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An Investigation on Organizational Charlatan Behaviour and Moral Identity as Predictors of Shame: Importance for Education

Juneman Abraham*

Psychology Department, Bina Nusantara University

Rahma Putri Noka Berline**

Psychology Department, Bina Nusantara University

Abstract

Corruption is one of the biggest problems that progressively undermine the life of Indonesian. At the psychosocial level, the Indonesian people, especially the leaders and public officials, many times have been referred to as “the shameless nation”; a designation that is attributed as the cause of the flourishing of corruption. Research breakthrough is needed in the educational world in order to better understand the roots of corruption and the minimal and even the lack of the shame. This predictive correlational study made the organization charlatan behaviour and moral identity as predictors of shame proneness. This study, which was conducted on 208 civil servants and private employees in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia (111 males, 97 females; mean of age = 32.19 years old, standard deviation of age = 10.495 years), showed that the organizational charlatan behaviour is unable to predict shame, but the moral identity can predict it. Implications of this study’s results for further advanced researches as well as practices in education are elaborated in the Discussion and Suggestions section.

Keywords: *shame proneness, charlatanism, moral identity, psychology of corruption*

* Juneman Abraham, Faculty Member-Subject Content Coordinator (FM-SCC) on Community Psychology Studies at Bina Nusantara University (BINUS.ac.id); Secretary General of Asian Psychological Association (APsyA.org); President of Association of Behavioural Researchers on Asians-Indonesia Chapter (ABRAIndonesia.org); Head of Organizational Compartment at Indonesian Psychological Association (HIMPSI.or.id), Personal page: <http://about.me/juneman> Address: Jl. Kemanggisian Ilir III no. 45, Kemanggisian/Palmerah, DKI Jakarta 11480, Indonesia.
E-mail: juneman@binus.ac.id

** Rahma Putri Noka Berline, Address: Jl. Kemanggisian Ilir III no. 45, Kemanggisian/Palmerah, DKI Jakarta 11480, Indonesia.
E-mail: nokaberline14@gmail.com

Introduction

Corruption has become one of the biggest problems in developing countries. Undoubtedly, corruption has damaged all dimensions of the everyday life of society. Numerous interventions and policies which use technology to prevent and eradicate corruption have been invented and applied. One of them is internet governance, which is aimed to ensure work mechanism and procedure to be in accordance with the rules, to ensure transparent monitoring and audit, to have automation eliminating discretion of public officials, to facilitate information exchange which can accelerate detection of corruption and coordinate actions taken by the anti-corruption institutions and their networks, to publicize the justice process in order to stir the public conscience, and to establish working process arrangement which is unambiguous and efficient to attain work accomplishment (Abraham & Sharron, 2015; Chairman of CA Technologies, 2010; Olken & Pande, 2012; Sutherland, 2014; Vittal, 2001). Unfortunately, Svensson (2005, p. 37) also stated that the holes in technology are often used by politicians and companies to gain public resources for private interest through corruption.

However, Carr and Jago (2014) stated that technology is not the only decisive factor in determining the success of eradicating corruption. They argued that the efficacy of using technology depends on its users. They added, "As long as public officials are motivated by private gain, solicitation of bribes and the giving of bribes will continue. This is not the fault of Information Technology (IT)" (Carr & Jago, 2014, p. 479). This argument is in line with the cases review conducted by Heeks (1999) which concluded that the effects of technology towards corruption are varied. Even though the technology is devised with a vision of anti-corruption, it is possible that not only that it has no impact on preventing and eradicating corruption, but also, paradoxically, it could create new ways of committing corruption. Heeks (1999) explained it as follows: "Corruption is a phenomenon rooted in the cultural, political, and economic circumstances of those involved. IT does little to affect these root causes, remains limited in its surveillance potential, and so cannot eliminate corruption." (p. 188).

The above elaborations show that the human factors must always be integrated with technology in anti-corruption program. Hence, in this study, the author would like to investigate one of human dimensions which have a role in the act of corruption, namely moral emotion, and specifically feeling of shame. This scope of study is intriguing in Indonesia as stated in the following statement: "Indonesian leaders have a long record of refusing to resign no matter how serious the allegations against them, no matter how high the level of public pressure." ("Slow to Shame", 2011). Jalaluddin Rakhmat (as cited in Ibrahim, 2013) said that Indonesia failed to become a great nation because it has lost its shame.

Shame has many popular forms, namely (1) social-defence of social-image, (2) self-defence (hiding, avoiding, externalizing), (3) self-improvement (reforming, repairing) (Gausel & Leach, 2011). The first two are derived from one's feeling of other-condemnation, followed by feeling of being rejected and/or inferiority, so that he/she feels the need to protect his/her image in front of others. The third is derived from a sense of self-defect, generated by personal moral transgression, so he/she needs to restore him/herself as a moral self (cognitive dissonance reduction mechanism). Cohen et al.'s (2011) instrument, namely GASP (guilt and shame proneness) addresses the second meaning of Shame (withdrawal action tendency) and the third meaning of Shame (negative self-evaluation).

Regarding relation between shame and corruption, Cohen, Wolf, Panter, and Insko (2011) stated that their constructed measurement instrument, i.e. guilt and shame proneness, can function to detect those who are vulnerable to committing corruption.

Shame is defined as negative feeling as a result of moral breach. Such feeling has impact on someone's self holistically ("I am a bad person"; negative self-evaluations). Thus, it *not* only has impact on the action ("My deed is bad"). This feeling is related to the internal condition and unstable in nature. In addition, shame is the result of personal moral transgression which is known by public (Cohen et al., 2011).

The aim of this study is to discover a psychological model that can measure the high or the low of shame as a moral emotion. The author proposed two variables in the model which are hypothesized to be able to predict shame, namely organizational charlatan behaviour (OCB) and moral identity (MI) (see Figure 1). Arguments in proposing them are elaborated in the next segment of this article. If the hypothesis is supported by empirical data then a technology which is able to detect OCB and MI, in order to reduce the act of corruption, is urgent to be invented. This study posits that the prime technology which needs to be devised is *behavioural technology* aiming at controlling the act of corruption. Behavioural technology is a concept proposed by Skinner (1971). However, Skinner denied the concept of agentic self. For him, behavioural technology depends fully on surroundings (including culture), which are on operant psychology practices and peripherals. This study employed general connotation (not Skinnerian in specific) of technology of behaviour, namely all technologies which aim at changing human cognition, affection, conation, and behaviour on the basis of understanding about dimensions of human behaviour.

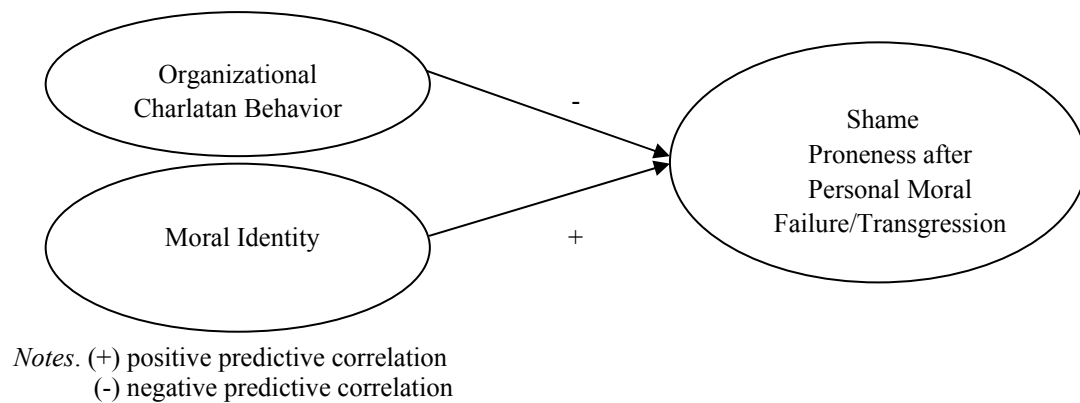


Figure 1. Hypothetical model

This study, investigating predictor of shame, is considered to be pivotal due to the following arguments. If someone performs an unethical act (including corruption in its various forms and scales) followed by low moral emotion, then if it is ignored, the feeling of shame within the person is increasingly eroded. In addition, if the unethical act is repeatedly performed, then it will make the person more accustomed to such act. Sensitivity of feeling ashamed becomes less which in turn makes the person becomes insensitive to such act. Sensitivity of shame of the individual will be reduced so that makes him/her insensitive to what he/she had done. Like a “vicious circle”, this cycle will further aggravate the person’s act of corruption, both qualitatively and quantitatively. If the predictors of shame are able to be identified, then intervention in growing and caring for one’s shame over unethical behaviour can be endorsed. So if such endorsement is nurtured and honed properly, someone will have a higher tendency to take ethical decisions, and it also raises ethical reactions.

As stated earlier that one of the proposed predictors of shame in this study is Organizational Charlatan Behaviour (OCB). OCB or *false performance* is behaviour of member of organization which is based on impression management, in which the behaviour is done to increase positive perception of others (such as from the superior official) towards his/her performance, although he/she himself/herself is aware that his/her actual performance is not as good as it suggests or appears (Gbadamosi, 2006; Parnell & Singer, 2001). In other words, a charlatan pretends to have a good performance in front of others and at the same time seeks to obtain the best appraisal from them.

Examples of charlatans are as follow: psychologist pretending to have the skills and knowledge more than they have (Fox, 1996); physician promising panacea of which its safety and efficacy have not been established by science (Cohn, 2013); “one who is not what he pretends to be” (Smullyan, 2013, p. 49); religious terrorists that show as if they advocate true religious commitment (Gordon, 2000); and “the ignoramuses in music who want to be regarded as skilled and excellent masters” (Kuhnau, as cited in Rose, 2011, p. 130). Weise (as cited in Rose, 2011 described charlatanism in the world of politics and musicology as follows:

“A person who through such bragging gains great patronage or promotion, gaining preference over his peers, and consequently will gain a better profit ... The political charlatan is not simply dishonest, but an example of status inconsistency, seeking an elevated rank unwarranted by his or her negligible talents ... [This concept] is readily applied, moreover, to unskilled musicians who seek through their boasting” to gain great patronage or promotion’.” (p. 129)

The main component of shame is negative self-evaluation (Shame-NSE). Cohen et al. (2011) argued that Shame-NSE positively correlated with component of honesty-humility of the HEXACO instrument. In other words, shame requires people to see and recognize themselves as who and what they are. Shame is a self-conscious emotion. This characteristic is inversely related to OCB because OCB is the behaviour that is “exaggerating” the true or authentic state of oneself. Consequently, this study hypothesized (H1) that OCB is able to predict shame in a negative direction. The higher the OCB, the lower the Shame will be.

If a charlatan commits unethical behaviour, based on the hypothesis, it is suggested that he/she has low shame. This study attempts to provide a new perspective regarding the relation between OCB and shame. McLaren (2010) stated that appropriate shame would prevent the act of charlatanism. This study suggested that higher charlatanism would facilitate someone to have lower shame, or it prevents someone to have a higher shame. Smith, Webster, Parrott, and Eyre (2002) stated that someone’s

reaction towards shame may be in the form of hostility (i.e. *not* high in negative self-evaluation) if he/she assumes that the public evaluation on him/her is considered to be unfair. In another direction, if someone acts unfairly towards others by performing charlatanism, he/she can still deceive the public by as if he/she has good performance yet the result is lower negative self-evaluation. This phenomenon fortifies the symptom of “self-serving bias” in social psychology.

What happens to OCB in this matter has the same characteristic as indigenous (Javanese) phenomenon in Indonesia, of which Sindhunata (2012) called as *slenco*. This phenomenon means that someone’s face has many layers of mask. When one layer is removed, there are still other layers. Sindhunata (2012, p. 10) stated:

“*Slenco* does not only remove the face but it also means that the communication is done without having face. In other words, it means that the communication is established without honesty and sincerity. We are not in our true state. What worse is when we want to reveal our authentic state, we cannot do it as we have lost it by previously covering it with many masks of falsehood. Such reality is what is now happening in Indonesia in terms of communication. We establish communication with others without showing our true state. It is a *slenco* (false) communication”.

The concept of “face” holds an important role in the above description. Within the behaviour of OCB, people are willing, intentionally and ironically, to lose face by disguising their authentic performance; whereas, in fact, “losing face” in the experience of feeling of healthy shame---although it is a “damaging experience (Ho, Fu, & Ng, 2004)---is a principle consequence of maintaining morality of an individual and society. For this reason, it is understandable that the author hypothesized an inverse correlation between OCB and shame-NSE.

The second proposed predictor of shame is moral identity (MI). Aquino and Reed II (2002) defined moral identity as self concept or self scheme which encourages moral actions; it consists of moral traits and has social references, whether others (who are familiar or unknown), members of a group, and any social constructions. In order to link MI and shame, firstly it is essential to review whether identity can produce emotion. Stets (2005) identified it by using identity control theory (ICT). Stets showed, “In ICT, positive [identity] nonverification may produce negative emotions, but only conditionally” (p. 53). In addition, Youngkyun (2008) indicated that moral identity may affect one’s degree of felt moral emotions (shame and guilt) after he/she commits unethical behaviour. Moral identity has references of how a *moral person* feels, thinks and acts (Aquino and Reed II, 2002), and shame is a part of moral emotions. Therefore, it was hypothesized that higher moral identity will result in the higher shame. In other words, there is a positive predictive correlation between moral identity and shame (H2).

Methods

Participants and Design

Participants in this study were 208 workers from various government and private agencies (111 males, 97 females; average age = 32.19 years old, standard deviation of age = 10.495 years) in Jakarta, capital city of Indonesia collected by convenience sampling techniques.

The design of this study is predictive correlational. Predictors of this study are organizational charlatan behaviour and moral identity. The criterion (dependent variable) is Shame. The data were analyzed by using multiple linear regression analysis.

Materials and Procedures

The participants were given psychological scales in Indonesian language in order to measure the predictor and criterion variables. The measurement tool was previously tested in a pilot study to 90 subjects in order to test its validity and reliability (measurement instrument tryout phase).

The reliability was measured by using internal consistency index, with Cronbach’s Alpha criteria of ≥ 0.600 . The validity was measured by using items validity indexes, with corrected item-total correlations criteria of ≥ 0.250 .

Measurement scale of organizational charlatan behaviour (OCB) is adapted from organizational charlatan scale constructed by Parnell and Singer (2001). This scale consists of 9 items which are grouped into 2 subscales, namely *Expectations* and *Image*. Examples of the items are as follows: (1) It’s more important to look busy than to be busy, (2) It’s better to figure out how the organization will evaluate you and work accordingly than to figure out what the organization needs and do it, (3) I am only concerned about what the organization expects from me, not what the organization should be doing, (4) You should make a special effort to enhance your appearance when you’re going to

be seen by those with the most power in your organization, (5) In today's competitive world, maintaining a strong positive image is critical to career success, and (6) It's a good idea to do what will result in strong evaluations even if it's not exactly what the organization needs to be done.

The choices of response of this scale range from *Strongly Disagree* (score of 1) to *Strongly Agree* (score of 6). Items (1) to (3) are examples of subscale of *Expectations*, namely attention/consent given by someone towards his/her outward appearance which indicates higher performance, seen from organization expectations. Items (4) to (6) are examples of subscale of *Image*, namely someone's effort in elevating his/her image in front of those who are considered to be important in an organization.

The reliability and validity tests showed that the OCB scale was reliable with Cronbach's Alpha index of 0.648 and corrected total-correlations ranged from 0.284 to 0.543, by eliminating 4 items.

The measurement scale of Shame is adapted and developed from GASP (guilt and shame proneness) instrument constructed by Cohen et al. (2011). Shame consists of two dimensions, namely Shame-NSE (negative self-evaluation) and Shame-WIT (withdrawal action tendency).

Shame-NSE is a dimension that measures how far someone assesses him/herself to be morally negative or foul after committing unethical deed. This dimension consists of 9 items. Examples of the items are as follows: (1) You rip an article out of a journal in the library and take it with you. Your boss discovers what you did and tells the librarian and your colleagues. What is the likelihood that this would make you would feel like a bad person?; (2) You successfully exaggerate your damages in a lawsuit. Months later, your lies are discovered, and you are charged with perjury. What is the likelihood that you would think you are a despicable human being?; and (3) You make a mistake at work and find out a co-worker is blamed for the error. Later, your co-worker confronts you about your mistake. What is the likelihood that you would feel like a coward?

Shame-WIT is a dimension that measures how far someone withdraws him/herself from social situation after committing unethical deed. This dimension consists of 8 items. Examples of the items are as follows: (1) After making a big mistake on an important project at work in which people were depending on you, your boss criticizes you in front of your co-workers. What is the likelihood that you would feign sickness and leave work?; (2) A friend tells you that you boast a great deal. What is the likelihood that you would stop spending time with that friend?; (3) You take office supplies home for personal use and are caught by your boss. What is the likelihood that this would lead you to quit your job?

The response choices of Shame-NSE and Shame-WIT instruments range from *Very Unlikely* (score of 1) to *Very Likely* (score of 7). The reliability and validity tests showed that Shame-NSE scale was reliable with Cronbach's Alpha index of 0.780 and corrected total-correlations ranged from 0.301 to 0.650, without any eliminations of the items. The Shame-WIT scale was not reliable with Cronbach's Alpha index of 0.461, and corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.300 to 0.453, by eliminating 6 items. Since the Shame-WIT dimension was not reliable, then it was not included in the field research.

The moral identity was measured with a psychological scale adapted from Aquino and Reed II (2002). This scale consists of 13 items, which is grouped into two subscales, namely Symbolization and Internalization. The choices of response of this scale range from *Strongly Disagree* (score of 1) to *Strongly Agree* (score of 6). This measurement tool has introductory remarks as follows:

Listed below are some characteristics that may describe a person:

caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, hardworking, helpful, honest, and kind.

The person with these characteristics could be you, or it could be someone else. For a moment, visualize in your mind the kind of person who has these characteristics. Imagine how that person would think, feel, and act. When you have a clear image of what this person would be like, answer the following questions.

Examples of items of the moral identity scale are: (1) It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics; (2) I strongly desire to have these characteristics; (3) Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am; (4) I often buy products that communicate the fact that I have these characteristics; (5) The fact that I have these characteristics is communicated to others by my membership in certain organizations; (6) I am actively involved in activities that communicate to others that I have these characteristics.

Items (1) to (3) are examples of *Internalization*, namely to measure how far the nine moral traits become primary matters within the concept of self. Items (4) to (6) are examples of *Symbolization*, namely to measure how far the nine moral traits are reflected in the everyday acts of the participants.

The reliability and validity tests showed that Moral Identity scale was reliable with Cronbach's Alpha index of 0.796 and corrected total-correlations ranged from 0.287 to 0.601, by eliminating 2 items.

Results

Demographic characteristics of participants of this research are showed in Table 1. Multiple linear regression analysis shows that $R^2 = 0.061$, $F(2, 207) = 6.700$, $p = 0.002$. It is found that organizational charlatan behaviour ($\beta = 0.117$, $p > 0.05$) cannot predict Shame-NSE. H1 was not supported by empirical data. Moral identity ($\beta = 0.190$, $p < 0.01$) significantly positively predict Shame-NSE (see Table 2). H2 was supported by empirical data.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

	Characteristics	Frequency
Worker type	Public Officials	167
	Private Employees	41
Working experience	0 – 5 years	153
	6 – 10 years	34
	11 – 15 years	3
	> 15 years	18
	Elementary School	9
Educational level	High School	23
	Bachelor	162
	Master	14
Marriage status	Unmarried	127
	Married	81
Salary per month	1 – 3 million	103
	4 – 6 million	96
	7 – 10 million	9

Table 2. Multiple linear regression analysis predicting Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation ($n = 208$)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Tolerance	VIF
Organizational Charlatan Behaviour	0.276	0.165	0.117	1.675	0.095	0.935	1.069
Moral Identity	0.283	0.104	0.190	2.722	0.007	0.935	1.069

Note: $R^2 = 0.061$; *SE* = standard error

Discussion

This study shows that Organizational Charlatan Behaviour (OCB) is unable to predict Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation (Shame-NSE). It means that the high or the low of OCB did not correlate with the high or the low of Shame-NSE. After having these results, the author then further investigated the OCB construct to find out why the predictive correlation did not exist. The author noticed that the non-existent of that correlation was caused by problems with *context and generalizations*. OCB is behaviour in the context of organization, while Shame-NSE is a moral emotion which plays a role in a variety of contexts (not just the organization) in everyday life. This argument can be triangulated from items in the psychological scales used in this study, as exposed above in the *Materials and Procedures* section.

The findings of this study, at the same time, implied that unethical or immoral behaviour committed by a person at the workplace or organization may not necessarily experience generalization into another context of his/her life. Shame-NSE as a moral emotion is related to someone holistically, not just one aspect of one's life as identified in OCB (aspect of one's performance as a member of an organization). In other words, it is not definite that one's behaviour in a particular area can predict his/her overall behaviour in other areas of life.

In addition, Magnis-Suseno (1987) indeed once stated:

“The word ‘moral’ always refers to the good or bad of the human *as a human being*. So, it is not only about the good or bad, for example, *as teacher, cook, badminton player or preacher*,

but also as a human being. Moral is the aspect of human life in terms of kindness as a human. Moral norms are the yardsticks to determine the right and the wrong attitudes and the actions in terms of the merits as a human being and *not as a specific and limited role of a doer.*” (p. 19).

However, there are evidences that our behaviours are not always guided by moral principles. Moral principles and norms are not always activated within an individual, especially if the individual fails to see the characteristics of a situation that requires the relevant moral response. Such failure can happen, for example, because there are other considerations of salient matters which dominate his/her psyche (Eyal & Liberman, 2012). By using the construal level theory (CLT), Eyal and Liberman (2012) and Gong and Medin (2012) successfully demonstrated through empirical research that *psychological distance* affects one’s moral judgment. The author suspected, based on the items presented in the psychological scales/questionnaire, that the OCB and Shame-NSE variables might be different in terms of type and size of the perceived psychological distances (abstract vs. concrete; social vs. hypothetical distances; cf. Trope, 2012) so it is possible that there are fluctuated scores within the participants based on the distances, and in the end they did not reveal any correlation between the two variables. It is recommended that in further study, it is necessary to make the psychological distance as mediating or moderating variable of the predictive relationship between OCB and Shame-NSE.

This study shows that moral identity (MI) is able to predict Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation (Shame-NSE) in a positive direction. In other words, the lower one’s moral identity is, the lower one’s Shame-NSE will be; and the higher one’s moral identity is, the higher one’s Shame-NSE is. It is in line with many results of studies using paradigm of moral disengagement. Moral disengagement is the reverse of moral identity (Aquino, Reed II, Thau, & Freeman, 2007). “Moral identity neutralizes the effectiveness of moral disengagement” (Aquino et al., 2007, p. 386). Aquino et al. (2007) argued, within high moral identifiers, moral identity occupies working self-concept and is ready to be accessed through memory so when interacting with moral disengagement potential, the identity which is based on moral commitments will reveal its salience and reconstruct or transform any cognitions colored by acceptance towards moral disengagement. For this reasons, it is understandable that the inverse correlation between OCB and shame-NSE was found.

Bandura, Barbaranelli, and Caprara (1996) stated that those who commit moral disengagement tend to act more disruptive to others than those who apply moral self-sanctions/self-censure towards their own behaviours which are damaging to others. By employing paradigm of self-regulatory mechanisms, Bandura et al. (1996) explained that moral disengagement led to inactivation of self-sanctions due to the absence of sense of moral agency; whereas self-sanctions is the integral part of Shame-NSE. This study is different from Bandura et al. (1996) and Stanger, Kavussanu, Boardley, and Ring (2013)’ research. Their research’s result showed a negative predictive correlation between *moral disengagement* and *anticipatory guilt*, whereas this present study successfully turned out a positive predictive correlation between *moral identity* and *shame proneness*---which is operationally defined as one’s tendency to experience negative self-evaluations after experiencing personal moral failure. It is known that, other than guilt, shame is the other great moral motivation. As illustrated earlier, shame and guilt proneness are the principles of morality and regulators. Thus, this present research makes theoretical contributions by expanding the network of explanatory variables of moral emotions.

This study also supports the arguments presented by Rothmund and Baumert (2014) that people with high shame proneness will have a high self-criticism as well. In fact, in the sociocognitive paradigm of Bandura et al.’s (1996), it is known that high moral identity includes high self-censure and self-sanctions. Both of those propositions (Bandura et al., 1996; Rothmund & Baumert, 2014) have compatibility, so if they are combined, it can be understood why moral identity and shame proneness are inversely correlated. However, the processes occurring in this correlation, whether they are reflective or automated, require further investigation.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study concluded that Moral Identity is able to predict Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation in a positive direction, while Charlatan Organizational Behaviour is unable to do so. This study has explained why OCB did not have predictive ability, as well as providing alternative perspectives on how to conceptualize a model that includes psychological predictors of moral emotion (in this case: Shame).

This study still has limitations, i.e. not covers another dimension of Shame, which is withdrawal action tendency (Shame-WIT). As described by Abraham and Gunawan (2014), a sub-scale measurement tool of Shame-WIT needs to be reconstructed in accordance with Indonesian cultural context. Cohen et al. (2011) stated that withdrawal is the act of disappearing oneself from public and avoiding of responsibilities, whereas in the context of Indonesia withdrawal is the act to prevent further

destruction and in line with moral virtue. The act of not withdrawing can be a form of self-defensive behaviour, and seen by others as an act of running away from responsibility (Gausel & Leach, 2011). It is suggested that multi yet contrastive meaning of “withdrawal” has resulted in the absence of validity of the Shame-WIT sub-scale as found in this research’s pilot study phase.

Implication of this study for education and learning is that activities and materials that lead to the establishment of moral identity need to be given to the students, but not doctrinally. Such establishment is set up through education that fosters critical thinking and a penchant for being autonomous (e.g. Splitter, 2011) in challenging and negotiating moral and citizenship dogmatism that opposes general moral principles, while at the same time realizing that our moral principles that are known and believed to be always in contestation and social discourses. Therefore, philosophical way of thinking needs to be integrated with the moral identity education. Thus, students are aware of their place in the world and actively have discussion with their conscience when facing moral problems or dilemmas, so that they can establish feeling of *healthy shame* (cf. Bogdanos, 2013) when occasionally experiencing failure in advocating their moral principles.

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