An Exploratory Study of Vicariously Embarrassing Classroom Incidents

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Purpose of the Study: This study introduces vicarious embarrassment to the marketing education literature. It identifies the types of incidents that generate vicarious embarrassment in the classroom and the cognitive/emotional and action responses to experienced vicarious embarrassment. Attribution theory provides clarity to identified relationships of incident type on the cognitive/emotional, action, and consequences (i.e., word-of-mouth, class participation, future course enrollment) of vicarious embarrassment as experienced by marketing students in the college classroom setting.

Method/Design and Sample: The Critical Incident Technique is conducted to acquire data from 483 marketing students. Content analysis is utilized in conjunction with t-tests, ANOVA, and Chi-square tests to investigate four research questions.

Results: The findings suggest that vicarious embarrassment is experienced by marketing students and identifies three incident types, six cognitive/emotional reactions, and six action responses. Significant incident type by both cognitive/emotional and action responses, as well as behavioral outcomes are identified. Attributions are significantly associated with both incident type and behavioral outcomes.

Value to Marketing Educators: This study provides the first known empirically based typologies for classroom vicarious embarrassment incidents, associated cognitive/emotional reactions, and action responses from the marketing student perspective. This study provides insights to instructors that suggest how they might actively manage situations that cause vicarious embarrassment in the classroom.

Keywords: vicarious embarrassment; Critical Incident Technique (CIT); attribution theory of motivation; classroom encounters.

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Embarrassment for an individual ensues if a behavior is believed to be unacceptable by others or indicates the individual's failure to successfully perform or to act properly based on their social role (Grace, 2007; Miller, 2006). As such, embarrassment is felt based on personal failures and/or inappropriate behaviors (Grace, 2007, 2009). Crozier (1998) notes that "embarrassment and the fear of embarrassment are common and unwanted experiences in everyday life" (p. 715). Vicarious embarrassment is a negative emotion which an individual can experience when witnessing others act in an embarrassing way (Kilian et al., 2018; Müller-Pinzler et al. 2012, 2016; Uysal et al., 2014; Ziegler et al., 2015).

Embarrassment for others is common, and can be experienced across a variety of social situations (Krach et al., 2011). To the best of our knowledge, the types of incidents that initiate vicarious embarrassment and subsequent reactions thereto have not been analyzed in the context of the college classroom. Facilitating the simultaneous production and consumption of educational services in the classroom involves an encounter where unexpected occurrences are common. Hoffman and Lee (2014, 2015) point out the importance of marketing educators enhancing their understanding of the forces that impact the classroom experience. Greater understanding provides a basis to develop strategies for better managing the experience (Swanson et al., 2015). Investigating vicarious embarrassment in a classroom environment is important as it can provide new insights into how instructors and other students who are present can impact the learning experience, which, in turn, may impact a student's future actions.

Grace (2009) notes that "attribution theory in the context of emotion may well be a fruitful avenue for future research" (p. 8). One approach to better understanding student responses to vicarious embarrassment is to explore the perceptions of an incident's causes. Attributions are perceptions of the causes behind observed events. The attribution theory of motivation proposes that people form opinions regarding the causes of observed events and the subsequent effects, which then guide their succeeding responses, centered on three facets: control, locus, and stability (Weiner, 1985). Stability signifies whether a person perceives that situational circumstances will stay constant (stable) or will vary (unstable). Stable consequences are believed to repeat, while unstable consequences produce doubt regarding what is yet to come. The locus of causality dimension is the individual's assessment of who is responsible for a particular occurrence. Controllability is determined by

perceptions as to whether the party responsible for an incident made a volitional choice (controlled) or whether that choice was forced and/or non-volitional (uncontrolled).

A fundamental duty of educational research is to identify and clarify the processes that govern how individuals react to and assess their classroom and learning experiences. This study provides the first known empirically based typologies for classroom vicarious embarrassment incidents, associated cognitive/emotional reactions, and action responses from the student perspective. Investigation of subsequent student intentions and behaviors suggests that incident type is associated with the likelihood of students engaging in negative word-of-mouth, participating in the class, and future course enrollment. This is particularly true for incidents perceived to be stable, controlled, and attributable to the instructor. Ultimately, this study provides insights to instructors that suggest how they might actively manage situations that cause vicarious embarrassment in the classroom.

The next section of the paper provides a literature review of embarrassment and attribution theory. This is followed by an introduction of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) as the primary methodology used to obtain data from 483 undergraduate university marketing students. Results are provided and discussed. The paper concludes with noted limitations and potential future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Embarrassment
Embarrassment is an unpleasant emotional response as a result of a recognized deviation from expectations and conventions that act to threaten an individual's social identity (Krishna et al., 2019; Maire & Agnoletti, 2020; Maire et al., 2019; von Schuckmann, et al., 2020).

Embarrassment is a feeling of concern with one's public image and with the reactions from real or imagined others. Embarrassment then is the negative consequence of a failure to present a desired image to others whom we regard as evaluating our performance. (Edelmann, 1987, p. 869).

Embarrassment acts to signal an individual's dedication to social relationships (Feinberg et al., 2012) and the importance of restoring those relations is demonstrated by engaging in behaviors to repair one's self-image (Dijk et al., 2009; Krishna et al., 2019; Maire & Agnoletti, 2020; Maire et al., 2019; Song et al., 2017). After experiencing embarrassment, often a negative emotion that one would tend to avoid, an individual seeks to regain "face" using apologies, humor, avoidance/escape, and remediation. *Face* is "the image of self portrayed in terms of approved social attributes" (Goffman, 1955, p. 213). Thus, "student embarrassment can be defined as feelings of discomfort or humiliation that occur as a result of a student's failure to present a desired image to his/her peers and/or teachers" (McPherson & Kearney, 1992, p. 5). In a classroom setting, the embarrassed individual

will generally be observed by a number of people (e.g., other students, the instructor). In addition, the embarrassed individual must interact with these same observers repeatedly over the duration of a course. As such, the fear of embarrassing one's self in the classroom is an unwanted experience.

Embarrassment in the Classroom
In their study of disruptive faculty behaviors, Hoffman and Lee (2015) report that "when faculty mishandle students' requests, students responded that they felt purposely embarrassed" (p. 136). It has also been reported that faculty single out (e.g., embarrass) students, causing classroom disruptions both to stop offensive behavior and to serve as a warning to classmates (Hoffmann & Lee; 2014; 2015).

McPherson and Kearney (1992) report that instructors embarrass students and, thus, threaten the student's public image, by accusing them of wrongdoing, labeling them (stereotyping), making them feel inadequate, discounting their ideas, or providing recognition that is negative. To save face, "students used Avoidance and Remediation almost exclusively to cope with teacher-initiated embarrassment" (p. 20). Avoidance involves the student seeking to cope with the embarrassment by trying to shift the conversation or simply being quiet and accepting the blame. Remediation involves complying with an instructor's request to correct the issue that created the embarrassing situation.

Rasooli et al. (2019) identify embarrassment as a common affective response for university students who perceive they are being treated unfairly. Prior research examining student perceptions of unfairness (Buttner, 2004; Chory et al., 2017; Horan et al., 2010) also found that instructors who were perceived to be unfair led to students feeling embarrassed. Students also feel embarrassment due to not being adequately prepared and lacking knowledge (unable to answer questions). The behavioral responses by students to embarrassment include decreased classroom participation, negative feelings and attitudes toward the instructor viewed as responsible for the unfair incident, inaction, and dissent. In addition, Ackerman and Gross (2003) found that when university students feel embarrassed, they enjoy the class less and have lowered expectations of success.

Empathic Embarrassment
Paulus et al. (2013) point out that people have the "ability to infer others' emotions" and that this is "a central mechanism in creating meaningful social interactions" (p. 1). As such, individuals can feel embarrassed simply by observing others violate social norms in an embarrassing manner (Uysal et al., 2014). Empathic emotion occurs when perceivers are able to understand what others are feeling. Empathic embarrassment arises when an observer sees the embarrassment of another and shares in that embarrassment, even though the observer's own social identity is not at stake (Miller, 1987). That is, an actor is embarrassed, and the individual who observes that

embarrassment then becomes embarrassed for that actor. Mirroring and mentalizing have been proposed as the processes through which empathetic response occurs (Paulus et al., 2013). Mirroring is the observer matching their actions and bodily states to the actor, while mentalizing is the observer projecting themselves as being in the same situation as the actor and trying to capture the actor's emotions as if the emotions were the observer's own. This internalization of the actor's feelings results in the observer also experiencing embarrassment.

Vicarious Embarrassment

Vicarious embarrassment is an emotional response similar to embarrassment, but the person experiencing it is merely observing the norm-violating behavior being exhibited by someone else. The embarrassment occurs independent of the observer's own behavior (Thompson, 2014) and no personal connection between the wrongdoer and the observer is required (von Schuckmann, et al., 2020). As such, the social target may not be feeling any embarrassment, or the perceiver may experience an emotional state of embarrassment that is distinct from the social target. Thus, vicarious embarrassment is not restricted to just shared affective experiences. Krach et al. (2011) first coined the term *vicarious embarrassment* and suggested that it can occur whether the embarrassed person is aware, or not, or whether the incident is intentional or unintentional. For example: you are watching a student doing a presentation who is using language normally inappropriate for a classroom setting. They appear to be unaware of the faux pas and exhibit no signs of being embarrassed. Yet, their classmates are vicariously embarrassed because they understand the threat to the presenter's social identity. For empathetic embarrassment to occur, the presenting student would have to be communicating to their classmates that s/he was embarrassed by their own actions.

Kilian et al. (2018) point out that the existence of vicarious embarrassment is greater "when interactions occur face-to-face and when in the presence of other customers, and thus customer-to-customer interactions, are more frequent" (p. 86). In service settings, these incidents have resulted in customers reporting annoyance, irritation, and discomfort and engaging in actions including ignoring or intervening in the situation (Kilian et al., 2018). Porath et al. (2010) report that customers who witness an employee-employee interaction that lacks civility can result in overall negative appraisals of the associated organization and negative expectations of future encounters with that organization.

Vicarious embarrassment should also be highly relevant in the shared experiences that occur in the traditional classroom setting. As Hoffmann and Lee (2015) state: "the classroom setting provides a classic example of a service encounter" (p. 129). Classroom encounters involve exchanges between a service provider (i.e., professor) and customer (i.e., student) with other customers (i.e., students) present, and the violation of social norms and/or standards can occur. Similar to other service settings where others can have a profound impact on the service recipient's experience, we would expect that being subjected to a vicariously embarrassing situation, the student will also have an immediate cognitive/emotional and behavioral response, which will then be followed by additional intentions and consequences. Crozier (1998) notes that "attention to embarrassed reactions can provide insight into the phenomenon" (p. 719). The attribution theory of motivation is introduced as a valuable framework to aid in understanding the relationship between the types of vicariously embarrassing incidents and resulting student outcomes.

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is based on the idea that people have a need to understand the causes of experienced events and that these causal perceptions impact emotions and behavior. People spontaneously engage in causal thinking, above all when faced with unforeseen or undesirable events (Weiner, 1985). This study uses attribution theory to better understand the consequences associated with causal explanations of experienced vicarious embarrassment in a face-to-face classroom setting. The focus of inquiry is on identifying the attributions for the observed incidents that create vicarious embarrassment for students and the resulting consequences.

Attribution theory does not explicitly speak to the effect of more or less psychologically distant locus dimensions, although it has been shown that locus attributions to different external entities will result in varied consumer responses in service encounters (cf. Kilian et al., 2018; Swanson & Kelley, 2001). It has been suggested that the source of embarrassment may have a noteworthy effect on the amount of embarrassment felt by a customer (Grace, 2009). As such, it would be important to understand if the types of incidents (and associated outcomes) attributed to an instructor would be substantially different from those attributed to a student.

Qualitative findings in service environments by Kilian et al. (2018) suggest that "the attribution of responsibility for vicariously embarrassing incidents by the observing customer is of crucial relevance to his/her evaluation of the situation, as well as to the strength of their potential effects" (p. 91), with greater negative effects occurring when service employees are involved. Similarly, a student who experiences a vicariously embarrassing incident may attribute the responsibility for it to the actions of the professor or another student. If the cause of vicarious embarrassment is predicted to persist, then the confidence in appraisals and yet-to-come behaviors is strengthened. This greater amount of conviction ought to produce less favorable evaluations and subsequent behaviors. But, if the cause of an outcome is anticipated to vary, then the absence of certainty will have a positive effect on how that incident is evaluated and on future behaviors (Weiner, 1980). Vicariously embarrassing incident

stability should be positively related to negative consequences.

This study focuses on behavior observed in others in the college classroom setting that results in marketing students experiencing vicarious embarrassment. Overall findings of the study demonstrate that experiencing vicarious embarrassment is common in college classrooms. As such, the current study addresses the following research questions: 1) What types of incidents create vicarious embarrassment in the college classroom? 2) What are the initial cognitive/emotional and action responses to experienced vicarious embarrassment in the college classroom? 3) What are the intentions and behavioral consequences of experiencing vicarious embarrassment in the college classroom? and 4) What insights can attribution theory provide into potential differences in the effect of incident type on the cognitive/emotional, action, and consequences of vicarious embarrassment as experienced by marketing students in the college classroom setting?

METHODOLOGY

Measurement
The participants were invited to think of a time when, as a student, they felt vicarious embarrassment in a college classroom situation (i.e., felt embarrassed in response to witnessing the embarrassing behavior of someone else) and to describe the situation. Respondents were then asked to think about the story they had just provided and share their thoughts and feelings at the moment of embarrassment as well as any immediate actions taken (if any) to try and cope with or decrease the embarrassment felt. Consequence measures included whether the respondent discussed the incident, and if so, with whom (e.g., family, friends, co-workers, other professors, classmates). If the situation was discussed, both negative word-of-mouth (warned others about the person responsible, attempted to persuade others not to take a class with or work with this person) and positive word-of-mouth (recommended this person to others, tried to convince others to work with or take a class with this person) were measured with two 2-item, 7-point Likert-type scales anchored by 'Strongly Disagree' (1) and 'Strongly Agree' (7). For two-item measures the Spearman-Brown coefficient is the most appropriate reliability statistic (Eisinga et al., 2013). The two scales were found to demonstrate acceptable reliability (WOM$_{negative}$ = .915; WOM$_{positive}$ = .917). All respondents were asked if they would take a class with this person again if they had the option (1 = Very Unlikely, 7 = Very Likely) and how likely they were to actively participate in the class after witnessing the incident that created the vicarious embarrassment (1 = Much Less Likely, 7 = Much More Likely). The questionnaire then measured perceived attributions related to the observed incident by asking 1) who was most responsible for creating the situation that was observed, 2) if the person most responsible had control or not of the reported incident, and 3) if the incident was a one-time (temporary or

unstable over time) event or something that was a common occurrence (permanent or stable over time). Demographic information (i.e., major, age, class standing, gender) was also collected from the respondents. No incentives were provided and participation in the study was voluntary.

RESULTS

Sample
Data was collected from undergraduate marketing students at a Midwestern 4-year public university. No screening question(s) related to vicarious embarrassment were used; respondents (n = 539) were simply asked if they would be willing to participate in a study about their classroom experiences. Fifty-six of the respondents described incidents that took place outside of a college classroom setting or were not incidents of vicarious embarrassment; their responses were removed from the study. The remaining respondents ranged in age from 19 to 30 years (mean = 20.8, SD = 1.1), were somewhat more likely to be female (52.2%), and included sophomores (12.8%), juniors (49.3%), and seniors (37.9%).

Content Analysis
The research used qualitative content analysis to classify the student responses to the open-ended survey queries into categories. This study utilized a conventional approach to content analysis where preconceived groupings were avoided so the categories could flow from the data. The scarce amount of research related to vicarious embarrassment in general, and in a classroom context in particular, guided this decision.

To obtain a general understanding of the data, all of the responses to each open-ended question were read several times. This was followed by a more intense reading of each response to begin identifying important thoughts being conveyed in the text. A preliminary coding scheme came to light via this process. Similar codes were combined to create categories. In this way, the categories developed are based solely on the incidents provided by the student respondents.

A test-retest approach was utilized to determine intra-rater reliability. Exhaustive and mutually exclusive response categories were independently created by the primary researcher and two research assistants. Each researcher worked with a different third of the questionnaires. After 60 days, the three researchers classified the same student answers into the previously formed categories. Having reached at least a .80 cutoff for each of the open-ended questions (Keaveney, 1995), the independently developed response categories were then shared and combined into a singular classification system for the incident type, emotions experienced, and actions taken. Intra-rater reliability was assessed by having all three researchers reanalyze all of the open-ended data into the agreed upon categories. Following the approach advocated by Perreault and Leigh (1989), the results demonstrate satisfactory levels of inter-rater reliability (I_r) for the

incident type (I_r = .96), cognitive/emotional response (I_r = .93), and actions (I_r = .91). Disputed responses were determined by discussion amongst the judges.

Incident Types
Research Question 1 sought to identify the incident types that create vicarious embarrassment in the classroom. Table 1 provides the typology of vicariously embarrassing college classroom incidents, associated definitions, frequency and percent of occurrence, along with a sample incident.

Table 1: Vicariously Embarrassing College Classroom Incidents

Incident Type	n	%	Sample Incidents	
Awkward Acts (improper or clumsy or an ungraceful act of expression and/or verbal blunder)	197	40.8	"There was a student that was so interruptive one day that it was awkward but no one said anything because she usually wasn't like this. She went off on tangents every time a question was asked and kept getting up and walking out multiple times during the class. It made me uncomfortable. Why is she doing this? Is she drunk? Did she just experience trauma? I assumed something was wrong with her." subject # 73	"My professor actually wrote on the white board with permanent marker, and one of the students said something about it. So the professor looked and said, "no this is a Sharpie", and the student responded with, "yes, Sharpies are permanent markers" and started to laugh. You could tell that the professor was embarrassed and they proceeded to try to erase the permanent marker for 3 minutes in dead silence. I got extremely uncomfortable when he was trying to erase it without saying anything, because everyone knew it would not come off. I honestly was struggling to watch without laughing." subject #85
Criticism (unsolicited negative comments, accusations, and situations where someone was being made the focus of attention)	150	31.1	"A student went up and asked a question about a problem the class was working on and received a rude response that seemed to be made to make them feel incompetent for asking. I felt bad for him. I thought that the professor in question was being arrogant. With that being said, I felt very embarrassed because she responded very loudly for the whole class to hear. My thought in that moment was that I don't want to go ask questions anymore because of how disrespectful she was the first time around. I was embarrassed for the student and that they were roasted in front of the whole class." subject #467	"My marketing professor was teaching us about a topic and a student corrected them and was arguing with a professor and became very rude as well. Why won't the student just drop it? I remember thinking "yikes" and then questioning other things that were taught to us and whether they were true or not. I think we all felt embarrassed for the professor" subject # 42.
Confusion (demonstrated lack of knowledge, misunderstanding, mistakes, and errors)	136	28.2	"Student was making a research presentation to the class and made multiple mistakes, forgot much of what she was supposed to be talking about, had to restart many times, and in general was not knowledgeable about the topic she was talking about. She was constantly pronouncing words incorrectly and reading off the screen. I felt bad for this individual and felt horrible in regard to how they were feeling." subject #30	"My professor came into an exam day and after spending 5 minutes explaining the exam someone told her she was talking about another class. She also forgot over half of the exams and went into panic mode calling other professors and borderline in tears while we were all waiting to take the exam. I felt embarrassed for her. I felt like she probably had something else going on in her day that made her so scatterbrained." subject #109

Awkward Act Based Incidents

Awkward acts were the most noted (40.8%) incident type and included situations in which the respondent reported witnessing something deemed to be improper ("The professor started complaining about his personal life and how he had no friends and was broke…it was so awkward" subject #128), clumsy ("A student confidently asked a question that the professor had clearly just explained extensively in great detail, and the prof was like 'really'?" subject #192), or an ungraceful act or expression ("So, through her embarrassment she started swearing and using words that should not have been in the presentation" subject #475), and/or verbal blunder ("The entire presentation she said the word "ethNics" instead of ethics. Soooo embarrassing. She was supposed to be the expert on the topic, and she wasn't even saying the right word" subject #360).

Criticism Based Incidents

The second most noted vicariously embarrassing incidents were criticisms (31.1%) These were exemplified by unsolicited negative comments ("The student disrupted the teacher and shouted a question in a very rude tone showing no respect" subject #219), accusations ("The instructor mistook a student as goofing off and walked up to the student sitting at the front row and made a whole scene right in the middle of the lecture. I felt embarrassed on behalf of the professor - who then realized that what the student was doing was relevant" subject #238) and situations where someone was being made the focus of attention ("The professor talked down to the student and was disrespectful" subject #193).

Confusion Based Incidents

The final vicariously embarrassing category included incidents that demonstrated a student or professor being confused (28.2%). Confusion based incidents included a demonstrated lack of knowledge ("Someone said something that didn't make sense and then just tried to make up for what they said by other information that was wrong" subject #336), misunderstandings ("A student asked a question and the professor went on and on about something that had nothing to do with his question. After she was done explaining for 20 minutes, she then asked, Does that answer your question? Wait, what was your question again?" subject #247), mistakes ("He just kept rambling on and then stopped abruptly without finishing-not prepared at all" subject #261), and errors ("She was trying to remember the word that she wanted to say, but she couldn't think of it. There was complete silence for almost a minute before she said, "I can't think of the word" subject #348).

Cognitive/Emotional Responses

Research Question 2 asked what the cognitive/emotional and action responses to experienced vicarious embarrassment in the classroom might entail. Responses to the second question were coded in one of six categories:

Empathy

Defined as sympathizing with another, empathy was the most prevalent response (n = 192), accounting for 39.% of all the responses. Part of experiencing empathy was the desire to aid the person the person associated with the vicarious embarrassment ("I felt sympathy for him and wanted to help, I wanted to just let him sit down next to me and talk" subject #179; "I was like, oh gosh you can do it, you're doing fine keep going! I just wanted to go up and help them" subject #103).

Awkwardness

Awkwardness accounted for 18.4% (n = 89) of the student cognitive/emotional responses("Felt bad for them. It made me feel awkward" subject #242). This category encompassed feelings of self-consciousness, unpleasantness, and not being comfortable ("Not only did it make me feel uncomfortable, but it was unpleasant for everyone in the class" subject #55).

Shock

Surprised confusion defines the third category: shock. ("Wow. Can't believe he just did that. I was shocked" subject #143; "I was confused and shocked by what had happened" subject #172). This classification accounted for 16.8% of the responses (n = 81).

Anger

The fourth most common response (11.6%), anger, was noted by 56 of marketing students. These respondents directly stated their anger ("I was angry with the professor for making the student feel stupid in front of the entire class rather than helping clarify the concept" subject #151) or indicated how exasperated and annoyed they were ("I was appalled and irritated by the student's comments" subject #121).

Relief

Students who expressed relief (7.2%, n = 35) were just glad it was not themselves in the reported incident ("No one really knew how to react, but I was just relieved it wasn't me" subject #171; "I just kept thinking, I'm glad that wasn't me" subject #64).

Fear

A small number (6.2%, n = 30) of respondents reported feeling apprehensive, tense and afraid ("At this point I felt distressed and frightened" subject #416; "I just felt really anxious and tense" subject #145).

Action Responses

Six action categories emerged from the coding process.

Moving On

Moving on was one of the two most noted actions taken by marketing students in response to experiencing vicarious embarrassment (27.5%). The respondent simply started doing something else ("I distracted myself with my devices until the dispute was over" subject #384).

Mentally Disengaging
Defined as disregarding by paying no attention to the incident, mentally disengaging was the second most noted action (23.4%) ("The student had obviously made a mistake as you could see the embarrassment on her face…but I ignored it" subject #426; "Just tuned it out" subject #142).

Disengaging Physically
Disengaging physically was noted by 91 (18.8%) of the respondents ("I tried to avoid eye contact with the student" subject #236; "I just looked away from the train wreck I was witnessing and sort of hid my face with my hands" subject #414).

Getting Prepared
A number (n = 52; 10.8%) of students sought to prevent the same thing from happening to themselves by getting prepared ("It made me nervous, so I needed to learn from her mistake and prepare" subject #187; I felt very bad for the student because I wouldn't want that to be me, so I started paying extra attention in class" subject #395).

Humor
An equal number of respondents (n = 47) responded to the witnessed incident with *humor* ("I thought it was awkward but funny…I just had to laugh" subject #142; "The professor and class all started to laugh, and you could tell he was really embarrassed" subject #470)., or by

Seeking Confirmation
Respondents attempted to measure the inappropriateness of the incident by checking with another student either verbally ("I asked my neighbor if they could believe how bad this was" subject #270) or non-verbally ("Other students and I made eye contact and we were all kind of thinking the same thing: she should probably stop talking or at least calm down a little" subject #230).

Consequences
Research Question 3 sought to identify the consequences of vicarious embarrassment as experienced by students in the classroom. The majority (60.7%) of respondents indicated that they shared the incident with others, including classmates in the course in which the incident occurred (74.2%), other friends outside of the classroom (73.9%), family members (26.1%), co-workers (10.2%), and other professors (5.4%). Both negative and positive WOM was reported to fall below the scale mid-point (mean$_{negativeWOM}$ = 2.85, SD = 1.97; mean$_{positiveWOM}$ = 2.31, SD = 1.56). Students reported being less likely (mean = 3.83, SD = 1.63) overall to participate in class after observing a vicariously embarrassing incident and were less likely to take a future class with the person the incident was attributed to if given the choice (mean = 3.88, SD = 1.96).

Relationship of Incident Type with Outcomes
To better understand the relationship of incident type with the measured outcomes, a chi-square test of independence was performed (see Table 2). The type of incident was found to be statistically significantly associated with both the type of reported thoughts/feelings (x^2 = 35.41, p = .000) and actions taken (x^2 = 23.86, p = .008).

Table 2: Relationship of Vicarious Embarrassment Incident Type with Cognitive/Emotional and Action Response

Vicariously Embarrassing Incident Type by Cognitive/Emotional Response[a]

	Incident Type					
	Awkward Act		Criticism		Confusion	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Empathy	76	38.6	40	26.7	76	55.9
Awkwardness	40	20.3	30	20.0	19	14.0
Shock	35	17.8	33	22.0	13	9.6
Anger	19	9.6	28	18.7	9	6.6
Relief	14	7.1	9	6.0	12	8.8
Fear	13	6.6	10	6.7	7	5.1
Total	197	100	150	100	136	100

Vicariously Embarrassing Incident Type by Action Response[b]

	Incident Type					
	Awkward Act		Criticism		Confusion	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Move On	44	22.3	47	31.3	42	30.9
Disengage Mentally	49	24.9	35	23.3	29	21.3
Disengage Physically	43	21.8	23	15.3	25	18.4
Prepare	17	8.6	18	12.0	17	12.5
Humor	29	14.7	5	3.3	13	9.6
Seek Confirmation	15	7.6	22	14.7	10	7.4
Total	197	100	150	100	136	100

[a]x^2 = 35.41, p = .000; [b]x^2 = 23.86, p = .008

ANOVA results indicate that incident type impacts student negative word-of-mouth ($F_{2,290} = 14.59$; p = .000), likelihood of taking a future class with the responsible party ($F_{2,480} = 18.93$; p = .000), and class participation ($F_{2,480} = 21.40$; p = .000). Scheffe post-hoc tests confirmed that the criticism-based incident category was statistically unique from the awkward acts and confusion incidents in all three cases (see Table 3).

Table 3
Vicarious Embarrassment Incident Type ANOVA Post-hoc and Descriptive Results

	Incident Type					
	Awkward Act		Criticism		Confusion	
Dependent Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Negative Word-of-Mouth[a]						
Subset 1	2.40	1.80			2.49	1.77
Subset 2			3.71	2.07		
Positive Word-of-Mouth[b]						
Subset 1	2.40	1.66	2.33	1.52	2.15	1.46
Future Course[c]						
Subset 1			3.09	1.94		
Subset 2	4.23	1.92			4.26	1.80
Class Participation[d]						
Subset 1			3.14	1.72		
Subset 2	4.22	1.53			4.01	1.45

[a]$F_{2,290} = 14.59$; p = .000; [b]$F_{2,290} = .66$; p = .514; [c]$F_{2,480} = 18.93$; p = .000; [d]$F_{2,480} = 21.40$; p = .000

Attribution

Research Question 4 asked if attribution theory may be useful in understanding the differences in the effect across incident types on the cognitive/emotional, action, and consequences of vicarious embarrassment. Overall, the provided incidents were most often attributed to a student (63.4%) and perceived to be controlled (77.0%) and stable (57.3%). Chi square testing indicates that incident type was significantly associated with locus ($\chi^2 = 65.31$, p = .000), control ($\chi^2 = 32.01$, p = .000), and stability ($\chi^2 = 22.75$, p = .000). Specifically, criticism-based incidents were more likely to be controlled, stable, and professor-based (see Table 4).

Table 4: Relationship of Attributions with Incident Type

	Incident Type					
	Awkward Acts		Criticism		Confusion	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Locus[a]						
Student	142	72.1	56	37.3	108	79.4
Professor	55	27.9	94	62.7	28	20.6
Controllability[b]						
Control	127	64.5	134	89.3	111	81.6
No Control	70	35.5	16	10.7	25	18.4
Stability[c]						
Stable	99	50.3	110	73.3	69	50.7
Unstable	98	49.7	40	26.7	67	49.3

[a]$\chi^2 = 65.31$, p = .000; [b]$\chi^2 = 32.01$, p = .000; [c]$\chi^2 = 22.75$, p = .000

Additional analysis of each attribution type with the investigated consequences (see Table 5) further supports that vicariously embarrassing incidents perceived as being controlled, stable, and having a professor locus are associated with more negative consequences.

Table 5: Attribution by Consequences t-Values and Descriptive Results

	Locus				
Consequence		Mean	SD	t-value	p
Negative Word-of-Mouth	Professor	4.03	2.05	9.01	.000
	Student	2.13	1.53		
Positive Word-of-Mouth	Professor	2.30	1.52	-.07	.940
	Student	2.31	1.58		
Future Course	Professor	3.04	2.00	-7.59	.000
	Student	4.37	1.77		
Class Participation	Professor	3.07	1.73	-8.26	.000
	Student	4.26	1.40		
	Control				

Consequence		Mean	SD	t-value	p
Negative Word-of-Mouth	Control	3.04	2.04	3.33	.001
	No Control	2.12	1.47		
Positive Word-of-Mouth	Control	2.31	1.57	.023	.981
	No Control	2.30	1.52		
Future Course	Control	3.76	1.98	-2.59	.010
	No Control	4.31	1.84		
Class Participation	Control	3.71	1.68	-2.95	.003
	No Control	4.23	1.41		
	Stability				
Consequence		Mean	SD	t-value	p
Negative Word-of-Mouth	Stable	3.26	1.99	4.41	.000
	Unstable	2.26	1.79		
Positive Word-of-Mouth	Stable	2.11	1.43	-2.49	.013
	Unstable	2.57	1.69		
Future Course	Stable	3.44	1.96	-5.90	.000
	Unstable	4.48	1.80		
Class Participation	Stable	3.53	1.68	-4.75	.000
	Unstable	4.23	1.47		

DISCUSSION

This study provides a typology of vicariously embarrassing incidents from the marketing student perspective. Used in conjunction with the identified emotional and behavioral outcomes, the research reveals new insights into the classroom experience. Findings suggest that students are not just passive observers in the classroom, but actively respond to others' conditions through vicarious emotions. During the data collection process, only two questionnaires were returned incomplete with the comments that "I have never experienced anything like this" and "I couldn't think of anything," suggesting that experiencing vicarious embarrassment is common in classroom situations and can occur when observing student interactions with each other or with a professor.

Research Question 1 sought clarification as to the types of incidents that create vicarious embarrassment in the college classroom. Three of the antecedents of vicarious embarrassment mirror those found to create consumer embarrassment as identified by Grace (2007): criticism, forgetfulness/lack of knowledge, and awkward acts. Sharkey and Stafford (1990) report that embarrassing situations for students were mostly related to awkward acts, violations of privacy, and forgetfulness. The findings of this study show that students are most likely to experience vicarious embarrassment when witnessing improper or awkward acts and/or verbal blunders in the classroom (40.8%), followed by seeing someone criticized and made the focus of attention via unsolicited negative accusations or comments (31.1%), closely followed by observing an actor being confused (28.2%). The findings suggest that the antecedents of student vicarious embarrassment may be captured within a few main incident categories.

Kilian et al. (2018), report that customer reactions to service encounter-based vicarious embarrassment include "vicarious shame, intention to flee, irritation, agitation, annoyance, and discomfort" (p. 87), with compassion representing only a small number of the responses.

Research Question 2 sought to identify the initial cognitive/emotional and action responses to experienced vicarious embarrassment in the college classroom. Vicariously embarrassed marketing students were most likely to feel empathy, followed by awkwardness, shock, and anger. Overall, some form of withdrawal (i.e., doing something else, disengaging) accounted for 69.7% of the student reactions to experiencing classroom-based vicarious embarrassment. This parallels findings by McPherson and Kearney (1992) who report that more than half of the students in their study utilized some type of avoidance tactic when coping with an embarrassing situation. Withdrawing from an embarrassing situation would appear to be a common response to experiencing personal embarrassment in general (Grace, 2007; Lewis, 2016; Petronio, 1984), in the classroom (McPherson & Kearney, 1992), and vicariously in the classroom.

Findings reported by Porath et al. (2010) suggest that witnessing negative employee interactions can result in a variety of negative perceptions regarding other employees, the organization overall, and anticipated future interactions with the organization. Kilian et al. (2018) state that "From a managerial point of view, the relevance of vicarious embarrassment in physical service environments is caused by negative spillover effects of the service experience, which lead to decreasing customer satisfaction, negative word-of-mouth and purchase intentions, and a negative impact on the overall image of the service provider" (p. 79).

Research Question 3 inquired as to the intentions and behavioral consequences of having experienced vicarious embarrassment in the college classroom. Identified consequences exhibited by students support the noted findings in other service environments. Specifically, a greater likelihood of engaging in negative word-of-mouth, decreased classroom participation, and reduced likelihood of taking additional courses with the person perceived as being responsible for causing the

vicariously embarrassing incident were identified. It seems clear that simply witnessing the norm violating actions of others can result in a host of negative outcomes.

The final research question asked what insights attribution theory might be able to provide into explaining incident type relationships with the cognitive/emotional, action, and consequences of vicarious embarrassment. Similar to findings regarding embarrassment experienced by customers in service situations (Grace, 2007, 2009), the results in this study suggest that the consequences of vicarious embarrassment are impacted by whom an incident is attributed to. In the present study, marketing students were more likely to favorably evaluate vicariously embarrassing incidents attributed to other students than those attributed to professors. Similar to findings by Grace (2007), criticism incidents were most attributed to the service provider. Findings by Hoffman and Lee (2015) suggest that instructor mishandling of student requests and seeking clarification on course concepts or assignments is an area that frequently generates student embarrassment. This study extends that earlier finding by demonstrating that responding to such requests disrespectfully can also have a negative impact on students who witness such encounters. Most faculty work hard to get students to ask questions and seek clarification on course topics to provide a positive learning environment. Due to the importance of this interactive skill, it is suggested that strategies for responding to student inquiries, as well as initiating questions, should be included as part of introductory training programs for new faculty.

Choe (2018) suggests that "a teacher who is mindful about their students' feelings would attempt to remediate an embarrassing situation for their students" (p. 16). She goes on to provide three strategies to manage student embarrassment. It is suggested that instructors may be able to remediate student vicarious embarrassment using these approaches as well. The first approach is to encourage other students to participate as a way to extricate a student from an embarrassing episode. Specifically, the instructor supports the struggling student by asking peers to help. This has the advantages of "recognizing the failed attempts as partial contribution, meanwhile encouraging participation from other students" (p. 25). A second approach includes the instructor normalizing a vicariously embarrassing situation by providing a factual account that demonstrates empathy. The final approach is to utilize compliments. Specifically, to attribute an embarrassing situation to a positive achievement (e.g., attribute the failure to creativity). Finally, it is suggested that "face" can also be protected by talking with students privately rather than in front of the entire class if feasible. The result should be less defensiveness on the part of the student due to personal embarrassment and a reduction in vicarious embarrassment for the rest of the class.

It is important to note that some educators use embarrassment intentionally to change student behavior and as a classroom management technique.

In this study, incidents were shared that would suggest an instructor was intentionally embarrassing a student to change behavior while sending a signal to other students in the class. For example, "a professor called out a student with a phone, yelled at them for a good minute or two, and asked them to leave. It was a very awkward situation. I was not wanting to say a word and surely not going to reach for my phone" (subject #52). The approach was likely effective for reducing the likelihood of students being on their phones. To gain compliance from students in the class, the instructor used the strategy of embarrassing another person either to socialize the class, simply sanction the person who exhibited inappropriate behaviors, or as a way to establish power. However, the same student also reported that "I didn't want to be in that classroom or participate anymore due to the professor's outburst…no reason to take a chance on what else would set the professor off."

In their study of disruptive student behaviors Hoffman and Lee (2014) report that some "students suggest that instructors should single out or embarrass disruptive students to set an example for the rest of the class" (p. 122). However, in the same study it is noted that this approach to managing classroom disruptions "may in itself be disruptive to the classroom environment" (p. 123). Martin (1987) reports that when teachers embarrass students, the student is less able to concentrate and fears seeking assistance from the teacher when needed. In addition to taking away from class time and disrupting the learning of content, this research identifies that experiencing vicarious embarrassment can also distract and negatively impact other students.

Overall, embarrassing a student to modify behavior and send a message to the rest of the class is an aggressive approach that may work. However, "once you resort to sarcasm or anything else that has embarrassment as its objective you again lose respect that may be hard or impossible to regain" (Felder & Brent, 2000 ,p. 3). So what is an instructor to do in order to address disruptive behaviors without creating vicarious embarrassment attributed to themselves, which can have negative impacts on the classroom? Simply ask the offending student stop what they are doing without being aggressive or sarcastic. The student may experience some personal embarrassment, but you will likely achieve your objective of controlling the situation without contaminating the class environment by generating vicarious embarrassment, which can reduce your credibility and associated respect over time. Prior to this study we know of no empirical research identifying that embarrassing incidents can create disruption in the classroom vicariously. Being aware of this phenomenon and its related outcomes provides insights to instructors to better manage these situations.

When students perceive the cause for their experienced vicarious embarrassment as likely to recur (i.e., stable), they report more negative behavioral intentions/responses relative to if they perceive that an incident is an uncommon occurrence (i.e., unstable).

Similarly, when students perceive the responsible individual has control over the cause for vicarious embarrassment, they experience more negative behavioral intentions/responses than when they believe the responsible party has no control. Specifically, findings suggest that when students perceive the cause of vicarious embarrassment to be controllable, they will exhibit more negatively valenced word-of-mouth, less classroom participation, and reduced intentions to take future classes with the responsible person, than when opposite conditions hold.

The findings in this study advance our understanding of the emotional process known as vicarious embarrassment in the college classroom. Students have expectations about instructor and classmate role behaviors. When either of these parties fail to perform their roles as expected, the result can be an experience that results in vicarious embarrassment. An implication of the findings is the importance of providing students and educators with a set of expectations that is clearly articulated and reinforced as a way to potentially reduce the occurrence of incidents that induce vicarious embarrassment. Classroom expectations can be managed by setting realistic conceptions of what is expected (Borghi et al., 2016). Setting expectations requires the provision of clear information. As an example, in the courses taught by the author all students are required to do presentations. Students are provided with a very specific rubric that is heavily weighted on speaking skills. An interactive presentation workshop is conducted at the start of each semester demonstrating exactly what is expected from both presenters, *and* the audience.

To better manage classroom expectation it is also important to research what students expect from the marketing instructor. Identified gaps can be addressed as a way to convey trust and confidence. This does not mean that educators cater to the whims of students, rather, by knowing where there are disconnects with student understanding of why certain expectations are in place, the instructor can clarify the importance and basis for different expectations. Using the aforementioned student presentations, students have raised concerns about being graded on things such as gesturing, facial expressions, and voice pacing. As such, the provided workshop includes information on the importance that internship providers and future employers place on verbal communication skills and how meeting the set classroom expectations will benefit the student in the future.

Professors and students will continue to have awkward moments, make mistakes, and at times criticize others. The provision of codes of conduct or clearly sharing course expectations can help everyone to act accordingly without violating social norms. It is hoped that findings from this study are useful to instructors seeking to improve their approach to teaching and to provide an overall enhanced classroom experience for their students.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

It has been reported in other service environments that what leads to embarrassment is context-specific and, thus, varies in different situations (Grace, 2007). To develop a more comprehensive understanding of embarrassment in the classroom context (personal and vicarious), it is important to understand this experience from multiple perspectives. Research is needed in other cultures, across different educational systems, and from the marketing instructor's perspective. Future research could sample marketing faculty to derive empirically based typologies for personal and vicarious classroom-based embarrassment incidents, associated cognitive/emotional reactions, and action responses to compare and contrast with the student findings presented in the current study.

In addition, embarrassment is not limited to face-to-face education, considering the use of discussion boards, video chats, and other emerging technologies used in the on-line environment. Research on how to improve online education through a better understanding of personal and vicarious embarrassment is needed. The focus of this research was restricted to face-to-face for this foray into gaining an initial understanding of vicarious embarrassment from the college student perspective. It would be useful to explore non face-to-face educational environments to identify differences and similarities in student vicarious embarrassment.

It has been reported that there are individual differences in the tendency to feel vicarious embarrassment (Thompson, 2014; Uysal et al. 2014). As such, all students will not be predisposed to experiencing vicarious embarrassment to the same extent. Future researchers may want to consider how individual differences in the tendency to experience vicarious embarrassment are related to the type of incidents that are recalled as being vicariously embarrassing and the associated consequences (e.g., evaluations of the class and/or the instructor).

There is little doubt that we all experience vicarious embarrassment at different times of our work lives, just as students have reported its occurrence during their academic careers. It is not clear if initial responses (e.g., empathy, shock, relief) and subsequent actions (e.g., disengaging, preparing, seeking confirmation) to vicarious embarrassment can be taught. If responses to experiencing vicarious embarrassment can be taught, what would be the correct responses for specific types of incidents? Would the college classroom provide an opportunity to help students learn how to respond? This might be an interesting avenue for future research.

Finally, Stocks et al. (2011) suggest that "liking a victim of embarrassing circumstances increases empathic embarrassment for him or her" (p. 4). As such, the level of experienced embarrassment about another's faux pas may differ based on the level of social closeness. Vicarious embarrassment has been shown to intensify when there is a personal connection or relationship between an individual witnessing, and

person acting, in an embarrassing way (Fortune and Newby-Clark 2008; Krach et al. 2016; Müller-Pinzler et al. 2016). The stronger the personal connection, the stronger the experienced vicarious embarrassment by the observer (Fortune and Newby-Clark 2008; Stocks et al. 2011). How social closeness impacts vicarious responses may be due to concerns about one's own social image or a stronger affective link which makes it easier for the observer to empathize with the observed situation, compared with unrelated others (Müller-Pinzler et al. 2016). In either case, the role of personal connection was not investigated in this study, but could be an interesting addition to extend these findings via future studies

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