grove & Fisk, 1992; Harris, Harris, & Baron, 2003; Solomon et al., 1985), but role theory also adopts the dramaturgical perspective that is the essence of the awkward account in the embarrassment literature (Miller, 1996; Silver et al., 1987). Role theory views social interaction (and social life) as a staged performance. In other words, life is theatre (Solomon et al., 1985) and people take on and perform specific roles that allow them to know what to expect in different situations. In the service encounter, customers and employees come together to engage in role performance by playing their own parts, and any other customers present can be treated as the audience.

The analysis of role performance often limits the individual in time and place, within a particular encounter. This means that when a customer enters the service encounter, their appearance in the role of a customer constrains them to engage in role enactment as a customer and to maintain the customer identity. The customer must be able to pay for their requested service, or when the customer visits a restaurant, they do not enter the kitchen area and begin to cook their own food as this constitutes the role of the employee (Goffman, 1961). According to this perspective, roles are also considered complementary and therefore must be performed successfully in relation to one another for an encounter to progress smoothly (Broderick, 1998; Solomon et al., 1985). Cooperation is therefore important to creating a working consensus (the implicitly agreed facts that define the situation) for any interaction context (Silver et al., 1987).

In the service encounter, the two primary roles are service provider and customer, and both must interact with one another. The way both parties act is based on the notion of service scripts. Scripts are connected to a web of information called schemas. A schema is a memory structure that contains a person’s general knowledge regarding a stimulus, for instance what behaviours are required of a specific role within the context of a particular social setting. Scripts are developed through an individual’s lifetime (through interaction, participation, observation, and repetition) to help (a) guide the actor’s behaviours and (b) to facilitate social understanding. In terms of guiding behaviours, scripts help generate expectations of typical activities around the event – what others should do, the meaning behind these behaviours, and what the individual should do (Abelson, 1981; Schank, 1980; Smith & Houston, 1985; Solomon et al., 1985).

In terms of scripts facilitating understanding, they contain information summarised/organised from previous experiences which can, in turn, facilitate the interpretation of new encounters by inferring the unknown from what is currently known (Alford, 1998). Under these circumstances, the individual retrieves knowledge from a past situation that is similar to the present one and appropriately interprets and conducts their current
behaviour based on what has happened in the past (Abelson, 1981). Because of this familiarity, the customer is at ease. There is predictability in the service encounter that comes from knowing what to do, and what to expect. When parties to an encounter act in accordance with their roles and accompanying scripts, they are considered competent social agents and equilibrium in the encounter is maintained (Goffman, 1959). However when there is a disruption of social performance, it is considered a serious flaw which causes the individual to become uncomfortable or flustered because they cannot meet the requirements of the social encounter (Parrott et al., 1988; Silver et al., 1987). In essence there is instability and disequilibrium in the encounter.

### 3.1.2.1 Service Scripts and Social Scripts

As described, scripts help to guide actor behaviours and ensure predictability, certainty and comfort, and following them ensures stable exchanges. Scripts that facilitate role performance can be differentiated as pure service scripts, or social scripts. The service script is commercially focussed, providing a formal description of how employees are expected to behave with consumers with the intention of standardising employee behaviours and reducing heterogeneity. The customers’ understanding of the service script is largely driven by the market through marketers’ claims (Darke, Ashworth, & Main, 2010; Spreng, MacKenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996), norms created by competition between brands (Cadotte, Woodruff, & Jenkins, 1987; Darke et al., 2010), and other external market-related communication such as WOM (Oliver, 1997). Together this understanding shapes customers’ expectations of what will happen in the service encounter (Solomon et al., 1985), and can be further used to evaluate their satisfaction with the service encounter. Based on expectation confirmation theory, also referred to as expectation disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1977, 1980; Spreng et al., 1996), consumer satisfaction with the service encounter is a function of both consumers’ expectations: what the consumer anticipates will occur in the service encounter or how they anticipate the product will perform (as a function of their understanding of the service script), and perceived performance: how the consumer perceives the actual performance of the product or service. This relationship between expectations and perceived performance can generate negative disconfirmation (where perceived performance falls short of expectations) or positive disconfirmation (where perceived performance exceeds expectations). Negative disconfirmation results in consumer dissatisfaction, which may comprise of negative feelings and guide negative behaviours towards the service firm. In contrast, positive disconfirmation results in consumer satisfaction, which can drive future positive feelings and behaviours towards the service firm. Finally, perceived performance can also be equal to consumers’ expectations, a situation referred to as confirmation.

In comparison to service scripts, the social script focusses more broadly on general human to human interaction. As soon as a social agent comes into physical proximity to others, the interaction will be governed by social scripts (the unspoken rules of society) which guide behaviours without much explicit consideration (Goffman, 1955, 1959, 1967). Social scripts take into account societal expectations and what is normative within a given culture. In every society, there will be a set of rules that prescribe appropriate behaviours, what should be done and what should not be done. When actions go against these social scripts, there is a violation of the social contract. These social scripts are not learnt through marketers’ claims but through social learning. In other words, they are socially constructed as a function of being raised in, and understanding the common
elements shared by members of a particular society or culture (Garfinkel, 1967; Han, 2011; Meng, 2008). Politeness for instance is a form of socially appropriate behaviour in interaction contexts which helps establish goodwill and a mutual balance of respect and consideration.

Face, the public self-image a person claims in social interactions, is the centre of a person’s social security and pleasure (Goffman, 1955, 1959). The social script, acting as an implicit contract, works to mutually protect face, that is, protect one’s own face as well as avoid causing others to lose face. Face is emotionally invested, meaning that when face is perceived as being threatened or enhanced in the social interaction, emotional responses will often accompany this perception (Goffman, 1967). Following social scripts help societies establish order and minimise social friction in everyday human interactions. Being implicit, they do not operate with conscious awareness. Only when the social script is violated or broken, will people become aware of the rules. This is the main idea expressed behind breaching experiments (Gregory Jr, 1982).

In awkward service encounters there is a disruption of social interaction through an inability to follow a social script (and not just the service script) (Goffman, 1956; Silver et al., 1987). Social encounters in general can be stressful occasions because conversational and behavioural fluency must be ensured (Mendes, Blascovich, Hunter, Lickel, & Jost, 2007). Being ‘in sync’ with others with whom we interact is an enjoyable experience. However, when the situation is not accurately interpreted, or social expectations regarding the behaviours of interacting partners are not met, the interaction becomes unstable, anxiety is heightened and the interaction disrupted (Hebl et al., 2000; Solomon et al., 1985). For instance, the violations of personal space are less emphasised in relation to service scripts, however respecting personal space is an important aspect of a social script. The notion of personal space describes the physical interpersonal distance that is deemed comfortable when interacting with others. It is defined as “the area individuals maintain around themselves into which others cannot intrude without arousing discomfort” (Hayduk, 1983, p. 293). Responses to invasions of personal space include escape (Felipe & Sommer, 1966), discomfort and negative feelings (Efran & Cheyne, 1974), heightened physiological reactions such as stress (Middlemist, Knowles, & Matter, 1976), and less social responsiveness (Konečni, Libuser, Morton, & Ebbesen, 1975). In contrast, Kanaga and Flynn (1981) found that appropriate spatial distancing allows individuals to interact with lower levels of stress. Consequently, communication is more effective, and the social situation is less threatening and more comfortable. In a service context, a stressor to personal space is crowding where there is less space than is personally desired. Crowding has been shown to cause stress because it frustrates the consumer, potentially inhibiting efficient achievement of their shopping task (Aylott & Mitchell, 1999).

3.1.3 Fundamental Human Needs

Even in a service encounter, consumers are people first and consumers second (Godwin, Patterson, & Johnson, 1999). This means that it is vital that consumers are able to fulfil their fundamental human needs before they fulfil their consumption needs, or, put differently, consumption needs are secondary to human needs, such as those relating to survival and self-identity (Chung-Herrera, 2007; Patterson, McColl-Kennedy, Smith, & Lu, 2009; Schneider & Bowen, 1999). In comparison to consumption needs, human needs are those
which people seek from life itself and are more unconscious by residing deeper in the human psyche (Chung-Herrera, 2007). Consequently, violations of these needs are likely to be more detrimental than violations to service expectations alone.

The importance of human needs in relation to the service encounter has been recognised in service encounter needs theory (SENT) (Bradley, McColl-Kennedy, Sparks, Jimmieson, & Zapf, 2010). According to this theory, motivation (needs), cognition and emotion are viewed as interdependent systems which are all critical for the effective management of service interactions. The primary argument is that the violation of psychosocial needs (as a result of various service acts) gives rise to consumption emotions which will then influence global evaluations and behavioural responses to the service encounter. Furthermore, for the ASE in particular, anxiety is suggested as the defining characteristic of awkward encounters (Clegg, 2012a). Given that anxiety involves threats to an individual’s ego-identity (Lazarus, 1991), it is reasonable to see threats to fundamental human needs as playing a role in consumers’ ASE.

It has been suggested that four fundamental human needs exist in the service encounter: the need for security, self-esteem, justice, and trust (Chung-Herrera, 2007). In terms of specific need sets, this research proposes that the two core needs most relevant are needs related to esteem (encompassing acceptance, belonging and others that enhance the self) and effectance (encompassing control and predictability). These needs are focussed upon because esteem (Fiske, 2014), and effectance are the basic motivations underlying day-to-day life, where the former is more affective and the latter more cognitive (Nezlek, 2003). Additionally, both influence perceptions of oneself as a competent social agent (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Waytz, Epley, & Cacioppo, 2010), yet represent different aspects of the social being. Effectance-related needs represent inwardly directed needs based on efficacy and competence within the individual’s environment, whilst esteem-related needs represent outwardly directed needs based on their perceived evaluation (of their social actions) by others in the person’s environment (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Franks & Marolla, 1976; White, 1959). Given that both contribute to perceptions of oneself as a competent social agent, it is possible that both can be activated jointly by being simultaneously threatened in a service encounter (Fiske, 2014; Kemper & Collins, 1990). However as they also represent different parts of the social being, it is also possible that situational stressors (i.e. awkward service encounters) will primarily threaten one, and to a lesser extent the other.

**3.1.4 Cognitive Disequilibrium**

Equilibrium (often used interchangeably with homeostasis) originated as a biological concept signifying the regulation and maintenance of a stable internal state, where all immediate needs are met. In humans for instance, there are a variety of thresholds or stability points and any significant deviation from these points will initiate responses (behavioural and physiological) aimed at returning to the stability point. One example is the regulation of human body temperature to remain at approximately 37 degrees Celsius. When the body temperature goes above this threshold, the body responds by sweating to help lower the temperature. Internal equilibrium is vital for survival however it is always under threat, and failure to adapt can lead to death (Cannon, 1929).
From its biological origins, the notion of equilibrium has been transferred to the social and cognitive domains. In the social domain, Goffman (1955, 1959, 1967) referred to a ritual equilibrium. According to Goffman, social predicaments disrupt an individual’s equilibrium and corrective action will need to take place to re-establish equilibrium. For instance, whilst politeness helps to maintain equilibrium in social interactions, being impolite will create a social disruption that threatens equilibrium because of the introduction of social conflict and disharmony (Methias, 2011). Impoliteness generates disequilibrium because it makes it difficult to maintain friendly relationships and social cooperation (Kienpointner, 1997). Other social theories also stress the importance of equilibrium for comfort. Affiliative conflict theory (Argyle & Dean, 1965), for example, suggests that a comfortable social interaction is represented by a point of equilibrium that balances approach and avoidance needs. When the balance shifts, it causes arousal and discomfort, and triggers efforts to return to the equilibrium point. All social behaviours (verbal and nonverbal) contribute to maintaining the equilibrium point but what is mostly emphasised is eye contact, physical proximity, and affiliation. Whilst all three are encouraged, when they go too far in any dimension, equilibrium will be disrupted. For instance, when someone gives you too much eye contact, it becomes creepy. The other dimensions will be then adjusted to help restore equilibrium, such as by increasing physical proximity.

Similarly to biological and social equilibrium, research on learning and cognition stresses a state of cognitive disequilibrium in problematic encounters, such as when faced with uncertainty or encountering obstacles (Graesser & Olde, 2003; Piaget, 1952). By nature, humans will organise their thinking processes and experience into structures, called schema, to help them deal with and understand social encounters. When we understand what is happening around us, we are said to be in a state of cognitive equilibrium. However when something contradictory happens, it creates an internal conflict which causes cognitive disequilibrium. Cognitive disequilibrium is an individual's private internal experience reflecting an unsettling state of imbalance and uncertainty in the cognitive system which signals the presence of a problem (Graesser, Lu, Olde, Cooper-Pye, & Whitten, 2005; Haan, 1985; Piaget, 1952). In this manner, cognitive disequilibrium disturbs a person’s intellectual balance (Piaget, 1952) and is experienced as internal conflict or mental tension, unease and self-doubt. Furthermore, in attempting to restore cognitive equilibrium, the individual becomes physiologically aroused, attention becomes concentrated, and cognitive activities become effortful through cognitive deliberation, questioning, and enquiry (D'Mello, Craig, Fike, & Graesser, 2009; Graesser et al., 2005). The restoration of equilibrium is compared to the moment of eureka or epiphany. Cognitive disequilibrium is similar to cognitive dissonance, in that it describes a discomfiting mental state when experiencing inconsistencies. Festinger’s (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance states that people prefer to be in a state of consistency, in other words they strive for internal consistency between expectation and their perceived reality. Dissonant states are psychologically uncomfortable because of the experience of unpleasant tensions. People will therefore actively avoid situations that are likely to induce it.

In Piaget’s (1952) theory of cognitive development, assimilation and accommodation are the two processes associated with cognitive disequilibrium. When social agents interact with their external world, they are engaging in processes that help them to adapt. Assimilation and accommodation lie at the core of this adaptation process. Assimilation refers to the biological process of integrating external elements into existing
structures, so that situations are managed with the existing structures. Accommodation, on the other hand, refers to the process of cognitive adaptation, whereby cognitive structures are modified to fit reality in order for the individual to be able to manage situations that were at first difficult to manage (Piaget, 1952). Assimilation will occur to some degree before accommodation is able to take place, and challenging situations, in particular, will require more accommodation (Baldwin, 1967). Contradictory experiences will initiate forces that facilitate the creation of a more coherent system through assimilation and accommodation. Equilibrium can be established between assimilation and accommodation through a process of equilibration. A situation is mastered when equilibrium is reached. Behaviours that have now been accommodated can then act as a tool for assimilating later experiences with the external world (Piaget, 1952).

Research on stress confirms the relevance of disequilibrium in the awkward encounter. An awkward encounter is stressful and the experience of stress will challenge a person’s mental and physical equilibrium (Chrousos & Gold, 1992). Second, research on the socially awkward situation has suggested destabilisation (i.e. disequilibrium) as the essence of awkwardness (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). Although equilibrium (or disequilibrium) can exist in different areas (i.e. biological, social, or cognitive), the importance of equilibrium in the ASE is proposed to lie at the cognitive level, due to: (1) cognitive appraisal theory which stresses cognitive processes and evaluations; and (2) the increased cognitive processing evident in the concept of mindfulness, and present in socially awkward situations (Clegg, 2012a).

3.1.5 Mindfulness

The concept of mindfulness has only recently appeared in the marketing domain and Ndubisi (2014), who examined categories of mindful consumers, has called for more studies. There are different conceptualisations of mindfulness. The traditional Buddhist perspectives is closely linked to meditational practices (Rosch, 2007), while a second view emphasises increased attention to the current experience (Langer, 1992), and a third proposes a two-component conceptualisation: (a) attention to the current experience; and (b) its non-evaluative observation (Brown & Ryan, 2003). In line with research on the socially awkward situation (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b), the current research adopts the second perspective to describe the awkward moment involving a state of hyper-vigilance involving conscious awareness and increased cognitive activity.

In general, features of a social interaction can alter the state in which information is processed, pushing toward or away from the mindful state of alertness (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000). Mindlessness and mindfulness are two basic states of mind that capture different forms of processing information, and the different ways in which an individual interacts with the self or the environment (Langer, 1992). In any situation, an individual will be in a mindless cognitive state or a mindful cognitive state (Langer, 1989a; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Mindlessness suggests limited attention and non-active mental processing involving an overreliance on existing information and behaviours. In this state, the individual is passive and simply responds to a few cues in their environment which inhibits the acknowledgement of new information. These responses are governed by pre-existing expectations or scripts that have been learned in the past so, once triggered by contextual cues, mindless behaviour is initiated and the script is simply followed effortlessly and outside of
awareness, resulting in minimal cognitive activity. This state of mindlessness is often evident in situations that are considered routine or highly familiar, as previous scripts can be relied upon and automatic, routinised responses generated (Langer, 1992; Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978; Nass & Moon, 2000). This means that as long as everything proceeds in the same fashion, the state of mindlessness continues with little conscious awareness and one appears to be in a partial trance (Langer, 1992). Operating under a mindless state is equivalent to being in cruise control. Surroundings are taken for granted and mental attention is freed up for other activities.

Mindfulness on the other hand, suggests a state of conscious awareness, an active processing of new information, and a sensitivity to the environment (Burgoon & Langer, 1995; Langer et al., 1978). Violations of expectations heighten awareness and influence information processing (Burgoon & Langer, 1995). With the activation of mindful processing, the individual ‘feels’ like they are being jolted awake. In particular, the individual will become hyper-vigilant and closely scrutinise the situation (through continual monitoring of their internal state and external environment), making them more sensitive to the present experience and more aware of multiple perspectives (Brown & Ryan, 2003). In this process, the arousal experienced can distort one’s perception of time because the internal clock speeds up. This gives the misperception of time slowing down, hence the event being longer (Droit-Volet & Meck, 2007). However, instead of time actually slowing down, the individual is really processing more information within the same amount of time; they are paying more attention to their surroundings and what is going on and therefore remember more of the experience (Stetson, Fiesta, & Eagleman, 2007). Mindlessness-mindfulness stem from dual-processing theory, the basic premise of which is that information processing occurs through two systems: analytic or automatic (Evans & Curtis-Holmes, 2005; Moscardo, 2009). Analytical processing is slow and logical as attention is directed at effortful mental activities, whilst automatic processing is fast and based on shortcuts or heuristics without deliberate thought (Kahneman, 2011).

A review of work in this area (Burgoon et al., 2000) identified novel events, situations of conflict, situations involving potential negative consequences, and events involving violations of expectations and the failure of goals as the underlying causes that transition an individual into a mindful state, where behavioural and affective responses become the centre of attention. These triggers appear to align well with previous classifications of awkward-inducing events (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b) and justify the relevance of mindfulness in these experiences. Additionally, becoming mindful can have an incapacitating effect (Langer, 1989a, 1989b), the same effect that may reflect the disruption of social interaction, as described by embarrassment researchers (Miller, 1996; Silver et al., 1987).

3.2 CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF CONSUMERS’ ASE

Having outlined the underlying concepts and theories in the previous section, the conceptual model of consumers’ ASE is now presented. The service experience is “the service encounter and/or service process that creates the customer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses which result in a mental mark, a memory” (Edvardsson, 2005, p. 129). Based on this definition, the awkward service encounter represents the
service encounter, whilst the ASE model represents the consumers’ overall experience. Drawing on previous research that reflects the awkward encounter and experience of the awkward moment (e.g. Epstein et al., 1998; Parrott et al., 1988; Silver et al., 1987), as well as the concepts outlined in the previous section, an ASE is defined as a service encounter episode which generates cognitive disequilibrium and heightens effortful cognitive processing, resulting in the perception of a social disruption in the service encounter. At its core, the ASE destabilises the customer’s interaction by disturbing their equilibrium. This experience of disequilibrium is uncomfortable, which is consistent with lay peoples’ description of the awkward encounter as cringe-inducing scenes of social discomfort accompanied with awkward silence (Kotsko, 2010). Starting with the notion that consumers’ ASEs represent stressful encounter disturbances involving internal imbalance, this research presents the following ASE model (Figure 5). The model has four main components: (1) situational stressors (i.e. the awkward service encounter), (2) cognitive states and processes, (3) emotional responses, and (4) firm-related outcomes.

3.2.1 Situational Stressors

Drawing on role theory (and the notion of social scripts), situational stressors that have the ability to disrupt a social interaction through a breakdown in role performances are expected to create an awkward service encounter which then initiates the ASE. These primary categories are normative violations, and non-normative service situations.

3.2.1.1 Normative Violations

When behaviours follow social scripts, the behaviours are described as normative or ordinary (Garfinkel, 1967) and parties in proximity to the social situation will be comfortable and at ease (Solomon et al., 1985). In contrast, when actions occur that violate social standards of behaviour, known as normative violations, problems in the interaction will also occur (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). In fact, many disruptive problems occurring in the customer-provider encounter where predictability is lost, are caused by not following a common social script (Solomon et al., 1985). When there is a failure to adequately perform a role, others are likely to judge the actor as incompetent, and the interaction is no longer smooth or successful. The botched performance represents a failure in impression management, which disrupts a formal property of the situation (Goffman, 1959), and generates flustered uncertainty. The actor can no longer calmly and gracefully perform a part in the social encounter (Silver et al., 1987). It upsets the complementary roles brought forth in a social interaction, forcing others to improvise, which at times they may not have the capacity to do. This existence of an explicit disruption is the defining characteristic of the awkward moment experience (Epstein et al., 1998).
Figure 5: Conceptual Model of Consumers’ ASE
The significance of normative violations in causing an awkward disruption is illustrated in Garfinkel’s breaching experiments. A breach, referred to as the explicit violation of social rules, brings to the forefront the tacit understandings and realities that many take for granted in their day to day interactions. Garfinkel (1967) reported a number of simple cases where familiar scenes of social interactions were violated, and others’ responses to these violations documented. The responses often took the form of bewilderment, confusion, and anxiety, and more importantly, were described as awkward. Further evidence supporting normative violations as causing an awkward service encounter is found within research on embarrassment and recent works on social awkwardness. Miller (1992, p. 191) has described the trigger of an awkward encounter as being “when expectations are disconfirmed”, and hence a social boundary has definitely been crossed (Clegg, 2012a). When expectations are disconfirmed through normative violations, it can cause disequilibrium for the customer because it decreases predictability and increases uncertainty (Goffman, 1967). Clegg (2012a, 2012b) refers to these cases, in particular those linked to someone’s behaviour, as counter-normative behaviours. Awkward silences are an example. Individuals are supposed to engage in a manner that minimises extended gaps in conversation, as a social norm surrounding smooth communication. However when an extended gap occurs, “an extended silence (3 seconds or more) at a transition-relevant place in a dyadic encounter” (McLaughlin & Cody, 1982, p. 301), it generates awkward discomfort.

To summarise, when behaviours follow normative conduct, the interaction is described as being stabilised, and all those involved (and aware of the behaviour) will be at ease (Clegg, 2012a). With a normative violation however (Clegg, 2012a), whether it be a matter of courtesy, appropriate mannerisms and/or etiquette, an appropriate course of action cannot be immediately determined to ensure the interaction remains smooth. The encounter can become awkward because participants begin to lose grasp of their immediate reality (Goffman, 1961). The individual perceives that there is no character that can be competently performed, becomes incapacitated and cannot mobilise themselves to proceed with the interaction (Silver et al., 1987).

### 3.2.1.2 Non-normative Service Situations

Non-normative service situations are those perceived by the customer to have vague or ambiguous service scripts (Wu & Mattila, 2013). This is common in unfamiliar settings where the customer will not know how to behave in the first place (Dahl et al., 2001; Wu & Mattila, 2013). This poses an awkward problem in the service encounter because, according to role theory, the roles of the service provider and the customer are complementary. From the service provider’s perspective, not all customers will be proficient to perform their part in the encounter. At a basic level, this introduces two groups of consumers, experts or novices (Bateson, 2002a, 2002b). Expert (i.e. more experienced) consumers differ from novices based on amount, content, and organisation of knowledge. Expert consumers in particular will have relevant information stored in long-term memory and, when activated through situational cues linked to previous experiences, the information is retrieved into working memory to guide behaviour (Abelson, 1981). As a result, they will know what to expect, can be more flexible and hence can adapt more easily to complex situations, such as variations in the service (Bateson, 2002a). In contrast, novice consumers with their lack of experience or familiarity, will possess limited memory structures to help direct their behaviours and navigate the service setting.
When customers are not aware of the script, an awkward encounter can arise as the appropriate course of action cannot be determined. The customer enters the interaction with uncertainty, which then breeds tension over whether they are ‘doing the right thing’ and they become afraid of behaving inappropriately (Wu & Mattila, 2013). Such tension and indecisiveness (Babcock, 1988) contribute to the encounter no longer being smooth, and disruption and disequilibrium ensue. In a previous study of disrupted interactions, this perceived loss of confidence was identified as a primary component (Gross & Stone, 1964). A loss of confidence reflects the uncertain tension of now knowing what to expect and what will happen next.

The issue of novice consumers may be most prevalent in travel and tourism. With today’s booming travel and tourism industry (Forbes, 2013), customers are constantly on the move in and out of countries that are culturally and religiously diverse, which then means exposure to different service settings and ways in which the service is performed. Accordingly, the customer may lack a coherent script and face role ambiguity (Tang & Chang, 2010). Experiences of role ambiguity in novel settings are equivalent to non-normative situations, as described by Clegg (2012b), where individuals perceive there to be a lack of instructions, or explicit situation-appropriate norms to guide their behaviour. Because the individual is then not confident about what they are required to do in their role, they are unable to determine if what they are doing is right or wrong. Even when the customer does choose a plan of action, they are still unable to determine whether their actions are right or wrong. Consequently, the experience is characterised by high levels of stress, tension and uncertainty, which reduces the customer’s perceived competence and confidence in the situation. All of these features are core characteristics of an awkward encounter.

Acknowledging non-normative service situations as one overall category of the awkward service encounter, aligns with existing research that familiarity can reduce embarrassment (Dahl et al., 2001; Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000). For instance, according to the awkward account of embarrassment, an awkward interaction will facilitate embarrassment (Silver et al., 1987). In order to then reduce embarrassment, the likelihood of a service interaction becoming awkward should be reduced. This can be done through helping customers become more familiar with the service process to ensure that they can progress smoothly with no threatening disruptions (Wu & Mattila, 2013).

Finally, the nature of the product/service themselves needs to be considered. A typical example is taboo products/services. In this situation, it is the product/service itself that is likely to generate a non-smooth encounter due to the levels of unease in dealing with the product/service, rather than any behavioural fault of those involved (Clegg, 2012a). For the purposes of this research, taboo products/services are classified as a sub-component of non-normative service situations. This is because research has shown that familiarity and experience in dealing with a taboo product can reduce the discomfort (Dahl et al., 2001). This could then mean that taboo products/services may have an element of novelty that contributes to the making of an awkward encounter, and familiarity desensitises the effect.
3.2.2 Cognitive States and Processes

In this section, we focus on the cognitive states and processes happening in an ASE. The model proposes that the customer will first generate appraisals that reflect a threat to fundamental needs. Next, cognitive disequilibrium is expected, accompanied by a sense of mindful alertness. The discussion then moves to the customers’ specific cognitive content (or appraisals) that are expected to trigger various emotions in ASEs. Together, the consumer’s cognitive state and processes reflect a form of evaluative monitoring and internal assessment of the situation.

3.2.2.1 Fundamental Human Needs

From the two major categories of situational stressors, it is proposed that these stressors will first invoke appraisals related to threats to the customer, in particular threats related to esteem needs and effectance needs. Threats to fundamental human needs are stressful because they contribute to a state of disequilibrium in the individual, and can increase cognitive activity aimed at managing the disequilibrium between perceived and ideal states (Clegg, 2012b). The increased cognitive activity is a form of increased demand on the customer’s resources (Folkman et al., 1986).

Esteem-related Needs

Esteem-related needs encompass acceptance, belonging and others that enhance the self. The current research groups these needs together because whilst some researchers make distinctions between them, other researchers see them as overlapping and hence not necessarily mutually exclusive (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007; Fiske, 2014; White, 1959). Threatened self-esteem, for example, may signal a threat to belonging (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). The need for acceptance, belonging, and enhancing the self are important goals and desired by most people. Individuals seek positive interactions and social approval from others because of these needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Epley et al., 2007). From an evolutionary perspective, basic survival and reproductive benefits come from esteem-related needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). They are so paramount that our social behaviours are monitored and regulated in a manner so as to encourage acceptance and discourage alienation or rejection. As an example, the sociometer or sociometer theory explains interpersonal behaviours in a social context and how people think and feel about themselves in that context (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). According to this theory, the sociometer is a monitoring system that gauges our interpersonal environment, taking in information about our relational value or importance in the eyes of others. The sociometer is represented as a continuum with rejection and acceptance existing at the upper and lower ends. The sociometer makes us feel good or bad about ourselves, depending on where we fall in the rejection-acceptance continuum (Leary, 1999). When the need for acceptance is threatened, we experience social pain which is marked by feelings of isolation, exclusion, or disconnection, and may lead to anxiety issues. In fact, simply imagining social rejection can increase physiological arousal (Baumeister & Tice, 1990; Craighead, Kimball, & Rehak, 1979; Leary, 1999; Leary & Baumeister, 2000).
Esteem-related problems have been argued as a central feature of awkward encounters (Clegg, 2012b). The events themselves and the accompanying perceived negative judgement generate a state of destabilisation and social disruption (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). Social rejection, for example, can increase arousal (Craighead et al., 1979), and induce social pain including anxiety (Baumeister & Tice, 1990), a common feature in awkward encounters. Also consistent with this argument is research on ostracism, another example of problematic affiliation, reflecting esteem-related threats. When someone is ostracised, their social expectations in terms of the desired attention received are not fulfilled, and psychological discomfort such as anxiety can result (Carver & Scheier, 1978; Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). The individual being ostracised is also likely to disengage, and behave as if hit by a stun gun despite being physically present (Williams et al., 2000). This disengagement can be interpreted as the individual being immobilised in a state of disequilibrium (Clegg, 2012b).

Research in other areas has also suggest a link between awkward service encounters and esteem-related problems. Embarrassment researchers for instance, describe the awkward encounter as one where the individual cannot mobilise themselves to proceed with the interaction (Miller, 1996). This notion of immobility is seen in research on bodily responses and social threat. In particular, perceived social threats were found to elicit reduced body movements, reflecting freeze-like behaviours (Roelofs, Hagenaars, & Stins, 2010). Threats to one’s sense of affiliation, in general, have also been associated with psychosocial disturbance (Sargent, Williams, Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, & Hoyle, 2002). This disturbance may imply the existence of cognitive disequilibrium, which again seems to be characteristic of an awkward encounter (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b).

Finally, in the consumer context, Aylott and Mitchell (1999) explored different stressors (i.e. disturbances to the customer’s homeostasis) associated with grocery shopping. Amongst the stressors identified were those relating to threatened acceptance and self-esteem, such as being seen by others purchasing sensitive products, or ‘second-best’ brands (as opposed to higher end brands). This event was stressful because it was associated to the perception that others would be judging the customer over their purchase choices. Another significant source of stress was employee behaviours, in particular where they were insensitive to the customer’s needs and requests, ignored the customer, or were impolite/inconsiderate. Again this situation involved threats to the customer’s feelings of acceptance and self-esteem.

**Effectance-related Needs**

Effectance-related needs are those relating to effectively mastering one’s environment with the aim of seeking meaning and hence increasing understanding, prediction and control (Epley, Waytz, Akalis, & Cacioppo, 2008; Epley et al., 2007; White, 1959). The external environment is full of uncertainty and ambiguity, so explaining and understanding the environment is crucial (Epley et al., 2007). In this research, we refer to effectance-related needs as encompassing the desire for control (which will have implications for predictability and understanding). We group these needs together because they are all cognitive in nature, focussing on information, thinking, and problem solving (Fiske, 2014), hence are closely intertwined. For instance, to facilitate effectance and hence control it is necessary to understand one’s environment and be able to predict and make sense of what is happening (Fiske, 2014). This ability may rely on past experience and knowledge (derived from scripts and roles) to generate predictions to make situations manageable. In uncertain situations,
people often wonder “why”, and try to develop explanations to get at the core of what is going on. However, having a shared understanding is adaptive because it allows us to function as effective social agents in groups, such as anticipating and coordinating our actions to others we interact with, so social life functions smoothly. We are able to make sense of our own actions and those of others.

In the service encounter, consumers seek effectance so they know what will happen, when it will happen, how it will happen, and to make the necessary changes if desired. These features help the customer to be comfortable with the situation. As previously discussed under role theory, however, the service encounter is a joint effort therefore threats to effectance are always present, because the service setting contains not only the consumer but also the employees and other consumers who cannot be directly controlled (Grove & Fisk, 1997). When these needs are threatened, a customer can experience a sense of not knowing what to do (Surachartkumtonkun et al., 2013) which then puts the customer in a distressed state (Skinner, 1996). This distress is suggested as being part of the process of cognitive disequilibrium in the ASE (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). Research on ostracism also shows that threats to effectance-related needs, such as control, are associated with psychological discomfort and an inherent ambiguity because questions are left unanswered, for instance, why won’t she acknowledge me? What did I do? (Williams et al., 2000). Again, this experience of uncertainty is considered to be a component of the state of awkward destabilisation (Clegg, 2012b). Furthermore, anxiety as a core characteristic of awkward encounters (Clegg, 2012a) involves ambiguity and uncertainty (Lazarus, 1991), and ambiguity and uncertainty are in turn linked to threats to control. Finally, it should be noted that although the notion of a lack of control may resemble the concept of customer powerlessness (Bunker & Ball, 2009), powerlessness is associated with high barriers to exit where there is poor recovery, hence ties in more with being ‘trapped.’ Our situations of a lack of control are focussed more on the ability to influence the current interaction in the desired direction, and have less to do with the ability to exit the relationship. Therefore the customer’s inability to exit the relationship with a firm is unlikely to generate an awkward encounter.

The consumers’ ASE model makes the connection between situational stressors and the two fundamental human needs for esteem and effectance, described in recent works on anthropomorphism (Epley et al., 2008; Epley et al., 2007). For instance, apparent predictability are suggested to impact effectance needs. In terms of the two dominant categories of the awkward service encounter outlined, normative violations and non-normative service situations both have implications for apparent predictability. Normative violations go against the expected standards of social behaviour and introduce uncertainty into the equation, hence impacting the apparent predictability of the service situation. Similarly for non-normative service situations where the customer possesses a lack of similarity/familiarity, the customer will not know how to behave, and further not know how the service should progress, which represents a lack of predictability (and hence control of what is to happen). In both cases, effectance-related needs are impacted because the customer’s ability to act as a competent social agent is threatened.

In addition to situational factors such as predictability, social disconnection is suggested to impact esteem-related needs through threatened belonging (Epley et al., 2008; Epley et al., 2007). Social disconnection can be introduced through both normative violations and non-normative service situations. An example of the
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former is when an employee ignores the customer’s request for assistance, or does not acknowledge the customer at all upon their entry into the retail store. In the case of non-normative service situations, by not knowing how things will proceed and what is expected of them in their role as the customer, the customer may experience isolation, or feel incompetent which then impacts their esteem. Finally, the connection to fundamental needs is also reflected by Clegg (2012b), who described awkward encounters as problematic cases of social affiliation. Issues of social affiliation can come about as a result of normative violations. For example when the customer’s card is declined, the expectation of a customer being able to pay for their purchases is violated. Failures such as this cause others present to display mannerisms that indicate social disapproval, criticism, or rejection which then threaten the customer’s perceived acceptance (Leary, 1999). Finally, White (1959) described situational factors such as unfamiliar environments and violations, as threatening effectance-related needs.

3.2.2.2 Cognitive Disequilibrium

A comfortable social encounter is characterised by a state of cognitive equilibrium which involves little cognitive effort (Piaget, 1952). In contrast, cognitive disequilibrium reflects an encounter that is mentally discomfor ting. In our conceptualisation of the ASE, a key component of this experience lies with cognitive disequilibrium, facilitated by the destabilisation of exchange patterns only experienced by those to whom the social destabilisation is explicit (Clegg, 2006, 2012a, 2012b). There are a number of sources that support disequilibrium as a key cognitive component of the ASE.

First, the causes of cognitive disequilibrium are often linked to two primary categories: (1) a conflict with prior knowledge such as a contradiction, or deviation from the norm; and (2) novel information or occurrences (D’Mello & Graesser, 2014; Graesser & D’Mello, 2011; Graesser et al., 2005; Kibler, 2011). For instance, in experiments introducing a breakdown scenario (an unexpected malfunction of a device) as a conflict with prior knowledge, cognitive disequilibrium was found to occur. However, once it was understood what caused the malfunction, equilibrium was restored as the conflict was resolved and the sense of discomfort subsided (D’Mello & Graesser, 2014; Graesser & Olde, 2003). In the case of understanding novelty, the encounter will challenge existing mental structures causing a sense of conflict, unease, and self-doubt in the individual as they attempt to understand or assimilate the new content. When the individual assimilates the new content successfully, they return to a state of cognitive equilibrium (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010). Both categories, contradictions and novelty, mirror the two primary categories proposed in our ASE model; normative violations, and non-normative service situations.

The second source is evidence from breaching experiments, which are essentially cases of normative violations linked to social anxiety (Garfinkel, 1967). Gregory (1982) attempted to produce a sociological explanation of the experience of this type of social anxiety, in particular focussing on the cognitive component. Using the accounts of students instructed to conduct breaching experiments, it was found that in the moment of carrying out the breaching action, their mental state changed from being at ease to instant stark anomic panic and tension. Interestingly, however, this tension disappeared as soon the individual moved out of the
vicinity. This notion of released tension coincides with someone returning to a state of cognitive equilibrium once their state of cognitive disequilibrium is resolved (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010). It appears to reflect what is described in a socially awkward situation, that is if participants are able to re-stabilise the situation successfully, then the social tension is released almost immediately (Clegg, 2012a). Finally, embarrassment researchers often loosely define the awkward account as involving a disruption in the social script and participants find themselves without a course of action (what to do and how to respond), and the encounter becomes disorganised (Miller, 1996; Silver et al., 1987; Weinberg, 1968). Being mentally disorganised exactly reflects cognitive disequilibrium, and the accompanying arousal will be elevated beyond a comfortable level (Honeycutt, 1993). It is for this reason that violations are perceived as being capable of undermining effective role performance, and therefore group or societal stability (Goffman, 1959).

### 3.2.2.3 Mindful Alertness

According to the notion of mindless behaviour, in routine (and familiar) service encounters, interaction with the environment will be passive with little cognitive effort required. In a study of tourist experiences using mindfulness concepts, repetitive features, traditional signs and designs induced a state of mindlessness, whereby the tourists were mentally absent from the tourist site (Law & Ting, 2011; Moscardo, 1996). In contrast to routine service encounters, when the service encounter was non-routine, either because it involved a violation or was new, a transition to mindfulness occurred (Langer et al., 1978). This was reflected in the same study where communication features capable of inducing mindfulness amongst tourists were proposed to be variety, novelty (such as being new or unique), and conflict and surprise (Moscardo, 1996). Additionally when tourists were unable to adapt and navigate a tourist site they became mindful, and attention was then directed towards finding their place.

As another example, service innovation which introduces a change can cause the transition from mindlessness to mindfulness (Zolfagharian & Paswan, 2015) because there is an inconsistency with past experience (Solomon et al., 1985). Mindlessness is a passive state of information processing where environmental information is being mechanically processed and not used for conscious consideration. This means that when asked, many specific details of the interaction will be unable to be recalled (Langer et al., 1978). In contrast, mindfulness is characterised by a heightened awareness, intense focus of attention, and increased sensitivity to changes in the situation (Moscardo, 2009).

Based on narratives of the socially awkward situation, the experience of an ASE will consist of the mindful intense focussing of attention on social behaviours, which magnifies social tension directed at those at the centre of the social disruption (Clegg, 2012a). This intense focus resembles a phenomenon which scholars refer to as the spotlight effect. The spotlight effect describes the tendency to believe that our actions stick out like a sore thumb, in overestimating how noticeable an unpleasant event is to others, which in reality may not even be that noticed (Gilovich et al., 2000; Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999). Interestingly, this intense focussing of attention also appears to immediately follow what was initially a period of casual attention (Clegg, 2012a). Goffman (1963) also described a similar change in quality of attention in social interactions, suggesting that,
even in unfocussed interactions, tacit monitoring still exists to ensure there are no abnormal or threatening occurrences. However when these occurrences do happen, they quickly attract attention. This change is seen as the transition from mindlessness to mindfulness. Mindful alertness is proposed to follow cognitive disequilibrium, because the two are associated. For instance, uncertainty and instability (characteristics of cognitive disequilibrium) are known to invoke mindfulness and, in contrast, certainty provokes mindlessness (Langer, 1989a, 1989b).

3.2.2.4 Monologues (thought orientations)

Internal monologue, also referred to as self-talk, sub-vocal speech, internal dialogue, inner speech, inner monologue, self-verbalisations, and self-statements (Hardy, Hall, & Hardy, 2004; Morin, 2005), is a form of introspection. It describes the cognitive process or activity of talking to oneself in a silent manner, often on one’s own subjective experience (Morin, 2005). Internal monologue is different to normal external speech because it does not function for interpersonal communication, and can exist in a condensed or fragmented form such as a single word, a phrase, or a complete sentence (Siegrist, 1995). Internal monologue can also be compared to the notion of imagined interactions. Edwards, Honeycutt, and Zagacki (1988) described imagined interactions as people having mental conversations with themselves. These conversations can be short or extended, ambiguous or detailed. Berkos, Allen, Kearney, and Plax (2001) explored imagined interactions as an information processing and coping mechanism in response to norm violations. In particular, the authors suggested that imagined interactions operate as a central processing mechanism to help the recipient cope. The imagined interactions will involve identifying the violation and making a decision on how to respond. Imagined interactions can help with understanding and awareness, planning, and releasing built-up tension (Edwards et al., 1988).

Two distinct forms of internal monologues can exist in social episodes: relaxing internal monologue and stressful internal monologue. While the former emphasises a form of pleasant internal monologue, the latter is frantic, unpleasant and based on feelings of discomfort and the perception that something has gone, or is about to go wrong. This perception generates tension which obstructs the smooth flow of events (i.e. the social disruption). The stressful internal monologue is most likely in consumers’ ASEs, as these are most often experienced in perplexing or ambiguous situations (Howell, 1986). Stressful internal monologues are also most relevant because of the situational demands that are suggested to trigger them, including norm violations, ego-involvement issues which nag at public failures (likened to threats to fundamental human needs), and fear and anxiety (Howell, 1986). Together, these situational demands mirror the stressors of ASEs previously discussed. For instance, ostracism as a form of threatened esteem-related needs will generate damaging introspection (Williams et al., 2000).

In the ASE model proposed, it is suggested that internal monologue will follow cognitive disturbance and mindfulness to help the customer deal with the internal discomfort (Langer, 1989a). This is supported by other research suggesting that a wakeful state, such as mindfulness, is a prerequisite of internal monologue (Morin, 2001, 2005). This purposeful thinking is aimed at deep inquiry which may include but not be limited to question...
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asking, reflection and reasoning. Questions are a processing component of cognitive activities and may include causal antecedent questions, such as why did X occur, or not occur (Graesser & Olde, 2003; Otero & Graesser, 2001). In this manner, the internal monologue may also reflect an appraisal process. The cognitive content of the internal monologue can focus on a variety of aspects associated with the encounter. In one study (Kendall & Hollon, 1989), the authors investigated the cognitive content associated with the experience of a more global form of anxiety. Three factors (or groups of self-statements) were identified: (1) a perceived inability to maintain coping and negative future views; (2) reflective self-doubt and questioning; and (3) confusion and worry for future plans. Interestingly, several of the self-statements were in the form of questions. In another study using thought sampling techniques with 380 participants, internal monologue was found to be directed at evaluations of the self, others close to the self, and the immediate physical environment (Morin, Uttl, & Hamper, 2011). Another study showed that internal monologue was also concerned with the evaluation by others of the self and about activities relevant to the self (Morin & Uttl, 2013). Given that cognitive disequilibrium can occur at various cognitive levels, including the self-concept and social interaction (Graesser & D'Mello, 2011), the questions in an ASE may focus on the self and the meaning of the social interaction. For instance, the customer’s uncertain coping potential could manifest as being unsure about what is going on, and what they should be doing (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005), whilst their uncertain future expectations could manifest as being worried about the potentially negative implications the event has for their public image, or seeking information about their current social standing as a result of the event (Miller, 1996). Overall then, it is expected that internal monologue as a result of an ASE is likely to focus on what this research calls: (1) action-oriented thoughts (or monologue); and (2) image-oriented thoughts (or monologue).

**Action-oriented Monologues**

Various descriptions of awkward encounters in the embarrassment domain have emphasised a loss of script as the core characteristic, for instance being without a chartered course of action, being indecisive about how to proceed, and experiencing a loss of direction (Miller, 1992; Weinberg, 1968; Withers & Sherblom, 2008). This suggests that one main concern in an ASE will be uncertainty about what may be going on, as well as what to do. It should then follow that the stressful internal monologue will emphasise cognitions involving sense making to regain control over the environment and to establish the next course of action to coordinate the current encounter. This is consistent with Clegg’s narrative of the socially awkward situation; that is, by acknowledging an encounter as awkward, we are communicating to ourselves that something has gone wrong in the interaction. Attention will thus be directed at what to do regarding the disruption to ensure social harmony is regained (Clegg, 2012a). As with self-management, the action-oriented monologue is focussed on figuring out what should be done/said (Brinthaupt, Hein, & Kramer, 2009).

**Image-oriented Monologues**

The awkward encounter is often characterised by anxiety. When someone experiences social anxiety, the state of “aversive, cognitive-affective reaction characterised by automatic arousal and apprehension” (Leary, 1983, p. 67), their internal monologue is distorted to exaggerate the current conditions (Howell, 1986). This exaggeration can see them focussing on receiving the negative evaluations of others, consistent with Clegg’s
general narrative of the socially awkward situation showing that those at the centre of the awkward situation show a heightened concern over what others are thinking. For instance, the interviewees thought, “If I left, what does that say about me?” (Clegg, 2012a, p. 268). Clegg’s (2012a) narrative also linked awkward encounters to uncertainty (situation and outcome). Under these circumstances, one can be gloomy and fixate on potential social punishments arising (Howell, 1986), which again reflects the negative implication for one’s social image.

3.2.2.5 Tonic Immobility

The cognitive disturbance arising in the customer from the processes and appraisals in the ASE, is expected to be reflected behaviourally as a moment of tonic immobility (Abrams, Nicholas Carleton, Taylor, & Asmundson, 2009). In particular, by being consumed with internal thoughts and contradictions, the customer will be unable to respond sensibly, which contributes to a physical disruption in the interaction. The customer may essentially freeze on the spot, a typical symptom of tonic immobility. Tonic immobility, defined as “a temporary behavioural state of motor inhibition” is when the individual demonstrates an unresponsiveness to external stimuli (Abrams et al., 2009, p. 550). It is often experienced in situations involving fear. Tonic immobility, primarily studied in the context of animal behaviour, is adaptive because it allows animals to be hyper-vigilant to environmental cues to determine an appropriate reaction (Schmidt, Richey, Zvolensky, & Maner, 2008). Recently, the concept has been applied to human behaviour. Roelofs et al. (2010) examined bodily-freeze responses in relation to social threat. In their experiment, participants viewed cues that were either socially threatening (i.e. showing angry faces), neutral, or socially affiliative (i.e. showing happy faces) whilst their bodily sways were monitored with a stabilometric force platform. The authors found that in comparison to the latter two groups, participants in the socially threatening condition exhibited significant reductions in body sway movements, which correlated with higher subjective anxiety scores.

This moment of tonic immobility is proposed to capture behaviourally the loss of script moment and associated immobilisation, as described by embarrassment scholars in the awkward account (Silver et al., 1987). Scherer, Zentner, and Stern (2004) suggested that freezing marks an appraisal process where one “cannot decide on, or does not have available, an appropriate behavioural reaction to deal adequately…” (p. 399). By freezing, the customer can closely monitor the source of uncertainty or danger to allow for reorientation. The customer is able to wait for further information, or hope that another social agent will help to release the tension in the situation (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). In communications research, this freezing accompanies the awkward silence (McLaughlin & Cody, 1982; Newman, 1982), which incapacitates performance and inhibits smooth interactions. Discomfort is often associated with interactive silence because of the need to interact smoothly (Newman, 1982). Experimental findings have shown that silence in conversations devalues the conversation. However when silence was justified through activities, the conversations were then deemed more favourable and thoughts were either positive or neutral. During silences that were not justified, the thoughts and feelings documented reflected anxiety, for instance how to restore the conversation, as in, what can I say next? (Newman, 1982). These findings suggest that the comfort or discomfort associated with the silence will depend on whether the silence is compatible with situational norms of the interaction. If silence is not legitimised, then
it is likely to be uncomfortable. In the case of the unwanted disruption in the ASE, the silence will not be legitimised, which gives space for self-conscious thoughts and the pressure to talk.

3.2.3 Emotional Responses

Emotions have been defined as “mental states of readiness that arise from cognitive appraisals of events or one’s own thoughts” (Bagozzi et al., 1999, p. 184). In line with this definition, consumption emotions have been empirically demonstrated to be a consequence of appraisals and, further, they have been shown to mediate the relationship between appraisals and evaluations and behaviours (Nyer, 1997). In the ASE model, it is proposed that in addition to embarrassment, which falls under self-conscious emotions, another class of emotions that can arise is knowledge emotions. By including knowledge emotions in the ASE model, it is believed that the current research can help differentiate when an ASE involves embarrassment, and when it does not.

3.2.3.1 Self-conscious Emotions

Self-conscious emotions are fundamentally social emotions. They play a central role in ensuring that participants in social interactions, such as the service encounter, behave in socially appropriate ways in accordance with roles and scripts pre-defined through socialisation and brought to the forefront in social contexts (Tracy & Robins, 2004; Tracy et al., 2007). Accordingly, these emotions promote social goals (Tracy et al., 2007). In contrast to basic emotions such as anger, self-conscious emotions require the customer to be self-aware, reflect upon the self and become the object of their own attention (Morin, 2006; Morin & Everett, 1990). The tendency to become self-aware (or self-conscious) usually occurs in the (real or imagined) presence of others, because concerns regarding how actions and the self are being evaluated by others increase (Dahl et al., 2001; Fenigstein, 1979; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975; Miller, 1996). These emotions can also be experienced collectively. For instance the good or bad actions of people we are closely affiliated with (i.e. family and friends) can also trigger our sense of pride, shame, or embarrassment (Silvia, 2009). Of the self-conscious emotions, embarrassment is most likely to exist in consumers’ ASEs (Miller, 1996; Silver et al., 1987).

Embarrassment has been defined as “the acute state of flustered, awkward, abashed chagrin that follows events that increase the threat of unwanted evaluations from real or imagined audiences” (Miller, 1996, p. 129). Further descriptions of embarrassment focus on a response to a threat towards an individual’s social identity, hence potentially discrediting their interactional face (Goffman, 1956). Face is the “positive social value a person effectively claims for himself” (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). In a social encounter, each individual will engage and cooperate in a manner to save face. This means they will avoid places and topics that threaten their face, and employ tactics to maintain face (Goffman, 1967). These behaviours are driven by the emotional responses attached to their face. An individual whose face is threatened will feel bad, ashamed, and inferior. This experience is referred to as a loss of face where reputational damage can result. In this way, a person’s face is seen as dependent on the flow of events in a social setting (Goffman, 1955, 1956). For the ASE in particular, when an individual loses their script, the momentary incapacitation is likely to threaten the face that
is being projected (Keltner & Buswell, 1997), which produces embarrassment (Miller, 1996; Parrott et al., 1988; Silver et al., 1987). In a recent model of self-conscious emotions (Tracy & Robins, 2004) it was shown that for embarrassment to occur, the appraisals involved were identity goal relevance and identity goal incongruence. An additional component was a focus on the individual’s public self, that is, how real or imagined others may be evaluating them. These appraisals appear to reflect components we have discussed as stressors in an ASE, such as fundamental needs and normative violations. A second self-conscious emotion that is closely related to embarrassment is shame. Consequently, shame is also expected as a possible emotional response to ASEs. Shame involves negative feelings about the self and, similarly to embarrassment, also occurs in response to threats to the social self. Some studies have even linked the two emotions and suggested that embarrassment is a mild form of shame; whilst embarrassment arises from trivial social transgressions, shame arises from more serious transgressions (Miller & Tangney, 1994; Tracy et al., 2007).

3.2.3.2 Knowledge Emotions

Knowledge emotions are a group of emotions closely associated to comprehension and thinking. Silvia (2010) suggested that these emotions stem from goals that surround knowing, thinking, and understanding and can therefore be thought of as reactions to information. When an individual is confronted with an occurrence that is incongruent with their existing knowledge or expectations, the knowledge emotion(s) is likely to ensue (Keltner & Shiota, 2003). This suggests that knowledge emotions are highly relevant to ASEs. Silvia’s (2009) two dimensional appraisal space model considers knowledge emotions to be a function of: (1) the level of novelty, complexity and familiarity; and (2) comprehension; coping potential or the ability to understand. Novelty and familiarity are clearly associated to non-normative service situations, reinforcing the relevance of knowledge emotions. Of the range of knowledge emotions identified in the literature (Silvia, 2010), two are expected to be present in ASEs, namely confusion and surprise.

Although some researchers classify confusion as a cognitive state, others suggest that confusion is an emotion or affective state (e.g. Keltner & Shiota, 2003; Rozin & Cohen, 2003; Silvia, 2009, 2010). The latter approach is of interest to this research. Confusion is a common response in relation to challenging situational experiences. However psychologists have primarily focussed on confusion in relation to chronic or persistent cognitive disorders, such as dementia and delirium (e.g. Thomas et al., 2012). In the marketplace the focus has been brand-related confusion, such as similarity confusion (when products/services appear overly similar), overload confusion (when the environment contains too much information which cannot be processed adequately to ensure confident decision making), and ambiguity confusion (where there is an inconsistency and consumers must update previously held beliefs and assumptions about the product/service) (Mitchell, Walsh, & Yamin, 2005). Confusion in the current research more closely resembles overload and ambiguity confusion and focusses specifically on the external environment and what is happening. Uncertainty is at the core of confusion (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). It serves as an important signal that comprehension has been lost and that more effort is needed to determine an appropriate course of action, or that it is better to withdraw from the situation (Silvia, 2009, 2010).
Prior research suggests that confusion is one key affective signature of cognitive disequilibrium (D'Mello & Graesser, 2014; Lehman, D'Mello, & Graesser, 2012). In one study, it was assumed that a breakdown scenario, used to induce cognitive disequilibrium, would be followed by confusion. In comparison to the control group, the breakdown scenarios did indeed induce greater levels of confusion (D'Mello & Graesser, 2014). It therefore follows that because cognitive disequilibrium is a feature within consumers’ ASE, confusion will also be generated. Drawing also on Silvia’s (2009) two dimensional appraisal space model, appraisals for confusion involve high novelty and low ability to comprehend. Further evidence in support of this appraisal space for confusion was found by Silvia (2010). In the first experiment, confusing pictures were rated by viewers as complex and incomprehensible. Then in the second experiment, manipulated changes in comprehension led to reduced confusion. The fact that appraisals for confusion involve high novelty and low comprehension clearly indicates a link between confusion and ASEs, as novelty and comprehension (via effectance-related needs) are suggested to be stressors that initiate an ASE. The connection between confusion and ASEs can also be illustrated using the example of ostracism. When ostracised, it is likely the individual will face an awkward encounter and ambiguity (Williams, 2001; Williams et al., 2000). This ambiguity generates an inner struggle of conflict and tension which makes the recipient ask themselves, “Why aren’t they replying?” or “Did I do something?” or “What has happened?” (Geller, Goodstein, Silver, & Sternberg, 1974), questions which reflect confusion. Finally, confusion has been documented as a common response to breaching experiments, in which it was described as awkward to undergo (Gregory Jr, 1982), and appeared to motivate behaviours indicative of withdrawal (Silvia, 2010). These behaviours also mirror behaviours identified in social awkwardness (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b).

Secondly, surprise is also expected because a startle response that interrupts ongoing action usually arises from appraisals of novelty, unexpectedness or discrepant events (Kim & Mattila, 2013; Vanhamme & Snelders, 2001). This interruption enables the focussing of attention on the situational event, such as questioning what is happening and why, in order to remove the discrepancy (Meyer, Niepel, Rudolph, & Schützwohl, 1991). In the consumer context, surprise has been documented as being triggered by an unexpected or incorrectly expected event (Kim & Mattila, 2013; Vanhamme & Snelders, 2001). This resembles a situational stressor, proposed earlier as initiating the ASE (i.e. normative violations). The discrepancy that arises interrupts smooth information processing. The individual experiencing surprise may pause to evaluate their current circumstances, leading to delayed responsive action (assumed to be a case of the momentary incapacitation). Although surprise is described as a neutral emotion, the emotion can be distinguished in terms of a negative surprise versus a positive surprise which in turn will elicit a negative or positive response. For instance, new (or unexpected) events trigger surprise, however the ability of the individual to cope (i.e. comprehension), will predict whether or not confusion will also ensue. If the individual cannot cope, then confusion is likely to ensue following surprise (Silvia, 2009, 2010). This is expected in the ASE, as low coping is seen as lacking the appropriate resources to navigate and proceed with the current interaction (Miller, 1996). Overall then, surprise in an ASE takes on negative associations.
3.2.4 Firm-related Outcomes

There are a number of firm-related outcomes expected in the ASE that will occur directly or indirectly as a result of the customer’s coping responses. These outcomes may include, but are not limited to, re-patronage intentions (as a form of avoidance coping), complaint behaviours (as a form of problem-focused coping), as well as negative WOM, satisfaction (or dissatisfaction), and brand attitudes.

3.2.4.1 Re-patronage Intentions

One firm-related outcome expected in an ASE is reduced re-patronage intentions. Re-patronage intentions capture the consumer’s willingness to continue being a customer of the firm in the future. Because re-patronage intentions are based on the future, scholars have used re-patronage intentions and exit behaviours interchangeably (for example Blodgett, 1994; Blodgett & Tax, 1993). When a consumer intends to re-patronise the firm, it means they are willing to come back and spend money on the firm. This behaviour is equivalent to staying with the firm. In contrast, when the consumer does not intend to re-patronise the firm, it means they will not return in the future, hence have adopted an exit strategy by taking their business elsewhere. The expected relationship between ASEs and re-patronage intentions is based on previous research on social awkwardness and embarrassment.

The negative influence of ASEs on re-patronage intentions has been established by research on the socially awkward situation (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). In Clegg’s study, socially awkward situations resulted in general avoidance coping responses that essentially blocked further communication. Interestingly, these avoidant responses were capable of being conducted over longer periods, beyond the immediate encounter. This was evident when some participants were not ‘moving on’ from the awkward event, hence needed to continue staying away from those involved. The need to stay away is also consistent with responses to anxiety, in particular, anxiety inducing situations (such as awkward encounters) often result in escape or avoidance behaviours (Lazarus, 1991). In the consumer context, avoidance behaviours may be reflected in reduced re-patronage and even exit behaviours.

Secondly, the experience of self-conscious emotions such as embarrassment are psychologically painful customer experiences (Tracy et al., 2007) which may encourage the customer to stay away from the firm in case of repeat episodes, or to avoid re-living the experience. One study of consumer embarrassment showed that 73% of respondents opted, in one way or another, to cease contact with the firm following their embarrassing experience. A small number said they would try to tolerate future interactions if it was impossible to avoid the firm (Grace, 2007). In a later study, embarrassment was found to discourage re-patronage intentions (Grace, 2009).

Finally, in relation to ostracism, consumers who were cyber ostracised (i.e. by ignoring the customer’s request for a fee estimate) (Williams, 2001) reported lower levels of perceived professionalism and were thus less likely to patronise with the firm, compared to those who received replies.
3.2.4.2 Complaint Behaviours (and Negative WOM)

In addition to avoidance coping (as reflected above with reduced re-patronage intentions), another dominant form of coping expected in relation to an awkward encounter is problem-focussed coping (Clegg, 2012a). The specific actions the customer can engage in for problem-focussed coping may include direct acknowledgement to resolve the underlying issues around the event. This is likely when the customer feels they still have some control over the situation, and that something can be done. These behaviours are consistent with what the services literature calls complaint behaviours. Complaint behaviours cover a variety of behaviours: voice responses, private responses and third-party responses (Singh, 1988), all focussed on communication following a service encounter outcome.

Negative WOM, defined as “all negatively valenced, informal communication between parties about goods and services and the evaluation thereof…” (Wetzer, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2007, pp. 661-662), is considered a form of complaint behaviours (Singh, 1988). However, it is more informal compared to traditional complaint behaviours that may be engaged in directly with the employee/firm. A review of negative WOM conceptualised this variable as resulting from an imbalance of expectations and perceptions (Buttle, 1998). Accordingly, it can be said to mirror normative violations. In terms of research on surprise as an emotional response in ASEs, a positive relationship is said to exist between negative surprises and negative WOM. It was found a negatively surprising experience will be shared with six others (approximately 5.58), on average, in a negative manner (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003). Finally, the experience of negative emotions is most likely to initiate negative WOM. In an exploratory study, 55% of respondents reported engaging in negative WOM following their embarrassing situation (Grace, 2007). In another study, consumer embarrassment was found to encourage negative WOM (Wu & Mattila, 2013). Uncertainty (which also exists in ASEs), is also said to facilitate negative WOM, driven by the desire to obtain comfort and advice (Wetzer et al., 2007).

3.2.4.3 Consumer Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction

Based on the situational stressors of ASEs, one of which is normative violations, another likely outcome is reduced consumer satisfaction. According to expectation disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1977, 1980), consumer satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) is a function of both the consumer’s expectations (what the consumer anticipates will occur in the service encounter or how they anticipate the product will perform), and perceived performance (how the consumer perceives the actual performance of the product or service). Three outcomes can result from this comparison: (1) negative disconfirmation where perceived performance falls short of expectations; (2) positive disconfirmation where perceived performance exceeds expectations; and (3) confirmation where perceived performance can also be equal to consumers’ expectations. Negative disconfirmation results in consumer dissatisfaction, and positive disconfirmation in consumer satisfaction. In terms of the ASE, a normative violation is likely to have occurred hence disconfirmation is triggered. Furthermore, this disconfirmation is most likely to be in the form of negative disconfirmation, in particular because the accompanying anxiety is unpleasant.
In other areas also, a decrease (increase) in satisfaction (dissatisfaction) is suggested based on the components proposed in the earlier phases of developing the consumers’ ASE. For instance, perceived control as a component of effectance needs has been suggested as an essential determinant of satisfactory interpersonal interactions (Faranda, 2001), and more specifically in the consumer context (Hui & Bateson, 1991). In a retail context, a reduction in perceived control by restricting customers’ movements negatively impacted shopping satisfaction (Van Rompay, Galetzka, Pruyn, & Garcia, 2008). Correspondingly, perceived control has been shown to have a positive relationship with satisfaction (Chang, 2008; Collier & Sherrell, 2010). Other studies also have found a positive relationship between perceived control and satisfaction in various contexts (Langer & Saegert, 1977; Namastivayam & Hinkin, 2003; Pacheco, Lunardo, & Santos, 2013). Novel service situations, another stressor in ASEs, have also been suggested to lead to dissatisfaction (Bateson, 2002a). This is because confidence in one’s actions is likely to lead to satisfaction (Solomon et al., 1985). However when one is not confident, dissatisfaction is likely to result. Finally, the nature/quality of the customer-employee encounter has been proposed as an important determinant of satisfaction (Bitner et al., 1990; Solomon et al., 1985). Given that awkward service encounters disrupt the encounter and are more likely to be an unpleasant experience (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b), ASEs are again expected to lead to reduced customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

3.2.4.4 Brand (or firm) Attitudes

Brand attitude is defined as “the consumer’s overall positive or negative disposition toward the brand, resulting from their perceptions of and satisfaction with brand stimuli” (Grace & O’Cass, 2005b, p. 127). This suggests that brand attitude is a global assessment that the customer holds about the brand (Wu & Wang, 2011). It can be related to product related attributes or non-product related attributes, and experiential benefits or functional benefits (Keller, 1993; Zeithaml, 1988). Due to this global evaluation, brand attitudes are considered a psychological construct linked to certain feelings regarding the brand. A positive brand attitude would therefore see the consumer as having positive brand judgments, such as feelings of goodness, whilst negative brand attitudes would suggest the opposite effect. In terms of factors that influence brand attitudes, previous research has shown that customer’s overall brand attitude is based on a comprehensive evaluation of brand-related attributes (MacKenzie & Spreng, 1992). Further, consumers’ emotional responses are a key predictor of brand attitudes (Morris, Woo, Geason, & Kim, 2002), as well as satisfaction (Oliver, 1980). Drawing on the last two in particular, first the emotional responses in ASEs have been proposed to include confusion and embarrassment, both negatively valenced emotions (Durso, Geldbach, & Corballis, 2012; Miller, 1996; Silvia, 2009) associated with customer distress, which in turn are likely to cause negative impressions and brand/firm evaluations. Second, in a satisfaction model, it was suggested that consumer attitudes are updated based on satisfaction levels (Oliver, 1997). Empirical evidence also exists to support this relationship (Brexendorf, Mühlmeier, Tomczak, & Eisend, 2010). Based on the previous section then, where it was proposed that ASEs lead to reduced consumer satisfaction (or increased dissatisfaction), there is a corresponding implication that ASEs will also lead to reduced favourable (or unfavourable) attitudes towards the brand and firm. Finally, it has been suggested that the outcome of various contact points between the customer and the service provider in the service encounter are the basis for creating favourable (or unfavourable) attitudes towards the service
brand (Brexendorf et al., 2010). For instance, the way the employee treats the customer in the service encounter will contribute to their perception of the employee, which in turn informs their perceptions of the brand (Brexendorf et al., 2010; Iacobucci & Hibbard, 1999). The unpleasantness of the ASE is thus likely to lead to unfavourable impressions, and further to unfavourable brand attitudes.

3.3 PROPOSED EXAMINATION OF CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The overall goal of this thesis is to examine consumers’ ASEs. Having presented a conceptual model of this experience in the previous section, the thesis will now revisit the three research objectives found in Chapter One, to (a) clearly illustrate how each objective will be achieved through one of three consecutive studies, and (b) clearly illustrate how each objective plays a role in examining the conceptual model. For illustrative purposes, the connection between the objectives, studies, and conceptual model is presented in Figure 6. As shown in Figure 6, under research objectives and studies, each research objective will be directly addressed by a separate study, as each has a different focus, however when combined, will contribute towards examining the entire conceptual model (as reflected under components of ASE model examined). Objective One for instance will primarily focus on the nature of the situation and attempt to confirm the situational stressors. To achieve this, Study One is proposed, using the critical incident technique (CIT) survey. This technique involves collecting a large number of awkward service encounters, which will be subsequently analysed through content analysis to determine the features and common types (i.e. the situational stressors). Having explored the front end of the conceptual model, the research moves on to Objective Two, which focusses on exploring consumers’ ASEs and identifying its core elements. In relation to the conceptual model, the primary focus of this objective moves beyond the situational stressors to identify the latter components of the model, however it is also acknowledged that when consumers are discussing their ASE, they will also refer to the situational stressors which may further confirm the categories identified in Objective One (Study One). To explore and identify these additional elements, this thesis will use semi-structured interviews with consumers who have experienced a recent or memorable awkward service encounter. The re-occurring themes in the interviews will represent the key components of the ASE. Together, Objective One and Two (to be fulfilled through Study One and Two respectively) represent phase one of the research – both are exploratory in nature as they first aim to explore consumers’ ASEs. Both in turn, will help confirm or tweak the components highlighted in the conceptual model, and hence prepare it for empirical analysis.

Following the exploratory phase, the empirical phase of this research is represented by Objective Three which essentially brings together and applies the learnings obtained through the previous phase. Objective Three focusses on statistically examining a complete model of consumers’ ASEs, to determine the relationship between components in the model and identify when embarrassment is most likely to occur. This will be achieved through Study Three which will use a scenario-based survey to gather data, and structural equation modelling to model relationships and the pathway to embarrassment. Overall Studies One, Two, and Three which aim to achieve Objectives One, Two, and Three, in its entirety, represent a complete assessment of consumers’ ASEs.
Figure 6: Connection between Research Objectives, Studies, and Conceptual Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Objectives and Studies</th>
<th>Research Approach</th>
<th>Components of ASE model examined</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase One: Exploratory</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study One aims to achieve Objective One:  To explore the underlying features and common types of awkward service encounters, and their association to embarrassment. <strong>Focus of experience:</strong> The situation (i.e. stressors).</td>
<td>Critical Incident Technique Survey <strong>Analysis:</strong> Content Analysis <strong>Data:</strong> US sample (via CrowdFlower)</td>
<td>Primary: (1) Situational stressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Two aims to achieve Objective Two:  To explore consumers’ ASEs (with an emphasis on cognitions, emotions, and behaviours). <strong>Focus of experience:</strong> Identification of elements in the loss of script moment, threats, and reactions.</td>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews <strong>Analysis:</strong> Content Analysis <strong>Data:</strong> NZ sample (via purposive and snowball sampling)</td>
<td>Primary: (2) Cognitive states and processes, (3) emotional responses, and (4) outcomes Secondary: (1) Situational stressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Three will be informed by the findings of Studies One and Two</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase Two: Empirical</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Study Three aims to achieve Objective Three:  To empirically examine consumers’ ASEs by modelling the relationship between components and when it is or is not likely to be embarrassing. <strong>Focus of experience:</strong> Complete examination of ASE model</td>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews <strong>Analysis:</strong> Structural Equation Modelling <strong>Data:</strong> US sample (via CrowdFlower)</td>
<td>Primary: (1 - 4) All components Relationship between model components AND when embarrassment is likely to occur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4 CHAPTER THREE SUMMARY

The purpose of Chapter Three has been to present a conceptual model of consumers’ ASEs. A number of concepts and theories were first outlined, including cognitive appraisal theory, role theory, fundamental human needs, cognitive disequilibrium, and mindfulness. These concepts and theories were then incorporated into a conceptual model of consumers’ ASE, which was segmented into four main components: (1) situational stressors (i.e. the awkward service encounter); (2) cognitive states and processes; (3) emotional responses; and (4) firm-related outcomes. Having presented a complete model, the chapter then went on to briefly highlight how the model will be examined, in particular by linking the Objectives and Studies that will follow to the model. The next chapters will now present each of the studies.
4.0 CHAPTER FOUR OVERVIEW

The focus of Chapter Four is to present Study One. The proposed methodology (see Figure 7) is first outlined, paying particular attention to the research objective, the approach to data collection (namely the CIT), the CIT survey design and administration, and finally the method of analysis and pre-analysis data checks. The focus then moves to the findings of Study One and the two primary categories of awkward service encounters are presented; those linked to: (1) normative violations, and those linked to (2) non-normative service situations. The percentage of reported embarrassment relative to awkward service encounters is also briefly discussed. Finally, a brief conclusion for the study is presented, and a chapter summary is also provided.

Figure 7: Chapter Four Overview

4.1 Study One Methodology
- Study Objective
- Critical Incident Technique (CIT)
- CIT Survey Design
- CIT Administration
- Method of Analysis
- Pre-analysis Data Checks

4.2 Study One Findings
- Awkward Service Encounters linked to Normative Violations
- Awkward Service Encounters linked to Non-normative Service Situations
- Awkward Service Encounters and Embarrassment

4.3 Study One Conclusion
To assist the reader, the aim, sample size, methods used, and key findings for Study One are summarised in Table 2. In the following section, Study One will be discussed in further detail.

Table 2: Study One - Overarching Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Aims</th>
<th>Sample Information</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To explore from the consumers’ perspective: (a) the underlying features and common types of awkward service encounters, and (b) their association to embarrassment</td>
<td>Recruited from CrowdFlower (online) US sample 437 respondents (each sharing 1 incident) 437 incidents collected</td>
<td>CIT survey Content Analysis</td>
<td>Two underlying features: (a) Normative violations (93.4%) - 10 common types (b) Non-normative service situations (6.6%) - 3 common types Of the awkward incidents collected, only 51% were reported as embarrassing Features/common types are not effective in differentiating between embarrassing versus non-embarrassing awkward service encounters</td>
</tr>
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4.1 STUDY ONE METHODOLOGY

4.1.1 Study Objective

The objective of Study One was to: (1) obtain an understanding of the core underlying features and common types of the awkward service encounter; and (2) conduct a preliminary examination of the association between awkward service encounters and embarrassment (in percentage terms). The CIT was adopted for Study One, as detailed in the next section.

4.1.2 Critical Incident Technique Approach (CIT) and Justification

Flanagan (1954) introduced and developed the CIT approach. The basic idea behind the CIT is to collect and make sense of observable human behaviours, termed the critical incident, so that practical problems can be addressed. The CIT can be applied either qualitatively or quantitatively. When applied quantitatively, the technique assesses the type, nature and frequency of incidents, which in turn may be linked to additional variables to increase understanding. The CIT is particularly useful when the objective is to understand, through description and explanation, a relatively new or underexplored phenomenon (Bitner et al., 1990; Gremler, 2004). Additionally, because the data comes from the participant’s own perspective, it generates an in-depth and accurate record of events (Grove & Fisk, 1997).

As described, the objective of Study One was to understand the core features and the common types of the awkward service encounter, as well as provide a preliminary examination of awkward service encounters and their association with embarrassment in percentage terms. Given this objective, the CIT was considered appropriate because by gathering a pool of critical incidents and scrutinising the characteristics of the incidents, commonalities and differences between the incidents could be identified. The underlying features of awkward
service encounters were then able to be established, and further the common types of awkward service encounters according to these core features identified. In addition, examining service encounters from the perspective of awkward service encounters has been underexplored, which reinforced the appropriateness of the CIT approach. Finally, allowing respondents to share their stories in their own words reduced researcher influence on the description of the collected incidents. This in turn provided an accurate record of events.

The CIT has also been applied successfully in examinations of the service encounter, including customer-employee interactions (both from the customer’s and the employee’s perspective) (Bitner et al., 1994; Bitner et al., 1990), and customer-customer interactions (Grove & Fisk, 1997). Together with the benefits outlined above, its application in this area supports its use for the current study. For the purposes of this study, the CIT was utilised via a survey, following steps outlined by Gremler (2004), in conjunction with previous works providing good exemplars for its use (e.g. Bitner et al., 1990; Edvardsson, 1992; Keaveney, 1995).

4.1.3 CIT Survey Design

There are many important aspects to take into consideration when preparing a survey, including a logical survey structure, the appropriate wording of questions, and pre-testing.

4.1.3.1 CIT Survey Structure

As the starting point for the survey (see Appendix A for the CIT survey), potential participants were presented with information informing them of the purpose of the research and what they would be required to do, should they wish to take part. Next, as the focus of the CIT survey was capturing participants’ awkward service encounters, the first part of the survey required participants to share a recent service encounter (one that happened preferably within the previous six months). In order to capture a diverse range of encounters, the decision was made not to restrict the service context. Participants were advised to provide as much detail as possible, with further prompts to include: (a) the service provider (i.e. brand or company) involved; (b) the specific circumstances leading up to the encounter; (c) what happened during the encounter; and (d) anything else that the participant felt was relevant in helping understand their reported awkward service encounter.

Once details surrounding the event had been gathered, the survey moved on to ask what the participant thought was the main cause of their awkward service encounter. The aim of this question was to allow the researcher to understand the cause of the awkward service encounter from the participant’s perspective. This information was not primarily for data analysis. However it provided a means of validating the analysis, by enabling identification and matching of proposed causes from both the participants’ and outside researcher’s perspective.

Next, the survey asked for three pieces of additional information about the participant’s awkward service encounter: (a) when (in terms of months ago) did the awkward service encounter happen?; (b) the participant’s perceived level of awkwardness; and (c) whether the participant believed they also experienced embarrassment. The timing of the participant’s awkward service encounter was included primarily for
classification purposes. The level of awkwardness and the presence of embarrassment served to help differentiate (if possible) between different types of awkward service encounters. Finally, the survey concluded with questions about primary demographic information, such as the participant’s gender and age. Although this study did not seek to generate a representative sample, respondents’ demographic information was obtained in order to describe the sample.

The survey structure was considered logical because the survey focussed entirely on the awkward service encounter and the primary details needed to understand the encounter, beginning from the circumstances of the event through to the participant’s evaluation of the event. The description of their encounter served as a good starting point because the participant introduced their awkward service encounter to the researcher, focussing specifically on the details of what happened and with whom. Having shared their version of what happened, the participant then had the chance to reflect on what happened and disclose what they thought was the primary cause of their awkward service encounter, how long ago it happened, how awkward it was, and whether or not they were embarrassed.

4.1.3.2 CIT Survey Wording and Pre-testing

In order to ensure the appropriate wording of questions, common principles such as avoiding jargon, ambiguous words, loaded questions, double barrelled questions, or questions that require significant effort from the participant, were followed when designing the survey questionnaire. These common principles acted merely as a guideline, however, additional modifications were anticipated following pre-testing of the survey. An initial draft of the survey was first pre-tested on six marketing postgraduate students (both at PhD and Master’s level). Comments were sought about the content of the survey, the choice of words used, the flow, and any additional factors that should be taken into account. A summary of the changes adopted can be seen below:

- Changes to instructions to be more explicit
- Added emphasis on anonymity
- Removal of a brief example of an awkward service encounter – seen as leading and could restrict the types of awkward service encounters that respondents share
- Removal of unnecessary descriptors
- Rephrasing of statements and/or words to provide simplicity and clarity
- Include added explanation for necessary jargon, such as service encounter, in the information sheet

After the appropriate modifications were made, the updated survey was further pretested on 10 family members and friends, none of whom had a degree in marketing, or were immediately affiliated to the University. This second pre-test acted as the field pre-test and focussed on assessing the general public’s ability to understand the questions asked, and the average amount of time required to complete the CIT survey. It was concluded that there were no major difficulties with understanding the survey questions and the amount of time required was not excessive and so data collection proceeded.
4.1.4 CIT Survey Administration

The decision was made to host the CIT survey online, following Grace (2007), to ensure that data could be gathered in a non-threatening manner (because the described scenarios could be associated to embarrassment, which might be a sensitive issue for some respondents), thus encouraging participation. Accordingly, the CIT survey was implemented in SurveyMonkey and then hosted on CrowdFlower, a crowdsourcing platform that allows users to upload requests that will be completed by a large number of people online from all over the world. Much like other crowdsourcing platforms, CrowdFlower acts as an intermediary, linking researchers to potential participants (De Winter, Kyriakidis, Dodou, & Happee, 2015). Although the CrowdFlower platform offers different sources of participants, the sample used for this study was restricted to participants located in the United States. Other available features used included the quality control feature, for instance limiting participants to a single completion only; this meant that participants could only participate once. The CrowdFlower contributor level was set at 2 out of 3, meaning the speed of data collection might be reduced, however the reliability of responses would increase.

In order to comply with the ethical requirements of the University (see Appendix D for all ethics documents), participant anonymity was ensured by explicitly excluding the collection of personally identifiable information, other than basic demographic data to understand the make-up of the final sample. Additionally, informed consent was ensured by giving potential participants the option to proceed, or not, with the click of a button on the first webpage, which also detailed information about the survey and what participants were required to do when going through the survey. Finally, participants were compensated for their time with a small payment on successful completion of the survey. In order to verify completion, participants were redirected to a survey code at the end, which was then copied to CrowdFlower for payment to be processed.

4.1.4.1 CrowdFlower Advantages and Disadvantages

As with other methods of data collection, there were a number of advantages and disadvantages to using crowdsourcing platforms such as CrowdFlower. The primary advantages of using crowdsourcing platforms include easy access to a large pool of potential participants, flexibility and convenience, faster speed of data collection and reduced costs. A disadvantage is the sample obtained is limited to the pool of people linked to CrowdFlower through its channel providers. Another potential issue is collecting low quality data due to participants who aim only to maximise the number of tasks/surveys completed, and hence their financial pay out.

Despite the disadvantages, the use of crowdsourcing platforms as a research tool is increasing in popularity (Mason & Suri, 2012). Since 2014, the use of crowdsourcing platforms for research, including behavioural and psychological experiments, has increased (De Winter et al., 2015). In the consumer context in particular, for 2016 alone, Google Scholar shows a number of articles in The Journal of Consumer Research and The Journal of Marketing which have used crowdsourcing to gather data. This suggests that using these platforms for this research is appropriate. In comparing respondents, a number of studies have shown that behaviours of subjects recruited through crowdsourcing platforms (in particular focussing on Mechanical Turk), are
comparable to those observed in laboratory subjects (e.g. Horton, Rand, & Zeckhauser, 2011; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Further, there were no meaningful differences between the populations obtained from crowdsourcing platforms and those of other internet samples, and there was high test-retest reliability (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Overall then, there appears to be only very slight differences in results obtained using crowdsourcing participants versus participants interviewed using others methods (see Mason & Suri, 2012 for more detail).

In terms of their cost efficiency and speed which can compromise data quality, the researcher attempted to differentiate between participants who properly completed the CIT survey and those who aimed to just get paid, based on survey completion time. This strategy was based on a study of malicious activity, defined as participants “with ulterior motives, who either simply sabotage a task or try to quickly attain task completion for monetary gains” (Gadiraju, Kawase, Dietze, & Demartini, 2015, p. 1). The study found that highly malicious participants were observed to have the lowest average task completion times, therefore using completion time as a tool for subsequent data cleaning was reasonable.

4.1.5 Method of Analysis

As with most CIT studies, the present study utilised content analysis to analyse the written data (Gremler, 2004). Content analysis is a “scientific, objective, systematic, quantitative and generalizable description of communication content” (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 10). Content analysis techniques involve the researcher creating or utilising a coding scheme then calculating necessary statistics to assess the inter-rater (or inter-coder) reliability.

To begin this process, data analysis and interpretation procedures, as outlined by Gremler (2004), were followed. This involved reading and re-reading incidents, and identifying recurring characteristics (using the tentative main categories based on the conceptual model in Chapter Three as a starting point). The unit of analysis used was discrete behaviours. However for those incidents where discrete behaviours were not deemed the cause of the participant’s awkward service encounter, the unit of analysis was expanded to include the nature of the situation/interaction. Clegg (2012a), for example, found that awkwardness could be latent within particular kinds of interactions, such as a novel situation, as opposed to being triggered through behaviours. Major categories that could account for all incidents in the incident pool were first created. Each major category was then reassessed to create potential sub-categories to arrive at specific behaviours and the nature of the situation/interaction causing the awkward service encounter. Next, a classification scheme was developed with descriptions of the identified categories. The classification scheme needed to be constructed in such a way as to assist external coders in categorising the data as objectively as possible. The classification scheme was then tested by using it to classify the entire pool of incidents and, where necessary, the scheme was redefined in the case of any incongruities (Sayre, 1992). Finally, two independent judges (whom had never seen the incidents or the coding scheme) were used to verify the classification scheme by also classifying the entire pool of incidents and assessing the inter-coder reliability, to determine whether the appropriate level had been reached. Measures used for inter-coder reliability were the percentage of
agreement, Cohen’s k (Cohen, 1960), and the alternative index of reliability (Ir) (Perreault & Leigh, 1989). Where a disagreement occurred, the classification of the incident was resolved through discussion. Once the content analysis process was completed, as a final task, the primary researcher calculated the frequency, mean awkward rating, and presence of embarrassment for each category. The intention of this final task was not to create generalisations but to provide characteristics of the sampled incidents.

4.1.6 Pre-analysis Data Checks

In Study One, a critical incident was defined as a specific occurrence in a service setting that was labelled as awkward. Incidents included for analysis had to meet the following criteria: (1) be awkward from the customer’s point of view; (2) occur in the context of services; (3) preferably occur within the last six months to ensure that adequate details can be remembered; and (4) contain sufficient information to allow adequate classification (Bitner et al., 1990; Grace, 2007; Keaveney, 1995). To ensure these criteria were met, the researcher began the data cleaning process by first assessing participants’ written responses to ensure that they met these conditions. As a second task, the researcher examined the amount of time taken to complete the survey. Surveys that were completed unusually fast were carefully scrutinised to determine whether the survey had been taken seriously, or whether there was enough detail in their description of the service encounter to enable subsequent analysis and classification.

In total, 514 respondents completed the survey. Each respondent shared one awkward incident resulting in a total of 514 to be analysed, however following an examination of the incidents (according to the conditions outlined above), a number were removed due to vague descriptions, not being service-related, not directly relating to awkwardness, or not being from a customer’s perspective. The total number of cases removed was 75, leaving a final sample of 437 critical incidents to analyse. Further information about the sample incidents for Study One is presented in Table 3. In the sample, fifty-nine percent of respondents were female. Ages ranged from 18 years to 60+ years with the primary age group being 21 to 30 year olds, and the service contexts contained in the incidents consisted of 8 primary industries (or service sectors) including restaurants, various retail outlets, telecommunication services, health and beauty, computing and electronics, automotive services, banking, and travel and tourism. Of the industries (or service sectors) identified, the highest occurrence of awkward service encounters was in the restaurant industry (30.9% of the entire sample), followed by retail stores (28.8% of the entire sample).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age breakdown</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-20 years</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30 years</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 years</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+ years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry breakdown</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Beauty</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing &amp; Electronics</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automotives</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel &amp; Tourism</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(^1)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)Other refers to industries that were reported by less than 10 respondents for example Charity Organisations, Homecare and Maintenance, and Insurance.
4.2 STUDY ONE FINDINGS

The final analysis procedure occurred in two primary phases. The first phase assessed whether the critical incident involved: (a) a normative violation; or (b) a non-normative service situation. In the second phase the exact behaviour was identified (or if an exact behaviour could not be identified, the situational setting) that primarily made the incident awkward. Once the final categories were established, separate meetings were held with two independent coders. At each meeting, the coder was given the critical incidents (along with general instructions and operational definitions for each category) and was informed of their task – to classify the incidents. The coder was given a chance to read the coding guide, as well as a small sample of critical incidents and encouraged to ask questions for clarification. Once all issues had been addressed, the coder was then left to classify the incidents alone, in their own time. The coder was instructed to contact the researcher as soon as they had finished coding, or whenever an issue needed clarification. Both coders returned the finished incidents approximately one to two weeks later.

Upon examination of the incidents, the percentage of agreement between both coders was satisfactory at 0.87. Similarly to Bitner et al. (1994), this research also utilised the inter-judge reliability (Perreault & Leigh, 1989) and the Cohen’s k (Cohen, 1960) which again were found to be satisfactory, at 0.93 and 0.86 respectively. A final meeting was then held with the coders to reconcile the discrepant incidents.

The final classification confirmed two underlying features of awkward service encounters and identified 13 common types. The incident sorting and categorisation process can be seen in Figure 8. The two underlying awkward service encounters were those arising from (1) normative violations, and (2) non-normative service situations. Normative violations focussed on violated social expectations or, in other words, the proper standards of behaviour (such as social or moral transgressions). Non-normative service situations focussed on novelty and the lack of familiarity with a service setting. This means these incidents were latent with awkward uncertainty, which could not be directly linked to human behaviours. Each will now be discussed in more detail.
Figure 8: Incident Sorting Procedure

Awkward service encounters linked to normative violations
1A: Employee mistakes and lack of knowledge
1B: Violation of customer’s social boundaries
1C: Employee intimidating and pressuring behaviours
1D: Communication problems and misunderstandings
1E: Witnessing others’ predicaments or conflicts
1F: Employee bizarre behaviours
1G: Customer oversights and blunders
1H: Employee impertinent behaviours
1I: Appealing complaint handling
1J: Customer unease with making corrections

Awkward service encounters linked to non-normative service situations
2A: Unfamiliar situations and settings
2B: Past associations
2C: Personal products and issues

Has a normative violation occurred and is this a major factor in causing the awkward encounter?

Is a non-normative service situation the major factor in causing the awkward encounter?

Create own category if incident is very distinct from existing options

Group One
Determine nature of the violation

Group Two
Determine nature of the situation

Yes
No
Yes
No
4.2.1 Awkward Service Encounters linked to Normative Violations

4.2.1.1 Employee Mistakes and Lack of Knowledge

In total, there were 10 types of awkward service encounters linked to normative violations, which made up 93.4% of the sampled incidents. Within this group (complete sample incidents for this group are presented in Table 4 and 5), the first type of awkward service encounter was employee mistakes and lack of knowledge. This type of encounter made up 12.1% of the sample and primarily captured employees’ odd or unbelievable mistakes, or where they possessed insufficient knowledge in comparison to the customer. Cases of unbelievable mistakes included the customer finding a fish bone in their ice-cream, and the employee serving alcohol beverages to a toddler. Furthermore, mistakes that forced customers to follow-up and provide the same information several times were included in this category, because it was beyond understandable for the customer, that a company could be so incompetent. While a few core-service problems occurred as well, such as slow service, these were primarily awkward because it left the customer feeling neglected, which should not be the case: “I had nothing to do and no one to talk to.” When there was a lack of expertise on the employee’s part, the customer often received insufficient advice or blank stares in response to their request for help, which then caused the awkward service encounter, for instance: “It was awkward because the salesman was of no help from a retailer that specifically sells cameras.” In these situations, many customers preferred to simply leave without making a purchase: “I left before the situation got any more awkward.”

4.2.1.2 Violation of Customer’s Social Boundaries

The second type of awkward service encounter, violation of customer’s social boundaries, made up 10.5% of the sample and primarily captured incidents where employees overstepped the customer’s personal boundaries. These specific behaviours included times when employees came too close to the customer: “He hovered barely an inch from my face”, or even unnecessarily touching the customer both in general areas: “The cashier made way too much physical contact with my hands”, as well as in more private areas: “The server spilt the drink on my pants then tried to wipe it all off (it was in the private areas).”

As well as these violations of physical space, there were also incidents that showed tension between interpersonal boundaries. As a representative of the company, not only should physical boundaries be maintained, but socially acceptable interpersonal boundaries are also important to ensure customers are kept comfortable. However, a range of incidents showed behaviours that clearly violated the customer’s boundaries. For instance, employees could be overly friendly in requesting private information: “The employee wanted to ask a million questions about myself”, or sharing their own private information: “She started telling me about her husband cheating on her.”

Other behaviours that violated the socially acceptable interpersonal boundaries included cases that involved sexual references, such as flirtatious behaviours. While being the recipient of flirtatious acts can be considered a compliment, these situations seemed to be awkward because the actions were being done by older individuals, or the customer was already in a relationship, or was simply not attracted to the employee: “The
flirting was coming from a much older man which made me feel extremely awkward.” Other cases of sexual references included those with excessive touching: “There was a lot of weird, unnecessary touching”, and direct discussion on the issue, “He said that his girlfriend now wanted to sleep-over all the time because he has the sexier bedding.”

Table 4: Awkward Service Encounters linked to Normative Violations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Incident Exemplar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A: Employee mistakes and lack of knowledge</td>
<td>Incidents where employees make mistakes (often odd or unbelievable) or possess insufficient knowledge (often in comparison to the customer)</td>
<td>After we finished our food, we ordered dessert. I ordered an ice cream. While I was enjoying the sweet treat I felt something hard, I took out the random piece in my mouth and it was a fish bone!!!!! I felt sick and I wanted to vomit. After having a nice dinner, you want to treat yourself with something sweet but you find something like that! It was awkward because you never expect that an expensive restaurant can give you a fish bone in your dessert!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B: Violation of customer’s physical/social boundaries</td>
<td>Incidents where employees violate the customer’s accepted boundaries (e.g. flirting, inappropriate touching, and oversharing or requesting personal information)</td>
<td>I was at a [restaurant] and the server spilt the drink on my pants then tried to wipe it all off (it was in the private areas) and then she proceeded to tell me all about her son who is 4 and had finally learnt how to poop in the toilet. I don't think that situation could get any more awkward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1C: Employee intimidating and pressuring behaviours</td>
<td>Incidents where employee(s) intimidate or attempt to force desired behaviours (e.g. a sale) from the customer</td>
<td>I was examining a product out of interest (specifically a lip-gloss) when a Sales Assistant approached me, appeared not to be talking to me but AT me (almost like she memorised a customer service script), took the lip-gloss out of my hand, went to the cash register and scanned the product and put it in a bag and everything, before I even really understood what was happening. Therefore I felt like I was forced into purchasing a product (because she had already scanned it at the register etc.) and I was not actually considering purchasing the product. It was highly awkward and since then I have refrained from using [company].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1D: Communication problems and misunderstandings</td>
<td>Incidents where there is a breakdown in communication e.g. language barriers, or misunderstandings</td>
<td>It happened on the phone with [company]. I needed to get a new battery for my laptop, because mine was fried. When I called a person speaking almost no English was on the other end. It was pretty awkward not knowing what he was saying, and it happens so much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1E: Witnessing others’ predicaments or conflicts</td>
<td>Incidents where the customer witnesses inappropriate or incompetent behaviours generally from a third-party perspective e.g. witnessing an argument</td>
<td>At [restaurant]. I'm not sure what caused it but I assume they were stressed from personal issues as well as a busy night at the restaurant (it was very crowded). The owners, a couple, began a slowly escalating verbal fight which I overheard snippets of as they did their business. It became very noticeable, awkward and made me want to leave.</td>
</tr>
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Table 5: Awkward Service Encounters linked to Normative Violations continued...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Incident Exemplar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1F: Employee bizarre behaviours</td>
<td>Incidents where the employee is behaving in a weird manner that usually leaves the customer baffled</td>
<td>When ordering my coffee, the macho male barista seemed to be a bit flirtatious and then out of nowhere in a very flamboyant manner he says, “girl let me tell you I just love your hair, and the colour.” I did not know how to react and could no longer tell if he was flirting with me or was envious. Immediately after I said thank you he went right back to his borderline macho demeanour as though nothing happened. At that point I was confused and just walked away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1G: Customer oversights and blunders</td>
<td>Incidents where the customer causes their own predicament e.g. forgetting wallet or causing the waiter to drop food</td>
<td>My computer and telephone service suddenly died while I was in the midst of an important job. I was extremely frustrated when I called and probably somewhat brusque and demanding with the customer service representative who answered. He slowly talked me through various checks, with my frustration level rising by the minute. Nothing seemed to work. Amazingly, the representative didn’t lose patience. I, on the other hand, was leaping about my desk when, to my utter mortification, I discovered I had kicked the cable connector loose. That was it. All my fault. I confessed that I had solved the problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1H: Employee impertinent behaviours</td>
<td>Incidents where the employee is blatantly rude and devalues the customer e.g. ignores the customer, or gives attitude</td>
<td>I was browsing through [company store] when a customer service rep approached me. They asked me if I needed any help or had any questions to which I replied “no, I’m just browsing.” They proceeded to stand close to me and watch over my shoulder as I tried out various apps on the [company product] and gave comments as I tried each one. After a couple minutes I said “thanks for your help but I’m just browsing at the moment” to which they replied “oh, I see, I should have guessed when I first saw you, my cousin does that too.” I gave them a quizzical look and left the store feeling unnerved and a little insulted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1I: Appalling complaint handling</td>
<td>Incidents where the employee is blatantly rude about complaints e.g. shouting at the customer regarding their complaint or reversing blame</td>
<td>I went out to dine with some friends and found hair in my food. I called the waiter over and tried to tell him without making things obvious until he accused me of placing the hair in the food myself to try to get over paying my bill. Ok, yes my food was almost gone but I did not do anything like that. I was so embarrassed, I didn’t even call the manager. I felt so awkward I placed the money for my food on the table and walked out of the restaurant leaving my friends behind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1J: Customer unease with making corrections</td>
<td>Incidents where the customer feels anxious or bad about making a correction (or complaint)</td>
<td>I was at [company] and I was going through the drive thru. I specifically asked for no meat on my [product], and they screwed it up. I had to go through the drive thru again and tell them what had happened and ask that they fix it. I felt awkward because I did not want to seem difficult, critical, or obnoxious.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.2.3 Employee Intimidating and Pressuring Behaviours

Next, employee intimidating and pressuring behaviours made up 8.9% of the sample and captured incidents where employees intimidated or attempted to force desired behaviours from the customer for their own (or the company’s) gain. Some of these aggressive behaviours were clearly directed at receiving a personal commission for instance, forcing the customer into a purchase: “The agent says, ‘well, you could die in a car crash on the way home!’”. Some employees went as far as blocking the customer from leaving: “She pretty much stood right outside my changing room door until I tried the items on.”

Apart from commission-focused acts, other aggressive employee behaviours were those aimed at encouraging participation in the firm’s events. For instance: “[She] made us choose to either hug the cow or leave without food.” Finally, overly attentive employee behaviours were not always appreciated by the customer, because it was considered intimidating or unreasonable: “The sales people kept staring at me as if I was going to steal”, and: “I was asked by the same worker if I needed help 4 times!”

4.1.2.4 Communication Problems and Misunderstandings

Communication problems and misunderstandings made up 6.6% of the sample and captured incidents where there was a breakdown in communication. Typical cases involved instances where communication was difficult despite being face-to-face. This was usually because an employee possessed a strong accent: “They couldn’t understand me (my accent), had to keep repeating myself”, or possessed limited English: “The cashier did not understand my request as her native language was not English.” When the flaw in communication was not face-to-face, it occurred because the use of different communication mediums impacted the clarity of communication content: “I was not able to understand the representative’s instruction about how to resolve the issue because it wasn’t face to face.” Flaws in communication appeared to generate confusion over what was actually being conveyed and concern over how they were being perceived: “I started to think that this guy thinks I’m extremely rude or just ignorant and can’t understand a simple accent.”

Misunderstandings were also classified here because they represented flaws in the interpretation of communication content. This was awkward because an erroneous interpretation often led to incorrect behavioural responses, for instance: “I felt awkward for laughing at what I thought was a joke.”
4.1.2.5 Witnessing Others’ Predicaments or Conflicts

Witnessing others' predicaments or conflicts made up 6.2% of the sample. These awkward service encounters captured incidents where the customer witnessed inappropriate behaviours of others, for instance witnessing an argument or overhearing private conversations. This meant that the customer’s awkward service encounter occurred from a bystander’s point of view, and that simply being in the vicinity of inappropriate actions was sufficient to initiate an awkward experience. The customer could see accidents and blunders of others, such as the clumsy moments of employees: “A server dropped all of the food by accident and began crying”, and those of other customers: “A lady knocked over a stand full of chips, the entire stand fell over.” Additionally, the customer could see conflicts in the form of an argument between employees: “I felt awkward eating whilst the waiter argued with the kitchen staff”, or between employees and other customers: “The cashier and another person were arguing back and forth.” It appeared that when in the presence of an argument, there was tension over what to do, whether to continue watching, leave, or try and intervene to dissolve the conflict: “It’s very awkward when people argue in front of you. You’re not sure how to act or what to say.” Under this category, the notion of conflict was extended to include witnessing the mistreatment of others: “Everyone in line was watching this poor girl get put down.” In other cases, the customer overheard personal matters such as the employee sharing their sexual activities with a colleague. In this situation the customer could no longer look at the employee directly in the face: “We both looked down as I ordered.”

4.1.2.6 Employee Bizarre Behaviours

Employee bizarre behaviours made up 4.8% of the sample and captured incidents where the employee(s) was behaving in a strange and unexplainable manner that often left the customer baffled. These behaviours were at times sudden, however primarily they did not make any logical sense based on the situation, or how things had been going beforehand. This meant that customers found it difficult to figure out a response. Typical examples of these strange behaviours were instances where employees terminated the interaction abruptly: “He left very quickly without giving any estimate…I didn’t know what to think”, where employees showed vastly contradictory mannerisms: “The macho male barista seemed to be a bit flirtatious and then out of nowhere in a very flamboyant manner he says, ‘girl let me tell you I just love your hair, and the colour’”, and where employees seemed to lack basic common sense: “I was told that this offer had expired at a date later than the current date.”

4.1.2.7 Customer Oversights and Blunders

Customer oversights and blunders made up 16.7% of the sample and captured incidents where the customer believed they had done something wrong, such as behaving in an uncivil or inappropriate manner (e.g. offending others, causing the waiter to drop food, forgetting their wallet, and raising a complaint only to realise that it was not the company’s mistake). The customer’s temporary lapse in physical control, emotional control, memory, and cognitive ability appeared to be the main driver of this type of awkward service encounter. These temporary lapses then gave rise to inappropriate conduct such as being unable to pay for their purchases: “I gave the retail person a credit card I use seldom and entered the wrong pin”, making a complaint and then
realising it was not a mistake: “I had made such a big scene and had been in the wrong”, and making stupid remarks. For instance a male customer offered to physically pick up a female employee so that she could reach an item that was out of her reach. When realising what he had just offered, he stated: “I just kind of stood there with that pale, blank expression on my face that one gets when he says something stupid.” Sometimes the customer would feel bad about their blunder because of how it affected the employee. For instance after yelling at the employee the customer stated: “The poor guy looked so out of place and I felt awkward about having put him under the bus.” A smaller subset involved the customer’s companion behaving inappropriately. The behaviours of acquaintances were grouped with the customer’s behaviours, based on the notion of ‘guilty by association’ (e.g. Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). The customer might therefore perceive the violation as their own.

### 4.2.1.8 Employee Impertinent Behaviours

Employee impertinent behaviours made up 15.8% of the sample and captured incidents where the employee was blatantly rude and devalued the customer. For instance, employees had ignored the customer or behaved in a manner clearly indicating that the customer was an inconvenience: “They acted like it was a pain for them to serve me.” Various judgmental behaviours towards the customer were also evident in this category. Employees judged customers based on their ability to make purchases: “He wouldn’t listen to anything I said at first and then scoffed at my phone choice”, and their financial position: “The staff made me feel like I was being cheap.” Employees even judged customers based on their physical appearance: “They said maybe I was too fat to fit those jeans”, and sometimes altered their level of service according to the customer’s appearance: “If I wear a suit I get better service.” Accusations against customers were also common. Employees would accuse the customer of improper acts, such as paying with fraudulent coupons, accuse the customer of stealing, and imply that the customer was lying: “I gave the agent my number (which ends in 0000) and was rudely told that number was not possible to have.”

Overall these behaviours appeared to be awkward because they made customers feel unworthy and insulted. In some cases, for no apparent reason, employees were unreasonably moody, angry or hostile towards the customer. Customers were belittled or used as a target to release the employee’s frustrations.

### 4.2.1.9 Appalling Complaint Handling

Appalling complaint handling made up 8.2% of the sample and captured incidents where the employee was blatantly rude about complaints, such as shouting back at or blaming the customer: “We tried to complain to the manager but then the manager started yelling at us”, and: “He ignored me and proceeded to berate me in front of a room full of people for 5 minutes then stormed off.” It was often the case that employees would take no responsibility for the customer’s problem by simply not caring, or even accuse the customer of causing or being the problem by inventing their complaints: “Even though it possibly could not have been my fault but I felt undermined.”
In general, when customers complained, the expected role of the employee is to attend professionally to the complaint to ensure satisfaction. Employees within this type of awkward service encounter however, contradicted this role because customers were left feeling demoralised by the lack of customer care: “It was just a strange situation where the company doesn't feel sympathy or concern for the customer.” When employees openly refused to attend or inadequately attended to complaints, customers were left with limited options: “I was told that that was how they serve their food and there was nothing they could do to rectify the situation.” This unwillingness to help, made customers feel unworthy.

4.2.1.10 Customer Unease with making Corrections

Customer unease with making corrections made up 3.4% of the sample and captured incidents where the customer felt anxious or bad about raising an issue: “I had to go up to the counter and tell them that they had given me the wrong coffee in front of many people.” These incidents were often linked directly to a service failure. However it was not the service failure that caused the awkward service encounter, but the customer’s uneasiness with raising the negative issue as it seemed confrontational. Customers realised that it was well within their rights to complain about an unsatisfactory service, and likewise to point out other errors the employee made. The idea of complaining, however, generated uneasiness for the customer, because not only were they concerned about hurting the employee’s feelings: “I didn't want to make her feel stupid, so then I felt really awkward”, but they were also concerned about how they would be perceived when the complaint is made: “I did not want to seem difficult, critical, or obnoxious.” Customers seemed to be more concerned about the employee’s feelings when the employee was pleasant to interact with. For instance: “The waitress was a very nice gal and had gone out of her way to be helpful and friendly, therefore it felt awkward to seem ungrateful and complain about the food.”

Overall, customers’ uneasiness with making complaints and pointing out errors seemed to relate to protecting both the employee and themselves. The notion of protecting the customer’s own image was further highlighted when one respondent made reference to the transgression that was necessary in formalising the complaint: “I had to do this in front of many people and so I felt I was pushing in line.”
4.2.2 Awkward Service Encounters linked to Non-normative Service Situations

The second group of awkward service encounters linked to non-normative service situations made up a significantly smaller proportion of the complete set of sampled incidents, at 6.6%. Within this second group, there were three common types of encounters (complete sample incidents for this group are presented in Table 6).

Table 6: Awkward Service Encounters linked to Non-normative Service Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Incident Exemplar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2A: Unfamiliar situations and settings</td>
<td>Incidents where the customer possesses a lack of knowledge or experience</td>
<td>Some friends and I went to a new local Japanese restaurant for dinner which we had never been to before. Once we were ready to order we called for the waiter. The awkward moment came when the waitress brought our meal which was meant to be cooked at the table but we had no idea how to cook the dish so we hesitated over whether we should start cooking and eating by ourselves or not. After sitting there not knowing what to do, we got the waitresses attention and we were shown how to cook the meal, which was indeed meant to be cooked ourselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B: Past associations</td>
<td>Incidents where the customer is exposed to past relationship partners or associates</td>
<td>I went into an [company] restaurant with part of my husband's family to eat dinner. My husband's brother worked at this restaurant (he was not working when we went in) and was dating a girl that was a waitress at the same restaurant. They had recently had a big fight (and he had told the family all about it) and they had discontinued their relationship. She was assigned to be our server. It was difficult to know what to do and how to interact with her because we didn't know if she had hard feelings toward him and we had all heard bad things about her, but social convention dictates cordiality in situations such as between server and guest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C: Personal products and issues</td>
<td>Incidents where personal products and issues are involved e.g. condoms or personal health problems</td>
<td>I received a call from a company that was trying to sell Vimax which is a male enhancement pill. At first I was unsure about who was calling so I put my call on speaker. Well I was not alone in the room. I was surrounded by about three of my friends. The first thing the lady did was verify who I was. Then the next sentence out of her mouth made the situation awkward and I was humiliated. The lady said “I am calling about the male enhancement product Vimax that you enquired about sir.” Needless to say I stepped out of the room and told the lady that it was an inappropriate time for me to talk.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2.1 Unfamiliar Situations and Settings

The first type of awkward service encounter was unfamiliar situations and settings. This awkward service encounter made up 3% of the sample and primarily captured incidents where the customer possessed a lack of knowledge or experience around the current service setting. A typical case was the customer receiving a particular type of service for the first time. When the customer had no prior experience with the type of service, an awkward service encounter arose because the customer did not know how to interact and behave. For
instance: “I first started our search for homes to buy but we had no idea what was involved”, and “I had never done anything like that before so I didn't know how to ask or what to say.” In these situations of first time service encounters, customer awkwardness could be reduced when the employee demonstrated compassion toward the customer’s lack of direction: “The saving grace was that the bank representative was very understanding.”

Some novel service situations were those that were simply abnormal. Nevertheless an uncertainty about how to behave and interact was still evident: “It was quite difficult to explain my exact problem to them as it was quite unusual.” There seemed to be implicit tension in these abnormal situations. One respondent described a situation where an employee in a wheelchair was prideful and insisted on reaching for an item: “People walked by shaking their head at me because it was obvious in a few seconds I could just reach and grab the shoe…I didn't want to hurt his feelings…but the awkwardness was overwhelming.” Not only was the incident unique, but there was tension present because the customer could not act as they desired because of their concern for the employee, whilst at the same time there was tension over how others walking by were viewing the situation.

4.2.2.2 Past Associations

Past associations made up 1.4% of the sample and captured incidents where the customer was exposed to past relationship partners, or past associates, which made the current interaction uneasy and hence they lost confidence in what they should be doing. These awkward service encounters arose from the presence of a particular individual (in the interaction) and had the individual been another person, the service encounter would not have been awkward. A number of the individuals causing the awkward service encounter were past relational partners of the customer, such as an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, whom it appeared the customer preferred to have no interaction with: “An ex-girlfriend worked there…she came to say hello and it was weird.” Simply encountering them was awkward: “I got mad and asked the boss to come out and when he did the boss was my ex-boyfriend. That was a very awkward moment.”

Other incidents involving personal associations were those where different role positions appeared to clash. It is here that knowledge of prior roles caused tension characteristic of an awkward encounter. For instance, one respondent indicated that during working hours their role was that of an educator. However on one occasion outside working hours, they visited Hooters and realised that: “My waitress was a former student of mine wearing mini shorts and a shirt that exposed far too much. I felt uncomfortable in this situation and left.” Here it was not the excessive exposure that generated the discomfort; it was the fact that the waitress was a former student and hence viewing her in this light caused discomfort. Had the waitress had no previous ties to the customer, the evening quite possibly would have continued as normal. Overall then, although the current interaction may have been faultless, it was still awkward.
4.2.2.3 Personal Products and Issues

Personal products and issues made up 2.3% of the sample and captured incidents that involved sensitive products and services such as condoms or menstrual product purchases, and healthcare visits. With regard to healthcare visits, disclosing one’s state to the doctor could be an awkward encounter especially if the condition was not a typical case of a cold or flu: “I felt awkward while explaining my personal health problem…[it was] uncommon and a little embarrassing.” Sensitive issues also included sensitive products such as hygiene products, sexual products, and undergarments. It was awkward for customers when purchasing or discussing these products: “I tried to cancel a sex toy order and had to explain to the service rep what I ordered and why I needed it cancelled.” The discomfort appeared to arise from the perception that others were evaluating them negatively: “It was a little embarrassing to buy the products (lice shampoo) in the first place since lice is associated with being dirty.” Undergarments were less of an issue, however did present uneasy moments for customers, particularly when employees of the opposite gender were present: “I felt myself starting to blush when my assistant [measuring my bra] was a male.” Overall, these incidents were primarily independent of direct behavioural triggers.

4.2.3 Awkward Service Encounters and their Association with Embarrassment

Having understood the core features and identified common types of awkward service encounters, the focus now turned to awkward service encounters and their association with embarrassment. For this task, statistics were generated for the incidents to reflect the percentage within the sample and within each type of awkward service encounter, the average awkwardness rating, and the percentage of incidents that were also considered embarrassing. This information is contained in Table 7.

Examining Table 7, it is evident (based on the average awkwardness ratings) that with the exception of customer unease with making complaints, all awkward service encounters collected were at least moderately awkward (scale 1 = a little awkward to 7 = very awkward). Past associations possessed the highest awkwardness rating, followed by personal products and issues. However, the main insight is that, of the entire sample, only 51% of the awkward service encounters collected were reported as also being embarrassing. This suggests that an awkward service encounter is not the same as an embarrassing situation. Consequently, embarrassment is only a potential consequence of awkward service encounters. Another interesting issue was that no individual category of the awkward service encounter was perfectly non-embarrassing or perfectly embarrassing (with the exception of personal products/issues). This means that other factors (i.e. other than situational characteristics) may be at play in determining whether an awkward service encounter then becomes embarrassing for a customer. Additionally, it further supports the need to conduct research to understand awkward service encounters and to differentiate between the various consequences. Finally, it appears that personal products/issues were always indicated as embarrassing. Although issue may be taken with the small number of incidents sampled to reflect this type of awkward service encounter, this finding nevertheless supports existing research that examines consumer embarrassment through focussing on personal products and issues.
CHAPTER FOUR: EXPLORATORY STUDY ONE

Table 7: Awkward Service Encounters and their Association with Embarrassment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normative Violations</th>
<th>CIT Sample</th>
<th>Embarrassment Portion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A: Employee mistakes and lack of knowledge</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awkwardness Rating</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B: Violation of customer's social boundaries</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1C: Employee intimidating and pressuring behaviours</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1D: Communication problems and misunderstandings</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1E: Witnessing others' predicaments or conflicts</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1F: Employee bizarre behaviours</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1G: Customer oversights and blunders</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1H: Employee impertinent behaviours</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1I: Appalling complaint handling</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1J: Customer unease with making corrections</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category total</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>93.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-normative Service Situation</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2A: Unfamiliar situations and settings</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B: Past associations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C: Personal products and issues</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall total</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 STUDY ONE CONCLUSION

For the participants in this study, awkward service encounters were represented by two primary underlying features; normative violations, and non-normative service situations. Within normative violations, 10 specific types of awkward service encounters were identified, whilst non-normative service situations involved three specific types. When comparing the underlying features, it was evident that awkward service encounters related to normative violations occurred to a much greater extent than awkward service encounters related to non-normative service situations. The nature of awkward service encounters also ranged from; those directly attributable to employees, for instance employee bizarre behaviours; to those that were attributable to the customer, for instance customer oversights and blunders; and those that were not attributed to behaviours at all, for instance past associations. Even more interesting was the fact that not all participants experienced embarrassment in their reported awkward service encounter, therefore embarrassment was only a potential consequence, and the two should not be treated as the same. Furthermore, across the 13 types of awkward service encounters, with the exception of personal products/issues, there was no clear distinction between the
types of awkward service encounters that were more or less likely to result in embarrassment. This suggests that the ability to scrutinise the relationship between awkward encounters that are embarrassing, or non-embarrassing, is not linked to an analysis of situational characteristics. Instead, the power to establish the difference between when embarrassment is or isn’t elicited, may be found in other parts of the experience, beyond the circumstances of the encounter.

4.4 CHAPTER FOUR SUMMARY

The focus of Chapter Four has been to present Study One, an exploratory study that aimed to examine awkward service encounters. In presenting Study One, this chapter has described the approach to the research, survey design and administration, data analysis and cleaning. The chapter has also presented the findings of Study One. In particular, the specific types of awkward service encounters were described with examples to further illustrate them. The chapter finished with a basic assessment of the relationship between types of awkward service encounters and embarrassment. A primary outcome of this assessment is the suggestion that to better understand when embarrassment is or is not elicited, it is necessary to go beyond analysing the circumstances of the encounter, by examining other components of consumers’ ASEs.
CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORATORY STUDY TWO

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE OVERVIEW

Chapter Five presents Study Two. Similarly to the previous chapter, the proposed methodology will be outlined (see Figure 9) and the findings presented, followed by a brief conclusion for the study, and a chapter summary. The outline of the proposed methodology will cover the study objective, the approach to the research (that is using semi-structured interviews), the design of the interview, recruitment of interviewees, and finally the method of analysis that will be used to analyse the interviews. The presentation of the study’s findings will be broken down into three main components: (1) the key components identified (using the conceptual model in Chapter Three as a basis); (2) interviewees’ understandings of the relationship between awkward service encounters and embarrassment; and (3) interviewees’ understandings of the relationship between awkward service encounters and service failures. Whilst the first point addresses the primary objective of the study (i.e. exploring the ASE), the latter two points are expected to help position awkward service encounters (and hence the ASE) alongside existing research from a lay person’s perspective.

Figure 9: Chapter Five Overview

5.1: Study Two Methodology
- Study Objective
- Semi-structured Interviews
- Interview Design
- Interviewee Recruitment
- Method of Analysis

5.2: Study Two Findings
- Key Components of Consumers’ ASE
- Awkward Service Encounters and Embarrassment
- Awkward Service Encounters and Service Failures

5.3: Study Two Conclusion
To assist the reader, the aim, sample size, methods used, and key findings for Study Two are summarised in Table 8. In the following section, Study Two will be discussed in further detail.

**Table 8: Study Two - Overarching Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Aims</th>
<th>Sample Information</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To explore consumers’ ASEs, in particular, identifying key elements i.e. threats, cognitions, emotions, and other reactions</td>
<td>Purposive and Snowball sampling NZ sample 12 consumers who have had an ASE</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews Content Analysis</td>
<td>Presence of key components in model confirmed ASEs can exist independently of embarrassment - Embarrassment requires image concerns ASEs can differ from service failures - A “perfect” service can be awkward - Lack of own experience can be awkward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.1 STUDY TWO METHODOLOGY

#### 5.1.1 Study Objective

The primary objective of Study Two was to explore consumers’ ASEs in more detail. In this process, with the conceptual model as a guide, particular attention was paid to the key components (i.e. cognitions, emotions, behaviours) of the ASE and how they may relate to one another using semi-structured interviews.

#### 5.1.2 Semi-structured Interviews

An interview is defined as "a method of data collection in which one person (an interviewer) asks questions of another person (a respondent)” (Whiting, 2008, p. 35). The interview approach was used because it facilitated the researcher’s primary aim of obtaining a deeper understanding of what consumers undergo in an ASE, including cognitions, emotions, and behaviours. Additionally because the interviews were face-to-face, it allowed the researcher to further query issues not immediately understood, an added benefit which could not be achieved with the CIT surveys. Interviews can be structured (using a specific questionnaire format with largely closed questions), semi-structured (contain predetermined questions but allows additional questions through dialogue), or unstructured (open questioning to obtain detail, and more questions emerge from the interview) (Whiting, 2008). The semi-structured interview approach was adopted in particular because it provides a balance of flexibility and structure with regard to the type of questions asked (Marsh, Mitchell, & Adamczyk, 2010). Interviewees can freely express the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings surrounding their experience, whilst also allowing the interviewer to ensure that the primary purpose of the research is maintained throughout. Additionally, there is already a basis for what information the researcher wishes to gather (Britten, Jones, Murphy, & Stacy, 1995).
5.1.3 Interview Design

In designing the questions to include in the interview guide, issues that could not be concluded from Study One (for instance what makes an awkward service encounter embarrassing versus not embarrassing) were taken into account, as well as issues directly addressing the objective of the study. The planned structure for the interviews (see Appendix B for the interview guide) began with general questions aimed at exploring the interviewee’s general understanding of the term awkward, for instance how they interpreted the term, and what they associated with it. Next, the discussion focussed on awkward encounters both in everyday interactions and those more specific to the service encounter. For the awkward service encounter, the interviewee was asked to describe the circumstances of the event, what their thoughts and feelings were throughout their ASE, and how the situation had influenced their subsequent evaluations and behaviours. It was to be made clear to the interviewee that their entire experience was of interest. Finally the interviewees were to be asked to reason, (from their own experiences as well as cases which they have discussed in the interview), the similarities and/or differences between awkward encounters (or awkwardness) and embarrassment. In this process, interviewees would be asked to focus on their thought processes when facing an awkward encounter only (independently of embarrassment), and then to focus on their thoughts when facing an embarrassing situation.

Prior to conducting the ‘real’ interviews, the interview guide was practiced with family and friends. This step was taken to familiarise the researcher with the different ways in which the interview could proceed, to test the flow of the intended questions, and to make the researcher aware of potential important points missed. Overall, practicing helped the researcher identify any potential problems that should be dealt with before actual data collection began.

5.1.4 Interviewee Recruitment and Interview Procedure

In order to recruit potential interviewees, non-probability sampling was used, in particular purposive and snowball sampling. The use of purposive sampling was considered appropriate because at this stage of the research, the purpose was to understand the ASE. Whilst anyone could be a potential interviewee, the main criteria was simply that they must have had an ASE, and be over 18 years of age. Ensuring that the interviewee had experienced an ASE allowed the interviewee to reflect and provide detail about the exact topic of investigation (Whiting, 2008). The approach to purposive sampling involved a call for interview participants using notice boards, and word-of-mouth through family, friends, and colleagues. Once an interviewee(s) was identified, snowball sampling was then used, where the interviewee was asked to help find other potential interviewees that fit the purpose of the study. This approach was appropriate because the current research was only in the initial stages of examining consumers’ ASEs.

To meet the required ethical responsibilities, before beginning the interview each interviewee was required to read a participant information sheet which contained important information about the study, including the purpose, their right to withdraw, confidentiality, and how the data provided would be used. Once the participant information sheet was understood, the interviewee was asked to sign a consent form to formally acknowledge their understanding. During the interviews, permission to record the interview with a digital recorder was
CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORATORY STUDY TWO

requested from the interviewee. Although it is acknowledged that recording devices may make participants uncomfortable, hence potentially affecting the way the interviewee may answer questions, the benefits were expected to outweigh the costs. Cavana, Delahaye, and Sekaran (2001) suggested that not only does the use of a recording device capture everything that is said in the interview, it can also help the researcher revisit the data during the analysis stage. Whiting (2008) reiterated this point by suggesting that having a permanent record of the interview is vital. Finally, each interviewee was compensated for their time with a gift voucher, funded through the University.

5.1.5 Method of Analysis

Following the completion of each interview, the interview was transcribed and read to establish the key ideas shared by the interviewee, and to get an initial idea of how many concepts from the conceptual model outlined in Chapter Three (the pre-determined categories for analysis) were evident. Once 12 interviews had been completed, many of the pre-determined categories were present and few new notions had emerged. The decision was therefore made to cease data collection as saturation was achieved, and to prepare the transcribed interviews for analysis.

Content analysis was the method of analysis used. Content analysis classifies contextual data into manageable key pieces of information. Content analysis was considered appropriate because the objective of Study Two was to understand consumers’ ASEs. The method could provide a broad description of the phenomenon, where the primary categories identified describe the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Content analysis can be carried out qualitatively or quantitatively. Qualitative content analysis involves determining the meaning of the data through a process of grouping the data into categories. These categories are treated as emerging from the data. Quantitative content analysis extends this process to include numerical representations of the categorised data. This is also referred to as a quantitative content analysis of qualitative data. For instance McDonald (1994) used quantitative content analysis for personal interviews. With quantitative content analysis, it is assumed that the frequency of content suggests significance (Sayre, 1992).

For the purposes of this study the data was obtained through an open ended enquiry, hence was qualitative in nature, but the analysis adopted the quantitative method of content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Lisak, 1994). Furthermore the process was deductive as there were pre-determined categories to inform the content analysis (Forman & Damschroder, 2008; Patton, 1990). The unit of analysis selected is the theme, defined as “a single assertion about a subject” (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 12). For this study, the themes that were put into the categories reflected the key concepts in the ASE.

To begin the data analysis process, the interviews were read through numerous times to identify the presence of key themes which reflected the concepts proposed in the conceptual model of consumers’ ASE (from Chapter Three). Once this initial process was completed, a coding manual was created containing descriptions of the themes, and examples of each theme. It should be noted that when discussing the consequences, the interviewees primarily described how the awkward service encounter affected them and how they dealt with it. Hence themes of avoidance coping, and problem-focussed coping were used for coding, instead of specific
firm-related outcomes. Two additional categories were also added to acknowledge discussions involving attempted differentiations between: (1) service failures and awkward service encounters; and (2) awkward service encounters and embarrassment elicitation (or the embarrassing situation).

The coding manual was then presented to two independent coders who were not directly connected to, and had no previous understanding of the study. Each coder met the researcher independently and was asked to familiarise themselves with the coding manual and encouraged to ask questions to resolve any uncertainties. Once the coder was familiar with the coding manual, they were presented with a few of the themes to categorise to test their ability to code. Once the test had been adequately completed, the coder was given: (1) a document containing all the snippets of text (483 in total) to be coded into theme categories (with notes of where the text could be found in the actual interview, to give the coder context if needed); and (2) copies of the 12 interviews that were marked with highlighted passages corresponding to the snippets of text to be coded in the first document (Lisak, 1994). Each coder was then left to complete the coding process in their own time (i.e. read through the text to understand each passage and to also refer to the interviews if needed, and make a judgment of which theme best captured the text). The coders returned the completed coding approximately two weeks later.

The next step in the content analysis process was the calculation of reliability. The inter-judge reliability is the "degree of consistency between coders applying the same set of categories to the same content" (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 14). For this study, the percentage of agreement between the two coders was 0.90, whilst the alternative index of reliability (Ir) (Perrault & Leigh, 1989) was 0.94. Reliability coefficients above 0.85 are considered sufficient (which was the case with this study) and the researcher need only treat the results with caution when the value reported is below 0.80 (Kassarjian, 1977). In cases where the chosen theme did not coincide, the independent coders were invited for a final meeting to resolve the different perspectives.

5.2 STUDY TWO FINDINGS

In total 12 consumers were recruited (4 male and 8 female). All interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes in length. Basic demographic information for the interviewees is presented in Table 9. Based on Table 9, it is evident that interviewees ranged from 19 to 49 years, with a mean age of 29. This means that the sample is skewed towards younger consumers, however it is important to note that interviewees were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling where they must have had a recent or memorable ASE, had to be at least 18 years of age, and had to be comfortable and willing to meet the researcher face-to-face to share their experience. More emphasis was placed on these factors (to gain an initial understanding of the experience) and not on age in particular, as a potential determinant of a person's ASE. Future research may wish to take age into consideration as a subset of demographic determinants of ASEs, however for the purposes of Study Two, saturation was reached therefore the analysis proceeded.
Table 9: Interviewee Age and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Number</th>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before presenting the findings, it is important to bear in mind that content analysis is a descriptive technique, thus to take the analysis beyond descriptions does not meet the purpose of the technique. Conclusions drawn should reflect the descriptive content which can be accompanied by descriptive data, but not direct causation as this constitutes improper leaps. The presentation of results should be descriptive and nothing more (Carlson, 2008). The quantitative summary of results can be seen in Table 10. The key themes representing the major concepts will now be presented.

5.2.1 Key Components of Consumers’ ASE

5.2.1.1 Normative Violations

Throughout the interviews, it was evident that the ASE began (through the awkward service encounter) as a violation of the customer’s expectations, or violations of what were considered appropriate behavioural boundaries during the customer-employee interaction. These violations could be attributed to the customer themselves, or to the actions of service providers. In one case, Frank spoke of an awkward service encounter where he was being yelled at for no apparent reason: “I don’t know what was up with him that day, but he just got angry…started shouting we don’t have any in stock, you get the idea.” The response was particularly shocking and violated appropriate standards of behaviour, because the customer had only enquired about the availability of stock and when more would come in. In another case, Sam shared a time when he was browsing with the assistance of a salesperson, when to his surprise, the salesperson suddenly exited: “[I] started talking to the sales person. Then all of a sudden the sales person seemed to abruptly excuse themselves and shot off…as a customer [that] was very awkward.”
Table 10: Key Components of ASEs Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme (15)</th>
<th>N texts</th>
<th>N interviewees</th>
<th>% interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normative violations</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-normative service situations</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectance-related needs (and threats)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteem-related needs (and threats)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive disequilibrium (discomfort)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful alertness</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented thoughts</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image-oriented thoughts</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary immobility (disruption)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge emotions</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-conscious emotions</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance coping</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-focussed coping</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkward service encounters and embarrassment elicitation</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkward service encounters and service failures</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While both the above cases reflect normative violations attributed to the employee, the customer can also be the cause. For instance, Frank caused his own awkward service encounter by misunderstanding the nurse’s instructions and therefore conducted actions that crossed the appropriate boundaries:

*I had the idea that it [needle] was gonna be put in my bum, but it was actually going to be put into my hip. And before I realised this, I already pulled my pants all the way down…when I realised it was going into my hip, it was just real awkward…like it was unnecessary of me to pull my pants down…[and] I’m going a bit too far with what I’m doing.*

Likewise Pam failed to maintain her poise by losing her temper at restaurant staff, thereby making a temporary scene which caused her awkward service encounter:

*We got there at two minutes after seven and they had given the table away. I got quite angry and at that point I did say something. And I think, because it was such a small restaurant, it probably seemed like I was shouting.*

The notion of normative violations was also reflected in responses surrounding general unmet expectations: “It tends to happen when there’s an expectation of certain behaviour and it’s not met,” negative surprises: “It gets you by surprise and at the same time it’s not a very good surprise,” and unpredictability: “It comes, it’s unpredictable…it just happened.” This meant that the event itself was experienced as having a strange
atmosphere: “That’s not how that service should be given and I had a very weird experience.” Additional descriptors used were “abnormal occurrences”, “something different”, and “something inappropriate.”

It appeared that an awkward service encounter arising from a normative violation was based on the notion of maintaining social norms or situational scripts. For instance, Annie explained that by staying within the boundaries of social norms, a sense of predictability is ensured which then contributes to smooth interactions and an overall sense of comfort. However when there are violations, the sense of predictability and comfort is lost:

Social norms provide the tracks on which everyday life runs…and that provides a certain predictability in life, so when we follow social norms, we display our competence…we affirm others expectations of what it is to be in the situation…so when that’s broken the opposite of that happens…people read it as a sign of your incompetence.

In particular for the service encounter, customers are meant to maintain their role as a customer by following the social script of a customer. When they, for instance, are unable to pay, it creates a normative violation from their side:

It goes against the expectations of a restaurant patron. People coming into the establishment are expected to be able to settle the bill…this is a disruption to that particular experience and it’s not normal…[having] to explain it, acknowledges, the non-normality of the situation and I suppose that gives rise to awkwardness.

This then creates the temporary social breakdown of what normally would be a smooth encounter.

The situational script (which at times may differ from the social script) must also be adhered to. In this case, the customer had informed the firm about an issue and in the midst of attending to the problem, the representative attempted a casual conversation which was deemed inappropriate given the current circumstances:

I considered the fact that you've done something wrong, and then you tried to be friends with me by playing the ethnicity card. This is not appropriate for this situation…you need to be apologetic…you need to tell me exactly what you're going to do to fix the situation. Don't try to make friends with me through unrelated topics.

In the same discussion, the interviewee explained why this act was inappropriate in this situation, however at the same time would be acceptable in a different social setting as a component of social norms and socially acceptable behaviours:

In another situation if we were 2 people meeting for the first time, that conversation might have gone differently as in oh yes I've been here x years…so there might have been a conversation around that.
5.2.1.2 Non-normative Service Situations

An awkward service encounter could also occur through a lack of experience or familiarity, which was often evident in service situations that were new or novel to the consumer. General descriptions used to reflect non-normative situations included: “It was my first time”, “They’re not familiar with a given script for a situation” or “They haven’t had enough experience.”

Completely new service situations were likely when customers were exposed to other cultural norms, such as when consuming services in other countries. This was shown when Sean recalled his trip overseas with a colleague who had to engage in a different way of eating:

>Culturally in [country] that’s fine. Everybody uses metal chopsticks but for the person it could be awkward because he’s never done it and he might feel like everybody’s looking at him… and [judging] whether he was doing it correctly or not.

In comparison to completely new service situations, encountering new aspects of a previous service appeared to be more common. Grace for instance spoke of a time where she had enquired about bra sizes. While having purchased bras before, she had never asked for assistance, therefore on this particular occasion, asking made the situation awkward: “All the other times I just go and just pick one out…but that was the first time I wanted to get the right one, so it’s awkward for me being my first time asking.” Similarly Sean had experienced being on a flight before, but his awkward service encounter was with flying in business class for the first time: “I felt awkward about it because I wasn’t sure what to expect…you just do things, but then you weren’t sure if you’re doing it right.”

The lack of familiarity or experience seemed to generate an awkward service encounter because it created more uncertainty about how the process should unfold, and what was expected of him. Annie’s comment reiterates the uncertainty of not knowing what actions are required:

>When you’re coming into a new situation that you’ve never been in before, you won’t have a script…there’s a lot of uncertainty in the situation itself as to where it’s gonna go, how do you act, what do you do next kind of thing.

The significance of inexperience and a lack of familiarity was highlighted by interviewees as a contributing feature of awkward service encounters through their discussion of how an awkward service encounter could become less awkward, or not be awkward at all. In particular, interviewees seemed to suggest that when they were more familiar, they knew what to expect, and when familiarity existed on both sides for participants in the encounter, it was more likely that expectations and performance would be matched. For instance, Sam appeared to prefer familiar brands as a means of reducing the likelihood of an awkward service encounter occurring:
[I like] sticking to a particular brand or service or product which I’m aware of…that ongoing repeat business…you’ve kind of got that idea it’s not going to be so awkward because you know how things work and their approach to certain things.

Sean also makes a similar suggestion: “You can overcome awkwardness once you gain experience.”

5.2.1.3 Effectance-related Needs (and threats)

Throughout the interviews, references to effectance-related needs and their subsequent threats did not occur as often as anticipated. In fact, they were the least mentioned (only mentioned by 4 interviewees). The general loss of control which impacted the ability to be competent social agents was reflected in the following comments by interviewees: “It’s unpredictable”, “You may not have any control over the situation” and “They don’t know what the outcome’s going to be…they’ve got this fear of what’s going to happen.”

Perceived threats to effectance-related needs specific to the service encounter were illustrated in Abby’s interaction with a sales employee. In particular, Abby was being pressured to make a purchase that she did not want: “They keep pushing and pushing…it gets really awkward coz you feel pressured to react in a certain way but you don’t want to.” Here Abby had entered a store with the intention of browsing however she was constantly hassled by an employee who was coercing her to make a purchase. Although she did not want to make a purchase which was evidenced by her comment: “You don’t want to”, she felt pressured because of their persistence and, further, was uncomfortable about telling the employee off. This then made her feel as if she had no choice in the situation.

In Carla’s case, the threat to her effectance-related needs involved an employee refusing to accommodate her request to return products which had only been purchased moments earlier. She believed she was entitled to return the items, however the employee consistently refused her request:

I was there for 10 or 15 minutes and I shouldn’t have to do that. He should have just straight away said, “Look, we can’t replace the wings; we’ll give you the money”, and I would’ve been okay about that, but for me to stand there for 10 or 15 minutes and go over and over and over explaining myself.

Carla was trying her best to make them see her point (and allow the return), however the harder they made the interaction, the more control she seemed to lose and the more awkward the encounter became.

5.2.1.4 Esteem-related Needs (and threats)

In comparison to effectance-related needs, references to esteem-related needs occurred more often and were made by more interviewees (9 interviewees). General references to esteem needs included: “It’s human nature to want to preserve a certain image of yourself and if that image gets shattered it causes anxiety”, and “They expect to have other people like them…people would go the distance to make sure that people like them.”

Subsequent threats to esteem-related needs, as illustrated by interviewees, seemed to occur when employees were not at all considerate of customer feelings. In Pam’s case, she spoke of an occasion when she went out...
for dinner with friends. When they then went to pay for their meals, instead of making pleasant conversation with the customer, the employee made an unnecessary comment that was deemed insulting, hence threatened their esteem (especially true for women) by referring to their size:

_He said to my friend oh, you ate the most, I would’ve expected you to eat the least. And so it was an insult to everyone there because he expected the other two of us to eat more, and he thought that she was eating too much. It was just unnecessary._

Similarly for Abby, an employee made her feel as if she was not being valued as a customer, which formed part of her ASE. Abby wanted to treat herself so went to a salon. The salon employees however discriminated against her on the basis of her low income, which then made the experience unpleasant and awkward for her:

_The price I was quoted was this, I can’t really afford to pay that much, and saying those words tainted the rest of my experiences…you started off with having a massage and a massage chair and a glass of wine and this and that…then by the last time you really felt like they were doing you a favour by letting you spend that much money on your hair._

Abby was made to feel as if she was not worthy of being in the salon and having the employees even work on her hair simply because they knew her occupation and earning ability. She summed this up with the following statement at the end of sharing this particular experience: “_I felt that because they were being a little bit snobby about what I was earning and how much I could afford, I shouldn’t really be in the salon._”

### 5.2.1.5 Cognitive Disequilibrium (i.e. imbalance and discomfort)

The notion of disequilibrium was shared by all interviewees. In fact, when asked what their awkward encounter was like, the first descriptions often included being uncomfortable (or discomfort), a sense of uneasiness, stress, tension, and burdensome. Whilst a range of descriptors were given, interviewees appeared to have difficulty suggesting anything further than reiterating the discomfort. For instance despite encouraging interviewees to suggest what they meant by this discomfort, it was often the case that interviewees would re-emphasise the discomfort: “_Uneasiness, or that something’s not quite right_; “_An uneasy feeling in the air, tension_;” and “_It’s strange, there’s this weird atmosphere, and it’s uncomfortable._”

When describing their ASEs however, the sense of discomfort, tension, and uneasiness were again evident among the interviewees. Mitchell related his sense of discomfort when having his hair cut, due to the employee’s actions:

_I don’t know whether she was on drugs or something, everything I said she didn’t hear and she would ask me again…at the end, as I was leaving, she was like make sure you come back again before you leave for Sydney. And I’m like well I’m not moving to Sydney…oh it was so weird. What a creepy lady._
More than once, Mitchell used expletive words in describing the incident, which showed just how uncomfortable the situation was for him. In Sandra’s case, when her card was declined, she described the moment of extreme discomfort, repeatedly using the words horror and die (social death):

[I] pulled out the credit card, and that declined too. Oh my gosh, horror, horror, horror, it was packed, it was five o’clock in the evening, so people are just coming from work to purchase their goods…so it was just, oh my gosh, oh my gosh, die, die, die.

Here the discomfort was so intense she repeated ‘horror’ and ‘die’ three times, consecutively. Then being unable to handle the situation (or decide what to do to make the situation better), she made a quick exit.

5.2.1.6 Mindful Alertness

According to the interviewees, their ASEs also consisted of what appeared to be a jolt of alertness and heightened mental processing. References to the sense of alertness were expressed as an active awareness of what was happening, and explicit visual monitoring of their environment, for instance: “They’re more alert”, and “You’re zoning out then your eyes start wandering around.” In this moment, customers then engaged in what appeared to be a process of evaluative monitoring and internal assessment of the situation. Descriptions of heightened mental processing included, “You’re not engaged with the situation so you engage with your own thoughts”, “You don’t acknowledge it [awkwardness] in the forefront but you sort of internally”, “You’re acknowledging that there’s a situation here that’s different”, and “It’s more of like going through your head…I need to take a moment here.” In this part of the awkward experience then, it seemed that their attention was suddenly focussed on the present moment and, in particular, thinking about the present moment: “People will just start being quiet because they’re kind of processing it.” Additionally, this part of the experience was not about calmly thinking about the current encounter, but was effortful and scattered, as if they were processing a lot of information in a small time frame: “Your mind just starts going all over the place…like whoa man what’s going to happen now.”

In Sam’s case, when he realised he had come face to face with a person he had had a previous negative encounter with (classified as past associations in Study One), he became very mindful: “I was holding my breath and just really thinking…what am I going to say that’s going to make him not flip out all the time and that.” His description reflected the thought processing that was going on, and his explicit focus on the situation.

5.2.1.7 Action-oriented Thoughts

Two types of thought (or monologue) orientation were present in the interviews. These thought orientations captured the stream of monologue and concerns that were at the forefront of the ASE. The first thought orientation was labelled as being action-oriented. This orientation centred on not knowing what to do (and trying to work out what should be done), or what to think. Simply not knowing what to do was stressful for the customer because the service encounter felt like it had come to a halt. Although in some cases the customer may have been able to think of a few options, they could still be uncertain as to which option was the best. This is illustrated in the following example by Sean, in the context of a service situation that was novel to him:
When I went on the plane [business class] I wasn’t really sure where to go or what to do…the lady came to me and she asked, oh do you want me to put your suitcase for you to the storage…they don’t really do that in economy class…I felt awkward about it because I wasn’t sure what to expect.

In another case Carla spoke of an ASE where she witnessed a normative violation by another customer. The customer’s card was declined and when the employee informed the focal customer of this occurrence, the customer suddenly became angry at the employee, as if the situation was the employee’s fault:

This woman had turned around and was going off at her, like it was all her fault that her card had declined. I was there at the same time while this woman was going off…it was awkward watching it, I was just standing thinking, oh my God, seriously?

In this example, Carla did not know what to think and interestingly, despite the shock of what she was seeing, she continued to awkwardly watch instead of removing herself from the situation or intervening. Abby made reference to similar situations of witnessing disputes, clearly indicating that in these situations she was at a loss of what to do:

I didn’t know them and didn’t know how to react, should I say something, should I not say something…just being in there and having to witness it all, it’s a state of, I don’t know, what do I do, do I leave, do I stay, do I watch?

Other general expressions shared by the interviewees to explain action-oriented thoughts included: “You have this pause where you try and think of what to do or what to say”, “What should I do, should I continue on in this conversation…or should I just move on? Should I alert her or him and tell them…”, and “It kicks in, oh my gosh, what do I do now.” Interviewees also demonstrated this thought orientation through hesitation and doubt which again reflected their indecisiveness about what action to pursue: “It’s all these internal dialogues of shouldn’t I, shouldn’t have I” and an overall inability to deal with the current situation: “You don’t know what to say, how to resolve it…how to respond.” Interestingly, when action-oriented thoughts originated from both sides of the interaction, it made the awkward encounter worse because it appeared to stall the interaction even more. For instance, when describing the moment of having your card declined, Abby said:

You’ve got the person going, oh crap, what do I do now, but then the salesperson thinking, oh no, what am I going to do, are they going to leave all their stuff here, so if it’s uncertainty on both sides then it can be amplified.

5.2.1.8 Image-oriented Thoughts

In contrast to action-oriented thoughts, image-oriented thoughts were concerned with negative social evaluations and hence focussed on how the customer might be perceived by others. In particular, when entering the service encounter, the customer preferred to maintain an acceptable social image which meant that they feared being classed into a less respectable group of consumers. This fear appeared to be so strong that at times the customer would forgo certain rights such as complaining, simply to maintain a social identity
they thought was acceptable. They didn’t want to appear difficult or be classed as a troublesome customer as suggested by Amy:

You don’t really wanna trouble them… [or] be one of those sorts of customers who point out mistakes and what not. Even though I know they should’ve got it right the first time, I just feel awkward going back.

In general when describing their concerns over social evaluations, interviewees provided descriptions such as: “You’re just overall afraid of what they’ll think of you”, “I guess the fear is that you’re being judged for being incompetent”, and “I didn’t want to come off on the wrong foot.” Social evaluations were important to the customer because of how it affected them and their reputation and esteem: “It’s human nature for people to judge and you don’t want to be judged in the wrong way.”

This thought orientation appeared to be dominant when it was the customer’s behaviour that violated normative standards. When a payment mishap occurred, the customer immediately became concerned about how others may be viewing them, for instance Abby: “The person is judging you behind the counter and I’m always afraid that other people overhear…they might think that I don’t have a job or that I’m bad at managing my money.” Sandra and Sean expressed similar concerns to Abby when their cards were declined as their attention became focussed on what others were thinking of them: “It’s the judgement…oh here goes a girl who’s on the dole”, and “It creates these kind of negative associations, and nobody wants to look like they don’t have sufficient funds to sustain their lifestyle.”

In other ASEs as well, the significance of social evaluations was evident. In Amy’s case, her ASE involved her father receiving an incorrect order. Her father then reacted angrily which made a scene, and she was concerned about how her father’s behaviour would generate a negative impression of both her father and herself, as she was with him:

Because that person is with you…and they’re actually swearing at that person [employee], the impression is actually going to be on yourself as well…I was concerned they’d have a negative impression of me, like why are they making a big deal of this.

In Grace’s case, her ASE involved a first-time personal product inquiry, followed by the immediate realisation that the information was on a sign nearby. She then became concerned that others had overheard and were judging her ignorance:

I thought they might be thinking something…like I’m new to the country, I just came from somewhere and not experienced in shopping and I went to the wrong shop…[or] she’s dumb, she doesn’t see the sign.

Finally, in Frank’s case, where he misunderstood the nurse’s instructions and pulled his pants all the way down, upon realising his mistake he then became concerned with how the nurse was evaluating him: “That person might think I was strange.”
5.2.1.9 Temporary Tonic Immobility (disruption)

During customers’ ASEs, the stage of heightened cognitive processing, evaluative monitoring and internal assessment of the situation appeared to associate itself with a specific behavioural response known as temporary tonic immobility. This state was exhibited as a disruption or temporary halt in the present encounter, as the customer became solely focussed on processing the event (as expressed by Grace): “There’s always a pause where you just look at that person that’s with you …you just look at each other and feel that awkward moment.”

Mitchell also referred explicitly to this pause in the moment: “It paralyses you…[and] you see it happening like a slow motion car crash”, whilst Annie made the explicit connection between pausing (awkward silence) and her thought processes:

She asks me, are you [ethnicity]? Yes. Awkward silence - right? And the reason that was awkward for me is because my inner monologue was saying yeah so, that conversation has nothing to do with this particular one.

When asked about the significance of pausing, or what she had previously described as the “dot dot dot” moment, she makes direct reference to the awkward silence: “It’s an awkward silence…it’s an unnatural pause in a situation.” She also stated that without it, the situation would be a lot less awkward, or not awkward at all: “If the script carries on normally, nobody registers your feeling of awkwardness or your awkward thoughts, then it wouldn’t be an awkward situation.”

5.2.1.10 Knowledge Emotions

Knowledge emotions were clearly described in consumers’ ASEs, with a specific focus on confusion and surprise. Confusion was expressed through attempts to make sense of the situation which reflected a general feeling of being baffled and hence scrutinising behaviours or the situation, for instance: “You keep thinking about it, why did it happen?”, “I was just like what’s going on, that’s what was on my mind at that time”, and “I would just be in disbelief that it just happened.” In particular in Frank’s ASE, he was yelled at for no apparent reason so he could not understand their reaction: “He was screaming at basically nothing…there were only two questions I asked, and they were both different questions.” Similarly for Mitchell, when he was getting his hair cut, the employee was behaving in such a bizarre manner that he could not comprehend what was going on: “I was sitting there saying to myself what’s happening…I was just so confused.”

The presence of confusion also appeared through facial expressions for instance: “An expression of being perplexed”, or “A blank look, puzzled.” These expressions effectively expressed the customer’s internal experience of confusion: “The blank look on the face, it’s like I need to take a moment here, you get confused.”

Overall, the experience of confusion in consumers’ ASEs was summed up neatly by one interviewee when they stated that “Awkward is quite often you don’t know what’s going on.”
CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORATORY STUDY TWO

Surprise, the other knowledge emotion often seen, was described by Grace when she witnessed a conversation between a manager and their employee: “It was just surprising... I was right there when she was accusing her of stuff.” The experience of surprise was also communicated by interviewees through a sense of disbelief and shock: “We were shocked that someone would be so rude and inappropriate” and “You’re just surprised... the whole feeling is just a feeling of shock.” The type of surprise in consumers’ ASEs was also more likely to be a negative one: “It gets you by surprise and at the same time it’s not a very good surprise.”

While surprise, as a knowledge emotion, appeared to be standard across most ASEs, confusion seemed to be most commonly experienced when the customer felt an inability to deal with the situation. This was illustrated by Mitchell during his session with the bizarre hairdresser:

“She was asking me these questions but she wasn’t listening to what I was saying because she repeated it 3 times... I was just so confused and I wondered should I even bother answering, should I make up a completely new answer, she was always a little flaky but that was like a whole new level.”

5.2.1.11 Self-conscious Emotions

As expected, the presence of self-conscious emotions was also evident in the interviews. In fact, the word embarrassment was used often when describing their ASEs. When Carla tried to return some goods (food items) she had only taken out of the store 10 to 15 minutes previously, she described the experience of trying to get the employee to do something about the situation as embarrassing for her: “It was getting quite awkward and embarrassing because everyone was standing around watching.” Frank also experienced embarrassment, when he was shouted at for no apparent reason (besides interacting with the staff member at the wrong time – when they were in a bad mood): “It was awkward being shouted at... then [when I] realised people were around me, I felt embarrassed.” And similarly for Sam, when he was filling his car with petrol, a problem originating from a miscommunication between himself and a staff member with limited English caused him to lose his poise. This then caused his ASE which contained embarrassment: “I just completely lost it... they didn’t realise that it was quite embarrassing for me because I don’t often sort of flip out in that way.”

A second type of self-conscious emotion was shame. Interestingly, interviewees seemed to describe shame as being simultaneously experienced with embarrassment. For example, when interviewees described an incident of their card being declined (or similar payment mishaps), embarrassment was always likely to be expressed. However, references were also made to shame in these moments: “You’re ashamed that you were confident to think that you had money” and “It’s a mixture of being ashamed of not having the money.” The close association seen between embarrassment and shame may be due to the two emotions sharing similar characteristics.

In contrast to knowledge emotions, self-conscious emotions appeared to occur primarily when the presence of others was evident to the customer, which contributed to the customer’s concern about being socially evaluated: “It’s embarrassing when people can hear”, or when the cause of the awkward service encounter was related to the customer: “It [embarrassment] comes back to that personal aspect”. This was illustrated in
the following example where Sandra’s card was declined and she was worried about how others may be evaluating her: "There was so many other customers…a lot of peering eyes, a lot of judgement." Further in the interview, she described the incident as being particularly embarrassing:

My mum got annoyed because I didn’t carry the other backup credit card…she was like, you put yourself in that situation, it’s funny for you now, but at the time it must’ve been really really embarrassing. And I was like, yes, yes it was.

5.2.1.12 Avoidance Coping

One means by which customers dealt with ASEs was engaging in avoidance coping, which had implications in particular for re-patronage intentions towards the firm. Interviewees expressed their desire to exit and avoid the issue, employee, or the firm through statements such as: “I wanted to leave this store half way through the haircut”, “I turned my back on her…I didn’t want her to come up to me”, and “It’s still really hard to come back.” In Sandra’s case, when her card was declined and she realised that she had no other means of paying, she quickly left the scene: “I had never power walked like that ever in my life. I ran to my car and thought, oh my gosh I’m never doing this again…so I haven’t been back since.”

Customers can also take prior action to help them avoid unnecessary ASEs: “I tend to move money from one account to another to make sure things like that don’t happen.” What appeared to drive avoidance-related behaviours was the desire to remove themselves from the location of the ASE: “It’s that environment, that one spot that you’re standing in…that is where all the awkward tension is…I’m trying to run away from that circle of death.”

This response was a way in which they could make themselves feel better, “You need to remove yourself from the situation so that you can feel better about yourself” and hence suggests that ASEs are situationally bound - tied closely to the location. Whilst in some cases, the customer’s avoidance coping could be permanent: “I didn’t go back to that outlet or that brand”, fortunately for firms, at other times the need to avoid the service provider was only temporary: “I went back like months later not straight away.”

5.2.1.13 Problem-focussed Coping

In contrast to avoidance coping, when customers engaged in problem-focussed coping, they were attempting to fix the issue by tackling the cause of the ASE directly. These actions included the explicit acknowledgement of the awkward encounter through humour: “I’d try to damper it with humour”, direct apologies: “I’ll have to say I’m really sorry”, or actively seeking a resolution: “Just try and resolve it.” A customer could adopt any of these options depending on the circumstances of their ASE and how comfortable they were in engaging in the problem-solving behaviour. In Grace’s case, her card was declined and she attempted to try and resolve the issue by then opting for layby: “I said oh, I’ll do a lay-by and come back and pay for it.” She also indicated that being able to pay for at least some items (or making it clear that she was able to come back and pay) made her feel better than leaving the store empty-handed.
For Sam, his ASE involved being bombarded with personal products from nearby promoters whilst dining with someone in a café. As he didn’t want to give off the wrong impression, when the awkward encounter occurred, he chose to lighten the atmosphere with humour: “I kind of took it as a joke…we’ll just give this [condom] to the waiter as a tip.” For Nancy, her ASE involved her hair. In this case, she had gone to get her hair done however her usual hairdresser (whom she refers to as her friend) was sick. This meant that another staff member had to fill in. Although Nancy was hesitant, the manager told her not to worry, and the staff member herself boasted highly about her level of expertise. Surprisingly however, the end result was just shocking as it was nothing like what she had been assured:

> She was talking about where she went to in the world, who she met and all these famous hairdressers and designers, really selling herself. And then when she took the towel off my hair and the foils, I was just like, what the hell is this?

Once her disbelief had subsided, Nancy engaged in problem-solving by demanding that they fix her hair: “I said you need to sort this out because it’s not on and I’m not going to go out this weekend looking like this.” Her response had implications for complaint behaviours directed at the firm. In comparison to avoidance behaviours, behaviours directed at addressing the issue appeared to be less frequent and this may be been due to avoidance behaviours being “easier” to engage in.

Finally, an interesting form of problem-focussed coping was customers intervening to help another customer. This reflected the ASE from what was initially a bystander’s perspective. In this instance, the interviewee was shopping and had witnessed another customer’s card being declined. Instead of prolonging the awkward moment by just watching the situation unfold further, she intervened to help: “Another person couldn’t pay and it was a mother…she had necessities for her baby…was about twenty seven dollars off so I walked up and I paid for it.”

5.2.2 Awkward Service Encounters and Embarrassment Elicitation

Earlier, two general sets of emotions were found to be generated in consumers’ ASEs: knowledge emotions (the most dominant being confusion), and self-conscious emotions (the most dominant being embarrassment). In addition, two general sets of thought orientations were documented. Upon comparison, it appeared that the primary distinction between whether or not an ASE involved embarrassment lay with which of these aspects was brought to the forefront in the interaction, and hence what the customer explicitly focussed on. This aligns with suggestions in the literature that embarrassment often results from the threat of unwanted evaluations in unanticipated predicaments (Miller, 1996; Silver et al., 1987). In turn, embarrassment is likely to be linked to thought processes emphasising a concern over social evaluations, as the public self is of most concern. This could suggest that when the customer is not at all concerned about being socially evaluated, they are unlikely to experience self-conscious emotions such as embarrassment, and instead only knowledge emotions will be apparent.
In a number of cases shared by interviewees, it was clear that some ASEs recalled, occurred independently of embarrassment. In other words, the interviewee acknowledged that the service encounter was awkward, however claimed to have no experience of embarrassment. Mitchell for instance spoke of a visit to a hairdresser, which he labelled as awkward. In this ASE, the employee was overly friendly and initiated conversation with him throughout his visit, however then responded to Mitchell’s answers as if they weren’t actually paying attention. This was evident when Mitchell said he couldn’t believe he was having the same conversation with the employee three times! When the discussion in the interview then moved to embarrassment, he stated that the encounter was not at all embarrassing to him: “I wasn’t really embarrassed in that situation. But I found it awkward.” Based on this experience, he believed that embarrassment was not the same as, or a stronger form of, awkwardness, but a response that could present itself in ASEs: “I don’t think they’re on a continuum [awkward and embarrassment], I think there’s awkward situations where embarrassment comes into play.”

Similarly Grace said her ASE was awkward but not embarrassing: “It’s only awkward. So I’m not embarrassed.” This particular ASE involved her only as an observer to an interaction between an employee and their manager. Specifically, she overheard the manager questioning the employee about why they were working when their employment had been terminated. She tried to act as if she hadn’t noticed the conversation, however being in close proximity to such an interaction was enough to make the situation awkward.

Annie also explicitly expressed the lack of embarrassment in her ASE. Annie’s ASE involved an error that she was trying to correct, however in the process, the assisting employee attempted to engage in other conversations which then caused the awkward experience:

\[
I \text{ had awkwardness, but I don’t think I had embarrassment. In some instances like you forget your money at the restaurant, that’s both…or if another customer is doing something awkward I might think that’s an awkward situation but again wouldn’t feel embarrassed.}
\]

Finally, Sam’s ASE also occurred independently of embarrassment, when exchanging his order and receiving a negative look from what appeared to be the manager or owner of the café: “I didn’t feel embarrassed because I knew when I went up to the counter I asked for exactly what I wanted…when it was served, it wasn’t what I asked for.”

The fact that these ASEs occurred without the experience of embarrassment in differing service contexts suggests they were not specific to individual service contexts. In contrast, when consumers expressed a concern over others’ evaluations in their ASE, they were more likely to indicate that in the particular ASE, they had experienced embarrassment. In Grace’s case, she had asked about a personal product and experienced embarrassment because she was concerned about what others were thinking about her: “It’s awkward asking, and then it’s embarrassing when people can hear…they probably think I’m new to the country or something.”

Drawing on their previous experiences in general, interviewees also illustrated their understanding of the difference between an ASE that was only labelled as awkward, and those that involved or generated
embarrassment. These differences again centred on a person’s cognitive content. For instance, in an ASE that was not embarrassing the customer had action-oriented thoughts about how to respond, whilst those that were embarrassing were centred on the explicit awareness of others observing and therefore potential negative judgments:

Your main thought for embarrassment is you’re just thinking about what you just did. While awkwardness is you’re thinking about what’s going on…you’re confused, your face expresses a thinking face…but when it’s embarrassing it’s oh my gosh, I just did something embarrassing.

Other ways in which interviewees emphasised the essence of an ASE that was not embarrassing, was: “This one [awkward] is a questionable, I’m not too sure’ look…what do I do, what have I done before…it’s confusion.” When taking the examples together, the resulting emotion of confusion appeared to be linked with action-oriented thought processes surrounding what should be done. This was illustrated in the following example where the interviewee was having a haircut and the employee exhibited bizarre behaviours which made no sense: “I was sitting there saying to myself what’s happening. I was just so confused and wondered should I even bother answering this, should I make up a completely new answer.”

On the other hand, the experience of embarrassment and shame was most linked to situations involving image-oriented thought processes (social evaluations). This was illustrated in the following examples. In Amy’s case, her card was declined and her concern over the judgement of others caused her embarrassment: “You don’t want them to think you’re poor, that you’ve got no money…I get embarrassed.” Similarly Abby made the connection between embarrassment and concerns over social evaluation: “You don’t want people to see you in a certain way and therefore you’re embarrassed about it…that’s again based on how you think other people would have thought of you.”

These descriptions highlight interesting relationships between when embarrassment is and isn’t likely to occur. However, as stated earlier, there was no intention of suggesting causal relationships through the current data.

5.2.3 Awkward Service Encounters and Service Failures

Based on the interviews, it appeared that service failures were not a feature of some types of awkward service encounters. It was apparent from some interviewees that awkward service encounters could also occur in cases where there was nothing wrong with the service. For instance Sean had gone for a massage and although there was no mention of anything going wrong with the encounter, he still described the experience as awkward and uncomfortable. This suggests that some service industries may be more prone to awkward service encounters, due to the nature of the service provided. Awkward service encounters may be more prevalent in healthcare for instance, serving as a potential inhibitor of health evaluations. Sean’s shared ASE also clearly showed a point of departure between ASEs and service failures, in that ASEs can occur even when the service is performed exceptionally well on the employee’s part, therefore there is no explicit service failure.
For instance, it was evident from Sean’s description of his first business class flight that his lack of experience generated uncertainty regarding how to behave and what to expect. This meant that the customer was concerned about how others perceived their actions, and this created an ASE for the customer despite there being no wrongdoing on the firm’s or employee’s part: “It’s not because they did something wrong, but I felt awkward because I wasn’t sure what to expect.” Referring to the same experience, he also suggested that even with good service, the customer can still have an ASE:

“That is an example of a service encounter that is really good, but you still feel awkward about it because you’re not used to it…it was good in terms of the service was good but the feeling of awkwardness, I wouldn’t say that was a good feeling of awkwardness.

5.3 STUDY TWO CONCLUSION

Based on the interviews conducted in this study, an ASE can begin with a normative violation (which could be attributed to any party in the service encounter), or a non-normative service situation and a perceived threat to the customer’s effectance-related or esteem-related needs. When either of these occurred, the ASE would then be initiated, the cognitive aspects of which were cognitive disequilibrium, mindful alertness, and thought processes (or monologues) focussed on actions or their image. Emotionally, the ASE consisted primarily of knowledge emotions, particularly in the form of confusion and surprise, and self-conscious emotions, particularly in the form of embarrassment and shame. In terms of their coping responses, customers would primarily engage in avoidance and problem-focussed coping. Taken together, these components describe the ASE. Study Two has identified and outlined the nature of these components. These confirmed components provide the basis for Study Three, an empirical study.

5.4 CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY

The focus of Chapter Five has been to present Study Two, an exploratory study to find the key components of consumers’ ASE. This chapter has described the approach to the research (i.e. semi-structured interviews), interview design, recruitment, and analysis for Study Two. The findings were also presented, capturing components of the ASE in its entirety, from the beginning of the experience (i.e. the situational stressors) to the perceived end of the ASE (i.e. coping strategies). Finally, in further trying to understand the nature of consumers’ ASEs, the chapter also presented relevant findings to assessing interviewees’ perceptions of the relationships between awkward service encounters and both embarrassment and service failures. The information obtained in the Study Two is used next as the basis for Study Three.
CHAPTER SIX: EMPIRICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

6.0 CHAPTER SIX OVERVIEW

In the previous study (Study Two), descriptions of the key concepts from the conceptual model were examined. In Study Three, the findings from the content analysis in Study Two will be used as a resource for further research, as advocated by Carlson (2008). The purpose of Chapter Six is to examine the interrelationships between the key concepts in consumers’ ASEs. A set of hypotheses (see Figure 10) regarding the relationships (i.e. between the situational stressors, the cognitive dimensions, the emotional responses and firm-related outcomes) are outlined, and the resulting empirical model of consumers’ ASEs presented. The operationalisation of the model’s constructs is then presented, and the chapter ends with a brief summary.

Figure 10: Chapter Six Overview

6.1: Hypothesis Development
- Effects of Situational Stressors
- Cognitive Dimensions of Consumers’ ASE
- Linking Cognitions and Emotional Responses
- Linking Emotional Responses and Firm-related Outcomes

5.2: Operationalisation of Constructs
- Multi-item Scales
- Single-item Scales
6.1 HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

As an overall framework, the current model adopted cognitive appraisal theory (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus, 1991). To recap on Chapter Three, cognitive appraisal refers to a person’s assessment of the encounter as being relevant or irrelevant to their well-being. This assessment involves primary appraisals and secondary appraisals. Primary appraisals first evaluate whether there is anything at stake in the encounter, whilst the secondary appraisal evaluates the possible actions (if any) that can be used to overcome, or prevent, harm from occurring. This may involve seeking more information or controlling actions for impression management. Based on the primary and secondary appraisals, consumer emotions will be elicited (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). For instance, if the encounter is appraised as irrelevant to well-being, there will be no emotional reaction. In contrast, when the encounter is appraised as relevant to well-being, the magnitude of what is at stake determines the intensity of the emotional reaction. Finally, coping refers to a person’s efforts (both cognitive and behavioural) to manage the encounter (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Folkman et al., 1986).

For simplicity, the hypotheses are divided into four primary sections: (1) the effects of situational stressors; (2) the cognitive dimension of consumers’ ASEs; (3) linking cognitions and emotional responses; and finally (4) linking emotional responses with the firm-related outcomes (which reflect consumer coping).

6.1.1 Situational Stressors

The first hypotheses acknowledge the primary threats evident in consumers’ ASEs: effectance-related threats and esteem-related threats. Effectance-related needs (Chang, 2008; Hui & Bateson, 1991), and similarly esteem-related needs (as reflected in studies focused on the social aspects of the service) (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998; Worsfold, Worsfold, & Bradley, 2007), are important for customers. Effectance and esteem are social motives and so when fulfilled, help create comfortable social situations (Stevens & Fiske, 1995). They help the individual manage the ‘self’ in social environments (Fiske & Dépret, 1996). However when entering a service encounter, situational stressors (which reflect the changing aspects of the environment) have the potential to either threaten or fulfil these needs for the customer (Waytz et al., 2010).

Based on a theory of anthropomorphism (Epley et al., 2007), uncertainty, as a key component of effectance threats, is said to arise from novelty, unpredictability, or violated expectations. Both novelty and unpredictability are present in non-normative service situations, whilst violated expectations directly resemble normative violations. Normative violations and non-normative service situations were the two primary groups identified as the situational causes of awkward service encounters in Study One. According to SENT (Bradley et al., 2010) also, the antecedents to needs such as effectance and esteem include acts, or the omission of acts, occurring during the service encounter.

Examples of acts hindering effectance-related needs in particular, include deviations from role expectations as the customer and the employee then need to improvise in the interaction and invest in more cognitive resources to effectively navigate the situation. It also includes occasions where employees refuse to act on
customer requests, or fix the customer’s problems which can threaten the customer’s perceived control (Surachartkumtonkun et al., 2013). Both of these sets of behaviours reflect normative violations.

On the other hand, acts hindering esteem-related needs in particular include belittling acts, rudeness, hostility, and incivility. From the customer’s perspective, such acts represent normative violations on the employee’s part, as the role of employees is to serve the customer and treat them with respect with the hope that they will return. Other research on social failures (or loss of face) has made a connection between normative violations and esteem-related threats (Wan, 2013). A social failure refers to any failure on the employee’s part in the service interaction that generates a loss of social resources to the customer, such as status or esteem (Chan et al., 2009). A range of behaviours representing normative violations can cause a loss of the customers’ social resources, for instance ignoring the customer, or discriminating against the customer. Inappropriate behaviours as a form of normative violations have also been shown to threaten the customer’s esteem (Surachartkumtonkun et al., 2013).

Based on the above information, H1a, H1b, and H2a are proposed. Harm in the form of effectance threats and esteem threats is perceived in the process of primary appraisals (Surachartkumtonkun et al., 2013), consistent with the cognitive appraisal theory (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus, 1991, 1993). Finally, although evidence could not be found for or against the current H2b, it is assumed that the customer’s lack of confidence in an unfamiliar setting could have at least some implications for their esteem, for instance through the temporary perception of incompetence.

H1: Normative violations increase (a) effectance threats, and (b) esteem threats

H2: Non-normative service situations increase (a) effectance threats, and (b) esteem threats

6.1.2 Cognitive Dimension of Consumers’ ASE

The cognitive dimensions of consumers’ ASEs are proposed to occur through an initial threat appraisal which causes the disruption of homeostasis, described as a state of cognitive disequilibrium consisting of tension, disorder and incoherence. This is followed by mindful alertness, and then thought processes (monologues) that are action-oriented or image-oriented. Beginning with threat appraisals, when social conflicts threaten social needs the encounter will be disruptive and upsetting, which will then introduce disequilibrium characterised by an instability in the exchange. For instance, when experiencing control deprivation, a customer can become distressed and disoriented as they experience a sense of not knowing what to do, or what is going on (Surachartkumtonkun et al., 2013). Research supporting the notion that threatened needs (effectance and esteem) can lead to a disruptive imbalance in the encounter has suggested that control needs (an example of effectance needs) possess a ‘homeostatic character’ (Fiske & Dépret, 1996). This means that when threatened, a person’s homeostasis can be disrupted and put into a state of imbalance. Other research suggests that perceptions of control have a positive effect on stress reduction (Geer, Davison, & Gatchel, 1970; Langer, Janis, & Wolfer, 1975), therefore it should also hold true that the perception of control loss would
increase stress and heighten anxiety (Fiske & Dépret, 1996). Finally, the significance of a loss of control in disrupted interactions has also been highlighted by Gross and Stone (1964).

For esteem-related needs, scholars have proposed self-esteem as a monitoring system for acceptance versus rejection (Leary, 1999; Leary et al., 1995), and have further linked threats perceived by this monitoring system to a disruption of homeostasis and disequilibrium (Clegg, 2012b). For instance, in the service interaction, whether or not the employee smiles at the customer or deliberately ignores them will have an influence on the customer’s perception of acceptance or rejection, which in turn has implications for their esteem. If the event is perceived as a threat (by signalling rejection), the individual becomes aroused in a state of destabilisation (Baumeister & Tice, 1990; Craighead et al., 1979; Leary, 1999; Leary & Baumeister, 2000), or psychosocial disturbance (Sargent et al., 2002).

The potential of both effectance and esteem threats in influencing disequilibrium is consistent with suggestions that a need deficiency has the potential to generate a state of inner tension, referred to as disequilibrium, which reflects a state of crisis (Goossens, 2000; Henning, 2011). It is also consistent with SENT where interpersonal conflict and tension, experienced as a sense of pressure and uneasiness, is said to arise when a need is not being fulfilled (Bradley et al., 2010). This conflict, tension, and uneasiness are characteristic of disequilibrium. Accordingly, H3 and H4 are proposed:

H3: Effectance threats increase cognitive disequilibrium

H4: Esteem threats increase cognitive disequilibrium

As a stressful experience, the essence of the ASE involves changes that go beyond the customer’s level of comfort, hence threatening their homeostatic equilibrium (Moschis, 2007). The experience of this disequilibrium (in response to discrepancies or unmet needs) signals a problem with the current experience and triggers a drive to resolve the problem (Graesser & Olde, 2003). This drive focusses cognitive effort in an attempt to restore equilibrium (Kumashiro, Rusbult, & Finkel, 2008). This means that the individual will be put into a cognitively active state of mindful alertness (Langer et al., 1978), where more cognitive processing occurs and they more closely observe the actions to come (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Consequently the individual will be able to reflect upon their existing knowledge and beliefs, and further be able to analyse and reassess the situation with the aim of re-establishing equilibrium (Piaget, 1952). The presence of mindful alertness in the awkward moment is supported by Clegg’s (2012a) reference to the immediate transition to explicit attention, from what was initially a state of implicit attention. This transition has also been referred to as ‘switching gears’ to reflect the shift between cognitive modes, that is, from automatic processing to conscious (active) engagement. More importantly this transition is said to occur under problematic conditions, such as being in disequilibrium (Louis & Sutton, 1991). It is therefore hypothesised that:

H5: Cognitive disequilibrium increases mindful alertness

States of mindful alertness are a prerequisite of the stressful internal monologue (Morin, 2001, 2005), which describes uncontrolled but conscious thoughts. This is consistent with research in the social communication
domain which suggests that in the context of violations, attention is directed towards the interaction and the individual undergoes a process of interpretation and evaluation to gain understanding, and to guide behavioural progression (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Burgoon & Jones, 1976). In this process internal explanatory questions may be asked to gather the information needed to help restore equilibrium (Graesser & Olde, 2003). The cognitive content of the internal monologue can focus on a variety of aspects that are associated with the encounter (Kendall & Hollon, 1989).

Based on narratives of the socially awkward situation in particular, one aspect that consumers may focus on in their state of mindful alertness is action-oriented monologue, where attention will be directed at what to do regarding the disruption to ensure social harmony is regained (Clegg, 2012a). Similarly, based on the embarrassment literature, which makes explicit references to the awkward interaction, an additional aspect that may be focussed on is their social image/status (Manstead & Semin, 1981; Miller, 1996). These internal monologues mirror the process of secondary appraisals emphasised in cognitive appraisal theory (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus, 1991, 1993). The next hypothesis is thus:

\[ H6: \text{Mindful alertness increases (a) action-oriented monologue, and (b) image-oriented monologue} \]

6.1.3 Linking Cognitions and Emotional Responses

Earlier in this research, it was proposed that the awkward moment involved cognitive disequilibrium. Confusion was a particular focus because it is the affective component of cognitive equilibrium (Lehman et al., 2012). Confusion is triggered by a loss of understanding or predictability, such as when the environment presents insufficient or contradictory information (Durso et al., 2012; Keltner & Shiota, 2003), which ties it nicely to previously identified components (i.e. normative violations) of the ASE. Cognitive appraisal theories of emotion, which state that the specific emotion arising in response to a situation depends on how the individual appraises the situation (e.g. Lazarus, 1991; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), confirm that different emotions arise based on one’s cognitive assessment of the encounter. For an ASE in particular, it is proposed that the appraisal dimension that distinguishes between confusion and embarrassment is action-oriented internal monologue for the former and social image-oriented internal monologue for the latter.

The action-oriented internal monologue and confusion link ties in with Silvia’s (2009) appraisal space model, where confusion is assumed to follow appraisals of high novelty and low comprehension. In particular, confusion will arise from the cognitive processes around what is known, what is expected to happen, and what is able to be comprehended in the situation (Silvia, 2009, 2010, 2013). Applying these descriptions to the service encounter, this may infer customers being unsure of their role and hence how to proceed, which is the essence of the action-oriented internal monologue. It is therefore hypothesised that:

\[ H7: \text{Action-oriented monologue increases confusion} \]

Throughout the embarrassment literature, various accounts of embarrassment have been described. Studies aimed at comparing each account to arrive at the more superior explanation have generally rated the top two as the awkward interaction model and the social evaluation model. However later reviews appear to suggest
that the social evaluation model is theoretically stronger (Miller, 1992, 1996; Parrott et al., 1988; Parrott & Smith, 1991) and that, in most cases, the awkward interaction model is dependent upon social evaluations to generate embarrassment. In other words, it is difficult for an awkward interaction to trigger embarrassment without also generating concern over unwanted evaluations (Miller, 1996). In essence then, when there is a failure of self-presentation, an individual can become increasingly concerned with others’ judgments, which then activates public self-consciousness. However when this concern is not a factor, embarrassment is unlikely (Edelmann, 1981; Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Miller, 1996).

Accordingly, it is suggested that when the customer is not at all concerned about their social image, they are unlikely to experience self-conscious emotions such as embarrassment. In contrast, when their social image is of concern, embarrassment is almost guaranteed. Based on this line of reasoning, it is therefore hypothesised that:

**H8: Image-oriented monologue increases embarrassment**

### 6.1.4 Linking Emotional Responses and Firm-related Outcomes

In a consumer oriented coping framework, Duhachek (2005) proposed three types of coping: active, expressive, and denial (or avoidance). These coping strategies are reflected in three firm-related outcomes examined, namely complaint intentions, negative WOM (as venting), and avoidance behaviours. The present study’s focus on the these three responses, coincides with a recent study which showed that coping responses in socially awkward moments were identified as occurring through avoidant or confrontational (i.e. complaint) behaviours (Clegg, 2012a). Additionally, based on previous research on daily stressful events, one form of coping alone was used in less than 2% of cases (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). This means that coping responses are unlikely to be engaged with independently of each other, thus a joint analysis may be a better approach.

Initial research on confusion in the marketplace concentrated on brand confusion, focussing on the physical similarity of a brand’s products (Foxman, Berger, & Cote, 1992; Lomax, Sherski, & Todd, 1999; Mitchell & Papavassiliou, 1999). Accordingly, brand confusion was defined as consisting of “one or more errors in inferential processing that lead a consumer to unknowingly form inaccurate beliefs about the attributes or performances of a less-known brand based on a more familiar brand’s attributes or performance” (Foxman et al., 1992, p. 125). In contrast to brand confusion, some scholars have suggested consumer confusion goes beyond legal issues (i.e. trademark infringements) to incorporate employee and consumer behaviours. Consumer confusion represents “a temporary exceedance of an individual capacity threshold for absorbing and processing environment stimuli [including actions]...[it] is an emotional state that makes it difficult for consumers to select and interpret stimuli” (Schweizer, Kotouc, Wagner, & Rudolph, 2006, p. 185), and has implications for their ability to understand what is or should be happening.

Based on the current literature, consumer confusion has been linked to a range of responses. For instance, confusion has been suggested to motivate behaviours indicative of withdrawal (Silvia, 2010), to result in general negative attitudes (Mitchell & Papavassiliou, 1999), and has been associated to negative WOM
CHAPTER SIX: EMPIRICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

(Mitchell et al., 2005; Turnbull, Leek, & Ying, 2000) and decreased loyalty (Foxman et al., 1992; Foxman, Muehling, & Berger, 1990). In specific markets, the negative effects of confusion have also been documented. For instance in the market for higher education, when confused the customer may also postpone or abandon the purchase, a behaviour that is equivalent to immediate exit, which means that the firm then loses a sale (Drummond, 2004). In the context of internet-based customisation, dimensions of confusion have been found to reduce product satisfaction (Matzler, Stieger, & Füller, 2011), and in the context of environmentally friendly products, confusion was found to reduce trust (Chen & Chang, 2013). Finally, in the Indian mobile market, confusion was found to negatively impact satisfaction and, although there was no direct effect of confusion on retention, the total indirect effect of confusion (through satisfaction and switching costs) was negative (Edward & Sahadev, 2012). Hence given the predominantly negative effect of confusion on consumer responses, as well as sources external to consumer research indicating negative responses such as withdrawal (Silvia, 2010), it is hypothesised that:

**H9: Confusion increases (a) complaint intentions, (b) negative WOM (venting), and (c) avoidance**

Embarrassment is an emotion related to social transgressions (Miller, 1996), which often motivates efforts to escape or avoid the event that is inducing the emotion (Sharkey & Stafford, 1990; Tracy et al., 2007). In the context of consumer research, embarrassment has primarily been examined in relation to sensitive products (e.g. Dahl et al., 2001). In this area, consumers have been found to avoid purchasing particular products (i.e. sensitive products) (Lau-Gesk & Drolet, 2005). More recently however, consumer embarrassment research has expanded to include examinations of the situation, such as embarrassing service failures (Wan, 2013).

In an exploratory study of embarrassing service situations, behavioural dimensions of embarrassment were identified as exit (i.e. flight), whilst longer-term firm related outcomes included negative WOM communications, and reduced patronage (and even boycotts) (Grace, 2007). Similarly, in the context of coupon usage, avoidance was observed when embarrassment was found to decrease the amount of coupons redeemed (Brumbaugh & Rosa, 2009). Finally, research has indicated that situations involving loss of face concerns (which can generate embarrassment), have the potential to influence dissatisfaction responses such as complaint intentions (Wan, 2013). Based on these negative implications, it is therefore hypothesised that:

**H10: Embarrassment increases (a) complaint intentions, (b) negative WOM (venting), and (c) avoidance**

For illustrative purposes, all hypotheses are presented visually in Figure 11.
CHAPTER SIX: EMPIRICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Figure 11: Visual Presentation of Hypothesised Relationships
6.2 OPERATIONALISATION OF CONSTRUCTS

To test the hypothesised relationships, where possible, pre-established scales were adopted because the constructs had a history of successful applications, hence issues such as validity and reliability had already been addressed. Once chosen as an appropriate representation of a construct in the current study, the items were then refined to reflect the research context.

6.2.1 Multi-item Scales

6.2.1.1 Cognitive Disequilibrium

Cognitive disequilibrium captures a state of mental discomfort. Therefore to measure cognitive disequilibrium, this research drew on measures for peace of mind. In particular peace of mind reflects an internal state of peace and harmony (Lee, Lin, Huang, & Fredrickson, 2013a). A sense of internal peace refers to being calm, and internal harmony refers to being in a state of balance. These characteristics are the complete opposite of disequilibrium, therefore when drawing on the items in the peace of mind scale, the intention was to reverse the items to then reflect disequilibrium instead of peace and harmony. The final three items selected after analysing the content of each item were presented on a 1-7 Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The exact items were:

1. My mind would not be at ease
2. My mind would be in an uncomfortable state
3. My mind would be unsettled

6.2.1.2 Mindful Alertness

In order to capture mindful alertness, items from the state mindfulness scale which rate moment-to-moment mindfulness (Tanay & Bernstein, 2013) were considered along with items from the “surroundings factor” of the situational self-awareness scale (Govern & Marsch, 2001). Based on an examination of the content of each item, three final items were selected and presented on a 1–7 Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The exact items were:

1. I noticed many small details in my experience
2. I felt that I was aware of everything in my environment
3. My attention was completely focussed on the present moment

6.2.1.3 Action-oriented Monologue

Internal monologue (or general thought processes) is difficult to measure. However several internal monologue-related self-report scales do exist, the most recent developed by (Brinthaupt et al., 2009) to measure both inner and private speech across a range of situations. In an examination of existing inner speech
self-report measures (Uttl, Morin, & Hamper, 2011), it was found that the existing scales possessed adequate reliability but convergent validity and divergent validity was lacking amongst the scales. The authors speculated that this may have been due to the non-comprehensive nature of the evaluated scales. As a result, instead of relying solely on an existing scale, this research explored other means of measuring internal monologue. To measure action-oriented internal monologue such as what to do, this study considered: items from Higuchi and Fukada's (2002) scale, which originally captured appraisals in a disrupted social interaction; items from a scale by Brinthaupt et al. (2009) which was designed to capture how people talk to themselves under certain circumstances; and an anxious self-talk scale (Kendall & Hollon, 1989). Of these items, three were selected and presented on a 1–7 Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The exact items were:

1. I was trying to figure out what I should do or say next
2. I was mentally exploring a possible course of action
3. I was giving myself instructions about what I should do or say next

6.2.1.4 Image-oriented Monologue

To measure internal monologue aimed at an individual’s social image, this study adapted items from Higuchi and Fukada (2002), which originally measured the apprehension of social evaluation. This was deemed appropriate because the items measured perceived impressions/evaluations and, further, similar items appeared in relation to anxious self-talk (Kendall & Hollon, 1989). Three items were selected and presented on a 1–7 Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The exact items were:

1. I was worried about how others present would evaluate me
2. I was concerned that others present would think badly of me
3. I was worried about how I was being presented to others

6.2.1.5 Confusion

The current studies on confusion in consumer research focus on brand confusion (Foxman et al., 1992; Foxman et al., 1990) which differs slightly from confusion due to behavioural acts or inadequate situational information. The study therefore turned to measures of confusion external to consumer research. In order to measure confusion, two items were adapted from Silvia (2010) and an additional item was added based on how interviewees (in Study Two) described their experience of confusion. The final three items were presented on a 1–7 Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The exact items were:

1. I felt confused
2. I felt perplexed
3. I felt puzzled
6.2.1.6 Embarrassment

To measure embarrassment, items were adapted from previous studies that had looked at embarrassment in a business context (Verbeke & Bagozzi, 2002, 2003). Embarrassment was measured with five items, presented on a 1–7 Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The exact items were:

1. I felt like sinking into the floor and disappearing
2. I felt humiliated
3. I felt small
4. I felt like I looked like a fool
5. I felt sheepish

Although Dahl et al. (2001) utilised a three item measure of embarrassment, the current research did not consider this scale because an item that contained the word “awkward” was included. This would have meant awkward and embarrassment was being treated as the same. The other two items emphasised being “embarrassed” and “uncomfortable.”

6.2.1.7 Complaint Intention

Complaint intentions capture the customer's intention to actively make a complaint to management. In order to measure complaint intentions, items were adapted from Wan (2013). Complaint intentions were measured with three items, presented on a 7-point scale. The exact items were:

I would make a complaint:

1. Very unlikely / Very likely
2. Inclined not to / Inclined to
3. Definitely will not / Definitely will

6.2.1.8 Negative WOM (vent)

WOM communications reflect how consumers talk about their service experience to others, whether it be friends or family. In contrast to complaining to the firm, WOM communications are more informal (which means the firm may not be aware of it), however by engaging in WOM the customer has the potential to influence their peers. When the service encounter is pleasurable, consumers can engage in positive WOM. However when it is uncomfortable, consumers may engage in negative WOM. Although negative WOM is negative in nature, recent research has shown the consumers may have different goals when engaging in negative WOM (Wetzer et al., 2007). One goal is venting to express the customer’s emotions, which may be common in negative experiences such as the ASE. Negative WOM (as venting) was measured with three items adapted from Wetzer et al. (2007), and presented on a 1–7 Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The exact items were:
I would tell family and friends about this situation because:

1. I would want to get it off my chest
2. I would want to blow off steam
3. I would want to vent my feelings

6.2.1.9 Avoidance items

To measure avoidance, items were first considered from existing scales that measure re-patronage intentions (e.g. Blodgett, 1994; Grace & O’Cass, 2005a; Jones, Mothersbaugh, & Beatty, 2000). Re-patronage intentions capture the customer’s intentions to return to a particular store, or to return to purchase the service again. In this manner, re-patronage intentions are the opposite of avoidance, thus appropriate existing re-patronage items could be reversed to reflect avoidance. Second, items from an avoidance subscale of the transgression-related interpersonal needs inventory were also considered (McCullough et al., 1998). Together, the items were compared for content, and three items chosen. The final three items used to measure avoidance were presented on a 1–7 Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The exact items were:

I would want to:

1. Stay away from the place
2. Avoid the place as much as possible
3. Withdraw any future interactions with the place

6.2.2 Single-item Measures

Single-item measures were used to capture the respondent’s perceived level of the violation (in the normative violation situations), the perceived level of unfamiliarity (in the non-normative service situations), the perceived level of effectance threat, and the perceived level of esteem threat. Effectance-related threats describe a set of associated needs that may be threatened. However, for simplicity and the ease of focusing on one dimension, effectance threats were operationalised as the perception of a lack of control only. Similarly for esteem-related threats, which can cover a set of closely associated needs, esteem threats were operationalised with the perception of a lack of acceptance only.

All four items were measured on a 1–7 Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

The exact wording of the items is presented below:

- The staff(s) actions were not consistent with "what should" have happened (normative violation)
- I was not familiar with the service setting (non-normative service situation)
- I did not have much control over the situation (effectance threat)
- I did not feel I was (or would be) accepted (esteem threat)
In addition to these four single-item measures, three other single-item measures were also included to capture how realistic the scenarios were perceived to be, as well as monitor the levels of awkwardness and embarrassment. Scenario realism was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

The exact wording of the item is presented below:

- Similar scenarios do happen in real life

The level of awkwardness item was measured on a 10-point scale representing opposite ends of a continuum (as seen below).

Please rate how awkward it was for you:

- A little awkward / Very awkward

The level of embarrassment item was adapted from Grace (2009) and presented on a 10-point scale representing opposite ends of the continuum (as seen below):

Please rate how embarrassing it was for you:

- A little embarrassing / Very embarrassing

### 6.3 CHAPTER SIX SUMMARY

The purpose of Chapter Six has been to present an empirical model of consumers’ ASEs that could be tested in future studies. In describing the model, a set of hypotheses regarding the relationships between key components of the ASE was outlined and it was further indicated how the model constructs would be operationalised. Having completed this process, we now move to Study Three to test the proposed relationships.
CHAPTER SEVEN: STUDY THREE

7.0 CHAPTER SEVEN OVERVIEW

Chapter Seven presents Study Three. The chapter first outlines the proposed methodology (see Figure 12), paying particular attention to the research objective, the approach to data collection (namely scenario based surveys), the survey design and administration, and finally the method of analysis and pre-analysis data checks. The findings of Study Three are then presented. First the results of confirmatory factor analysis are outlined, then validation of model constructs, and the scenario checks to ensure that they were satisfactory. The results of the hypothesis tests are then presented and finally, a chapter summary is also provided.

Figure 12: Chapter Seven Overview

7.1: Study Three Methodology
- Study Objective
- Scenario-based Survey Design and Administration
- Method of Analysis
- Validity Checks for Constructs
- Pre-analysis Data Checks

7.2: Study Three Findings
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis
- Validation of Model Constructs
- Scenario Checks
- Hypothesis Testing
CHAPTER SEVEN: STUDY THREE

To assist the reader, the aim, sample size, methods used, and key findings for Study Three are summarised in Table 11. In the following section, Study Three will be discussed in further detail.

Table 11: Study Three - Overarching Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Aims</th>
<th>Sample Information</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To empirically examine a complete model of consumers’ ASEs, and distinguish between processes that predict embarrassment | Recruited from CrowdFlower (online) US sample 373 respondents | Scenario-based survey Structural Equation Modelling | Violations ↑ effectance and esteem threats  
Non-normative situations ↑ effectance threat  
Both threats ↑ cognitive disequilibrium  
Cognitive disequilibrium ↑ mindful alertness  
Mindful alertness ↑ action and image monologue  
Action monologue ↑ confusion  
Image monologue ↑ embarrassment  
Confusion ↑ complaint intention, negative WOM, and avoidance  
Embarrassment ↑ negative WOM, and avoidance  
Additional:  
- Violations are more detrimental than non-normative service situations  
- Confusion has a wider impact than embarrassment  
- Embarrassment is determined by image monologues |

7.1 STUDY THREE METHODOLOGY

7.1.1 Study Objective

The primary objective for Study Three, the main study, was to statistically examine the relationships between constructs in consumers’ ASE. Additionally, an attempt was made to distinguish between processes that predict when embarrassment is or is not likely. To conduct the study, scenario-based surveys were used to collect data, and then structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse the data.

7.1.2 Scenario-based Survey Design and Administration

A scenario-based survey was chosen as the method of data collection for Study Three. A conscious decision was made to create scenarios of a chosen set of awkward service encounters for the following reasons: (a) it allowed for some consistency in terms of what respondents were evaluating; (b) the use of scenarios did not place a heavy emphasis on respondents’ memories, therefore minimising bias from time-altered memory
(Seawright et al., 2008); and (c) scenarios were beneficial from an ethical perspective because exposing subjects to real world encounters can potentially cause distress and induce negative emotions.

In Study One, a total of 13 types of awkward service encounters were identified. Obtaining a sample of sufficient size to accommodate all 13 awkward service encounters in the study, and then testing the effects of their various constructs, would have been a cumbersome task. Two features had been identified at the very core of these awkward service encounters, normative violations and non-normative service situations. Comparing all 13 may not necessarily have identified any other differences existing between them, and efforts to include them all may have been redundant. On this basis, two awkward service encounters were initially planned to be included to reflect the two primary categories. However, after further consideration, the decision was made to use four awkward service encounters.

The justification for using four instead of two awkward service encounters lay with the acknowledgement of the two fundamental need sets identified as important for consumers’ ASEs: effectance and esteem. Although the perceived effectance and esteem threats were based on the participants’ appraisals, by including only two awkward service encounters (one as a normative violation and the other as a non-normative service situation), it was believed that variability in the perceived effectance or esteem threat (relative to each category) would be restricted. For this reason, the researcher utilised four awkward service encounters in total, two representing normative violations and two non-normative service situations. Furthermore, between the two awkward service encounters within each category, the researcher attempted to make one awkward service encounter oriented towards effectance threats (operationalised as control threats), whilst the other was oriented towards esteem threats (operationalised as acceptance threats). Again, the purpose of using the four awkward service encounters was not to compare differences between the types of awkward service encounters, but to work with a manageable number of awkward service encounters which respondents can be exposed to, as well as to ensure there would be enough variability in the scenarios to enable the differences in the relationships between constructs to be tested.

In order to determine, which awkward service encounters were best to use, scenarios for all 13 types of awkward service encounters were created and pre-tested. In total, 119 respondents rated the 13 scenarios in terms of: (1) the degree of normative violation; (2) the degree of non-normativity in the service situation; (3) the perceived level of awkwardness; (4) their perception of how realistic the scenario was; (5) the perception of control threats; and (6) the perception of acceptance threats. A comparison of the 13 scenarios revealed that all 13 were rated as being fairly awkward, as evidenced by ratings of at least 6 on a 10-point scale, where 1 = “a little awkward” and 10 = “very awkward.” Similarly all 13 scenarios were rated as being fairly realistic, as evidenced by ratings of at least 5 on a 7-point scale, where 1 = “strongly disagree” that similar scenarios do happen in real life and 7 = “strongly agree” that similar scenarios do happen in real life. Further comparisons of the remaining measures resulted in the best four scenarios being identified as: (1) employee bizarre behaviours; (2) employee impertinent behaviours; (3) unfamiliar service situations and settings; and (4) personal products/issue. Scenarios 1 and 2 represented the category of normative violations, and scenarios 3 and 4 represented the category of non-normative service situations. Following completion of a final version
of the four scenarios, the remainder of the survey was then designed (see Appendix C). The procedure for designing the survey followed the same approach as Study One. To reiterate, the procedure involved ensuring a logical survey structure, ensuring the appropriate wording of questions, and pre-testing.

In terms of maintaining a logical structure, the survey began by presenting critical information to potential participants, including the background of the study, confidentiality, and how the data would be used if they did take part. In this process, the potential participant was also informed of the requirements in the current task: to read a short description of a service encounter and to take a moment to envision that they were the focal customer in the scenario. Once the participant chose to proceed, the scenario was presented and when sufficient time has passed (to allow them to think about the scenario), the participant then proceeded to rate multi-item scales reflecting different constructs relevant to the ASE, as well as relevant single-item scales. Finally, the participant was asked to indicate their gender and their age.

At all stages of the task and in the content of the scenario-based survey, every effort was made to use terms that would be easily understood. The content of the study had been pre-tested on a group of PhD students for feedback prior to launching the study. In particular, the researcher asked the group of PhD students to pay attention to a number of important aspects including the choice of words used, the ease of understanding the statements in the survey, ease of completing the survey, and the time required to complete the survey. Overall this process resulted in a number of necessary changes being made to the original version, such as changes to instructions for clarity and changes to word choices.

For consistency, the survey administration also followed the same approach as Study One. Accordingly, CrowdFlower was used again, respondents were limited to only people from the United States, participation was limited to one time only, and the contributor level was selected as 2 out of 3. As an additional feature however, the current study was timed so that the 'proceed' button was disabled until sufficient time had elapsed to complete each section. This was done to try and ensure respondents took sufficient time on each section and to minimise respondents racing through the survey just to get paid. Sufficient time had been determined by pre-testing (with PhD students) to establish how long the survey would take if the participant had read everything and completed the survey appropriately. At the end, two open-ended questions were also included to help clean the data. Answers to these two questions were assessed, to see how seriously each participant had treated the task.

7.1.3 Method of Analysis

For Study Three, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the theoretical structure of the constructs included, in preparation for hypothesis testing. SEM was then used to test the hypotheses. SEM is a form of modelling capable of testing the interrelationships and impact of multiple variables simultaneously (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). This capability brought several benefits to the current study. First the method is better at capturing the real effects because all variables are simultaneously taken into account. Hence a more complex form of modelling occurs, because relationships are tested together instead of being tested in ‘blocks’, such as with hierarchical regression which captures certain relationships and excludes
others. Second, SEM is able to incorporate constructs and their accompanying multiple indicators into the model when testing relationships. This is expected to give more precise results in comparison to when constructs are captured solely through composites or single-item indicators. Third, it has the ability to account for measurement error (Steenkamp & Van Trijp, 1991). This is important because it does not impose the unrealistic assumption of having established perfect measurements for the variables (Gallagher & Brown, 2013). Due to these advantages, SEM is highly regarded for theory development and testing (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Steenkamp & Van Trijp, 1991).

When conducting both CFA and SEM, the goodness of fit statistics needed to be evaluated for the model. The goodness of fit statistics used included a combination of absolute fit measures, incremental fit measures, and parsimony fit measures, as each type adopts a slightly different perspective (Hair et al., 2006; Ho, 2006). For illustrative purposes, Table 12 shows a summary of the fit measures used and the criteria by which they were evaluated.

Table 12: Summary of Criteria for Fit Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fit Measure</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative/normed chi-square</td>
<td>An overall indicator of model appropriateness, calculated as the chi-square value divided by the degrees of freedom.</td>
<td>Acceptable fit = value &lt; 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Root means square residual (RMSEA) | Seeks to measure the discrepancy per degree of freedom.                 | Excellent fit = RMSEA < 0.05  
|                                 |                                                                                  | Acceptable fit = RMSEA < 0.10  |
| Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)        | This measure is used to compare alternative models or a proposed model against a null model. | Good fit = TLI > 0.95           
|                                 |                                                                                  | Satisfactory fit = 0.90 < TLI < 0.95 |
| Comparative Fit Index (CFI)     | Measures the improvement in non-centrality between the observed and predicted models. | Good fit = TLI > 0.95           
|                                 |                                                                                  | Satisfactory fit = 0.90 < TLI < 0.95 |
| Incremental Fit Index (IFI)     | Measures the improvement in non-centrality between the observed and predicted models. | Good fit = TLI > 0.95           
|                                 |                                                                                  | Satisfactory fit = 0.90 < TLI < 0.95 |

Source: (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair et al., 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 1998)

Following an assessment of the goodness of fit statistics, an additional task was to assess the significance of the regression weights and standardised regression weights. In CFA, regression weights are required to be significant, however if an item is not significant, the item is interpreted as not being related to the construct, that is the item is not a statistically significant measure of the construct and may need to be removed (Hair et al., 2006). In SEM, a significant regression weight between two constructs suggests a significant relationship between the constructs. Turning to the standardised regression weights, these values in the CFA indicate the relative relationship between a construct and its measurement items. Consequently, the value should be reasonably high (at least 0.70) (Hair et al., 2006). In the SEM, the standardised regression weights indicate the relative relationship between the independent and dependent variables.
7.1.4 Validity Checks for Constructs

In Study Three, multi-item scales and multiple constructs were to be used, therefore it was important to assess convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity assesses the extent to which measures for the same construct are related (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003). This assessment can be done by calculating both construct validity and construct reliability. To determine construct validity the average variance extracted (AVE) will be calculated using the standardised regression weights. The resulting AVE value must then be greater than 0.50 for construct validity to be met. An AVE exceeding 0.50 indicates that the level of convergence is sufficient. Next, to determine construct reliability, it is necessary to assess whether there is internal consistency between the measurement items of a particular construct. This assessment requires the calculation of a reliability value, which will then be compared to the minimum threshold of 0.70. Ideally, the calculated reliability value should be at or above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2006).

Second, discriminant validity assesses whether or not constructs are distinct. When the assessment of discriminant validity is violated between two constructs, it is concluded that the two constructs are not distinct; in other words, both capture the same phenomenon (Hair et al., 2006). Ideally constructs being used together in the same model should be distinct. In order to assess discriminant validity this research used the method proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981) the researcher must compare the squared correlation between two constructs (i.e. each pair) at a time, against the AVE for each of the two constructs (i.e. AVE for construct 1 and AVE for construct 2). To achieve discriminant validity, the AVE for each of the two constructs must be greater than the squared correlation of the two constructs.

7.1.5 Pre-analysis Data Checks

The data for Study Three was checked for the possibility of malicious respondents, those “who either simply sabotage a task or try to quickly attain task completion for monetary gains” (Gadiraju et al., 2015, p. 1). First, the amount of time taken to complete the survey was assessed. The data obtained from respondents with a fast completion time was scrutinised to determine whether or not the respondent had actually paid attention to the task and the rating of the items. If the responses did not make sense in relation to one another, then it was likely that the respondent had chosen any response simply to finish and get paid. These were therefore deleted. Second, in addition to completing the primary task, respondents were also required to answer two open-ended questions related to the scenarios. These written tasks helped the researcher determine whether respondents had paid attention to the purpose of the study and the instructions. For instance, the open-ended answers were assessed to see if answers were related to the task. Responses that had issues in this area were removed from further analysis.

As a final task, in order to use SEM, a number of assumptions had to be addressed. These included: 1) independence of observations, 2) random sampling, 3) linearity of relationships, and 4) multivariate normality (Ho, 2006). In regards to the independence of observations and random sampling, the data for Study Three were collected from a sample of CrowdFlower members. CrowdFlower is an opt-in platform where members sign up to complete tasks. Although the sample was random within the platform and participants could only
participate once in the study, it did not represent a random sample of United States consumers. Whilst this may have posed a slight problem, the same issues would have still applied if the researcher had, for instance, used other panels because participants would again consist of only those who were signed up. Student samples also only reflect a certain demographic.

Second, to examine the linearity of relationships and normality respectively, this research used a combination of plots and statistical tests. The partial regressions plots of the variables and plots of residuals showed no major issues, and curve estimations in SPSS for proposed relationships between variables showed sufficient linearity. For normality, an examination of the skewness (degree to which the distribution of the data is skewed) and kurtosis (the peakedness of the data distribution) revealed that the greatest absolute skewness value was $|-1.21|$ and the greatest absolute kurtosis value was $|2.05|$. The skewness (taken as an absolute value) was compared to 3 as the threshold, and the kurtosis (also taken as an absolute value) was compared to 10 as the threshold (Aminu & Shariff, 2014; Kline, 2011). Both values suggested there were no major issues. Next an examination of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests showed that for both tests, the p-values for all variables were significant ($p<.05$), which suggested that the data distribution differed from a normal distribution. Although these tests were significant, such normality tests are also sensitive to the sample size; the greater the sample size, the more likely the test will be significant (Hair et al., 2006). An examination of the normal Q-Q plots also showed no major issues. After completing the process of data checking and cleaning, the final sample for Study Three consisted of 373 respondents. Of the sample of 373, 60% were female and respondents were aged 35 years on average. As a final assessment, the central limit theorem suggests that large sample sizes (above 30) approximate a normal distribution, and therefore Study Three met this criterion.
7.2 STUDY THREE FINDINGS

In this section, the constructs in the model are evaluated and the appropriate validity checks presented.

7.2.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA was used in this research to confirm the structure of the constructs used in preparation for hypothesis testing. All multi-item constructs were entered into AMOS for analysis. The corresponding results of this first analysis can be found below in Table 13:

Table 13: CFA output 1 – Model fit of all constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Fit</th>
<th>Run 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi Square ($\chi^2$)</td>
<td>838.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of freedom (df)</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental Fit Index (IFI)</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucker-Lewis (TLI)</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 13, the overall fit measures indicated an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 (341) = 838.49$, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = 0.95, IFI = 0.95, and TLI = 0.94). To identify other potential issues, the regression weights were assessed. Although all regression weights were significant at the 5% level, the standardised regression weights showed potential problems with three items. Accordingly, these items were removed from the analysis. Following the removal of the three items, all standardised regression weights were then above the threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2006) with the exception of one mindful alertness item Q11_1, which had a standardised regression weight of 0.67. Although below the threshold of 0.70, the decision was made to retain this item because it very closely approached 0.70. The final model fit and regression weights are presented below in Table 14 and 15. The research can now proceed to checking the validity of the constructs.

Table 14: Final CFA Output – Model fit of all constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Fit</th>
<th>Run 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi Square ($\chi^2$)</td>
<td>566.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of freedom (df)</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental Fit Index (IFI)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucker-Lewis (TLI)</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15: Final CFA Output – Regression weights of all constructs

| Q10_3   | Cognitive Disequilibrium | 1.00  | 0.90 |
| Q10_2   | Cognitive Disequilibrium | 0.98  | 0.88 |
| Q10_1   | Cognitive Disequilibrium | 0.93  | 0.84 |
| Q11_2   | Mindful Alertness        | 1.32  | 0.83 |
| Q11_1   | Mindful Alertness        | 1.00  | 0.67 |
| Q12_3   | Action-oriented Monologue| 1.00  | 0.81 |
| Q12_2   | Action-oriented Monologue| 0.99  | 0.74 |
| Q12_1   | Action-oriented Monologue| 1.01  | 0.78 |
| Q13_3   | Image-oriented Monologue | 1.00  | 0.93 |
| Q13_2   | Image-oriented Monologue | 0.97  | 0.90 |
| Q13_1   | Image-oriented Monologue | 1.03  | 0.94 |
| Q14_1   | Confusion                | 1.00  | 0.88 |
| Q14_2   | Confusion                | 1.00  | 0.90 |
| Q14_3   | Confusion                | 1.02  | 0.91 |
| Q16_2   | Embarrassment            | 1.28  | 0.86 |
| Q16_3   | Embarrassment            | 1.11  | 0.80 |
| Q16_5   | Embarrassment            | 1.00  | 0.70 |
| Q4_1    | Negative WOM (vent)      | 1.00  | 0.88 |
| Q4_2    | Negative WOM (vent)      | 1.03  | 0.90 |
| Q4_3    | Negative WOM (vent)      | 0.98  | 0.88 |
| Q8_1    | Complaint Intentions     | 1.00  | 0.97 |
| Q8_2    | Complaint Intentions     | 0.98  | 0.95 |
| Q8_3    | Complaint Intentions     | 0.94  | 0.95 |
| Q6_3    | Avoidance                | 1.00  | 0.94 |
| Q6_2    | Avoidance                | 0.99  | 0.96 |
| Q6_1    | Avoidance                | 1.00  | 0.96 |

***p < .001
7.2.2 Validating Model Constructs

In order to validate the constructs to be used in the model, both convergent and discriminant validity were assessed.

7.2.2.1 Convergent Validity

For a construct to possess convergent validity, the construct must have both construct validity and construct reliability. First, construct validity was assessed by using the standardised regression weights to calculate the AVE of a construct. Once calculated, it was then necessary to determine whether this value was greater than 0.50. Where the AVE value was greater than 0.50, there was evidence to suggest construct validity (Hair et al., 2006). Second, construct reliability was calculated by also using the standardised regression weights. Where the value representing construct validity was greater than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2006), there was evidence to suggest that the construct did possess construct validity. The resulting calculations for convergent validity are presented below in Table 16:

Table 16: Convergent Validity Checks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct Validity</th>
<th>Construct Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(AVE &gt; 0.50)</td>
<td>(value &gt; 0.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Disequilibrium</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful Alertness</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented Monologue</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image-oriented Monologue</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative WOM (vent)</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaint Intentions</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the results shown in the table above, all constructs possessed construct reliability as all values were above 0.70. Similarly all constructs possessed construct validity as values were above 0.50. The assessment of validity could thus proceed to discriminant validity.

7.2.2.2 Discriminant Validity

In order to calculate discriminant validity, the method proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) was followed. This method involved a comparison of each construct’s AVE with the squared correlation between the two constructs. When both AVEs were greater than the squared correlation, there was evidence to suggest discriminant validity between the two constructs. The results of this AVE and squared correlations comparison are presented in Table 17.
Table 17: Discriminant Validity Test – AVE and squared correlations comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs Compared</th>
<th>AVE 1</th>
<th>AVE 2</th>
<th>Squared Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mindful Alertness &lt;-&gt; Action-oriented Monologue</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful Alertness &lt;-&gt; Image-oriented Monologue</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful Alertness &lt;-&gt; Confusion</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful Alertness &lt;-&gt; Embarrassment</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful Alertness &lt;-&gt; Negative WOM (vent)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful Alertness &lt;-&gt; Avoidance</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful Alertness &lt;-&gt; Cognitive Disequilibrium</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Image-oriented Monologue</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Confusion</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Embarrassment</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Negative WOM (vent)</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Avoidance</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Cognitive Disequilibrium</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Complaint Intentions</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Confusion</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Embarrassment</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Negative WOM (vent)</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Avoidance</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Cognitive Disequilibrium</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image-oriented Monologue &lt;-&gt; Complaint Intentions</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion &lt;-&gt; Embarrassment</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion &lt;-&gt; Negative WOM (vent)</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion &lt;-&gt; Avoidance</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion &lt;-&gt; Cognitive Disequilibrium</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion &lt;-&gt; Complaint Intentions</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment &lt;-&gt; Negative WOM (vent)</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment &lt;-&gt; Avoidance</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment &lt;-&gt; Cognitive Disequilibrium</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment &lt;-&gt; Complaint Intentions</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative WOM (vent) &lt;-&gt; Avoidance</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative WOM (vent) &lt;-&gt; Cognitive Disequilibrium</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative WOM (vent) &lt;-&gt; Complaint Intentions</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance &lt;-&gt; Cognitive Disequilibrium</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance &lt;-&gt; Complaint Intentions</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Disequilibrium &lt;-&gt; Complaint Intentions</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown, for each comparison between two constructs, the AVE for each construct was greater than the squared correlation of the two constructs. The data therefore suggests there was discriminant validity for all constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

### 7.2.3 Scenario Checks

The study used scenarios to reflect four different types of awkward service encounters. Although the intention was not to directly compare how responses differed between the four scenarios, the scenarios were still assessed to see how well they met their purpose of capturing realistic, normative violations and non-normative service situations, which differed on control (reflecting effectance) and acceptance (reflecting esteem) threats.

First, in assessing "realism" the one-way ANOVA showed that the means of the groups were not significantly different across the four scenarios (p value = 0.88 > 0.05). Given that the lowest realism rating was 5.33 on a 7-point scale (see below), it was concluded that all scenarios were deemed realistic. The homogeneous subset(s) for this assessments as well as the assessments to follow, are presented in Table 18.

Second, in assessing perceived normative violations, the one-way ANOVA showed that the means of the groups were significantly different across the four scenarios (p value = 0.00 < 0.05). As intended, the mean values for scenarios 1 and 2 (representing awkward service encounters associated to normative violations) were significantly higher than the mean values for scenarios 3 and 4 (awkward service encounters associated to non-normative situations). It was thus concluded that the manipulation for differences in normative violations was successful.

Third, in assessing perceived non-normative service situations, the one-way ANOVA showed that the means of the groups differed significantly across the four scenarios (p value = 0.00 < 0.05). As intended, the mean value for scenario 3 was significantly higher than for scenarios 1 and 2. However scenario 4 was significantly higher than scenario 2 but not scenario 1. The homogeneous subsets presented show that with the exception of scenario 1, the manipulation for differences in non-normative situations was successful.

Fourth, in assessing perceived control threats, the one-way ANOVA showed that the means of the groups were significantly different across the four scenarios (p value = 0.00 < 0.05). More importantly, when looking at the scenarios reflecting normative violations (i.e. 1 and 2), there was a significant difference in terms of the perceived level of control threats. However when looking at the scenarios reflecting non-normative service situations (i.e. 3 and 4), the perceived level of control threats did not significantly differ. This means that the attempt at creating variations in the level of control threats relative to normative violations was successful, whilst its variation relative to non-normative service situations was less successful.
Table 18: Scenario Comparison – Homogeneous Subsets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realism</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 3: Unfamiliar situations/settings</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1: Employee bizarre behaviours</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 2: Employee impertinent behaviours</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 4: Personal products/issues</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normative Violations</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 4: Personal products/issues</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 3: Unfamiliar situations/settings</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1: Employee bizarre behaviours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 2: Employee impertinent behaviours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-normative Service Situations</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 2: Employee impertinent behaviours</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1: Employee bizarre behaviours</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 4: Personal products/issues</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 3: Unfamiliar situations/settings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Control Threats</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 4: Personal products/issues</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 3: Unfamiliar situations/settings</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 2: Employee impertinent behaviours</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1: Employee bizarre behaviours</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Acceptance Threats</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 4: Personal products/issues</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 3: Unfamiliar situations/settings</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1: Employee bizarre behaviours</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 2: Employee impertinent behaviours</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awkwardness Level</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 3: Unfamiliar situations/settings</td>
<td>6.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 4: Personal products/issues</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1: Employee bizarre behaviours</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 2: Employee impertinent behaviours</td>
<td>8.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fifth, in assessing the perceived acceptance threats, the one-way ANOVA showed that the means of the groups were significantly different across the four scenarios (p value = 0.00 < 0.05). When looking at the scenarios reflecting normative violations, (i.e. 1 and 2), there was a significant difference in terms of the perceived level of acceptance threats. However when looking at the scenarios reflecting non-normative service situations (i.e. 3 and 4), the perceived level of acceptance threats did not differ significantly. This means that similarly to the previous case, the attempt at creating variations in the level of acceptance threats relative to normative violations was successful, whilst its variation relative to non-normative service situations was less successful. Despite this issue, the scenarios could still be used for analysis as the intention was not to compare differences in effects between conditions.

Next, in assessing the level of awkwardness, the one-way ANOVA showed that the means of the groups were significantly different across the four scenarios (p value = 0.00 < 0.05). More importantly, the four scenarios were indeed perceived as awkward by respondents, as seen in the minimum rating of 6.53 on a 10-point scale.

Finally, in addition to a single-item measure to reflect the level of awkwardness, a single-item measure of embarrassment was also included to assess the scenarios. Through four pairwise analyses (one for each scenario), it was evident the scenarios included awkward service encounters where the perceived level of awkwardness and embarrassment significantly differed, as well as an awkward service encounter where the level was not significantly different (see Table 19). Including awkward service encounters that were both distinct and similar in terms of the awkward and embarrassing ratings in the current study may have beneficial for assessing their interrelationship in an ASE and to differentiate when consumer embarrassment occurred.

Table 19: Awkward and Embarrassment Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario Description</th>
<th>Awkward Rating</th>
<th>Embarrassment Rating</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Pairwise Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1: Employee bizarre behaviours</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>p = 0.00 &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 2: Employee impertinent behaviours</td>
<td>8.41</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>p = 0.00 &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 3: Unfamiliar situations/settings</td>
<td>6.53</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>p = 0.00 &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 4: Personal products/issues</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td>7.36</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>p = 0.59 &gt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After reviewing all four scenarios, it was concluded that despite some minor issues, the scenarios had mostly worked as intended.

7.2.4 Hypothesis Testing

The testing procedure began with a model which incorporated all the relationships in the hypotheses. The overall fit measures for this model indicated an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 (388) = 1284.42$, RMSEA = 0.08, CFI = 0.91, IFI = 0.91, and TLI = 0.90). The results are presented in Figure 13:
Figure 13: Visual Presentation of Study Three Results

Notes: Standardised regression weights are presented

*a p < 0.01
*b p < 0.05
*c p < 0.10
n.s. = not significant
As seen in Figure 13, hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported as normative violations positively influenced effectance threats ($\beta = .36, p < .01$) and esteem threats respectively ($\beta = .58, p < .01$). Regarding hypothesis 2, non-normative service situations positively influenced effectance threats ($\beta = .11, p < .05$), however non-normative service situations did not significantly influence esteem threats. This means that hypothesis 2a was supported, but hypothesis 2b failed to be supported. Next, both effectance threats ($\beta = .16, p < .01$) and esteem threats ($\beta = .37, p < .01$) were found to positively increase the experience of cognitive disequilibrium, which lent support for hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4 respectively. Hypothesis 5 was also supported as the experience of cognitive disequilibrium was shown to positively influence mindful alertness ($\beta = .66, p < .01$). Moving to hypothesis 6, mindful alertness positively influenced action-oriented monologue ($\beta = .73, p < .01$) and image-oriented monologue ($\beta = .45, p < .01$) which supported hypothesis 6a and 6b respectively. Action-oriented monologues in turn positively influenced confusion ($\beta = .48, p < .01$), whilst image-oriented monologue positively influenced embarrassment ($\beta = .68, p < .01$), which then supported hypothesis 7 and hypothesis 8 respectively. Finally, in terms of how emotions influenced firm-related outcomes, confusion was found to positively influence complaints intentions ($\beta = .25, p < .01$), negative WOM ($\beta = .27, p < .01$), and avoidance ($\beta = .18, p < .01$). This supported hypotheses 9a, 9b, and 9c. Second, embarrassment was found to have no significant influence on complaint intentions, however embarrassment did positively influence negative WOM ($\beta = .33, p < .01$) and avoidance ($\beta = .42, p < .01$). The data then failed to support hypothesis 10a, however did support hypotheses 10b and 10c.

7.3 STUDY THREE CONCLUSION

Using the conceptual model developed earlier in this research, the current study (presented in this chapter) has successfully modelled the majority of the components and arrived at statistical conclusions regarding the relationships between the components. The results obtained from this analysis have supported most of the hypotheses presented as summarised in Table 20. In terms of the process of consumers’ ASE, the episode starts with a normative violation (in this case one that is attributed to employee actions) which has the potential to threaten both the customer’s effectance and esteem needs. Alternatively, with ASEs that begin with a non-normative service situation, based on the data, this only has the potential to threaten effectance. Effectance threats then generate the customer’s cognitive disequilibrium which in turn facilitates mindfulness alertness, and mindful alertness in turn makes the customer engage in action-oriented thoughts or image-oriented thoughts. If action-oriented thoughts are of main concern, then confusion is likely, which in turn encourages the customer’s engagement in negative WOM, complaint, and avoidance. In contrast, if image-oriented thoughts are of main concern, then embarrassment is likely. Embarrassment in turn, only encourages the customer’s engagement in negative WOM and avoidance.
TABLE 20: SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESIS RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Hypothesis Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a: Normative violations increase effectance threats</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b: Normative violations increase esteem threats</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2a: Non-normative service situations increase effectance threats</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2b: Non-normative service situations increase esteem threats</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: Effectance threats increase cognitive disequilibrium</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: Esteem threats increase cognitive disequilibrium</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: Cognitive disequilibrium increases mindful alertness</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6a: Mindful alertness increases action-oriented monologue</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6b: Mindful alertness increases image-oriented monologue</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7: Action-oriented monologue increases confusion</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8: Image-oriented monologue increases embarrassment</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9a: Confusion increases complaint intentions</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9b: Confusion increases negative WOM</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9c: Confusion increases avoidance</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H10a: Embarrassment increases complaint intentions</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H10b: Embarrassment increases negative WOM</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H10c: Embarrassment increases avoidance</td>
<td>Supported</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7.4 CHAPTER SEVEN SUMMARY

In chapter seven, this research has described the process and results of Study Three. In describing the process of Study Three in particular, the objective and research approach was detailed as well as the means of data collection, proposed data checks and method of analysis (i.e. SEM). In conducting the analysis, the results showed that with the exception of two, all the study’s hypotheses were supported. The hypotheses that lacked support referred to the ability of non-normative service situations to influence esteem needs and the ability of embarrassment to influence complaints intentions. Having completed Study Three, the focus now turns to a combined discussion of the results from all studies.
CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

8.0 CHAPTER EIGHT OVERVIEW

The structure of Chapter Eight is presented in Figure 14. Chapter Eight brings together all the research conducted for this thesis. The research objectives are revisited, answered, and discussed. Following this process, the academic and managerial contributions of this research are outlined, followed by a discussion of the limitations of the research, and future research opportunities. Finally, the chapter (and the thesis) ends with an overall conclusion.

Figure 14: Chapter Eight Overview

- 8.1 Research Objective One
  - Features and Types of Awkward Service Encounters
  - Awkward Service Encounters and their Association with Embarrassment

- 8.2 Research Objective Two
  - Key Components of Consumers’ ASE

- 8.3 Research Objective Three
  - Relationships between Components in Consumers’ ASE

- 8.4 Academic Contributions

- 8.5 Managerial Contributions

- 8.6 Limitations and Future Research

- 8.7 Conclusions
CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

8.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE ONE

Objective One of this research was to: (1) obtain an understanding of the core underlying features and common types of awkward service encounters; and (2) to conduct a preliminary examination of the association between awkward service encounters and embarrassment (in percentage terms). The following section addresses Objective One.

8.1.1 Features and Types of Awkward Service Encounters

Based on the results of Study One, the underlying features of awkward service encounters were found to relate to normative violations and non-normative service situations. The essence of normative violations was the transgression of a social script of which the focal customer (i.e. the person reporting on the awkward service encounter) was explicitly aware. A typical example was when the employee was overfriendly, coming too close to the customer as they interacted. According to research on personal space and social boundaries (Argyle & Dean, 1965; Burgoon & Jones, 1976; Felipe & Sommer, 1966), social agents manage their acts to maintain a comfortable level. This comfortable level is determined by what is considered acceptable to both parties. In the context of this research, when employee behaviours violated these implicit social boundaries (i.e. the employee as a stranger coming too close), discomfort was triggered and an awkward episode ensued. The service script dictates how interactants should behave in the service encounter and represents just one type of social setting. It is embedded in a larger set of social scripts, violations of which can also trigger an awkward episode. A typical example in this research was when the employee was rude to the customer.

In contrast to normative violations, the essence of non-normative service situations did not lie with an explicit behavioural transgression but with the customer’s lack of experience as a function of the service situation, or as a function of what arose in the service situation. In the former case where the lack of experience was linked to the service situation, the customer may have been engaging in a certain type of service (or a particular component of the service) for the first time. A typical example was a customer dining in an ethnic restaurant or flying for the first time. In the latter case the lack of experience was linked to a circumstantial event that put the customer in a unique yet unpleasant situation. Another example was an unexpected encounter with a previous relationship partner who was in the role of an employee, or an acquaintance overseeing a sensitive product purchase.

The two underlying features identified (normative violations and non-normative service situations) can be compared and contrasted to categories of socially awkward situations (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). The categories of socially awkward situations have been identified as: (1) uncertain or non-normative social situations; (2) perceived social or moral transgression (also called counter-normative behaviours); (3) events involving negative social judgements; and (4) events that make social processes explicit. Uncertain or non-normative social situations reflect situations that are latent with uncertainty because they lack precedence. It is not known how the situation (and the accompanying behaviours) should proceed and the choice of even simple behaviours then becomes difficult and rife with tension, due to the fear of doing something wrong or making oneself appear incompetent. This type of situation is also present when a person has just entered a social
setting and has yet to orient themselves to the situation. It is this moment of social uncertainty and hesitation that is the essence of this first type of socially awkward situation. Perceived transgressions (or counter-normative behaviours) reflect inappropriate or flawed behaviours which breach moral or social standards, for instance speaking with a stutter or making socially inconsiderate statements. In these situations, awkwardness is triggered in particular amongst those who are aware of the breach. These two categories of socially awkward situations closely resemble the underlying features of awkward service encounters identified in this research. In a wider sense, the initiation of an awkward encounter across different contexts may then be a function of these two features.

The third type of socially awkward situation is events involving negative social judgements. According to Clegg (2012b) explicit negative social judgements are rare but can occur as negative social remarks or gestures. In the consumer context (and of this research), these actions are placed under normative violations because such actions (in particular) from the service provider suggest rudeness, which violates the social standards of courtesy and respect towards the customer. From the customer’s own perspective, their engagement in negative social remarks or gestures (especially intentional) is unlikely to be awkward because they will not perceive this as a transgression. Implicit negative social judgements, on the other hand, occur as a result of social attention or memory failures and these are most likely viewed as transgressions by the individual suffering this failure. They also occur as ambivalent responses in conversations involving a lack conversational flow, which based on the current research, would fall under normative violations as communication problems.

The final type of socially awkward situation is events that make social processes explicit, including formal events such as those involving formal introductions. Such events increase social attention towards the formal acts. For those at the centre of the formal act in particular, it appears as if every action is being closely scrutinised. In the current research, this socially awkward situation was not reflected in the consumer context possibly because, despite being subject to social scripts, interactions in the service context are considered casual interactions, and attention is only heightened when something goes wrong.

The two underlying features identified (normative violations and non-normative service situations) can also be compared to typologies of embarrassment, in particular those that place an emphasis on the dramaturgical perspective. The most relevant typology created in this manner was by Gross and Stone (1964). Their analysis revealed three major role requirements: (1) identity, (2) poise, and (3) confidence in established identity and poise. When any of these are disturbed, the foundation of the social interaction is broken. Identity refers to the social self that is aimed by an individual. For example, a teacher’s personal appearance and behaviours should be consistent with that of a teacher when they are within the school setting. Poise refers to a social agent’s ability to control the self and the situation (i.e. space, props, equipment, clothing, and body). This has direct connections to the fundamental need for effectance. As indicated in Study Three, when effectance (as control) is threatened cognitive disequilibrium is triggered. The maintenance of confidence refers to following and having confidence in expectations (performance norms) to ensure social stabilisation. These categories do not directly reflect normative violations or non-normative service situations, however their characteristics do occur within normative violations and non-normative service situations. For instance, when the customer is unable
to pay for their purchases (normative violation), their identity as a customer is essentially unable to be maintained. Similarly, if the customer accidentally knocks down a stand (normative violation), they have lost their ability to control the self and the situation (i.e. poise). Finally, if the customer enters an ethnic restaurant for the first time (non-normative service situation), they may not have much confidence in how to behave. Gross and Stone (1964) appeared to place more emphasis on the social function that is lost as opposed to the underlying feature of situation, such as the occurrence of a violation. Having compared these two primary categories with those identified in previous research (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b; Gross & Stone, 1964), it is evident that many similarities exist in their underlying features. The categories are not distinct but provide an alternative approach to assessing the awkward encounter.

Thirteen common types of awkward service encounters were identified. Those arising out of normative violations were: (1) employee mistakes and lack of knowledge; (2) violations of customers’ social boundaries; (3) employee intimidating and pressuring behaviours; (4) communication problems and misunderstandings; (5) witnessing others’ predicaments or conflicts; (6) employee bizarre behaviours; (7) customer oversights and blunders; (8) employee impertinent behaviours; (9) appalling complaint handling; and (10) customer unease with making complaints. Awkward service encounters arising out of non-normative service situations were: (11) unfamiliar situations and settings; (12) past associations; and (13) personal products and issues. When compared to other types of service disruption in consumer research, many of the awkward incidents collected appeared to reflect service encounter failures. Service encounter failures have been attributed to “some aspect of the service employees’ behaviours or attitudes” (Keaveney, 1995, p. 76), such as uncaring and impolite behaviours, or what Bitner et al. (1990) described as employees’ unprompted and unsolicited actions. However in addition to these service encounter failures, actual failures linked to the customer were also present (i.e. customer oversights and blunders). Finally, the cases of non-normative service situations, although not due to a direct failure on anyone’s part, appeared to emphasise a lack of confidence on the customer’s part over what to do given the circumstances they were in.

8.1.2 Awkward Service Encounters and their Association with Embarrassment

Examining awkward service encounters and their association with embarrassment justified the importance of awkward service encounters as the starting point, as only approximately 50% of the incidents collected also reported the presence of embarrassment. More importantly, across the common types of awkward service encounters, with the exception of personal products/issues, none were found to be perfectly aligned with embarrassment, suggesting that certain types of awkward service encounter are always likely to be embarrassing for some, and not for others. This finding has important theoretical implications in redefining the awkward interaction account of embarrassment. First, there was preliminary evidence to suggest that awkward interactions may not be the primary cause of embarrassment and, instead, embarrassment may only be a potential consequence of awkward service encounters. Second, with only a 50% correlation between the two, it was clear that whether or not an awkward service encounter was likely to lead to embarrassment may have depended on aspects other than those explicit or observable in the situation. Accordingly, the importance of
studying consumers’ ASEs and how key components within it influenced one another was demonstrated, as opposed to focussing solely on features of an awkward service encounter.

8.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE TWO

Objective Two in this research was to explore consumers’ ASEs in more detail. In particular, attention was paid to identifying key components (i.e. cognitions, emotions, behaviours) within the ASE. The following section addresses Objective Two.

8.2.1 Key Components of Consumers’ ASE

Study Two interviewees’ descriptions of their ASEs revealed 13 key components. These components represented different segments of the ASE, but were nevertheless all associated. The components (ordered based on cognitive appraisal theory and prior research), consisted of: the situational stressors (1) normative violations and (2) non-normative service situations; followed by the two primary needs being threatened: (3) effectance-related needs and (4) esteem-related needs; followed by the cognitive states and processes triggered: (5) cognitive disequilibrium, (6) mindful alertness, (7) action-oriented thoughts, and (8) image-oriented thoughts. Whilst undergoing the changes in cognitive states and processes, (9) tonic immobility was also described by interviewees, such that by being distracted and mentally stuck, their physical response seemed frozen. Next, interviewees described emotional responses consisting of: (10) knowledge emotions, and (11) self-conscious emotions (most dominantly confusion for the former and embarrassment for the latter). Finally as coping responses, interviewees described engaging in behaviours that could be grouped as: (12) avoidance coping, and (13) problem-focussed coping.

The first set of key components (i.e. situational stressors) consisting of normative violations and non-normative service situations represented the underlying features present in awkward service encounters, as identified in Study One. Study Two confirmed these features. For the second set of key components (i.e. the needs at stake), based on their evaluation of the situational stressors, the customer could appraise the awkward service encounter as threatening their effectance-related needs or their esteem-related needs. Effectance-related needs refer to the customer’s perceived ability to control, understand, and predict what is happening or what will happen in their current service encounter. Esteem-related needs refer to issues such as the customer’s perceived level of acceptance/belonging, and ability to enhance the self. In the third set of key components (i.e. cognitive states and processes), customers were thrown into a state of cognitive disequilibrium where they felt an internal imbalance often described with words such as “uneasiness”, “tension” and “discomfort”, and referred to in other research on awkward encounters as cringe-inducing scenes of discomfort (Kotsko, 2010). Accompanying this internal imbalance, was a sense of hypervigilance and externally focussed monitoring of the external environment, termed in this research as mindful alertness. In this state, a sense of the social situation being projected under a spotlight is experienced, as those aware of the awkward occurrence focus their attention on the source of the awkward encounter. As the focal customer was considered as being part of this social exchange, the customer needed to think about what the situation now
meant for them. This would then direct their attention to action-oriented thoughts by focussing on what was going on and hence what they as the customer should now do. For the customer at the centre of the awkward occurrence, it was likely they may direct their attention to image-oriented thoughts. Image-oriented thoughts focus on concerns over negative social evaluations, in other words what others present were thinking about the customer; were they thinking of the customer as poor, stupid, or inconsiderate and so forth? Some interviewees also described themselves in their role as customer as being paralysed in the moment due to the immense levels of panic the situation had brought. This translated into tonic immobility (a physically still behavioural response) which seemed to be present as the customer was being "overtaken" by their cognitive activity. Once the customer had undergone the “cognitive phase”, their emotional responses could consist of knowledge emotions (such as confusion) or self-conscious emotions (such as embarrassment). Finally, in order to cope with the awkward episode, the customer could engage in avoidance coping and/or problem-focused coping. Avoidance coping (as the name states) involved the customer distancing themselves and staying away from the service situation, the people, and the firm associated with their ASE. For the firm this translates to lost patronage (or exit behaviours). In contrast, problem-focused coping involves the customer dealing with the problem head on, oftentimes in a confrontational manner to address the predicament. For the firm, this translates to complaining behaviours.

In the process of identifying the key components of consumers’ ASEs, the second research objective also offered preliminary insights into the relationship between some components. In particular, two primary thought orientations were identified in the ASE: action-oriented and image-oriented. These two thought orientations appeared to be core determinants of the type of emotional response. When the customer’s thoughts were primarily action-oriented, the customer seemed more likely to engage in knowledge emotions such as confusion. In contrast, if the customer’s thoughts were primarily image-oriented, the customer seemed more likely to engage in self-conscious emotions such as embarrassment. This relationship was hinted at when discussing with the interviewee whether the ASE they shared had been embarrassing. For those who suggested that their ASE did involve embarrassment, they oftentimes described image-oriented thoughts. However when the ASE did not involve embarrassment, the nature of the shared ASE emphasised confusion and thoughts directed at actions.

Finally, in examining the key components, there was also preliminary evidence of a difference between a subset of awkward service encounters and service failures, based on discussion during the interviews about how awkward service encounters compared to other disruptive incidents in the service encounter. It seemed that some awkward service encounters could be clearly differentiated from service failures based on the customer undergoing awkwardness, but at the same time there being essentially nothing wrong with the service offered (or its performance). In fact the employee could perform the service exceptionally well and still have the customer undergo an ASE. This was likely in cases where the customer was in a non-normative service situation.
8.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE THREE

Objective Three was to statistically test the relationships between constructs in consumers’ ASEs. Additionally, an attempt was made to distinguish between processes that predict when embarrassment is or is not likely. The following section addresses Objective Three.

8.3.1 Statistical Relationships between Components in Consumers’ ASE

Based on the 13 key components identified in Study Two, 12 were included in a statistical analysis to assess the relationship between them, and to more formally present the process model. Although it had been an interesting observation in the interviews, tonic immobility was excluded. The consumers’ ASE had been modelled using cognitive appraisal theory as the primary foundation for the model, and accordingly the core sections focussed upon were stressors, cognitions, emotions, and coping. Tonic immobility as an accompanying response in the cognitions phase, did not adequately fit this modelling frame.

The results of SEM suggested that normative violations (as a result of employee behaviours) threatened consumers’ effectance and esteem needs, however non-normative service situations appeared to only threaten consumers’ effectance needs. The fact that non-normative service situations did not influence consumers’ esteem needs may reflect the scenario of the non-normative service situation used, where the customer had yet to do anything wrong. However in other cases (of non-normative service situations) where the customer had made the wrong call and realised that they have behaved inappropriately, it was likely they would perceive social rejection based on their behaviours, causing negative effects on their esteem needs. Once consumers perceived a threat to their effectance or esteem needs, the customer’s homeostasis would then be impacted, presented as cognitive disequilibrium (the internal mental discomfort that arose). The experience of cognitive disequilibrium signalled a problem with the encounter and put the customer into a state of mindful alertness (characterised by an intense focussing of attention and hypervigilance). The customer would then engage in heightened cognitive activity aimed at sense-making of the situation, monitoring behaviours and planning their behaviours (i.e. action-oriented monologue), or aimed at social evaluations and how they were currently being projected (i.e. image-oriented monologue). When the customer was primarily focussed on action-oriented monologues, they were more likely to experience confusion as an emotional response. In contrast, when the customer was primarily focussed on image-oriented monologues, they were more likely to experience embarrassment as an emotional response. Finally, negative WOM and avoidance were likely to be used as coping options when the customer was either confused or embarrassed. Complaint intentions however, appeared to only result when the customer was confused. As a whole, this process represents what consumers undergo in an ASE.
8.4 ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

In addressing Research Objective One, Study One identified primary categories with underlying qualities similar to those of awkward encounters (or disrupted interactions) suggested by previous studies (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b; Gross & Stone, 1964). The current study not only affirmed but also extended previous research by identifying 13 specific cases of awkward encounters in the consumer context. Although the experience of awkwardness has been suggested to be overt such that it is easily recognisable and felt (Clegg, 2012a; Kotsko, 2010), the identification of these 13 specific cases will help researchers in the future dissect these encounters further. For instance, the explicit norm being violated (in particular for the case of normative violations) can be understood to allow for the identification of norms that are most relevant to awkward service encounters. For example, awkward service encounters arising from communication problems and misunderstandings will be related to effective communication norms. This will facilitate a more detailed analysis of awkward service encounters and the situational characteristics that can fracture stable social interactions.

It is evident from Study One that the ability to differentiate when embarrassment does or does not occur, does not lie with an objective understanding of the situational characteristics. Only approximately 50% of awkward service encounters were rated as also having been embarrassing for the customer and, further, the presence of embarrassment varied across the different types of awkward service encounters. Overall (with the exception of one) there was no clear pattern between the presence of embarrassment and the different awkward service encounters. The lack of a clear and meaningful pattern may also explain why in prior research, different arguments for the primary cause of embarrassment were argued for (Miller, 1996), but when developing typologies of embarrassing incidents, the incidents were diverse and did not incorporate the different primary causes as these were differentiated at the appraisal level (Keltner & Buswell, 1997).

It was found in Study Two that emotions such as confusion and embarrassment had a significant presence in consumers’ ASEs. This may suggest that ASEs differ from the most commonly examined negative service incident, the service failure. Existing research on service failures suggest that anger is one of the dominant emotions present (Bonifield & Cole, 2007; Bougie et al., 2003). Anger is driven by the desire to restore justice and equity because the person experiencing anger feels that they have been unjustifiably wronged (Averill, 1983; Funches, 2011; Lazarus, 1991). Confusion and embarrassment in contrast are driven by comprehension and understanding (for the former), and primarily by social evaluation concerns (for the latter) (Miller, 1996; Silvia, 2009). Additionally, as with confusion and embarrassment, customer anger can drive negative responses which will have detrimental effect towards the firm. However as the emotions possess different bases, the negative responses may also differ. For instance, anger has been associated to negative responses such as retaliatory behaviours to restore justice (Bonifield & Cole, 2007). However in the interviews for Study Two, retaliatory behaviours were not clearly evident in the stories interviewees shared. This could mean that despite awkward service encounters representing a negative incident, similarly to the service failure situation, the ASE in its entirety represents a unique experience as it involves a different set of emotions. While it is not suggested that anger will never be experienced in an ASE, based on the current data the presence of anger in interviewees’ descriptions of their shared experiences was not dominant. Finally, the presence of confusion
and embarrassment as primary emotions in the ASE reiterated the findings of Study One where embarrassment was only present in approximately 50% of the awkward incidents collected. The other emotion that may have been elicited when embarrassment was unlikely may then have been confusion. The inclusion of confusion (over the situation) in the ASE context differs to existing uses of confusion in the consumer context where it is often examined in relation to brands or products (Foxman et al., 1992; Mitchell & Papavassiliou, 1997; Turnbull et al., 2000).

Based on both Study Two and Three, cognitive disequilibrium (a sense of mental discomfort) and mindful alertness were confirmed as key components of consumers’ ASEs. Cognitive disequilibrium reiterated what Clegg (2012b) has described as the sense of destabilisation, and mindful alertness reiterated the intense focussing of attention when assessing the socially awkward situation, also described by Clegg (2012a). This may suggest that these components are present in awkward encounters (and hence their experience) in social situations generally and across various contexts, including the consumer context. One slight difference however is the source of the disequilibrium emphasised. By using cognitive appraisal theory and drawing on cognitive states and processes (Graesser et al., 2005; Piaget, 1952) as the foundation for the process model of consumers’ ASE developed in this research, the customers’ cognitive processes and evaluations and resulting cognitive disequilibrium were emphasised. Clegg (2012b), however, appears to emphasise social disequilibrium (or destabilisation) as a consequence of focussing on the “social” situation.

Regardless of the emphasis, the key finding was the importance of disequilibrium itself to the experience of awkwardness. When the individuals’ equilibrium is broken they are in a state of internal imbalance, which may (or may not) be situated in more than one location as the individual’s entire self is imbalanced. Regarding the customers’ needs (also called goal states by Clegg (2012a, 2012b)), the current research was able to identify and confirm the presence of two primary goal states in consumers’ ASEs: esteem-related needs and effectance-related needs. The finding of esteem-related needs confirmed the goal state discussed in previous examinations of the socially awkward situations. For instance, Clegg (2012b, p. 694) stated that “acceptance functions as a primary goal-state” when providing general assumptions. However, the effectance-related needs identified in this research have not previously been directly addressed. They have only been indirectly described as a result of assessing disrupted interactions in relation to embarrassment (Gross & Stone, 1964). Effectance threats have been described as a loss of poise, identity, and confidence. All three were reflected in the current research. Lack of confidence, for example, was evident in non-normative service situations, action-oriented, thoughts and confusion in particular. In acknowledging effectance as another goal-state, future research will be able to more accurately assess the stakes involved in consumers’ ASEs and, further, assess in future models whether the two differing goals-states have alternative emotional consequences, coping responses, and relational outcomes.

Finally, the current research confirmed that ASEs represent distressing occurrences for customers (i.e. by forcing them into a state of unsettling cognitive disequilibrium for one), which negatively impact firms because of consumers’ chosen coping responses. These negative outcomes for the firm were shown in the current research as negative WOM, complaint intentions, and avoidance. Interestingly complaint intentions were only
influenced by confusion (and not embarrassment). While no clear conclusions may be drawn regarding why this occurred, it is possible that embarrassment (being a self-conscious emotion), turns the individuals focus solely on the self. This means there would be no implications in terms of trying to influence others’ (in this case the employee’s and the firm’s) behaviours by engaging in problem-focussed coping to address the issue.

This research tested the awkward interaction model through a focus on the awkward encounter and the awkward experience. This approach is in contrast to embarrassment researchers who have primarily assessed the awkward interaction from the perspective of embarrassment. By changing the perspective, embarrassment was found to be only a potential emotional consequence of awkward service encounters. Additionally, the results lend support to the social evaluation model of embarrassment (Edelmann, 1985; Manstead & Semin, 1981). This model argues that social evaluation concerns are the primary cause of embarrassment and, suggests further, that it is harder for a dramaturgic dilemma to cause embarrassment without simultaneously creating unwanted evaluations (Miller, 1996). Based on the modelled ASE and the corresponding results, when a dramaturgic dilemma (i.e. the awkward service encounter) occurs AND there are social evaluation concerns (i.e. image-oriented thoughts), embarrassment as an emotional response is activated. In contrast, when a dramaturgic dilemma occurs independently of social evaluation concerns, it is likely the customer will engage with action-oriented thoughts, which are then likely to activate confusion as an emotional response.

By being the first to unravel the experience (the ASE), the current research has expanded understanding of the awkward interaction beyond basic descriptors in the embarrassment literature to an actual process model (albeit consumer specific at the present moment). Further, it has increased understanding in a consumer context of a phenomenon that is not only distressing, but commonly occurring (based on the ease in which respondents shared their awkward service encounters in Study One).

8.5 MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Knowledge of the common types of awkward service encounters will allow management to be aware of the specific causes of awkward service encounters. Disruptions in everyday social encounters can create cognitive disequilibrium and instability in the interaction. When this experience is transferred into the consumer context, it has significant negative implications for firms through negative WOM, complaint intentions, and avoidance (i.e. reduced re-patronage) as highlighted in Study Three. These occurrences need to be prevented if firms want to grow their customer numbers and profits in the long-run. Knowledge of the common types of awkward service encounters will help managers redesign their services and the way in which they manage the service experience. In particular, the explicit and observable characteristics of awkward service encounters can be accommodated (i.e. planned for) and immediately recognised by employees who can then work proactively to manage the encounter.

For instance, for a new service that had just entered the market (i.e. non-normative service situation), service processes should be made as explicit as possible through company websites or staff communication. Virtual service experiences could also be introduced as part of the marketing plan to familiarise the customer with the
process. The importance of making service processes explicit is particularly important especially for services that are not frequently used however are heavily associated with stressful circumstances (i.e. funeral services), services that are primarily used for the first time when approaching certain life stages (i.e. mortgage services), or services that are culturally distinct. In the case of first-time mortgages for instance, the customer may be unfamiliar with the terms and conditions, which causes unease because they are unsure how to respond and may doubt every decision made.

In the case of culturally distinct services, this has significant implications for the international travel and tourism industry. At the end of 2014, over 1.1 billion tourists travelled internationally, with total international exports from international tourism reaching US$1.5 trillion. By the year 2030, the number of tourists travelling internationally is projected to reach 1.8 billion (World Tourism Organisation, 2014). As more consumers travel the world in search of new, exotic holiday destinations, they will be exposed to different service settings that may be largely culturally influenced, such as different forms of ethnic dining and hospitality. A customer’s exposure to new cultural etiquettes about which they have little previous knowledge will likely generate an ASE. It is therefore important to provide sufficient information to consumers in terms of what to expect, or have employees ready to assist ‘new’ customers, or those who they feel are lost as to what to do or how the service should proceed. Mitchell and Papavassiliou (1997) and Drummond (2004) have referred to these situations as the consumer being in alien market environments because of their limited experience of customs and practice. In other globalised markets also, it is important to understand the influence of culturally shaped scripts so as to minimise ASEs.

Consumers’ ASEs may occur more frequently in certain industries than others thus management needs to be more vigilant within these industries. In a study on HIV risk communication, Epstein et al. (1998) found that awkward moments between the patient and their physician affected the depth of their communication, and hence limited the amount of information gathered about the patient. This is concerning as patients may not be receiving the best healthcare advice possible. At a more general level, consumers may avoid particular services simply because they involve awkward encounters, such as personal (massage) services, health services, lingerie stores, and other adult stores. Service providers may therefore be losing business through no fault of their own, but simply due to the nature of the service provided. Consequently extra precautions need to be taken by services in these sectors.

Industries that handle significant amounts of customer phone calls should also be more aware of ASEs. Although awkward service encounters associated with different mediums were not explicitly categorised as an individual type, it was evident from the incidents collected in Study One and also interviewees’ descriptions in Study Two that an ASE could also occur in these areas. It is therefore important to not only train customer representatives on the shop floor (or those interacting with the customer face-to-face) regarding ASE detection and management, but also customer representatives at other contact points, such as over the phone. The simplest way to detect awkwardness over the phone is the awkward silence from the customer’s side. Employees should therefore be trained in how to fill in such voids. McColl-Kennedy et al. (2009), in particular, recommended using technology to design early warning systems when dealing with customer rage episodes.
Similarly, firms with call centres could have software that assesses the customer’s speech to detect occurrences that signal the customer is undergoing awkwardness. In this manner, the ASE can be managed or responded to appropriately to put the customer at ease. This would encourage customers to more frequently deal with their enquiries or problems over the phone instead of physically going into an office, which saves time for the customer and the firm.

The understanding gained from Study Two and Three of the key components of the ASE, and the relationships between these components, could also be used to manage the customer’s experience. When an employee senses the customer is undergoing an ASE (from having been trained at how to look at the warning signs), the employee may then engage in behaviours aimed at stabilising the interaction for the customer through acts signalling positive social evaluation, or helping behaviours that show understanding which may then prevent the customer from progressing further into their ASE (Clegg, 2012a, 2012b). Alternatively, the employee may try to work with the emotions exhibited in the ASE. This is consistent with research showing customers’ emotional expressions serve as sources of information which can be used by the employee to make sense of a situation and guide their behaviours so that they can effectively manage the service encounter (Dubé & Morgan, 1998; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990; Van Kleef, 2010).

Consumers’ emotional response of embarrassment, for example, may be detected through their tendency to gaze down, control smiles, avoid eye contact, or shift gazes (Keltner & Anderson, 2000). Once aware, the employee can enact behaviours aimed at making the customer feel better about themselves and the situation. This could be as simple as attempting to minimise the significance of the customer’s embarrassment through humour. Humour facilitates emotion management by helping to release the uncomfortable tension that has built up and hence take control of the threatening situation. This transition dissipates the perceived threat, allowing a form of escape from the initial stress and discomfort. Amusement in the self and others is created and feelings in the situation are restored to specified bounds (Francis, 1994). Alternatively, in order to detect confusion, employees should focus on customers’ eye movements, the eyebrow area and mouth, taking note of raised or narrowed eyebrows and wandering, squinting or staring eyes (Rozin & Cohen, 2003).

Other ways to remedy aspects of consumers’ ASEs should also be considered. For instance, previous research has shown that the effects of threatened needs can be remedied. Threats to esteem needs in particular can be cushioned by enhancing the customer’s perceived importance, and threats to effectance needs by increasing the customer’s perception of choice and power (Williams et al., 2000). Such strategies should be included in employee training programs because with successful intervention and management, the problem caused by ASEs may be resolved on the spot (or at least minimised). Hence issues which magnify and extend the experience into future interactions are avoided (Clegg, 2012a), including the consequences identified in Study Three; negative WOM, complaint intentions, and avoidance.

As a whole, this research has reiterated the importance of facilitating stable employee-customer interactions to ensure that the customer is comfortable throughout their encounter with the firm. Additionally, with knowledge of the ASE, prevention strategies may be explored. However if ASEs do unexpectedly occur, employees should be trained to identify the warning signs and respond appropriately to re-stabilise the
interaction much more quickly (by disrupting its progression), hence reducing the duration of the customer’s uneasiness.

8.6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There were a number of limitations in this study which may also provide future research opportunities. The first limitation identified was the use of a scenario-based survey. Using a scenario-based survey helped ensure that respondents focussed on and evaluated the same set of awkward service encounters. However, it can be argued that the scenarios might not have been as distressing as would be the case in actual exposures, where the incident was experienced first-hand. Accordingly, the responses related in the current research may not necessarily reflect the intensity of responses under actual scenarios. This limitation however was unavoidable given ethics around exposing human subjects to potentially distressing service encounters. Additionally the required effects were still generated and it is possible that in real life settings, even stronger effect may be present.

As another limitation, attribution theory was not explicitly considered in conceptualising and modelling consumers’ ASEs. According to attribution theory, consumers are said to make causal inferences (Weiner, 1980) regarding service disruptions. These inferences include three dominant dimensions known as controllability (was the incident one the firm could control), locus (whether the cause is connected to the consumer or the firm), and stability (a temporary or fairly stable cause), which are largely judgment based and have been found to influence consumer reactions (Folkes, 1984). Variations can occur regarding the source of the ASE. For instance with normative violations, these can be considered as occurring as a result of employee behaviours or customer behaviours. In the current research, the normative violation scenarios both focussed on employee behaviours. Violations from customer behaviours could be studied in the future. Additionally, combinations of awkward service encounters could be considered. For instance, normative violations by the customer could be examined in the context of a familiar service (i.e. card declined during a supermarket purchase), or the customer’s normative violation could be examined in the context of non-normative service situation, hence their violation occurs from their lack of knowledge (i.e. mistakenly drinking from a hot water bowl in an ethnic restaurant which was meant to be for hand washing). It may therefore be interesting to incorporate attribution theory in the future to see how it might fit into the model of consumers’ ASEs.

Although attributions have been used to categorise and evaluate embarrassing situations (Grace, 2007, 2009), in a model of self-conscious emotions which includes embarrassment, embarrassment is proposed as being elicited when one’s public self-representation is activated (internal public), but not when there is an explicit internal versus external attribution (Tracy & Robins, 2004). In this process, future research might also incorporate a special case of embarrassment called empathic embarrassment (which was not directly examined in the scenarios created for this research). Empathic embarrassment is a type of embarrassment experienced as a bystander to another’s predicament, particularly when the bystander is imagining what the
focal individual is feeling. This form of embarrassment is distinct because it has no negative impact on the bystander's own social identity (Miller, 1987).

A further limitation relates to the samples used. Study One and Study Three used a United States based sample obtained from an online crowdsourcing platform. In contrast, Study Two was carried out locally with a New Zealand based sample of interviewees. The geographic variation in samples could not be avoided because the researcher is situated in New Zealand and face-to-face interviews were required to facilitate interaction and conversation. Additionally, the samples for all three studies were based on convenience sampling, and only basic demographic information such as gender and age was noted. This means that generalisability of results is limited, nevertheless, the research does serve as an important foundation for understanding the ASE. To address this limitation, future research may wish to examine consumers’ ASEs using a representative population sample, focusing on just one geographic location.

Another future research opportunity lies in examining moderation effects (i.e. interactions). In the current research, the ASE was modelled sequentially and possible moderation effects between the key components within the model were not considered, nor other additional moderating constructs. In terms of moderation effects between model constructs, it is possible that instead of the cognitive states (i.e. cognitive disequilibrium and mindful alertness) simply having a direct influence, they could also have moderated the effect of other paths. In terms of examining additional moderating constructs, the role of personal predispositions, for instance, could be examined. In the current research personal traits were not explicitly considered. However a number may significantly influence ASEs, the first of which is self-monitoring.

Self-monitoring describes one’s ability to monitor and control the self (i.e. emotional displays) to ensure social appropriateness within differing social contexts, and represents an individuals’ self-presentational style. While high self-monitors tend to control how they present themselves to others due to their high sensitivity to social cues, low self-monitors are less concerned and prefer to remain true to their feelings (i.e. what they are actually feeling), and display their reactions accordingly by presenting themselves at face value. This means that the behaviours of high self-monitors will always adapt to the demands of the situation based on what is ‘appropriate’, whilst the behaviours of low self-monitors will follow what they want despite social consequences. As an additional difference, high self-monitors (in contrast to low self-monitors) are active in facilitating smooth conversations and have the tendency to formulate plans of action prior to a social interaction (Snyder, 1987). Based on their ability to adapt their public presentation, high self-monitors are better able to remain calm even in stressful social situations (better emotion regulators). Consequently, high self-monitors may respond less negatively in ASEs as their adaptability allows them to cope better than low self-monitors (Snyder, 1974), therefore causing less perceived disruption and stress.

A second relevant personality trait is the tolerance of ambiguity. Tolerance of ambiguity refers to an individual’s tendency to interpret an ambiguous situation as a threat or a source of discomfort (Budner, 1962). Ambiguous situations are considered to involve novelty (i.e. there are no familiar cues), complexity (i.e. there are too many cues to process), insolubility, unpredictability, and uncertainty (Grenier, Barrette, & Ladouceur, 2005), all of which relate to ASEs. Low tolerance of ambiguity suggests that the person likes to avoid ambiguity and
responds with anxiety and uneasiness when exposed to ambiguous situations, and can view the situation as confusing. On the other hand, a person with high tolerance for ambiguity likes to and can better handle ambiguous situations. Overall then it means that those high with tolerance of ambiguity are better able to adapt by devising appropriate strategies of action. In the service encounter, the differences in consumers’ tolerance of ambiguity may impact the pace (how fast they proceed in the process) or the length (how far they actually proceed in the process) of an ASE. The ASEs of those with high versus low tolerance of ambiguity may differ completely.

A third personality trait is self-consciousness. Self-consciousness captures the natural tendency to direct attention to the self, either inwards or outwards. The scale developed to measure this individual difference captured two primary dimensions: public versus private. The private dimension centres around an awareness of personal thoughts and feelings whilst the public dimension centres around an awareness of the self as a social object (Fenigstein et al., 1975). Those that score high on the public self-consciousness dimension have a tendency to misperceive that others are constantly evaluating them. This makes them highly sensitive in social situations, such that perceived social rejection can make them react more negatively (Fenigstein, 1979). Consequently in an awkward service encounter, due to their high sensitivity to social threats, those high in public self-consciousness may find the experience more distressing than those scoring low on this trait, or take more measures to prevent the occurrence of awkward encounters because of their fear of embarrassment. For instance, experimental data has shown that those high in public self-consciousness are more likely to purchase embarrassing products because they are driven by the motivation to prevent future (and more devastating levels of) embarrassment. Consumers high in public self-consciousness behaved in this manner because embarrassment was more salient to them (Lau-Gesk & Drolet, 2005).

A fourth trait is the need for control. The need for control captures individual differences in the desire to control life events. This trait has the ability to interact with situational factors to generate different behaviours (Burger & Cooper, 1979). In this gambling scenario, those high in the desire for control scale perceived that they could control chance-events so bet more chips when they were allowed to bet before rolling the die. Given that control threats (i.e. effectance motivations) were previously discussed as being part of consumers’ ASEs, it is reasonable to expect that those high in the desire for control will perceive an ASE (in particular one relating to a loss of control) as being more negative and experience more stress than those who are not as high in their desire for control. Whilst not exhaustive, the personal traits described do provide an initial indication of their relevance to consumers’ ASEs.

Future research may also wish to replicate the three studies but with variations. For instance, Study One might be replicated to identify the common types of awkward service encounters (or whether there are variations) in particular industries. Examining awkward service encounters in individual industries is of relevance because services related to personal health (i.e. meeting a gynaecologist) are more likely to be latent with anticipated awkwardness, as opposed to incidental awkwardness occurring in other types of service interactions. This means that not only the way in which ASEs arise could differ, but also the process of the ASE. Comparisons could also be made with the aim of identifying which awkward service encounter or which form of
awkwardness, anticipated or incidental, is more or less damaging. This could be done through obtaining relative consumer ratings of awkwardness for each and determining their relationship with consumer responses that drive profits, for instance patronage.

For Study Two (i.e. identifying the key components of consumers’ ASEs), future research could adopt a purely qualitative approach. In the current research the approach was exploratory and used semi-structured interviews, however coding was influenced by the proposed process model of consumers’ ASEs developed from the literature. It is possible that research on the awkward experience is still in its infancy, therefore the current literature may not necessarily point to all the key components of the ASE. This highlights the importance of a purely qualitative approach to identify additional components that are less obvious, or have not yet been suggested as being part of this experience. Adopting a purely qualitative approach would allow additional components to emerge from the data.

Finally, Study Three (i.e. assessing the relationships between components of consumers’ ASEs) could be replicated with consideration of cross cultural effects, as consumers from different cultures have been shown to differ in their responses to unpleasant situations that involve embarrassment (Wan, 2013). An experimental design could also be used to more precisely establish causation between the variables. In this process, the research could also incorporate other important outcome variables that represent relational consequences for the firm. These could include trust, commitment, and relationship quality. Finally, given that ASEs are unpleasant, other variables to consider are those relating to the consumer’s well-being.

8.7 CONCLUSIONS

This research focussed on awkward service encounters and the associated process of consumers’ ASEs because of the lack of attention given to them in the academic literature, despite their ability to significantly influence firm outcomes. Cognitive appraisal theory was used as the foundation to explain how consumers perceive awkward service encounters as threats, and then undergo their ASE to arrive at coping responses that have implications for firm-related outcomes. Alongside this theory, additional concepts were also integrated into the model to arrive at a complete process model of consumers’ ASEs which was then empirically examined in the final study (Study Three).

Overall, this research has offered novel insights regarding consumers’ ASEs. An ASE in the consumer context is often initiated by a normative violation, or by being in a non-normative service situation (these act as the situational stressors, the awkward service encounter). Under these circumstances, the customer may appraise the encounter as threatening their effectance-related needs or their esteem-related needs, which in turn disrupts their homeostasis by causing an internal imbalance referred to as cognitive disequilibrium. This state will be accompanied by a sense of hypervigilance and environmental monitoring (mindful alertness), which facilitates a process of internal monologues that may be directed at what is going on, what actions are occurring, and what the customer’s actions should then be (action-oriented). Alternatively the monologue could be directed at social evaluation concerns (image-oriented). Following these cognitive processes, action-
oriented thoughts are likely to then facilitate confusion, whilst image-oriented thoughts are likely to facilitate embarrassment. Finally, whilst both confusion and embarrassment are likely to make the customer engage in negative WOM and avoidance, only confusion has the potential to influence customers’ complaint intentions.

In addition to offering novel insights about the process of consumers’ ASEs, by examining the phenomenon of the awkward experience, the research was also able to examine the awkward interaction model (as defined by embarrassment researchers) from the lens of an awkward encounter, as opposed to the lens of its emotional consequence of embarrassment. The awkward interaction account of embarrassment argues that a maladroit interaction is the only condition necessary to induce embarrassment (Parrott et al., 1988; Silver et al., 1987), meaning that embarrassment will occur even when the individual is NOT concerned over how others are evaluating them. However this was not the case in the current study, as a maladroit interaction on its own appeared to cause confusion as an emotional response.

It is hoped that this research will fuel further interest in consumers’ ASEs and more research will be conducted in this area. There is potential that the knowledge obtained from this research may be used in management to create awareness and understanding of ASEs, such that appropriate strategies are put in place to avoid them and, in the event they do occur, responses engaged in to help manage these stressful episodes for customers.
Appendix A: Awkward Service CIT Survey

This survey requires you to share an awkward service encounter of your own. Based on your personal understanding of the word awkward, please think of a time (in the last 6 months) when you as a consumer, had a particularly awkward service encounter.

Q1: Please describe your awkward service encounter in the space below. Be as specific as possible and concentrate on the facts such as:

   a) The service provider (i.e. brand or company) that was involved?
   b) The specific circumstances leading up to the encounter?
   c) What happened during the encounter?
   d) And anything else that you feel is relevant to understanding your awkward service encounter

Q2: What was the main cause of your awkward service encounter?

Q3: When did your awkward service encounter happen?

   □ Less than a month ago
   □ 1-3 month ago
   □ 4-6 months ago
Q4: On the following scale, please rate how awkward this service encounter was:

A little awkward  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Very awkward

Q5: Did you feel embarrassed?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Q6: What is your gender?

☐ Male
☐ Female

Q7: What age group do you belong to?

☐ Under 20
☐ 21-30
☐ 31-40
☐ 41-50
☐ 51+

This is the end of the survey, thank you for participating.
Appendix B: Interview Guide

Section A: What exactly is awkward, what does it mean?

- What is your understanding of the word?
- What does it suggest to you?
- What usually comes to mind?
- What do you associate with it?
- If you were to describe an awkward person, what would you say?

Section B: Awkward encounters/situations

- If someone says “that situation was awkward” what do you think happened?
- If a person is in an awkward situation:
  - What do you think is on their mind?
  - What do you think they are feeling?
  - How do you see them behaving?

Section C: Awkward service experiences

- Please recall a time when you had an awkward service encounter:
  - What happened?
  - What do you think caused the encounter to be awkward?
  - How would you describe the experience of your awkward service moment?
    - What were you thinking about?
    - What emotions were present?
    - How many people were present?
  - Overall, would you say it was negative or positive?

- Impact of the encounter:
  - What are your current thoughts towards the service provider/employee(s)?
  - How has this encounter influenced how you view the service provider?
  - Have you returned since the encounter?
  - Have you shared this encounter with anyone else other than in this interview?
Section D: Awkward versus embarrassment

- Take a moment to think about the terms awkward and embarrassment and compare them based on your previous experiences
  - Do you think these terms are the same or different? What made you choose this option?
  - Are awkward encounters always embarrassing? What makes you believe that this is the case?
  - If someone was experiencing an awkward encounter without embarrassment, what would it be like?
Appendix C: Scenario-based Survey

For this task, please take a moment to read the scenario that will be presented to you as if you are the main consumer being referred to inside the scenario. Try to imagine yourself in this role as much as possible. Please then answer the questions that follow based on the scenario presented. Thank you for your time and begin when you are ready.

Section A: Randomised scenario exposure

Scenario 1: Normative violation 1: Employee bizarre behaviours
Imagine that you are browsing in a retail store when a sales representative comes over to assist you. After speaking briefly about the functions of the product you are looking at, the employee seems to remember something and all of a sudden abruptly leaves without any explanation. This happened just when you were about to ask another question. You stand there in disbelief, not knowing what to think of their behaviour – why the hell did the employee just leave like that? Still a bit stunned and speechless, you do not move but start scanning around the room, and anxiously wait to see if the employee returns.

Scenario 2: Normative violation 2: Employee impertinent behaviours
Imagine that you are shopping at the mall. You were having a lazy day so did not dress up so much. As you enter this particular store, you notice that the employees are chatting together and while they notice you coming in, after looking at you from top to bottom, they do not bother to smile at you, or approach you to see if you require any assistance. As you have a look around, they continue to chat and ignore your presence. You eventually see an item that you like however your size is not available so you approach the employees to ask. They are not very responsive and act as if it is a pain to help you. At no point do they attempt to make small talk or engage in any pleasantry exchanges as if you are not worthy of their attention or time, possibly due to what you are wearing.

Scenario 3: Non-normative service situation 1: Unfamiliar situation/settings
Imagine that you are dining at a new ethnic restaurant. You have never tried this type of cuisine before therefore do not know what to expect, in particular what the food will taste like and whether or not they will have a different cultural dining etiquette. After taking your order, the waiter leaves. 15 minutes later the waiter serves your order, and hand grasping rice, also serves you a bowl of steaming liquid with a lemon slice that resembles soup. The waiter finally says “I hope you enjoy your meal and just let me know if you need anything else,” and then leaves. You hesitate and pause for a moment examining the steaming liquid as you are not completely sure why they served it - is this their cultural soup much like Japan’s miso soup? You then look around to see if other consumers have the same steaming liquid and what they are doing with it so that you can also do the same.
Scenario 4: Non-normative service situation 2: Personal products/issues

Imagine that you are visiting a new skin care specialist for the first time to have them check a terrible rash that has developed on your bottom. As you have never personally visited a skin care specialist before, you are unsure what to expect in the consultation process however, a friend has shared their experience with you so you feel that things are under control. Whilst sitting in the waiting room, two female consumers (who are also waiting), can be heard discussing their intentions for Botox to maintain their youthful appearance. This makes you feel insecure when you compare their case to the terrible rash on your bottom – who knows what the doctor may ask or assume about the rash. You think about leaving but make a conscious decision to stay. When the doctor finally calls you in, they sit you down and ask how they can help you today. As you try to explain, you nervously stutter and stumble over your words and say that there is a painful rash on your bottom that seems to be spreading. The doctor then puts on some gloves and asks you to show them the rash for a closer inspection.

Q1: As the main consumer in the scenario, please rate how awkward this situation would be for you:

A little awkward  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10 Very awkward

Q2: As the main consumer in the scenario, please rate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I did not have much control over the situation</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not feel I was (or would be) accepted</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not familiar with the service setting</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff(s) actions were not consistent with &quot;what should&quot; have happened</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar scenarios do happen in real life</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q3: As the main consumer in the scenario, please rate how embarrassing this situation would be for you:

A little embarrassing  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10 Very embarrassing
Section B: Please rate how much you disagree or agree with the following statements:

Q4: As the main consumer in the scenario, I would tell family and friends about this situation because:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| I would want to get it off my chest | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I would want to blow off steam      | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| I would want to vent my feelings    | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

Q5: As the main consumer in the scenario, I would want to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Stay away from the place | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| Avoid the place as much as possible | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| Withdraw any future interactions with the place | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

Q6: As the main consumer in the scenario, I would make a complaint:

| Very unlikely | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Very likely | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| Inclined not to | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Inclined to | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| Definitely will not | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Definitely will | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

Section C: Please rate how much you disagree or agree with the following statements.

Q7: As the main consumer in this scenario:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| My mind would not be at ease | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| My mind would be in an uncomfortable state | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| My mind would be unsettled | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
Q8: As the main consumer in this scenario:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My attention would be focussed on the present moment</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My awareness of what is happening around me would increase</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The situation would seem as if it is being projected under a spotlight</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q9: As the main consumer in this scenario:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would try and figure out what I should do or say</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be thinking about possible courses of action</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would think about how I should proceed in that moment</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q10: As the main consumer in this scenario:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would be worried about how others would evaluate me</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be concerned that others would think badly of me</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be worried about how I was being presented to others</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section D: Please rate how much you disagree or agree with the following statements.

Q11: As the main consumer in this scenario, I would feel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perplexed</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puzzled</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q12: As the main consumer in this scenario, I would feel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like sinking to the floor and disappearing</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humiliated</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like I looked like a fool</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheepish</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section E: To help us understand our sample, please provide us with the following information.

Q13: What is your gender?

☐ Male
☐ Female

Q14: What is your age?


Q15: Please note 3 things you remember clearly about the original scenario that was presented to you:


Q16: Other than customer-employee interactions, what else did you think this research was about?


This is the end of the survey, thank you for participating.
Appendix D: Ethics

Study One:

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: Understanding awkward service encounters

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Sokkha Tuy and I am enrolled for a doctoral degree in the Department of Marketing at the University of Auckland Business School. As part of my research I would like to conduct web-based surveys to understand awkward service encounters. More specifically, I wish to explore the underlying characteristics that contribute to a consumers’ awkward service encounter.

Given that you are a consumer of services, you are invited to participate in this research and I would really appreciate any assistance you can offer me. Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation at all to complete the web-based survey. Where you do decide to participate, please proceed. Completing and submitting this survey is a form of consent. Additionally, once you submit the survey, you cannot withdraw from the study because each submission is completely anonymous. At no point will you be required to disclose any information which can identify you, therefore I will not be able to identify which submission is yours should you wish to withdraw. The submission of the survey is final.

The survey should not take more than 10 minutes to complete as the main task in the survey involves recalling and disclosing an awkward service encounter. There will be no adverse consequences or physical or psychological risks. The data collected from the surveys will be used for the purposes of completing my PhD thesis and will be analysed by the researcher. In addition, the data collected can be used for the purposes of paper publications in academic journals and conference proceedings. The surveys will be kept for six years in a locked cabinet file (in electronic format) on the University of Auckland premises, and subsequently destroyed (by erasing the data) in accordance with the regulations of the University.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance with this survey. If you have any questions or queries regarding the research, please feel free to ask me, the details are below.

Yours sincerely,

Sokkha Tuy.
For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact the Human Participants Ethics Committee of the University of Auckland, my supervisor, or the Head of Department. The details are as follows:

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APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 02/04/12 for a period of three years. Reference number 2012/8008.
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Understanding awkward service encounters

Name of Researcher: Sokkha Tuy

Dear Researcher,

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet on this survey, and I understand the nature of the research.
- I understand that I can choose not to participate, and can withdraw from this research at any time before I submit the survey. Once the survey is submitted, no information can be withdrawn.
- I understand that data about me will not be obtained from any third parties.
- I understand that the data will be kept for a period of 6 years, and then destroyed.

I agree to take part in this research:

☐ Yes    Proceed to survey
☐ No     Go to: “Thank you for your time” and exit from the survey link.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 02/04/12 for a period of three years. Reference number 2012/8008.
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the significance of awkward service experiences

Dear Participant,

My name is Sokkha Tuy and I am enrolled for a doctoral degree in the Department of Marketing at the University of Auckland Business School. As part of my thesis I would like to conduct interviews to understand awkward service experiences. In particular, I would like to focus on understanding what causes an awkward service experience, what consumers think and feel in these encounters, and how these encounters influence the customer’s future interactions with the particular service provider.

If you have had an awkward service experience, you are invited to participate in this research and I would appreciate any assistance you can offer me. Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation at all to be interviewed. Where you do decide to participate, I (the researcher) will provide you with a consent form to sign and an interview date and time will be arranged. The data collected from the interviews will be used for the purposes of completing my PhD thesis. In addition, the data collected can be used for the purposes of paper publications in academic journals and conference proceedings. The interview will take between 60 to 90 minutes to complete and will be conducted at a time and location convenient to you. You may also be contacted briefly after the interview for clarification purposes. In the interview, you will be asked some questions aimed at understanding your awkward service experience, in particular the factors that caused your awkward service experience, and your thoughts and feelings during and after the encounter. There will be no adverse consequences or physical or psychological risks. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without giving reasons, within one week from the interview date.

I will audio-tape the interview for transcription purposes. Please be assured that the tapes will not be used for any other purpose apart from those identified above and you will not be identified at any time in the research and subsequent reporting as pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. The recording machine can be switched off at any time at your request. The audio-tapes and transcripts will be kept for six years in a locked cabinet file (in electronic format) on the University of Auckland premises, and subsequently destroyed (by erasing the data). Consent forms will be kept separately for a period of six years in a locked cabinet file on the University of Auckland premises. Your details will not be given to any third parties at any stage during the research, so your confidentiality is guaranteed. Should you be interested in the results of this study, a summary of results is available upon request.
If you are prepared to be part of this study, please complete the consent form overleaf. To compensate you for your time, I will provide you with a $25 Westfield gift voucher. If you have any questions or queries regarding the research, please feel free to ask me, the details are below.

Yours sincerely,

Sokkha Tuy.

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact the Human Participants Ethics Committee of the University of Auckland, my supervisor, or the Head of Department. The details are as follows:

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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the significance of awkward service experiences

Name of Researcher: Sokkha Tuy

Dear Researcher,

I have read and understood the Participation Information Sheet and know whom to contact if I have any queries or questions.

- I understand that participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw myself or any information traceable to me at any time up to one week from today without giving any reason.
- I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained.
- I understand that data about me will not be obtained from any third parties.
- I understand that the interview will be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that the data will be kept for six years in the archive at the University of Auckland, and will be disposed of within 6 months after in accordance with the regulations of the university.
- I agree to take part in this research which will take 60 to 90 minutes.
- I agree to be contacted by the researcher (at a later date) if further clarification of my interview is required.
- I do/do not wish to be sent a copy of the summary of results. My email address for further queries is s.tuy@auckland.ac.nz

Name:

Signature:

Date:

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 30/08/13 for a period of three years. Reference number 2013/8517.
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: Investigating awkward service encounters

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Sokkha Tuy and I am enrolled for a doctoral degree in the Department of Marketing at the University of Auckland Business School. As part of my research I would like to conduct web-based surveys to understand awkward service encounters. A service encounter is any exchange between you as a customer and a service firm or its employees. I wish to explore in particular, the impact these events have on the customer and/or firm relationship.

Given that you are a consumer of services, you are invited to participate in this research and I would really appreciate any assistance you can offer me. In the survey, you will be asked to recall and document an awkward service encounter and then rate a number of scales to help me better understand the impact of these events. Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation at all to complete the web-based survey. Completing and submitting the survey will be treated as consent to participate. Additionally, once you submit the survey, you cannot withdraw from the study because each submission is completely anonymous. At no point will you be required to disclose any information which can identify you, therefore I will not be able to identify which submission is yours should you wish to withdraw. The submission of the survey is final.

The survey should not take more than 10 minutes to complete. The data collected from the surveys will be used for the purposes of completing my PhD thesis and will be analysed by the researcher. In addition, the data collected can be used for the purposes of paper publications in academic journals and conference proceedings. The surveys will be kept for six years in a locked cabinet file (in electronic format) on the University of Auckland premises, and subsequently destroyed (by erasing the data) in accordance with the regulations of the university.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance with this survey. If you have any questions or queries regarding the research, please feel free to ask me, the details are below.

Yours sincerely,

Sokkha Tuy.
For any queries regarding this research, please contact myself, my supervisor, or my Head of Department. For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact the Human Participants Ethics Committee of the University of Auckland. The details are as follows:

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APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 13/04/15 for a period of three years. Reference number 2015/014431.
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Investigating awkward service encounters

Name of Researcher: Sokkha Tuy

Dear Researcher,

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet on this survey, and I understand the nature of the research and why I have been selected.
- I understand that I can choose not to participate, and can withdraw from this research at any time before I submit the survey. Once the survey is submitted, no information can be withdrawn.
- I understand that by choosing to participate in this research, I will not be asked for information that personally identifies me.
- I understand that the data will be analysed only by the primary researchers.
- I understand that the data will be kept for a period of 6 years, and then destroyed.

I agree to take part in this research:

☑ Yes Proceed to survey
☑ No Go to: “Thank you for your time” and exit from the survey link.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 13/04/15 for a period of three years. Reference number 2015/014431.
REFERENCES


Gilovich, T., & Savitsky, K. (1999). The spotlight effect and the illusion of transparency: Egocentric assessments of how we are seen by others. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 8(6), 165-168.


REFERENCES


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