

# Implicit Shame and Avoidant Interpersonal Style: The Mediating Role of Identity Fragility

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aimed to investigate the mediating role of identity fragility in the relationship between implicit shame and avoidant interpersonal style among young adults in Vietnam.

**Methods and Materials:** The research employed a descriptive correlational design with a sample of 424 university students from Vietnam, selected using the Morgan and Krejcie sampling table. Data were collected through standard tools: the Implicit Association Test for Shame (IAT-Shame), the Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS) to assess identity fragility, and the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) for measuring avoidant interpersonal style. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analyses were performed using SPSS-27 to examine bivariate relationships. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was then conducted in AMOS-21 to test the proposed mediation model, and model fit was evaluated using a range of fit indices.

**Findings:** The results of Pearson correlation showed significant positive relationships between implicit shame and identity fragility ( $r = .47, p < .001$ ), implicit shame and avoidant interpersonal style ( $r = .39, p < .001$ ), and identity fragility and avoidant interpersonal style ( $r = .52, p < .001$ ). The structural equation model showed good fit ( $\chi^2 = 132.48, df = 74, \chi^2/df = 1.79, RMSEA = 0.043, CFI = 0.97$ ). Path analysis revealed that implicit shame had a significant direct effect on identity fragility ( $\beta = .47, p < .001$ ) and on avoidant interpersonal style ( $\beta = .19, p = .004$ ). The indirect effect of implicit shame on avoidant interpersonal style through identity fragility was also significant ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ), confirming the mediating role.

**Conclusion:** These findings highlight the importance of implicit shame and unstable identity structures in shaping avoidant relational behaviors, emphasizing the need for psychological interventions that address unconscious emotional vulnerabilities and promote identity coherence.

**Keywords:** *Implicit shame, Identity fragility, Avoidant interpersonal style.*

## 1. Introduction

Avoidant interpersonal style has been conceptualized as a behavioral and cognitive pattern that prioritizes self-protection and emotional distance over relational intimacy. Such individuals often perceive closeness as a threat to autonomy or self-coherence, leading to chronic detachment from others (Berenson et al., 2018; Meisel & Colder, 2021). This detachment is not merely behavioral but is reinforced by a cognitive schema rooted in distrust and vulnerability avoidance. Research has shown that attachment style plays a critical role in shaping interpersonal strategies and that those with avoidant attachment tend to suppress emotions and disengage from conflict, thereby preserving emotional safety at the expense of authentic connection (Evraire et al., 2022; Rek et al., 2018). These patterns are often learned in early relational contexts and carried into adulthood, where they manifest in various domains, from romantic relationships to professional interactions.

A growing body of evidence suggests that avoidant interpersonal style is influenced by affective experiences such as shame—particularly when this emotion is internalized and outside conscious awareness. Implicit shame, as opposed to explicit or acknowledged shame, involves automatic and non-conscious negative evaluations of the self in response to perceived social failure or disapproval (Stuke et al., 2020; Zubenko, 2021). This form of shame is especially pernicious because it operates silently, shaping self-concept and behavior without being subjected to rational reflection or verbal processing. Individuals who harbor implicit shame may not recognize it directly but may nonetheless exhibit self-defeating relational patterns, such as excessive withdrawal, hypersensitivity to rejection, and emotional unavailability (Mukherjee & Sinha, 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). Importantly, implicit shame does not merely result from interpersonal experiences; it is maintained and reinforced by a fragile and incoherent sense of self.

The concept of identity fragility refers to an unstable and poorly integrated self-concept that lacks clarity, coherence, and continuity over time. Such fragility may render individuals vulnerable to external evaluations, increasing their sensitivity to shame and rejection (Kaya et al., 2023; Rostami et al., 2022). In this context, identity fragility may serve as a psychological conduit through which implicit shame translates into avoidant relational behavior. When individuals perceive themselves as fundamentally flawed or unworthy—a core feature of internalized shame—their

already fragile identity structures may further disintegrate under the pressure of social expectations, prompting defensive withdrawal from interpersonal situations (Choe & Lee-Jin, 2024; Malivoire & Koerner, 2021). Empirical studies have indicated that individuals with unclear self-concepts often report higher interpersonal anxiety, lower social confidence, and more maladaptive conflict resolution strategies, supporting the notion that identity fragility exacerbates relational avoidance (Choi & Min, 2019; Darawong, 2017).

Furthermore, cultural and contextual factors also shape the expression and impact of shame and interpersonal style. In collectivist societies such as Vietnam, where social harmony and relational obligations are emphasized, implicit shame may be more likely to influence identity development and interpersonal conduct. Shame in these contexts is not merely an individual experience but a social one, deeply intertwined with community expectations and perceived role fulfillment (Čiuladienė & Walancik, 2020; Tanasescu, 2024). As such, individuals who experience implicit shame may be especially prone to identity confusion and interpersonal avoidance, as these serve as adaptive strategies to minimize perceived social threat or disapproval (Carfagno et al., 2024; Hassan et al., 2022). This culturally sensitive understanding is crucial when examining how psychological variables interact within specific sociocultural environments.

Attachment theory provides a robust framework for understanding how implicit shame and identity fragility jointly contribute to interpersonal dysfunction. Studies have consistently linked insecure attachment—particularly the avoidant subtype—with deficits in emotional regulation, empathy, and conflict resolution skills (Arianfar et al., 2022; Lee & Park, 2020). These impairments often manifest as avoidant behaviors that serve to reduce emotional vulnerability. At the same time, the internalization of negative self-evaluations associated with implicit shame can erode the individual's sense of identity, making it more fragmented and less resilient to relational stressors (Li et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2020). In such cases, the combination of implicit shame and identity fragility creates a psychological environment where avoidance is not merely preferred but perceived as essential for self-preservation.

Moreover, the role of emotion regulation strategies in mediating interpersonal outcomes has been underscored in recent research. Individuals who struggle to recognize and manage emotions like shame are more likely to engage in interpersonal avoidance, especially when their identity

structure lacks clarity and resilience (Stancu, 2025; Wijaya et al., 2024). Emotional dysregulation associated with shame can hinder self-expression, reduce trust in others, and promote a reliance on distancing strategies, all of which reinforce avoidant interpersonal styles. In addition, distorted cognitive appraisals—such as catastrophizing, personalization, or mind-reading—often accompany both implicit shame and fragile identity structures, further undermining interpersonal efficacy (Bazezew & Neka, 2021; Klimenkova, 2017).

Another relevant dimension involves the impact of early relational experiences and developmental traumas, which can plant the seeds of both implicit shame and identity diffusion. Negative caregiving environments, invalidation, and chronic criticism are known to disrupt the development of a coherent self-concept and increase susceptibility to implicit shame responses (Berenson et al., 2018; Meisel & Colder, 2021). When these developmental vulnerabilities remain unaddressed, they form the psychological infrastructure for relational avoidance in adulthood. Additionally, the combination of shame-proneness and identity instability has been found to predict low levels of trust and cooperation in close relationships, as individuals fear that exposing their true selves will lead to rejection or abandonment (Evraire et al., 2022; Rek et al., 2018).

Despite the conceptual and empirical relevance of these constructs, there remains a paucity of integrative research examining how they jointly influence interpersonal styles. Most prior studies have explored the independent effects of shame, identity, or attachment on relational behavior, without accounting for their interrelations or underlying mechanisms. The present study addresses this gap by proposing and empirically testing a mediation model in which identity fragility serves as an intermediary variable linking implicit shame to avoidant interpersonal style.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational research design to investigate the relationships between implicit shame, identity fragility, and avoidant interpersonal style, and to examine the mediating role of identity fragility. The target population consisted of university students and young adults residing in urban areas of Vietnam. A total of 424 participants were selected using simple random sampling, with the sample size determined based on the guidelines provided by Morgan and Krejcie's (1970) sample size table

to ensure statistical power and representativeness. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 35 years and included a balanced representation of genders, educational backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses. All participants completed a battery of standardized psychological measures assessing the study variables. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical procedures were strictly followed in accordance with institutional guidelines for psychological research involving human subjects.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Avoidant Interpersonal Style

The dependent variable, avoidant interpersonal style, was assessed using the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) developed by Feeney, Noller, and Hanrahan in 1994. This instrument includes five subscales, two of which—"Discomfort with Closeness" and "Relationships as Secondary"—are specifically designed to capture the characteristics of avoidant interpersonal orientation. The full ASQ consists of 40 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree), with higher scores on the relevant subscales indicating greater avoidance in close relationships. The tool has demonstrated strong internal consistency and construct validity in various populations, and its psychometric properties have been confirmed across different cultural contexts in numerous studies, supporting its use as a reliable measure of avoidant relational behavior (Fossati et al., 2014; Ravitz et al., 2010).

#### 2.2.2. Identity Fragility

To measure identity fragility, the study utilized the Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS) developed by Campbell et al. in 1996. This 12-item scale evaluates the extent to which individuals possess a clearly defined and stable sense of self. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater self-concept clarity and, conversely, lower scores reflecting greater identity fragility. The SCCS is a unidimensional measure without subscales, making it ideal for detecting fluctuations and instability in self-identity. The scale's reliability and validity have been extensively validated, with high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha values often exceeding 0.80) and strong convergent and discriminant validity reported in multiple psychological studies (Nagar & Ahmed, 2024; Tamaela et al., 2024).

### 2.2.3. Implicit Shame

Implicit shame was measured using the Implicit Association Test for Shame (IAT-Shame), adapted specifically to capture non-conscious shame responses, based on the original Implicit Association Test framework by Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998). This computerized task assesses automatic associations between self-related words and shame-related versus neutral words. Although the number of items can vary depending on the specific IAT design, the typical structure includes seven blocks of trials involving categorization tasks to measure reaction times indicative of implicit shame bias. Scoring is computed using a D-score algorithm, with higher scores reflecting stronger implicit shame associations. The IAT has been widely employed in psychological research and has demonstrated good internal consistency and test-retest reliability. The shame-specific version of the IAT has been validated in recent empirical studies, confirming its effectiveness in capturing implicit emotional constructs with minimal susceptibility to self-report biases (Homayouni et al., 2023; Jeon & Park, 2023).

### 2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Initially, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed using SPSS version 27 to explore the bivariate relationships between the dependent variable—avoidant interpersonal style—and the independent variables—implicit shame and identity fragility. This provided preliminary insight into the strength

and direction of associations among the variables. To test the proposed mediation model and to assess the indirect effect of implicit shame on avoidant interpersonal style through identity fragility, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS version 21. The SEM analysis allowed for the simultaneous estimation of multiple relationships while accounting for measurement error and latent constructs. Model fit indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Chi-square statistics were used to evaluate the adequacy of the model. Significance levels were set at  $p < 0.05$  for all inferential analyses.

## 3. Findings and Results

The sample consisted of 424 participants from Vietnam, including 228 females (53.77%) and 196 males (46.23%). The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 35 years, with a mean age of 22.84 years ( $SD = 3.91$ ). In terms of educational attainment, 248 participants (58.49%) were undergraduate students, 132 participants (31.13%) were graduate students, and 44 participants (10.38%) had completed postgraduate education. Regarding marital status, 359 participants (84.67%) were single, 61 participants (14.39%) were married, and 4 participants (0.94%) were divorced. These demographic characteristics reflect a predominantly young, educated, and unmarried sample, suitable for investigating interpersonal and emotional variables such as shame, identity, and relationship styles.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for Main Variables (N = 424)*

Variable	M	SD
Implicit Shame	0.42	0.18
Identity Fragility	31.67	6.84
Avoidant Interpersonal Style	47.23	7.51

As shown in Table 1, the mean score for implicit shame (measured through the D-score from the IAT) was 0.42 ( $SD = 0.18$ ), suggesting moderate levels of unconscious shame-related associations. Identity fragility had a mean score of 31.67 ( $SD = 6.84$ ), indicating a notable degree of instability in self-concept among participants. The avoidant interpersonal style had a mean score of 47.23 ( $SD = 7.51$ ), reflecting a tendency toward relational avoidance in the sample.

Prior to conducting parametric analyses, the necessary statistical assumptions were evaluated and met. Tests for normality indicated acceptable skewness and kurtosis values for all main variables: avoidant interpersonal style (skewness = 0.22, kurtosis = -0.31), identity fragility (skewness = 0.15, kurtosis = -0.45), and implicit shame (skewness = 0.36, kurtosis = 0.18), all within the  $\pm 1$  range recommended for large samples. Linearity was confirmed through inspection of scatterplots, showing consistent linear

trends between predictor and outcome variables. Homoscedasticity was verified by plotting standardized residuals against predicted values, revealing a random distribution. Multicollinearity was also assessed, with Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values below the threshold

of 5 for all predictors: VIF = 1.24 for implicit shame and VIF = 1.19 for identity fragility, indicating no concerns. Therefore, the data satisfied the assumptions required for both Pearson correlation and SEM analyses.

**Table 2**

*Pearson Correlations Between Study Variables (N = 424)*

Variables	1	2	3
1. Implicit Shame	—		
2. Identity Fragility	.47** (p < .001)	—	
3. Avoidant Interpersonal Style	.39** (p < .001)	.52** (p < .001)	—

Table 2 illustrates the Pearson correlations among the study variables. Implicit shame showed a significant positive correlation with identity fragility ( $r = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and with avoidant interpersonal style ( $r = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Identity fragility was also significantly correlated with avoidant

interpersonal style ( $r = .52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results support the hypothesized associations and indicate that greater levels of implicit shame and identity fragility are associated with stronger tendencies toward avoidant relational behavior.

**Table 3**

*Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model*

Fit Index	Value
$\chi^2$	132.48
df	74
$\chi^2/df$	1.79
GFI	0.95
AGFI	0.91
CFI	0.97
RMSEA	0.043
TLI	0.96

The structural model exhibited good fit across multiple indices (Table 3). The chi-square value was 132.48 with 74 degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/df = 1.79$ ), indicating a reasonable level of model parsimony. Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.95) and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI = 0.91) exceeded the recommended thresholds. The Comparative Fit

Index (CFI = 0.97) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.96) also suggested excellent model fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.043) fell well within the acceptable range ( $< 0.05$ ), indicating that the model fits the data well.

**Table 4**

*Path Coefficients for the Structural Equation Model (N = 424)*

Path	b	SE	$\beta$	p
Implicit Shame → Identity Fragility	9.17	1.28	.47	< .001
Identity Fragility → Avoidant Style	0.68	0.07	.44	< .001
Implicit Shame → Avoidant Style (Direct)	2.34	0.82	.19	.004
Implicit Shame → Avoidant Style (Indirect via Identity Fragility)	6.24	1.12	.21	< .001
Implicit Shame → Avoidant Style (Total)	8.58	1.23	.40	< .001

As seen in Table 4, the direct path from implicit shame to identity fragility was significant ( $b = 9.17$ ,  $\beta = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that higher implicit shame predicted greater

identity fragility. Identity fragility also significantly predicted avoidant interpersonal style ( $b = 0.68$ ,  $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The direct path from implicit shame to avoidant

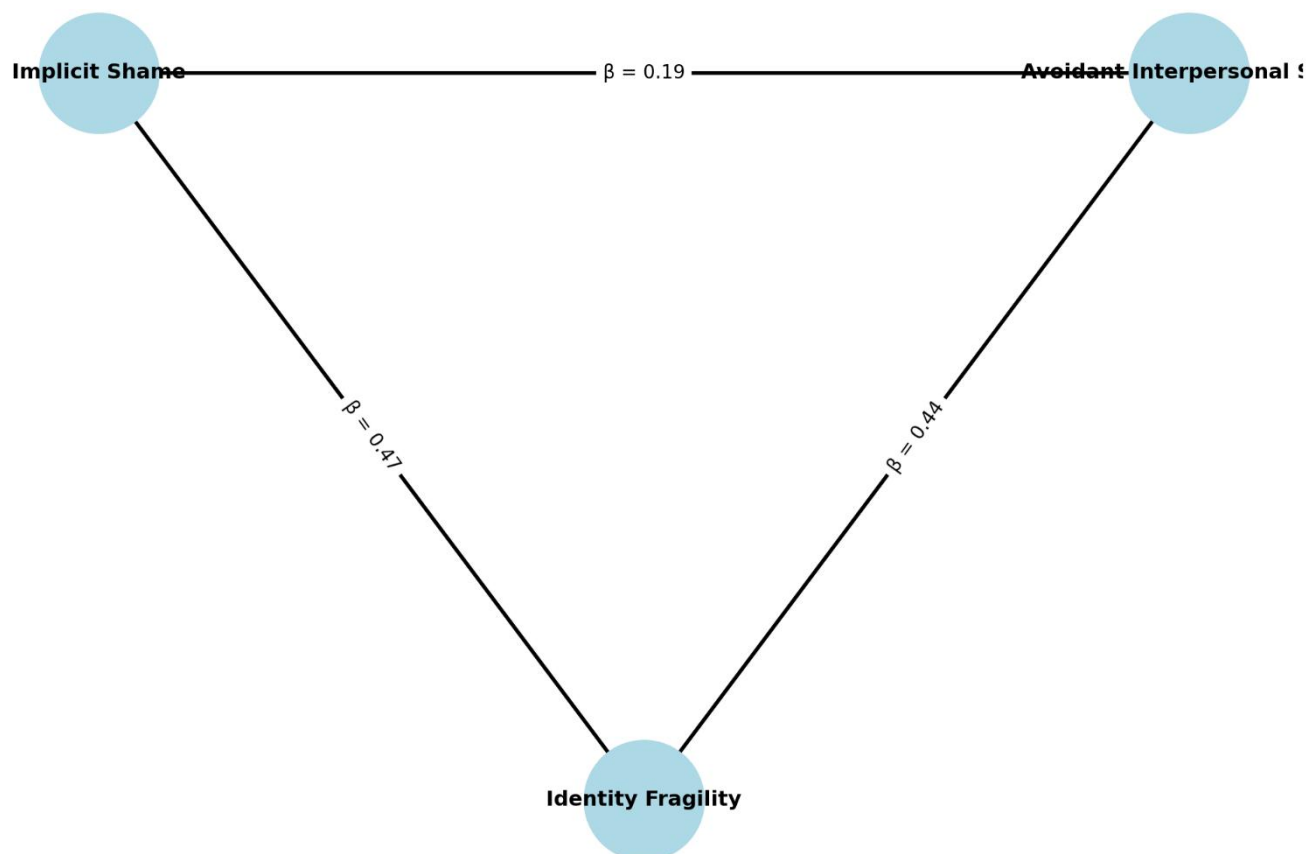


interpersonal style was also significant ( $b = 2.34$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $p = .004$ ), though the indirect path through identity fragility ( $b = 6.24$ ,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .001$ ) suggests a meaningful mediation

effect. The total effect ( $b = 8.58$ ,  $\beta = .40$ ,  $p < .001$ ) confirms that implicit shame influences avoidant interpersonal style both directly and through its impact on identity structure.

**Figure 1**

*Model with Path Coefficients*



#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the relationship between implicit shame and avoidant interpersonal style and examined the mediating role of identity fragility among Vietnamese university students. The findings confirmed that implicit shame was positively and significantly associated with avoidant interpersonal style, and that identity fragility mediated this relationship. The direct path from implicit shame to avoidant interpersonal style was statistically significant, indicating that individuals who harbor high levels of unconscious shame are more likely to avoid emotional closeness and interpersonal vulnerability. Furthermore, the inclusion of identity fragility as a mediating variable revealed that a fragmented and unstable sense of self serves as a psychological bridge linking shame to relational withdrawal.

The Pearson correlation analyses demonstrated that implicit shame had a significant positive correlation with both identity fragility and avoidant interpersonal style. These results suggest that individuals who unconsciously view themselves as flawed or inadequate tend to develop incoherent self-concepts, which in turn fosters avoidant tendencies in social interactions. The SEM analysis further validated this model, showing a strong model fit and confirming that identity fragility significantly mediated the link between implicit shame and avoidant interpersonal behavior. In essence, when implicit shame undermines self-clarity and self-worth, individuals are more inclined to disengage from interpersonal relationships as a form of psychological self-preservation.

These findings are aligned with previous studies that have identified shame as a core emotion in the development of maladaptive interpersonal behaviors. For instance, Berenson

et al. (2018) found that shame-prone individuals tend to make negative attributions for social rejection and are more likely to interpret neutral social cues as rejecting (Berenson et al., 2018). This hypervigilance to potential rejection reinforces avoidant strategies, as individuals seek to protect their fragile self-concept from further injury. Similarly, Malivoire and Koerner (2021) emphasized that individuals with chronic worry and interpersonal problem-solving deficits often exhibit high levels of shame and low self-efficacy in relational contexts (Malivoire & Koerner, 2021). The current study extends this literature by confirming that even when shame is implicit—operating outside of conscious awareness—it still plays a significant role in shaping interpersonal styles through its impact on identity coherence.

The mediating role of identity fragility also resonates with studies that have explored the relationship between self-concept clarity and social functioning. Kaya et al. (2023) noted that identity instability, often rooted in unresolved attachment trauma, leads to dysfunctional interpersonal cognitions and behaviors (Kaya et al., 2023). When individuals lack a stable sense of self, they are more susceptible to internalizing negative social feedback, thus heightening their vulnerability to implicit shame and avoidant behaviors. Choe and Lee-Jin (2024) further reinforced this by showing that individuals with poor stress coping mechanisms and weak identity integration experience greater interpersonal stress and lower psychological well-being (Choe & Lee-Jin, 2024). These findings reinforce the proposition that identity fragility does not only reflect internal confusion but also functions as a pathway through which emotional vulnerabilities are externalized in social contexts.

Moreover, this study's findings are consistent with attachment-based research highlighting the association between insecure attachment and avoidant interpersonal styles. Arianfar et al. (2022) demonstrated that individuals with avoidant attachment patterns tend to suppress emotional needs and adopt caregiving styles that maintain emotional distance (Arianfar et al., 2022). These individuals often struggle with vulnerability and intimacy, relying instead on self-reliance and detachment. Rostami et al. (2022) similarly found that insecure attachment was linked to weaker moral identity and dysfunctional relationships, mediated by identity-related constructs (Rostami et al., 2022). Such evidence supports the notion that avoidant interpersonal style is not merely a behavioral tendency but is underpinned by deeper psychological structures such as

attachment insecurity, implicit shame, and fragile self-definition.

The results of the current study also align with those of Lin et al. (2020), who found that attachment style influences interpersonal problems through emotional dysregulation and maladaptive digital coping strategies (Lin et al., 2020). These findings parallel the idea that avoidant interpersonal style may be a symptom of broader emotional and cognitive vulnerabilities. Li et al. (2020) further found that adverse childhood experiences indirectly predicted compulsive behaviors and relational dysfunction through disrupted self-schemas and shame-related beliefs (Li et al., 2020). Taken together, these studies reinforce the current model's validity, indicating that the interplay between implicit shame and identity fragility creates a fertile psychological ground for avoidant relational behavior to emerge.

The cultural context of the study also deserves mention. In collectivist societies such as Vietnam, social conformity and relational harmony are prioritized over individual expression. In such environments, shame is not only internalized but also socially reinforced through community norms and expectations (Čiuladienė & Walancik, 2020; Tanasescu, 2024). Individuals who fail to meet perceived social standards may internalize shame in ways that disrupt identity formation and increase the use of avoidance as a protective strategy. Wijaya et al. (2024) also noted that in Asian organizational contexts, interpersonal conflict is often avoided or suppressed, contributing to a culture of emotional disengagement (Wijaya et al., 2024). These cultural dimensions magnify the psychological effects of shame and identity fragility, emphasizing the importance of culturally attuned interventions and assessments.

Furthermore, the link between implicit shame and interpersonal difficulties has been corroborated by studies in clinical and subclinical populations. Zubenko (2021) found that early maladaptive schemas rooted in shame and rejection sensitivity predicted withdrawn and emotionally detached lifestyles in student populations (Zubenko, 2021). Zhang et al. (2023) identified a similar association in individuals with disordered personality styles, noting that shame-based traits often co-occur with identity confusion and avoidance tendencies (Zhang et al., 2023). These studies confirm that the mechanisms explored in this research are not only applicable to normative populations but also reflect broader trends observable in psychopathology.

Importantly, the interpersonal consequences of shame are not only cognitive or affective but also behavioral. Choi and Min (2019) revealed that adult attachment styles

significantly predicted how professionals manage occupational stress and interpersonal conflict, with avoidant individuals showing reduced cooperation and engagement (Choi & Min, 2019). Darawong (2017) similarly showed that conflict management styles rooted in emotional avoidance contributed to dysfunction in collaborative environments (Darawong, 2017). These studies underline the tangible, day-to-day implications of the dynamics observed in the current study and affirm the relevance of this model beyond academic theory.

In sum, the findings from this study reinforce the interconnectedness of implicit emotional processes, identity structure, and interpersonal functioning. Implicit shame, though often unacknowledged, exerts a powerful influence on how individuals perceive themselves and relate to others. When compounded by identity fragility, this emotional residue creates a psychological environment ripe for relational avoidance. The current study adds empirical support to the growing body of literature linking shame, identity, and interpersonal behavior, while also expanding the understanding of these relationships in culturally specific contexts.

## 5. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations. First, the use of self-report measures, even for implicit constructs, may introduce response biases or limit the depth of emotional insight. Although standardized tools were used, the interpretation of implicit shame through a behavioral task like the IAT may not capture the full nuance of unconscious affective processes. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. While the SEM model supports a mediational framework, longitudinal studies are needed to establish temporal precedence among the variables. Third, the study sample was drawn from university students in Vietnam, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other age groups, populations, or cultural settings. Cultural variables were not directly measured, so assumptions regarding collectivist norms remain inferential.

Future research should explore these relationships using longitudinal or experimental designs to better capture the causal pathways between implicit shame, identity fragility, and interpersonal behavior. Incorporating qualitative methods could also enrich the understanding of how individuals experience and navigate shame and relational withdrawal. Moreover, future studies should aim to replicate these findings across different cultures, age groups, and

clinical populations to assess the broader applicability of the model. It would also be valuable to examine moderating variables, such as emotional intelligence, mindfulness, or resilience, which may buffer the effects of implicit shame and protect against identity destabilization and avoidant tendencies.

Practitioners working with clients who exhibit avoidant interpersonal styles should consider assessing for implicit shame and identity coherence as part of their intake and formulation process. Therapeutic approaches that focus on strengthening self-concept clarity, such as schema therapy or narrative therapy, may be particularly beneficial. Interventions should also aim to gently bring implicit shame into conscious awareness, allowing clients to reframe and process these emotions in a safe environment. In culturally sensitive contexts, it is important to align therapeutic goals with clients' values around relational harmony and social expectations, while still encouraging authentic self-expression and emotional intimacy.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.



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