Reliability and Validity of a Distinct Embarrassability Inventory

Formal research on embarrassment dates back to Goffman (1956). Since Goffman’s early study of embarrassment, a rising interest in the self has grasped researchers’ attention. Embarrassment has been found to be related to a number of social and psychological events, such as self-esteem (e.g., Edelmann, 1987). Researchers have also focused on the sources of embarrassment (see Edelmann, 1987), responses to embarrassment (Keltner, 1995; Sharkey & Stafford, 1990), as well as individual differences in embarrassability (Edelmann & McCusker, 1986). Embarrassment has also been shown to be a common emotion across many cultures (Edelmann & Iwawaki, 1987; Miller & Leary, 1992) and influenced by culture (Singelis & Sharkey, 1995). Further research on embarrassability (an individual’s susceptibility to embarrassment [Modigliani, 1966]) has shown that there is a link between a person’s image of himself/herself and embarrassability (Singelis & Sharkey, 1995) and that there are different types of embarrassment (Miller, 1987; Miller, 1992).

The purpose of this study is to further develop and provide reliability and validity data for a Distinct Embarrassability Inventory (DEI) developed by Carpenter, Dowdle, Kendrick Cardona, and Singelis (1997). This study will rely on extensions of previous research to provide concurrent validity as well as a factor analysis of the DEI to explore distinct types of embarrassment similar to those found by Miller (1992) and Carpenter et al. (1997).

Embarrassment, as defined here, is “a short lived emotional/psychological response of social chagrin…that occurs as a result of a discrepancy between one’s idealized role-identity and one’s presented role-identity…” (Sharkey, 1992, p. 258).