Service Employees' Occupation-Based Metaperceptions and Coworker Support: A Self-Verification Perspective

Nicholas A. Smith
nick.a.smith2@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research & Artistry at Huskie Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Huskie Commons. For more information, please contact jschumacher@niu.edu.
ABSTRACT

SERVICE EMPLOYEES’ OCCUPATION-BASED METAPERCEPTIONS AND COWORKER SUPPORT: A SELF-VERIFICATION PERSPECTIVE

Nicholas A. Smith, M.A.
Department of Psychology
Northern Illinois University, 2024
Lisa Finkelstein, Director

Service occupations are often characterized by employees’ frequent interpersonal contact with customers and other employees. This study investigates the directional effect of self-esteem on two service-specific ‘feedback’ constructs—occupation-based metaperceptions and coworker support. Applying a self-verification perspective, this study tests a framework that aims to address questions on why individuals may respond more negatively or favorably to forms of feedback characteristic of their occupation. Results from my study (N = 385) provide mixed support for the self-verification perspective, identifying a marginally significant negative moderation effect of self-esteem on the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work meaningfulness. A significant moderation effect opposite to the hypothesized relationship was found, indicating a positive moderation effect of self-esteem on the negative relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work engagement. Results supported the hypothesized relationship identifying self-esteem as having a negative moderating effect on the relation between coworker support and emotional exhaustion. My findings also provide support for coworker support as a buffer on the positive relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and emotional exhaustion. In total, this study contributes to research on self-verification theory by identifying a novel construct—occupation-based
metaperceptions—as a ‘feedback’ variable within the self-verification framework. My work additionally contributes to the service literature by identifying coworker support as a resource that can alleviate the damaging effects of occupation-based metaperceptions on service employees’ well-being, illuminating avenues for future research on interventions to preserve the well-being of service employees.
SERVICE EMPLOYEES’ OCCUPATION-BASED METAPERCEPTIONS AND COWORKER SUPPORT: A SELF-VERIFICATION PERSPECTIVE

BY

NICHOLAS A. SMITH
©2024 Nicholas A. Smith

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Thesis Director:
Lisa M. Finkelstein
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my committee members for their ongoing support and encouragement. Alecia M. Santuzzi, thank you for the thoughtful insights and perspectives you provided for this project. Mahesh V. Subramony, thank you for your support with this project, and your mentorship over these past few years. The way you infuse your professional endeavors with passion and heart has inspired me in so many ways. Lisa M. Finkelstein, thank you for your endless support through this process. I consider myself lucky to have you as a mentor and friend.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES ..............................................................................</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES ...........................................................................</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES ........................................................................</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT .........................</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem and Self-Verification Theory ...................................</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation-Based Metaperceptions .............................................</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworker Support .......................................................................</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Main Effect of Self-Esteem ...............................................</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation-Based Metaperceptions and Coworker Support Interaction ...</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHOD ....................................................................................</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants and Procedure .....................................................</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures ..................................................................................</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RESULTS .................................................................................</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Analysis ..................................................................</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis Strategy .....................................................................</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis Testing ...................................................................</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. DISCUSSION ........................................................................................................ 46

   Implications for Research and Practice .............................................................. 50

   Limitations and Future Directions .................................................................... 54

   Final Thoughts .................................................................................................... 58

REFERENCES ........................................................................................................ 60

APPENDICES ........................................................................................................ 75
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Block 1: Regressions for the Occupation-Based Metaperceptions and Coworker Support Direct Relationships</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Regressions for the Main Effects of Self-Esteem</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Regressions for the Coworker Support and Occupation-Based Metaperceptions Interaction Effects</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Proposed Model of Occupation-Based Metaperceptions and Coworker Support</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Through the Self-Verification Perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Moderation of Self-Esteem on the Relationship Between Occupation-Based</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metaperceptions (OBMP) and Work Meaningfulness (WM)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Moderation of Self-Esteem on the Relationship Between Occupation-Based</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metaperceptions (OBMP) and Work Engagement (WE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Moderation of Self-Esteem on Coworker Support (CS) and Emotional</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exhaustion (EE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Interaction Effect of Coworker Support (CS) and Occupation-Based Metaperceptions (OBMP) on Emotional Exhaustion (EE)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. INFORMED CONSENT FORM</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. DEBRIEFING INFORMATION</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. FOCAL MEASUREMENT ITEMS INCLUDED IN THIS RESEARCH</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A prominent workforce trend over the past several decades has been the rapid increase in the number of service jobs (Autor & Dorn, 2009). Although many occupation-oriented challenges have been identified across service jobs, including limited opportunities, low pay (Goos & Manning, 2007), and broader societal antipathy toward service occupations (Moss et al., 2008; Wildes, 2005), relatively little research has examined the ways in which service employees view themselves within their respective occupations. Research indicates that employees develop attitudes and engage in behaviors that signal favorability toward their work (e.g., job satisfaction, Heller et al., 2002; job performance and intrinsic goal setting, Erez & Judge, 2001) if they maintain a positive view of self (Johnson et al., 2008). Pairing these findings around employee self-views with the occupation-oriented challenges often characteristic of service positions, it becomes clear that service workers’ self-views play a critical role as they face and overcome occupation-related challenges.

Many service occupations have long been viewed as low in value and prestige (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Mejia et al., 2021; Walmsley et al., 2020), and these perceptions can lead service workers to adopt different self-views (i.e., self-esteem) within their occupations. Working in service occupations that are perceived by others as low-prestige can challenge employees’ ability to develop and maintain an esteem-enhancing identity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). In particular, Kusluvan et al. (2022) found that working in low-status and disesteemed
occupations can negatively influence career commitment due to decreases in occupation-based self-esteem. Other research suggests that working in high-prestige occupations can lead to increased self-esteem (Fujishiro et al., 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2002), further emphasizing the effect of occupational characteristics such as status and prestige on employees’ self-perceptions. Given the individually and organizationally relevant consequences of self-esteem (i.e., turnover intentions, Cheng & Tung, 2019; career commitment, Kusluvan et al., 2022; job satisfaction, motivation, and citizenship behaviors, Pierce & Gardner, 2004), continued examination of potential occupational elements (i.e., prestige, status) that can undermine the positive effects of service employees’ self-views (i.e., self-esteem) is needed.

Alongside displaying direct effects on critical work outcomes, self-esteem has often been examined as a moderator (Avey et al., 2011; Ferris et al., 2015, Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Zhang et al., 2022). For instance, the consequences of poor organizational climate on employee stress and emotional exhaustion are more pronounced for individuals lower in self-esteem (Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2003) compared to those with high self-esteem. Individuals low in self-esteem have also been found to be more vulnerable to experiencing well-being struggles—in particular, anxiety and stress—when presented with role stressors (i.e., performance role ambiguity, Thompson & Gomez, 2014). Related to the current study, self-esteem has been tested as a key moderator impacting employee work engagement (Shu & Lazatkhlan, 2017; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007), meaning (Neves et al., 2021; Routledge et al., 2010), and emotional exhaustion (Lapointe et al., 2011; Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2003), and is positively related with identification-related constructs (i.e., organizational identification, Wu et al., 2016). In total, these findings highlight the wide-ranging direct and moderating effects of self-esteem on downstream work outcomes.
Although evidence indicates that having high self-esteem will nearly always provide benefits at the individual and organizational level, Swann’s (1987) self-verification theory (SVT) provides a counterargument to this widely held conclusion. SVT suggests that people prefer others to view them similarly to how they see themselves (Swann, 2012). Put differently, under the tenets of SVT, people respond more favorably to feedback or information that is congruent with their self-views, compared to feedback or information that conflicts with their views of self. People may often desire situations that provide a sense of self-confirmation because receiving confirmation can increase individuals’ confidence that they truly know and understand themselves (Swann, 2012). Conversely, information that disconfirms one’s self-view can lead to feelings of uncertainty about oneself, as well as a creating feelings of being misunderstood by others (Booth et al., 2020). The premise of SVT, thus, uniquely predicts that people likely favor feedback or information that is congruent with their self-views—importantly, even if their self-views are negative.

Previous empirical work identifies relationships that align with the self-verification perspective. For example, Valentiner and colleagues (2011) applied SVT in the context of social anxiety, and identified that as individuals’ social self-esteem decreases, they maintain stronger preferences for negative rather than positive feedback. Amarnani et al. (2022) provide additional support for this theoretical perspective in the service context, finding that people higher in self-esteem show a higher likelihood to withdraw extra-role behaviors (i.e., customer-directed OCBs) after experiencing customer mistreatment due to experiencing lower levels of self-verification. In line with the rationale of SVT, Amarnani and colleagues’ work highlights that receiving feedback (i.e., customer mistreatment) that contradicts self-views (i.e., self-esteem) can lead to
negative downstream outcomes (i.e., decreased engagement in customer-directed OCBs).

Similarly, from a stress and well-being perspective, Ayduk and colleagues (2013) found that individuals with negative self-views experienced heightened anxiety (i.e., cardiovascular responses) after receiving positive feedback compared to negative feedback, while those with positive self-views displayed the opposite (i.e., lower anxiety). The authors further identify that negative feedback can lead to reductions in cardiovascular responses and negative nonverbal affective displays, as well as increases in creativity for individuals with negative self-views. In sum, these findings provide support for the seemingly counterintuitive notion that negative feedback or information can actually produce positive consequences to employees’ well-being and behavior.

Wiesenfeld et al. (2007) provide additional evidence of the moderation of self-views within the self-verification perspective, finding that individuals higher in self-esteem displayed a stronger positive relationship between procedural justice perceptions and organizational commitment. Conversely, the relationship between perceptions of procedural justice and organizational commitment became negative for those lower in self-esteem. The authors identified similar trends in relationships between procedural justice and absenteeism. In other words, receiving information or stimuli (i.e., procedural justice perceptions) that is inconsistent with one’s self-view (i.e., self-esteem) can lead to negative consequences (i.e., decreased commitment, increased absenteeism), regardless of whether the information is positive or negative. These results emphasize the beneficial effects of receiving feedback that confirms one’s self-views, given the observed effects produced on the critical individual and organizational outcomes of organizational commitment and absenteeism. Thus, despite the initial
sense of counterintuitiveness related to the idea that positive self-views (i.e., high self-esteem) can sometimes lead to negative work outcomes (e.g., decreased extra-role behaviors, Amarnani et al., 2022)—and negative self-views (i.e., low self-esteem) can sometimes lead to positive work outcomes (e.g., increased creativity, Ayduk et al., 2013)—the tenets of SVT can be applied to illuminate why this trend may occur.

As mentioned earlier, negative judgments are often attached to service occupations (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Mejia et al., 2021), and service workers’ awareness of these judgments can inhibit their ability to develop positive self-views in their job (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Kusluvan et al., 2022). An individual’s perceptions of what others think of them is defined in the literature as metaperceptions (Laing et al., 1966). Due to the present study’s focus on service employees’ awareness of how others view their jobs, this study identifies this phenomenon as service workers’ occupation-based metaperceptions. Specifically, in this study, occupation-based metaperceptions refer to the perceptions service employees have regarding others’ negative views toward their job. Because negative metaperceptions are often exaggerated compared to positive metaperceptions (Landry et al., 2023; Moore-Berg et al., 2020), it can be expected that service employees’ perceptions of others’ negative judgments placed on their jobs (i.e., negative occupation-based metaperceptions) can play an impactful role in their ability to construct or maintain positive role identities, in turn leading to negative consequences. For example, awareness of others’ negative occupation-related perceptions has been shown to influence work behaviors critical to the long-term success of the organization, such as exiting the organization and refraining from recommending the occupation to others (Pinel & Paulin, 2005; Wildes, 2005).
Despite the conceptual and empirical connections made between negative occupation-based metaperceptions and employee self-views, little research has integrated the self-verification perspective into the metaperception literature. In contexts involving metaperceptions, SVT would suggest that individuals with positive self-views may be prone to experiencing stronger adverse consequences as their negative metaperceptions increase due to the larger discrepancy between how they view themselves and how they think others view them (i.e., feedback or information received by the individual). SVT, on the other hand, would also suggest that individuals low in self-esteem may be more likely to experience stronger positive outcomes as their negative metaperceptions increase, resulting from the confirmation received by the individual regarding how they view themselves and how they think others view them. Overall, these expected relationships align with the underlying rationale of SVT; however metaperceptions have yet to be examined as a form of feedback within the self-verification framework. The present research, therefore, seeks to integrate a self-verification perspective into the metaperception literature by identifying why some service employees may respond more negatively or favorably when they possess a sense of awareness of the negative perceptions others hold toward their occupations.

In addition to investigating the role of occupation-based metaperceptions as a form of feedback within the self-verification framework, this study also aims to test an organization-rooted feedback variable (i.e., support) using a self-verification perspective. Specifically, employees’ perceptions of coworker support will be assessed, given its relevance to service settings as well as the abundant findings indicating that receiving support from peers within the workplace can lead to improved work outcomes. For instance, those who are helpful and
supportive toward others can positively influence employees’ feelings of meaning in their work and organizational commitment (Colbert et al., 2016; Susskind et al., 2000). SVT, however, would also suggest that receiving support from coworkers will only lead to benefits if this information confirms employees’ self-views (i.e., self-esteem); this relationship has received little attention in the extant literature, and warrants investigation.

To capture employees’ views of self, a critical element in the self-verification framework, self-esteem, will be tested as a moderator in the relationships between the two feedback constructs—occupation-based metaperceptions and coworker support—and the study’s focal outcome variables, given the evidence indicating that different levels of self-esteem (low vs. high) can have directional effects depending on whether the feedback people receive provides confirmation or disconfirmation toward their self-views (De La Ronde & Swann, 1998). Examining these relationships has practical significance in the sense of informing practitioners on the possible ways that employees may respond differently to feedback and support from others, and underscoring the need for interventions specifically geared toward employees based on their levels of self-esteem. For example, employees may react differently to coworker support based on their self-views, such that low self-esteem workers may experience stronger benefits from feeling understood rather than receiving what may be perceived as undeserved support (i.e., positive feedback) that disconfirms their views of self (North & Swann, 2009). From a different perspective, testing SVT in service employees’ responses to occupation-based metaperceptions and coworker support can also illuminate the need for managers and organizational leaders to develop and implement interventions to improve self-views in their employees.
Four outcome variables—work meaningfulness, occupational identification, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion—will be examined due to their relevance to the service context (Allen et al., 2014; Matthews et al., 2014; Shantz & Booth, 2014). These outcomes address questions such as ‘Who am I in this job?’ (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009) and ‘How do I feel in this job?’, whose answers can be greatly influenced by employees’ awareness of others’ negative judgments toward their jobs, the support they receive from coworkers in the organization, and how they view themselves.

Work meaningfulness refers to the extent to which an employee perceives their job as worthwhile and valuable (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Occupational identification represents the degree to which employees align themselves with the occupation and those in the same line of work (Ashforth et al., 2013). These two identity-related outcomes are particularly relevant for the current study, given that negative occupation-oriented perceptions can harm employees’ sense of identification and meaning in their work (Kreiner et al., 2006). Further, meaningfulness and occupational identification have been positively linked to other important employee outcomes, such as work engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and performance (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Cardador et al., 2011; Fürstenberg et al., 2021; Hirschi, 2012); therefore, it is important to understand the various factors that can influence employees’ perceptions of meaning and identification in their jobs.

Well-being consequences (both positive and negative) of service employees who maintain negative occupation-based metaperceptions or receive support from coworkers within the organization will also be assessed with the inclusion of work engagement and emotional exhaustion in the study model. From their respective literatures, these two variables have been
identified as representative constructs of both ends of the continuum of work-related well-being (Grandey, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2008; Wirtz et al., 2017). Work engagement is defined as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Emotional exhaustion is typically viewed as a consequence of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), and represents feelings of fatigue and depletion (Grandey, 2003). Further, emotional exhaustion can be influenced by a numerous factors, such as through draining one’s resources (Hochschild, 1983). Given the wide range of effects that well-being can produce on downstream outcomes (i.e., turnover intentions, organizational commitment, counterproductive work behaviors, and job performance) (Boddy, 2014; Brunetto et al., 2012; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000), continued investigation of novel phenomena that can affect employee well-being at work (i.e., emotional exhaustion and work engagement) is critical.

In sum, the current study aims to apply a self-verification perspective to explain the ways in which service workers’ self-esteem can directionally affect the relationships between (a) negative occupation-based metaperceptions and (b) coworker support on work consequences relevant to the service context (i.e., work meaningfulness, occupational identification, work engagement, emotional exhaustion). Given that these two forms of feedback have received little to no attention in research applying a self-verification perspective and can play a meaningful role in service contexts, in particular, a primary objective of my research is to advance the service and self-verification theory scholarship through the examination of these relationships.

Also, research testing constructs related to occupation-based metaperceptions (i.e., occupational stigma consciousness/awareness, Ashforth et al., 2007; Pinel, 1999) have largely
resided in the ‘dirty work’ literature, which specifically focuses on employees working in occupations explicitly characterized by physical (e.g., garbage collectors), social (e.g., welfare aides), and moral (e.g., paparazzi) taint (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014). Therefore, another objective of this study is to expand scholarship on occupation-related metaperceptions to service occupations likely perceived as being outside the boundaries of ‘dirty work’ (i.e., flight attendants)—yet still viewed as low-status by others—opening the door for future research endeavors on frontline employees’ perceptions at the occupational level.

My study additionally seeks to explore the potential interplay between occupation-based metaperceptions and coworker support, as this interaction has yet to be investigated and can provide valuable insights into the potential ways in which the damaging effects of negative occupation-based metaperceptions can be alleviated. The theoretical model for the study is shown in Figure 1, and the following section provides a comprehensive review of the literature.

Figure 1. Proposed model of occupation-based metaperceptions and coworker support through the self-verification perspective.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Self-Esteem and Self-Verification Theory

There has been a considerable amount of research examining the link between self-esteem and self-verification theory (SVT); however, the findings have generally been mixed. For instance, some empirical evidence suggests people with high self-esteem who receive negative feedback experience greater motivation to improve because of their inherently high levels of self-efficacy (Bono & Colbert, 2005). However, the participants in that study were MBA students working in non-service occupations, and their respective jobs were most likely held to a higher regard than that of service occupations, possibly contributing to their higher likelihood of responding positively to negative feedback. Service workers can be expected to experience more difficulty responding to negative feedback toward their jobs, particularly when negative occupation-based metaperceptions are high, because changing societal perceptions could appear to resemble an insurmountable goal (Shantz & Booth, 2014).

Shantz and Booth (2014) tested the moderating relationship between call center workers’ core self-evaluations and occupational stigma consciousness, finding that the way employees respond to occupational stigma consciousness is impacted significantly by their own self-views. The authors emphasize the role of identity conflict in the relationship between occupational stigma consciousness and personal identity to explain why some workers may respond more
negatively or favorably to occupational stigma than others. Ashforth and colleagues (2008) provide additional evidence that identity conflict can produce adverse outcomes, thus providing an explanation for why high self-esteem workers who are also aware of the negative perceptions toward their occupation are more likely to experience negative work outcomes. On the other hand, this explanation can also account for why low-self-esteem individuals who are conscious of negative occupation-based metaperceptions might respond more favorably, given that the metaperceptions they possess actively confirm their personal identity.

As an example to highlight the interplay among these variables, restaurant workers are often aware of the negative judgments placed on their jobs (see Shigihara, 2018; Wildes, 2005), including others’ judgments toward the distasteful tasks and servile relations characteristic of food service occupations. Additionally, these employees likely maintain at least some level of self-view in relation to their jobs. According to SVT, restaurant employees’ work outcomes may expectedly be impacted differently based on the extent to which their occupation-based metaperceptions and self-esteem coincide. Therefore, restaurant workers who are aware of the negative beliefs people generally maintain about restaurant work are, in theory, more likely to experience heightened negative work consequences if they also have high self-esteem, due to the incongruence between how they perceive themselves and how they think others view them in their jobs. On the other hand, restaurant workers with high self-esteem who are generally unaware of the negative judgments placed on their job are expected to be less likely to experience negative outcomes because their self-view and perceptions of how others view them is more closely aligned.
These expected relationships extend similarly to employees with low self-esteem. In line with the previous food service example, the tenets of SVT would indicate that low self-esteem restaurant employees will respond more favorably as occupation-based metaperceptions increase, due to the confirmation of self-views received from this form of feedback. However, low self-esteem restaurant workers who display low awareness of others’ negative views toward their jobs would expectedly respond less favorably due to the lack of self-view confirmation received.

Similar trends can also be observed in the threat literature. For example, under typical conditions not involving forms of threat, workers high in self-esteem can be expected to respond to feedback by engaging in primary control behaviors, such as exerting effort to demonstrate competence (e.g., self enhancement; Kitayama et al., 1997, Morris et al., 2019). These behaviors can include attempts to display skills or manage others’ impressions of them in pursuit of gaining respect (Rubenstein et al., 2020). However, high self-esteem individuals who feel under threat are more likely to engage in secondary control behaviors, such as becoming more withdrawn and passive in their job (Baumeister & Tice, 1985). Engaging in secondary control behaviors may be more common for employees working in low-status jobs because they may not feel as if they can change the views society has placed upon their occupations (Shantz & Booth, 2014). Moreover, when working in a role that is looked down upon by others, an employee high in self-esteem may perceive this as a threatening situation, leading to the inability to engage in primary control behaviors, such as working harder to rectify the situation. When applying this concept to the current study, service workers high in self-esteem who are aware of the negative judgments placed on their jobs can be expected to experience heightened negative work outcomes, resulting from the increased likelihood of engaging in secondary control behaviors (e.g., withdrawal).
Importantly, it is worth acknowledging other self-concept theories that would predict different processes to occur upon receiving feedback connected to one’s self-concept. For example, self-affirmation theory (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1988) in this study’s context would suggest that when faced with a negative feedback variable such as occupation-based metaperceptions, individuals would seek to maintain their positive self-views by engaging in processes or behaviors to affirm one’s adequacy (Steele, 1988). Thus, given that self-affirmation theory extensively deals with threats to self (Sherman & Cohen, 2002), this theoretical perspective is more suitable for research investigating strategies used by individuals to confront and cope with these threats (see Soral et al., 2022).

However, the objective of the present study is not to assess the strategies people use to cope with threats to their self-concept, but instead is to investigate the phenomenon that feedback (both positive and negative) can be perceived either (a) positively or (b) as threats to one’s self-concept differently depending on the person. Therefore, rather than approaching occupation-based metaperceptions as a threat to self for all people, this study integrates occupation-based metaperceptions as a form of feedback connected to service employees’ jobs that is perceived differently based on self-views (i.e., self-esteem). Given this approach, a self-verification perspective is warranted because this theoretical view places particular focus on the process in which people receive feedback, determine the extent it confirms or disconfirms their self-concept, and experience positive or negative consequences accordingly.

**Occupation-Based Metaperceptions**

Service occupations are wide-ranging and diverse, including, for instance, retail workers,
food service employees, call center workers, and security guards. Although the share of labor
hours of service occupations in the United States has grown by over 30% in recent decades
(Autor & Dorn, 2009), positions in this industry have remained as some of the least educated and
lowest paid forms of employment. Although service jobs are essential to the success of the
economy, the broader society generally maintains negative perceptions of service employees
(Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014; Pinel & Paulin, 2005). Many service positions, such as call center
work, are often perceived negatively by the public for competence-related reasons, such that
these jobs do not require unique skills (Lloyd & Payne, 2009). Moreover, the majority of
interactions in service occupations are believed by the general public to be simple, basic, and
scripted (Fernie & Metcalf, 1998). Findings also suggest that customers frequently disrespect and
treat service workers negatively, and do not feel compelled to reciprocate kindness toward these
employees (Grandey et al., 2007). Ultimately, these continuous negative interactions with
customers can actively reinforce service employees’ awareness of society’s antipathy toward
their job, leading to unfavorable work-related consequences (e.g., engagement in deviant
behaviors, Sliter et al., 2012; withdrawal, Wang et al., 2011).

Recent studies have investigated techniques that service employees utilize to manage
their awareness of others’ negative perceptions toward their jobs. Shigihara (2018), for example,
identifies that restaurant workers internalize the public’s distinction between jobs and careers,
such that jobs are considered temporary, while careers embody a lifelong profession. In this
study, Shigihara found that restaurant employees who are conscious of the negative perceptions
attached to their jobs cognitively reconstruct their perceptions of their role, such as through
viewing their jobs as temporary rather than long-term. Ultimately, it can be expected that this
shift in perception can produce negative consequences on service-oriented outcomes including occupational identification, work meaningfulness, and work engagement, and emotional exhaustion, given that employees are often managing these negative societal perceptions by employing strategies to detach and withdraw themselves from their jobs.

The present study assesses the moderating role of self-esteem on the relationship between negative occupation-based metaperceptions and service work-oriented outcomes. In particular, service workers who have high self-esteem and maintain awareness of the negative perceptions attached to their job at the societal level are expected to be more likely to experience negative effects to their occupational identification, work meaningfulness, and work engagement, and positive effects to their emotional exhaustion, resulting from the conflict between how they feel about themselves in their role and their perceptions of how society views them in their role. Alternatively, service employees who are low in self-esteem are expected to experience positive work outcomes when they are conscious of the negative perceptions attached to their jobs, because these perceptions confirm how they feel about themselves in their respective role.

In sum, there has been considerable empirical evidence supporting the self-verification perspective suggesting that workers with positive self-views (i.e., high self-esteem) maintain preferences for positive feedback, whereas workers with negative self-views (i.e, low self-esteem) prefer negative feedback (Amarnani et al., 2022; Shantz & Booth, 2014; Swann, 2012; Valentiner et al., 2011; Wiesenfeld et al., 2007). The current research seeks to extend this literature by applying a self-verification perspective to the service work context to examine service employees’ responses to a unique feedback variable—occupation-based metaperceptions—largely characteristic of low-status frontline occupations. In particular, I
propose that self-esteem can have a directional effect on the relationship that negative occupation-based metaperceptions will have on service-oriented work consequences. The following is hypothesized:

**Hypothesis 1**: Self-esteem will moderate the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and (a) occupational identification, (b) work meaningfulness, and (c) work engagement, such that the relationship will be negative at higher levels of self-esteem and positive at lower levels of self-esteem.

**Hypothesis 2**: Self-esteem will moderate the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and emotional exhaustion, such that the relationship will be positive at higher levels of self-esteem and negative at lower levels of self-esteem.

**Coworker Support**

The role of coworker support on employee downstream consequences has been studied extensively across service settings. Coworker support can be identified through the functions of instrumental (i.e., helping behaviors) and emotional support (i.e., sympathetic behaviors, listening to one’s problems; Beehr et al., 2000). Service workers have shown increases in customer orientation, job satisfaction, and affective commitment if they perceive their coworkers as supportive (Ng & Sorensen, 2008; Pinna et al., 2020; Susskind et al., 2003). Additionally, coworker support has been linked to decreased emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions (Ng & Sorensen, 2008; Tews et al., 2020; Zacher et al., 2014). A lack of coworker support can negatively affect health and well-being (Baethge et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2022) as well as performance (ten Brummelhuis et al., 2012) at work. Related to the current research, findings
indicate that coworker support can have positive effects on employees’ work meaningfulness (Colbert et al., 2016; Fletcher et al., 2018), organizational identification (Pepple & Davies, 2019), work engagement (Ahmed et al., 2019; Pinna et al., 2020; Sonnentag et al., 2021), and can produce negative effects on employees’ emotional exhaustion (Ducharme et al., 2008; Halbesleben, 2006; Zacher et al., 2014).

SVT serves as an alternative basis to argue against the notion that coworker support universally provides positive outcomes across all employees. The majority of research integrating self-verification perspectives to support resources within organizational settings is restricted to perceptions of support received from the organization and supervisor, rather than peers (see Booth et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2023). Chen and colleagues (2016), for example, find that employees who receive organizational support that disconfirms their views of self (i.e., locus of control) can lead them to ignore the support, resulting in an attenuated impact of organizational support on subsequent innovative work behaviors. Although this finding provides initial evidence for the role of SVT in support-related ‘feedback’, given that many service occupations require frequent interaction and cooperation among coworkers, there is a strong need for research assessing the potential role of SVT in employees’ responses to coworker support resources, in particular.

Recent work has integrated SVT within contexts of instrumental coworker support (i.e., helping behaviors), finding that the positive relationship between help received by others and individuals’ levels of a work engagement-related construct—vigor—is moderated by self-esteem, such that this relationship becomes stronger for those higher in self-esteem as compared to those lower in self-esteem (David et al., 2023). These results provide evidence for the
directional effect of self-views (i.e., self-esteem) on the relationship between coworker support and critical downstream employee consequences. However, the authors specifically tested these relationships in public coworking spaces, thus capturing coworker support in a unique setting that is likely not representative of typical service contexts involving coworker interaction and cooperation within an independent organization. Therefore, my study aims to address this gap by applying a self-verification perspective to the relationship between service employees’ experiences of coworker support and service-oriented consequences.

Kim et al. (2019) also identify the key moderating role of a support resource (i.e., friendship from coworkers) on the relationship between person-organizational fit and employees’ perceptions of self-verification, providing additional evidence that coworker support resources can be embedded in self-verification frameworks. Further, the authors acknowledge the need for more research in this area, specifically calling for additional focus toward the moderation of self-esteem and self-concept perceptions in similar relationships.

In light of these findings and calls for further investigation, the current study seeks to examine the moderating effects that self-esteem can produce on the relationship between coworker support and service-oriented outcomes. As an example, employees with high self-esteem can be expected to experience positive consequences to their work meaningfulness, occupational identification, and work engagement, and negative outcomes tied to emotional exhaustion, when the feedback (i.e., increased perceived coworker support) they are receiving coincides with their self-view. On the other hand, aligning with SVT, workers who possess low levels of self-esteem are expected to be more prone to experiencing negative work outcomes as perceived coworker support increases due to the disconfirmation between their self-views and
the feedback being received. Therefore, the following hypotheses are presented:

**Hypothesis 3:** Self-esteem will moderate the relationship between coworker support and (a) occupational identification, (b) work meaningfulness, and (c) work engagement, such that the relationship will be positive at higher levels of self-esteem and negative at lower levels of self-esteem.

**Hypothesis 4:** Self-esteem will moderate the relationship between coworker support and emotional exhaustion, such that the relationship will be negative at higher levels of self-esteem and positive at lower levels of self-esteem.

The Main Effect of Self-Esteem

Prior empirical work has examined the direct effects of self-esteem on various personal and work-related consequences. For instance, there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and job satisfaction (Gardner & Pierce, 1998; Judge & Bono, 2001; Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Reilly et al., 2014), happiness (Baumeister et al., 2003), and performance (Ferris et al., 2010; Gardner & Pierce, 1998). Additionally, self-esteem is positively related to constructs relevant to the present research context, including perceptions of work meaningfulness (Kim & Beehr, 2020), psychological well-being (Baumeister et al., 2003; Gardner, 2020; Kim & Beehr, 2018), and organization identification (Wu et al., 2016). Given the extensive empirical evidence supporting the link between self-esteem and various relevant work outcomes, the direct effect between self-esteem and service-oriented outcomes is tested for replication purposes. In particular, a positive relationship is predicted between self-esteem and work meaningfulness, occupational identification, and work engagement, and a negative main effect is predicted
between self-esteem and emotional exhaustion. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

**Hypothesis 5**: There is a positive relationship between self-esteem and (a) work meaningfulness, (b) occupational identification, and (c) work engagement, and a negative relationship between self-esteem and (d) emotional exhaustion.

**Occupation-Based Metaperceptions and Coworker Support Interaction**

Along with testing the effects of coworker support and negative occupation-based metaperceptions on work outcomes individually, this study also seeks to explore the interplay between these variables. With few studies exploring the role of coworker support as a coping resource for employees in disesteemed occupations (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Deery et al., 2019), more research is needed investigating if and how perceptions of coworker support can counteract the effects of employees’ occupation-based metaperceptions on attitudinal, behavioral, and well-being consequences. Sloan (2012) found that coworker support can protect employees from some of the adverse effects of mistreatment from customers, supervisors, and other coworkers, demonstrating the potential alleviating role of coworker support in instances of receiving negative feedback (i.e., mistreatment).

Further, the adjacent literature of stigmatized identities at work shows that perceptions of support can lead employees to feel more comfortable with disclosure of their identities (Jones & King, 2014). Together, these prior findings suggest the possibility of coworker support as a resource that can lessen the consequences of individuals’ negative experiences at work. This study seeks to extend the application of coworker support resources to a novel form of negative feedback at work (i.e., occupation-based metaperceptions), such that negative work
consequences presented by occupation-based metaperceptions—that is, decreases in occupational identification, work meaningfulness and work engagement, and increases in emotional exhaustion—are mitigated. Thus, my study explores the potential interaction effect between coworker support and negative occupation-based metaperceptions. The following exploratory research questions are presented:

Research Question 1: Does coworker support buffer the relationship between negative occupation-based metaperceptions and (a) occupational identification, (b) work meaningfulness, and (c) work engagement?

Research Question 2: Does coworker support buffer the relationship between negative occupation-based metaperceptions and emotional exhaustion.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

388 flight attendants were recruited from a commercial airlines company in the United States. Given prior research indicates that the flight attendant occupation has negative judgments attached to it (Elkins & Philips, 1999; Madera et al., 2017; Tilcsik et al., 2015), this sample of service workers was determined as appropriate for testing the proposed relationships in the current study. Additionally, a recent study used a sample of flight attendants and other in-flight crew members for the development of a stigma-based measure (Kim & Hyun, 2021), further evidencing the acknowledgement of the negative perceptions placed on the flight attendant occupation. All flight attendants were given the option to participate in this study as part of an ongoing training series being administered by the airlines organization.

In the present sample, the average age of the flight attendants was 54.1 years (SD = 10.5 years), and the average length of organizational tenure was 11.4 years (SD = 10.2 years). 306 (79%) of the respondents identified as female. Prior to completing any measures pertaining to the study, participants were asked to provide consent for their responses to be used for research purposes external to the airlines organization. Refer to Appendix A to see the informed consent form that the participants were required to read and provide consent to before beginning the study. Flight attendants were presented debriefing information upon completing the study (see
Appendix B). As previously mentioned, the survey was embedded within a training module administered by the airlines organization, and some of the language included in the debriefing message reflect this.

Measures

All study-relevant measures are discussed in detail below. To see the full list of measures for the focal constructs in the theoretical model (Figure 1), see Appendix C.

**Occupation-Based Metaperceptions**

Three were adapted items from Pinel’s (1999) measure of stigma consciousness to assess flight attendants’ metaperceptions toward their job and the people who typically work in this occupation. As mentioned prior, in this study, occupation-based metaperceptions are conceptualized and tested as a *negative* variable; thus, increases in occupation-based metaperceptions scores represent stronger perceptions of how respondents view others’ negative judgments toward their job. Prior to completing the measure, participants were instructed to reflect on their experiences with people who are not employed as flight attendants, and how these individuals think about and interact with flight attendants, aligning with related research using this measure (Pinel & Paulin, 2005; Shantz & Booth, 2014). These three items include, “Most people who are not flight attendants have a lot more negative thoughts about flight attendants than they actually express.”, “Stereotypes about flight attendants have affected me personally.”, and “Most people who are not flight attendants have a problem viewing flight attendants as equals.” The response scale ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).
Coworker Support

Tsui et al.’s (1997) measure of supervisor support was adapted to examine flight attendants’ perceptions of their surrounding coworkers’ support toward them at work. Due to the organization’s restrictions regarding survey length, three items from the authors’ original seven-item measure were used, and a sample item includes, “My coworkers are willing to listen to my problems.” Participants responded to these items on a seven-point agreement scale, ranging from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*.

Self-esteem

Employees’ self-esteem was measured using Robins and colleagues’ (2001) single-item measure of self-esteem (SISE). This measure has been established as a valid and practical alternative to the well-established Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE). The item used to capture self-esteem included, “I have high self-esteem.”, and respondents were asked to answer this item on a scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

Occupational Identification

To measure occupational identification, four items from Mael and Ashforth’s (1992) measure of organizational identification were adapted to fit the current context. Further, the authors’ original scale assessed perceived closeness with an organization and the extent to which individuals perceive an organization’s successes and failures as their own, and these items were adjusted to test employees’ identification with their occupation as a whole. An example item is “If a story in the media criticizes flight attendants, I would feel embarrassed.” Respondents were
asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree).

**Work Meaningfulness**

Work meaningfulness was measured using four items (e.g., “The work that I do makes the world a better place.”, “The work that I do is important.”) from Bunderson and Thompson (2009). Flight attendants were asked to indicate their perceived meaning of work on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree).

**Work Engagement**

Work engagement was measured using Schaufeli et al.’s (2017) shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), consisting of three items. Each item represented the three UWES subscales (vigor, dedication, absorption), respectively. Items for each subscale are as follows, “At my work, I feel bursting with energy.” (Vigor), “I am enthusiastic about my job.” (Dedication), and “I am immersed in my work.” (Absorption). Flight attendants were asked to respond on a seven-point Likert scale of agreement ranging from Never to Always.

**Emotional Exhaustion**

This study’s measure of emotional exhaustion was adapted from the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), and consisted of four items ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). Sample items included in this measure are as follows, “I feel emotionally drained from my work.”, “I feel fatigued when I get up in the
morning and have to face another day on the job.” Maslach and Jackson’s subscale has been used extensively across the emotional exhaustion literature (Dreison et al., 2018; Grandey, 2003; Lussier et al., 2021; Sessions et al., 2020).

Control Variables

Commonly stigmatized demographic attributes, including gender, age, and organizational tenure were collected as control variables because these variables may increase one’s likelihood of being treated poorly by the public or within workplace settings (Van Laar et al., 2019). Due to organizational barriers, racial and ethnic identity could not be collected from flight attendants.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

Prior to testing the study’s hypotheses, I examined the data to ensure low-quality responses were identified and removed. In total, three participant responses were removed due to missingness (> 50% of the items were unanswered), resulting in a total sample of 385 participants.

See Table 1 for the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha) for the study’s focal variables. Importantly, outside of occupational identification ($\alpha = .64$), all measures showed acceptable reliability coefficients, despite being shortened due to survey-length constraints in the organization. Response distributions across each measure were also examined to identify potential concerns pertaining to normality; in particular, skewness, kurtosis, and histograms were computed, and the response distribution trends were normal across all measures except for work meaningfulness ($\gamma = -1.93, \kappa = 4.49$) and coworker support ($\gamma = -1.66, \kappa = 4.63$). Respondents, on average, scored highly in work meaningfulness ($M = 5.9, SD = 1.22$) and coworker support ($M = 5.72, SD = 1.04$). Therefore, outliers were detected for participants who responded more than two standard deviations below the mean. In total, 3.6 percent and 3.4 percent of participant responses displayed outlier values for work meaningfulness and coworker support, respectively. Given the culture of this airlines company
Table 1

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. OBMP</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. CS</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. OI</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. WE</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. EE</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.57</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. WM</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. SE</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Gender</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Age</td>
<td>54.12</td>
<td>10.49</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Tenure</td>
<td>11.38</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 385.

*Note.* Reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha) provided in diagonal where appropriate.

*Note.* Correlations bolded for p < .05.

regarding values such as purpose and teamwork, these non-normality trends can be expected. In addition, it is important to note that the response distribution for the measure of occupation-based metaperceptions was approximately symmetric ($\gamma = -0.08$, $\kappa = -0.74$). This response distribution trend provides further justification for the use of the flight attendant occupation to examine occupation-based metaperceptions, given the relatively symmetric range of responses displayed by the sample.

Correlations were also examined to confirm the model variables’ relatedness to each other in the expected directions. Overall, outside of the positive correlation between occupation-based metaperceptions and occupational identification ($r = .32$), the correlations among the model’s predictor and outcome variables generally trended in the expected directions. Also, the outcome variables correlated with each other in expected directions—for example, work engagement and emotional exhaustion displayed a moderate-to-strong negative correlation ($r = -.57$), and work engagement and work meaningfulness displayed a moderate positive correlation ($r = .50$). In total, the measure correlations were determined as acceptable.

Lastly, common method variance (CMV) was also assessed, due to the study’s design characteristics (i.e., self-report, cross-sectional survey) that can influence CMV. Following recommendations by Podsakoff et al. (2012), a common method factor approach was used to test for CMV by computing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) including a single method factor. Using this procedure, the CFA identified that 24.7% of the variance was due to the common method; given that 50% variance is considered a critical value suggesting the presence of CMV (Lowry et al., 2012), the proportion of variance displayed in my model is not determined to be a critical concern.
Moderated hierarchical regression analysis was conducted following Pedhazur and Schmelkin (2013) to test the study’s primary hypotheses and research questions. All relationships in this study were analyzed using the R programming language (version 4.2.3; R Core Team, 2018), and specifically, the \textit{lme4} (Bates et al., 2015) and \textit{stats} packages. In the first block of the hierarchical regression analysis, I examined the main effect relationships of occupation-based metaperceptions and coworker support on the outcome variables of interest. In the second block of the analysis, the moderation effects of self-esteem on the focal relationships were tested.

Linear regression was used to test the hypothesized main effect of self-esteem on work meaningfulness, occupational identification, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion. Lastly, moderated multiple regression was used to test the research questions investigating the interaction effects of occupation-based metaperceptions and coworker support on the outcomes of interest. Throughout all conducted analyses, demographic variables including gender, age, and tenure were controlled for given their potential influences on employees’ perceptions of (a) interpersonal experiences at work—coworker support—and (b) how others view them within their job—occupation-based metaperceptions.

Hypothesis Testing

\textbf{Occupation-Based Metaperceptions: Main Effects}

The first and second hypotheses were tested using the moderated hierarchical regression.
Prior to testing the primary hypotheses, the main effects of occupation-based metaperceptions on occupational identification, work meaningfulness, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion were tested to determine the strength of these relationships prior to assessing the moderation effect of self-esteem. See Table 2 for detailed regression results for the main effect relationships.

To my surprise, there was a significant positive relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and occupational identification ($b = .35, p < .001$). Given that the measure of occupation-based metaperceptions was scaled such that higher scores indicate increased negative metaperceptions, this result signals that individuals more closely identify with their job when they perceive that others view their job negatively. The relation between occupation-based metaperceptions and work meaningfulness was nonsignificant ($b = .003, p = .946$). However, in line with what was expected, there was a significant negative relation between occupation-based metaperceptions and work engagement ($b = -.12, p = .014$), and a significant positive relation between occupation-based metaperceptions and emotional exhaustion ($b = .20, p < .001$). In sum, the direct relationship results suggest that occupation-based metaperceptions are associated with increased identification with the job, have little influence on the extent to which employees perceive their work as meaningful, and can produce negative consequences on employees’ well-being outcomes—that is, work engagement and emotional exhaustion.

**Occupation-Based Metaperceptions and Self-Esteem**

In the second block of the hierarchical regression analysis, self-esteem was included as a moderator on the relationships between occupation-based metaperceptions and occupational
Table 2

Block 1: Regressions for the OBMP and CS Direct Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Occ. Identification</th>
<th>Work Meaningfulness</th>
<th>Work Engagement</th>
<th>Emotional Exhaustion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>$b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.524</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.543</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.52</td>
<td>.606</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBMP</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>7.07</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model $R^2$ = .12, .16, .17, .18
Model $F$ (df) = 11.9 (5), 14.2 (5), 15.4 (5), 17.3 (5)
Model $p$-value = < .001, < .001, < .001, < .001

$n = 385.$

*Note. OBMP = Occupation-based metaperceptions, CS = Coworker support.*
identification, work meaningfulness, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion. Refer to Table 3 for the moderated hierarchical regression results.

Hypothesis 1a predicted that the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and occupational identification would become negative as self-esteem increases, and positive as self-esteem decreases. Results showed that the moderation effect of self-esteem on the occupation-based metaperceptions – occupational identification relationship was nonsignificant ($b = -.28$, $F(8) = 8.9$, $p = .359$), with the model explaining 16% of the variance in occupational identification ($R^2 = .16$, $F = 8.9$, $p < .001$). Thus, hypothesis 1a did not receive support.

In line with hypothesis 1b, the moderation effect of self-esteem on the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work meaningfulness was marginally significant in the predicted direction ($b = -.46$, $p = .07$). This model explained 20% of the variance in work meaningfulness ($R^2 = .20$, $F(8) = 11.7$, $p < .001$). A simple slopes test was also conducted, and provides partial evidence that self-esteem bolstered the negative occupation-based metaperceptions – work meaningfulness relationship only when self-esteem was high (+1SD; $b = -.10$, $p = .06$). As shown in Figure 2, the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work meaningfulness became more negative as self-esteem increased and became more positive as self-esteem decreased. However, given the marginal significance of this relationship, there is no conclusive evidence to support hypothesis 1b.

Unexpectedly, the moderation of self-esteem on the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work engagement displayed a significant trend opposite to the hypothesized direction ($b = .54$, $p = .04$), and this model explained 35% of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = .35$, $F(8) = 25.2$, $p < .001$). A simple slopes test also confirmed that self-
Table 3

Block 2: Moderated Regressions for the Effect of SE on the OBMP and CS Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Occ. Identification</th>
<th>Work Meaningfulness</th>
<th>Work Engagement</th>
<th>Emotional Exhaustion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.374</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.732</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.51</td>
<td>.613</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBMP</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.345</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBMP X SE</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>-.92</td>
<td>.359</td>
<td>-.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS X SE</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>.791</td>
<td>-.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model R-squared    | .16     | .20    | .35  | .29    |
Model F (df)       | 8.9 (8) | 11.7 (8) | 25.2 (8) | 19.1 (8) |
Model p-value      | < .001  | < .001 | < .001 | < .001 |

n = 385.

Note. OBMP = Occupation-based metaperceptions, CS = Coworker support, SE = Self-esteem.
Moderation Effect of Self-esteem on OBMP and WM

Self-esteem Low: Occupation-based Metaperceptions effect = 0.059
Self-esteem High: Occupation-based Metaperceptions effect = -0.083

Figure 2. Moderation of self-esteem on the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions (OBMP) and work meaningfulness (WM).

Self-esteem moderated the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work engagement only when self-esteem was low (-1SD; b = -.12, p = .01). As displayed in Figure 3, the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work engagement became more negative as self-esteem decreased and stayed relatively constant as self-esteem increased. In other words, this result trends opposite to the relationship expected through the self-verification framework, as high self-esteem in the present case is shown to buffer the negative influence of
occupation-based metaperceptions and work meaningfulness, while low self-esteem exacerbates this negative relationship. Therefore, hypotheses 1c is not supported.

![Moderation Effect of Self-esteem on OBMP and WE](image)

**Figure 3.** Moderation of self-esteem on the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions (OBMP) and work engagement (WE).

Finally, the results displayed a nonsignificant moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and emotional exhaustion ($b = -.05, p = .846$), with the model explaining 29% of the variance in emotional exhaustion ($R^2 = .29, F(8) = 19.1, p < .001$); thus, hypotheses 2 is not supported.
Coworker Support: Main Effects

Prior to testing hypotheses 3 and 4—which predicted the moderation effect of self-esteem on the relationship between coworker support and occupational identification, work meaningfulness, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion—the direct effects of coworker support on the outcomes of interests were conducted to determine the strength of the main effects. See Table 2 for the full regression results for coworker support direct relationships. As expected, perceiving coworkers as supportive had significant positive effects on employees’ occupational identification \(b = .18, p < .001\), work meaningfulness \(b = .37, p < .001\), and work engagement \(b = .27, p < .001\). In addition, coworker support produced significant negative effects on emotional exhaustion \(b = -.22, p < .001\), further highlighting the benefits of having peer support resources at work.

Coworker Support and Self-Esteem

In the second block of the moderated hierarchical regression analysis, self-esteem was included as a moderating variable on the relationships between coworker support and occupational identification, work meaningfulness, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion. Refer to Table 3 for the full regression results for hypotheses 3 and 4.

The moderation effect of self-esteem on the relationship between coworker support and occupational identification was nonsignificant \(b = -.08, p = .791\), with the model explaining 16% of the variance in occupational identification \(R^2 = .16, F = 8.9, p < .001\). Similarly, the results indicate that self-esteem does not have a significant moderating effect on the relationship
between coworker support and work meaningfulness \((b = -0.32, p = 0.262)\), with 20% of the model explaining the variance in work meaningfulness \((R^2 = 0.20, F(8) = 11.7, p < 0.001)\). Lastly, there was no evidence for the moderation of self-esteem on the relationship between coworker support and work engagement \((b = -0.29, p = 0.266)\), with 35% of the model explaining the variance in work engagement \((R^2 = 0.35, F(8) = 25.2, p < 0.001)\). Therefore, hypothesis 3a, 3b, and 3c are not supported. In other words, receiving feedback (e.g., support) that aligns with one’s self-views (e.g., self-esteem) was not shown to lead to stronger increases in occupational identification, work meaningfulness, and work engagement.

However, there was a significant moderation effect of self-esteem on the relationship between coworker support and emotional exhaustion \((b = -0.72, p = 0.007)\), with 29% of the model explaining the variance in emotional exhaustion \((R^2 = 0.29, F(8) = 19.1, p < 0.001)\). A simple slopes analysis was conducted to gather further information on how self-esteem is interacting within the coworker support – emotional exhaustion relationship, and this test confirmed that self-esteem significantly moderated the relationship between coworker support and emotional exhaustion only as self-esteem increased \((+1 \text{ SD}; b = -0.31, p < 0.001)\). Further, as shown in Figure 4, as self-esteem increases, the negative relationship between coworker support and emotional exhaustion becomes significantly stronger. However, against the self-verification perspective that would additionally predict a positive relationship between coworker support and emotional exhaustion for those lower in self-esteem, this moderation relationship remained slightly negative; thus, hypothesis 6 is only partially supported. To summarize, these findings are partially in line with the self-verification perspective, such that service employees who receive positive feedback (i.e., increased perceptions of coworker support) that is congruent with their
self-views (i.e., high self-esteem) display improved well-being outcomes— one of which, in this case, is emotional exhaustion.

![Moderation Effect of Self-esteem on CS and EE](image)

**Figure 4.** Moderation of self-esteem on coworker support (CS) and emotional exhaustion (EE).

**Self-Esteem: Main Effects**

See Table 4 for the full regression results for hypothesis 5, predicting the positive main effect of self-esteem on occupational identification, work meaningfulness, and work engagement, and its negative effect on emotional exhaustion. There is a significant
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Work Identification</th>
<th>Work Meaningfulness</th>
<th>Work Engagement</th>
<th>Emotional Exhaustion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>b : 2.25 (t : 4.66)</td>
<td>p : &lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>b : .03 (t : 1.55)</td>
<td>p : .121</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>b : -.02 (t : 1.21)</td>
<td>p : .23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>b : .37 (t : 1.42)</td>
<td>p : 3.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBMP</td>
<td>b : .04 (t : 1.55)</td>
<td>p : .002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>b : .04 (t : 1.55)</td>
<td>p : .002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b : .04 (t : 1.55)</td>
<td>p : .002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model R-squared</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model F (df)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model p-value</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. OBMP = Occupation-based metaperceptions, CS = Coworker support, SE = Self-esteem.

n = 385.
positive main effect between self-esteem and occupational identification ($b = .16, p = .002$), work meaningfulness ($b = .39, p < .001$), and work engagement ($b = .44, p < .001$), and the main effect between self-esteem and emotional exhaustion was significant and negative ($b = -.32, p < .001$). Thus, hypothesis 5 received full support.

**Occupation-Based Metaperceptions and Coworker Support: Interaction Exploration**

This study’s two research questions were tested using moderated multiple regression. See Table 5 for the full regression results for research questions 1 and 2. The interaction effect between coworker support and occupation-based metaperceptions on occupational identification was nonsignificant ($b = -.08, p = .778$), with 16% of the model explaining the variance in occupational identification ($R^2 = .16, F(7) = 10.1, p < .001$). Similarly, the occupation-based metaperceptions-coworker support interaction was nonsignificant on the outcome of work meaningfulness ($b = .32, p = .222$), with 20% of the model explaining the variance in work meaningfulness ($R^2 = .20, F(7) = 13.2, p < .001$). Lastly, the interaction between occupation-based metaperceptions and coworker support on work engagement was nonsignificant ($b = .32, p = .230$), with 20% of the variance in work engagement being explained by the model ($R^2 = .20, F(7) = 13.7, p < .001$). Thus, no significant relationships were identified in research question 1.

However, regarding the second research question, there was a significant negative interaction between coworker support and occupation-based metaperceptions on emotional exhaustion ($b = -.54, p = .04$), with 21% of the variance in emotional exhaustion being explained by the model ($R^2 = .21, F(7) = 14.1, p < .001$). A simple slopes test provides additional
### Table 5

Regressions for the CS and OBMP Interaction Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Occ. Identification</th>
<th>Work Meaningfulness</th>
<th>Work Engagement</th>
<th>Emotional Exhaustion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.494</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.48</td>
<td>.636</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBMP</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>-.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS X OBMP</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Model R-squared    | .16     | .20     | .20  | .21    |
| Model F (df)       | 10.1 (7)| 13.2 (7)| 13.7 (7)| 14.1 (7) |
| Model p-value      | < .001  | < .001  | < .001| < .001 |

n = 385.

*Note. OBMP = Occupation-based metaperceptions, CS = Coworker support, SE = Self-esteem.*
confirmation that the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and emotional exhaustion is stronger when coworker support is low (-1SD; $b = .25, p < .001$) versus high (+1SD; $b = .09, p = .11$). As shown in Figure 5, the positive relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and emotional exhaustion was attenuated as coworker support increased, suggesting a buffering effect of coworker support resources on the negative relation of occupation-based metaperceptions on emotional exhaustion.

Figure 5. Interaction effect of coworker support (CS) and occupation-based metaperceptions (OBMP) on emotional exhaustion (EE).
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Previous work has suggested that a self-verification perspective can be applied to explain why people may have preferences for positive versus negative feedback at work (Amarnani et al., 2022; Shantz & Booth, 2014; Swann, 2012; Valentiner et al., 2011; Wiesenfeld et al., 2007), ultimately identifying that people prefer feedback that confirms their own self-views. I aimed to extend work in this area to different forms of ‘feedback’ that have received limited attention in the related literature—namely, employees’ awareness (i.e., metaperceptions) of others’ negative views toward their job and perceptions of coworker support. In addition, given that constructs surrounding occupation-related stigmatization have largely been applied and assessed in jobs under the umbrella of ‘dirty work’, another purpose of this study was to extend an occupational stigma-related construct—negative occupation-based metaperceptions—to a service work setting (i.e., flight attendants) that does not reside within the category of ‘dirty work’, but is still viewed as low-status and disesteemed by the broader society.

Through integrating these smaller purposes, the overarching goal of this study was to incorporate a self-verification framework to explain why some employees respond more or less negatively or favorably to different forms of ‘feedback’—namely, occupation-based metaperceptions and coworker support—that are characteristic of service work contexts. Specifically, I argued that self-esteem can have directional effects on individuals’ responses to these two feedback constructs, such that perceiving positive (coworker support) or negative
(occupation-based metaperceptions) feedback that confirms one’s self-views (i.e., self-esteem) will have a positive effect on employees’ occupational identification, perceptions of work meaningfulness, and work engagement, while having a negative effect on emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, receiving positive or negative feedback that disconfirms one’s self-views were predicted to have a negative effect on employees’ occupational identification, perceptions of work meaningfulness, and work engagement, as well as a positive effect on emotional exhaustion.

The focal hypotheses pertaining to the interaction of self-esteem and occupation-based metaperceptions displayed mixed results. In particular, the hypothesized moderation effect of self-esteem on the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work meaningfulness was marginally supported. Although conclusions cannot be fully derived based on this marginal level of significance, this result provides initial evidence that the self-verification perspective may have some level of applicability to explain why employees high in self-esteem may actually face stronger negative perceptions of work meaningfulness as their occupation-based metaperceptions increase. Put differently, through the lens of self-verification theory, this result indicates that receiving feedback (i.e., negative occupation-based metaperceptions) that disconfirms one’s self-views (self-esteem) may lead to stronger consequences toward perceptions of work meaningfulness; however, further investigation is needed due to the lack of significance obtained in this study. Importantly, more work is needed here because this relationship poses an argument against other, perhaps more intuitive, theories explaining individual processes following threats. In particular, self-affirmation theory (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1988) and self-enhancement theory, for
example, would both suggest that individuals high in self-esteem would respond to threats or negative feedback by asserting their positive self-image, in turn providing a buffer to the effects these threats or negative feedback can have on outcomes such as perceived work meaning.

Despite this initial evidence supporting the self-verification perspective, the hypothesized moderation effects were not supported for the outcomes of occupational identification, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion. In fact, self-esteem showed a significant positive moderation on the negative relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work engagement, which was opposite from the hypothesized effect. In other words, self-esteem was shown to lessen the damaging effects of one’s awareness of others’ negative views to their job and their levels of work engagement—resembling a trend that would be predicted when integrating the perspective of self-affirmation theory (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1988).

The opposite moderation trends of self-esteem on the relationships between occupation-based metaperceptions and work meaningfulness (negative moderation) and work engagement (positive moderation) were surprising, given the moderate positive correlation between these two outcome variables \( r = .51 \). In the present context, self-affirmation theory would predict that when faced with threats toward one’s self-image (i.e., occupation-based metaperceptions), people will take steps to affirm their views of self (i.e., self-esteem), thus leading to lessened negative effects of the threats. Although this finding provides support for the application of self-affirmation theory, further investigation is needed to clarify cases in which self-affirmation theory or self-verification theory are more likely to explain the moderation effects of self-esteem on occupation-based metaperceptions and work outcomes (e.g., work meaningfulness).
For instance, pertaining to the results trends in this study, perhaps self-esteem displayed different moderating effects on the relationships of occupation-based metaperceptions on work meaningfulness (negative moderation) and work engagement (positive moderation) because of the conceptual distinctions between these two outcome variables. Whereas work meaningfulness has a stronger reliance on the societal value of one’s work (i.e., perceptions of one’s positive impacts on society) (Guo & Hou, 2022; Rosso et al., 2010), work engagement is more centered on the extent to which individuals can derive personal value from their work tasks (Chalofsky, 2010; Kuijpers et al., 2020; Warr & Inceoglu, 2012). In line with this rationale, occupation-based metaperceptions resemble employees’ perceptions of how the larger society views them within their jobs. When applying the self-affirmation perspective, it would make sense that as individuals' occupation-based metaperceptions increase, those higher in self-esteem may attempt to cope (i.e., affirm their self-concept) with their perceptions of the decreased societal value of their work, driven by threats presented by occupation-based metaperceptions, by placing more personal value on their work—such as through increased work engagement.

On the other hand, given that work meaningfulness relies on one’s perceptions of the societal value of their work, perhaps individuals high in self-esteem may react more strongly to occupation-based metaperceptions due to their perceived inability to change the societal views placed on their job—potentially leading to stronger negative perceptions of the societal value of their work (i.e., work meaningfulness). When applying the self-verification perspective, it would make sense that as occupation-based metaperceptions increase, individuals higher in self-esteem may be more likely to identify these negative societal-level perceptions as a higher-order threat that they cannot change; thus, the potentially unwavering perceptions of disconfirmation between
their views of self (i.e., self-esteem) and how the broader society values their job (i.e., occupation-based metaperceptions) may lead to stronger negative effects on the amount of societal value (i.e., meaning) they place on their work. However, to reiterate, this reasoning cannot be fully drawn due to the marginal significance of the moderation of self-esteem on the relation between occupation-based metaperceptions and work meaningfulness.

The study’s other focal hypotheses surrounding the moderating effect of self-esteem on a positive form of feedback (i.e., coworker support) also produced mixed results. Although there was a nonsignificant moderation effect of self-esteem on the relationships between coworker support and occupational identification, work meaningfulness, and work engagement, there was a significant negative moderation of self-esteem on the relationship between coworker support and emotional exhaustion. The negative moderation effect in this relationship signals that as self-esteem increases, the negative relationship between coworker support and emotional exhaustion becomes significantly stronger. Ultimately, this trend displays that employees who receive positive feedback—that is, support from coworkers—experience significantly lower levels of emotional exhaustion if their self-views (i.e., self-esteem) align with the positive feedback they receive. However, individuals low in self-esteem were still shown to experience a slight negative relationship between coworker support and emotional exhaustion. These results thus lend partial support to the self-verification perspective.

Finally, through the exploration of the role of peers in the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and the study outcomes, findings illustrated that coworker support can significantly buffer the positive relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and emotional exhaustion. In other words, coworker support can serve as a
resource for employees who perceive others as viewing their occupation negatively, in turn leading to improved well-being consequences (i.e., lower levels of emotional exhaustion). The influence of coworkers has not received much attention in the adjacent literature of occupation-related stigma perceptions, with findings in the dirty work suggesting that coworkers and managers can compensate for low social validation through support (Ashforth et al., 2017), but can also stigmatize their peers and create stronger hierarchies within occupations (Toubiana & Ruebottom, 2022). With recent work calling for further examination of the role of coworkers in stigmatized occupational settings, my results illuminate the beneficial effect of peer support resources when working in jobs perceived as low in status and esteem.

Together, these results provide initial evidence for the application of self-verification theory in explaining why some employees may respond differently to negative (occupation-based metaperceptions) and positive (coworker support) feedback based on their self-views. However, one result—specifically the positive moderation of self-esteem on the occupation-based metaperception – work engagement relationship—displays an instance where the opposite relationship can occur, thus highlighting the need for further work investigating the conditions or individual factors that can explain the nuanced moderating effects of self-views that were observed in this study.

Implications for Research and Practice

From a theoretical perspective, my study has several implications for research. First, across self-verification research, extant work has largely examined (dis)confirming feedback from proximal sources, including interviewers (Ayduk et al., 2013), psychologists (Szumowska
et al., 2022), customers (Amarnani et al., 2022), supervisors (Booth et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2022), and coworkers (Kim et al., 2019). With only one study to date assessing individuals’ views of broader societal perceptions through a self-verification lens, (i.e., occupational stigma consciousness, Shantz & Booth, 2014), my study further extends feedback sources within SVT to societal-level metaperceptions—in particular, occupation-based metaperceptions. Despite only receiving marginal support for the self-verification effect on the moderation of self-esteem on the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work meaningfulness, this research nevertheless expands the possible feedback sources to be investigated through the integration of self-verification perspectives.

Second, much of the extant occupational stigma research has examined stigma perceptions almost exclusively in employees working in jobs that might be viewed as ‘dirty work’ due to physical, moral or social taint (e.g., call center workers, Shantz & Booth, 2014; sex workers, Benoit et al., 2020; Uber drivers, Phung et al., 2021). However, through capturing occupation-based metaperceptions of employees in a non-dirty work occupation (i.e., flight attendant), this study provides evidence that employees across a broader range of service jobs might perceive negative societal views toward their jobs, in turn leading to downstream attitudinal (i.e., work meaningfulness) and well-being (i.e., work engagement, emotional exhaustion) consequences.

Third, in addition to extending occupation-based metaperceptions to non-dirty work occupations, my research advances the occupational stigma literature by identifying coworker support—a support variable that has been scarcely examined as an intervention to employees’
occupational stigma perceptions in the dirty work literature (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Deery et al., 2019)—as a buffering variable on the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions on employee well-being (i.e., emotional exhaustion). Identifying this buffering effect of coworker support opens the door for future work on developing and testing support-related interventions as helpful resources for service employees who possess occupation-based metaperceptions.

One of the key findings from this study was, opposite from the hypothesized relationship (i.e., the self-verification effect), self-esteem positively moderated the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and work engagement. From a practical perspective, this result highlights the importance for managers in service contexts to develop and integrate self-esteem interventions targeted toward employees suffering from negative self-views (i.e., self-esteem), as maintaining positive self-views (i.e., high self-esteem) can lead to mitigated effects of negative feedback (i.e., occupation-based metaperceptions) on employees’ work engagement. For example, given recent work identifying service employees’ feelings of empowerment (competence, Ma et al., 2021) and supervisors’ ethical leadership (Rice et al., 2020) as predictors of service employees’ self-esteem, service managers should seek to create interventions to enhance employees’ self-esteem, such as through employee empowerment and ethical leadership practices. Along with positioning self-esteem interventions toward those who are at-risk (i.e., individuals low in self-esteem), self-esteem interventions (as compared to social support-based interventions) may also be beneficial in occupational contexts characterized by autonomy and inconsistent social contact among coworkers.
Additionally, this study identified self-esteem’s negative moderating effect on the relationship between coworker support and emotional exhaustion, as well as the buffering effect of coworker support on the occupation-based metaperceptions – emotional exhaustion relationship. With these findings, it is important for managers to facilitate conditions that encourage peer-to-peer support. For instance, given that service climate perceptions can foster customer service behaviors (Mechinda & Patterson, 2011), and justice climate can enhance fair behaviors from coworkers (Ambrose et al., 2021), it can be expected that a climate characterized by supportive leadership (House, 1996), trust, and care (Kim et al., 2021), can in turn have an influence on coworkers’ supportive behaviors towards one another. Therefore, given the critical effect of coworker support on mitigating the consequences of occupation-based metaperceptions on service employee well-being (i.e., emotional exhaustion), service managers should strive to create conditions for coworker supportive behaviors to be encouraged and rewarded.

It is important to note that the negative self-esteem moderation on the relationship between coworker support and emotional exhaustion was only apparent for individuals high in self-esteem. Thus, these results indicate that coworker support interventions are likely to particularly benefit employees who are not at-risk (i.e., workers high in self-esteem). Also, given that coworker support (in addition to self-esteem) emerged as a moderating factor alleviating the consequences of occupation-based metaperceptions, it is worth acknowledging contexts in which coworker support-related interventions should be targeted over interventions to enhance self-esteem. For example, in service contexts characterized by high team contact and interdependence, such as in healthcare or retail occupations, managers may particularly benefit from targeting coworker support interventions due to frequent contact among employees.
Limitations and Future Directions

I note the following limitations of my study and associated avenues for future research. First, due to resource constraints within the organization in which the study was conducted, a cross-sectional, self-report study design was used, thus increasing the data’s susceptibility to common method bias concerns. Although the computed confirmatory factor analysis identified that the level of common method variance in my data was acceptable, future research can replicate my work following best practices for assessing independent and outcome variables at different time points. Along with this, future work can employ longitudinal designs to gather a more comprehensive understanding of how occupation-based metaperceptions and perceptions of coworker support form over time, and how these evolving perceptions interact with individuals’ self-views.

Second, my study was conducted on flight attendants in a single airlines company, thus raising generalizability concerns. Additionally, employees in the organization were likely experiencing additional disruptive work stressors rooting from events extraneous to the typical service context, further raising issues of generalizability. A primary contribution of my study was to extend the construct of occupation-based metaperceptions to service settings that are not considered ‘dirty work’, but may be viewed as disesteemed and low-status; status and esteem, however, can vary substantially across service occupations, which can limit the external validity of my results.

Further, given that factors such as job complexity and educational level contribute to occupational status and esteem (Garcia-Mainar et al., 2018; Spaeth, 1979; Treiman, 2013), occupation-based metaperceptions are likely to vary across service jobs. For instance, on the one
hand, the flight attendant occupation requires extensive training and has a relatively high level of job complexity—such as requiring skills in responding to safety emergencies, customer service, and teamwork. Therefore, this job may be viewed as higher in prestige than other service occupations. On the other hand, there are fewer education qualifications to pursue a job as a flight attendant compared to other service roles such as social workers, teachers, or nurses; for these reasons, the flight attendant occupation may be viewed as lower in status than other service occupations. With this in mind, my model may unfold differently across service jobs that have lower (or higher) status and esteem—future work can extend my model to explore these nuances.

A third limitation is that a significant portion of the study sample includes members of a select team in the organization that have been identified as ‘high achievers’ in the company, raising concerns pertaining to the responses gathered, as flight attendants included in the sample may potentially be more vocal than the average flight attendant. Further, this unique sample may also represent certain demographic groups more strongly than others. For example, the sample was considerably older ($M = 54.12$ years, $SD = 10.49$ years) and more tenured ($M = 11.38$ years, $SD = 10.2$ years) than expected, perhaps resulting from participants being recruited from this select team in the organization. In addition, interesting tenure-related results emerged in relation to the other model constructs (e.g., occupation-based metaperceptions, work meaningfulness, work engagement, emotional exhaustion). Specifically, employee organizational tenure displayed significant positive correlations with occupation-based metaperceptions and emotional exhaustion, and significant negative correlations with work meaningfulness and work engagement; but surprisingly, age generally displayed opposite correlations across these variables. More research is needed investigating the role of tenure in service contexts as having
effects on attitude (e.g., work meaningfulness), perception (e.g., occupation-based metaperceptions), and well-being (e.g., work engagement, emotional exhaustion) outcomes.

Fourth, this study measured occupation-based metaperceptions in terms of employees’ awareness of others’ negative judgments toward their job, but did not capture the employees’ internalization of these judgments. Therefore, work remains for examining potential differences across employees who internalize others’ perceptions compared to those who are merely aware of that these judgments exist. As an example, flight attendants with higher competence in the role might be aware of others’ negative judgments toward their job, but display a lower likelihood of internalizing these judgments because they might more easily associate occupation-based metaperceptions as threats to the occupation and not their ability to perform in the role. Future work can explore the intricacies between individuals’ awareness and internalization of others’ negative views toward their job.

Fifth, although some of my findings align with self-verification theory, I did not specifically measure the self-verification process; rather, through the design of the study, its existence is inferred by measuring the congruence between feedback (occupation-based metaperceptions and coworker support) and self-view (self-esteem) variables. In other words—because of the design of the study—I did not include a mediator to empirically test the self-verification process, i.e., the extent to which an individual perceives that the feedback provided confirms their self-views. Future work can utilize experimental designs to extend and strengthen the present work by testing the self-verification process more directly through empirically testing the theoretical rationale that underlies the study’s moderation hypotheses.
Although most of my study’s focal measures displayed acceptable reliabilities, another limitation to my work is that nearly every measure was abridged due to constraints for survey length. On top of this, one of the abridged measures, in particular—occupational identification—showed a low reliability ($\alpha = .64$). Further, as was displayed in the correlation test (Table 1) and main effect regression (Table 2) between occupation-based metaperceptions and occupational identification, the relationship between these two variables trended positive, which was opposite of the expected direction. Given the low reliability and unexpected relationship trends, perhaps the adapted measure for occupational identification no longer effectively represented the construct. Conversely, social identity theory can provide reasoning to the observed positive relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and occupational identification (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Kreiner et al., 2006). In the present case, social identity theory would propose that employees in low-status, disesteemed jobs would be likely to develop self-enhancing beliefs as a defense against negative societal perceptions towards their jobs (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), thus increasing their identification with their job, peers, or organization. Future work can further parse out the nuances of employees’ identity formation in low-status jobs.

Lastly, the present study takes initial steps to identify the buffering effect of coworker support on the negative consequences of occupation-based metaperceptions. However, more attention is needed on testing interventions that can be employed by managers and peers to assist employees in creating occupational ideologies that transcend perceptions of others’ negative job-related views. For instance, managerial-level interventions can encompass investing in development opportunities for employees or creating support programs (e.g., employee resource groups), as these interventions can increase individuals’ job embeddedness and perceptions of
organizational support and climate. Peer-level interventions can test different forms of support that may be helpful for employees working in disesteemed jobs, such as recognition of peer efforts, mentorship among coworkers, and strategies for increasing perceptions of inclusion. Testing these interventions can provide insight on skills that may be effective to train in employees across low-status occupations, as well as resources that can be provided to employees to assist them in maintaining positive perceptions of the job.

Final Thoughts

It is intuitive to think that occupational stigma perceptions are only acknowledged by individuals employed in occupations that are widely understood as being stigmatized, such as ‘dirty’ jobs. This study, however, shows that employees across a broader range of service occupations (i.e., flight attendants) can also display awareness of others’ negative occupation-related judgments, illuminating a novel avenue for future work to investigate the role of service employees’ occupation-based metaperceptions. Through this occupation-focused approach, my work advances the literature on self-verification theory to expand possible feedback constructs within this framework to include occupation-based metaperceptions. Given the contrasting findings of the moderating role of self-esteem on the relationships between occupation-based metaperceptions and work meaningfulness and work engagement, respectively, I hope that my work sparks further inquiry into the nuances of when and why a self-verification versus a self-affirmation perspective may be more suitable to explain the moderating effect of self-views (i.e., self-esteem) on the relationships between occupation-based metaperceptions and service employee-oriented outcomes.
This study additionally provides evidence that a self-verification perspective can be applied to explain why some employees may respond more favorably to coworker support than others. In particular, I find that employees with higher self-esteem respond more favorably to coworker support, such that their levels of emotional exhaustion show stronger negative effects compared to those with lower self-esteem. My study also identifies the buffering role of coworker support on the relationship between occupation-based metaperceptions and emotional exhaustion, indicating the importance of support from surrounding peers in reducing the harmful influences of employees’ awareness of others’ negative perceptions toward their jobs. It is my hope that this study opens the door for future work to investigate support interventions to alleviate the damaging effects of occupation-based metaperceptions and foster sustained well-being in service employees. Through a broader lens, I hope my work stimulates more research focusing on a critical group of workers in our society: service employees.


APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Northern Illinois University
Consent to Participate in a Research Study

**Study Title:** The interplay of supervisor support and occupational stigma consciousness on service worker outcomes

**Investigators**

Name: Nicholas Smith  
Dept: Psychology  
Phone: 918-408-8535

Name: Lisa Finkelstein  
Dept: Psychology  
Phone: 630-926-6298

**Key Information**

- This is a voluntary research study on service employees’ perceptions of support and stigma.
- This 10-minute study involves responding to online survey questions assessing work-related attitudes and perceptions.
- The benefits of participating in this study include contributing to research expanding our knowledge of the various effects that stigma can produce on employees’ attitudes and behaviors.
- There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

**Description of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to explore the interplay among perceived stigma toward one’s job, self-views, and support. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: complete a one-time, 10-minute online survey where you will respond to a series of statements examining perceptions of work-related stigma, support, self-views, and outcomes.

**Risks and Benefits**

The study contains no reasonably foreseeable (or expected) risks.

The benefits of participation are to contribute to furthering researchers’ general knowledge of the effects that stigma can produce on employees’ attitudes and behaviors. Also, participating in this research will allow you to reflect on your experiences as a service employee.

**Confidentiality**

This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity.

- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

**Your Rights**
The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to skip any question or research activity, as well as to withdraw completely from participation at any point during the process.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact the researcher, Nicholas Smith, at nsmith6@niu.edu or by telephone at 918-408-8535. Also, you may contact Dr. Lisa Finkelstein at lisaf@niu.edu or by telephone at 630-926-6298.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigators or if you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you may contact the Northern Illinois University Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, and Safety at 815-753-8588.

**Future Use of the Research Data**
After removing all identifying information from your data, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

________________________________________________           _____________________
Participant’s Signature                                  Date
APPENDIX B

DEBRIEFING INFORMATION
Thank you for your participation in this survey! The purpose of this research is to examine frontline service employees’ experiences within their occupations. In particular, we are interested in exploring the interrelationships between service employees and surrounding parties (i.e., customers, coworkers) within the work context. Additionally, this study seeks to investigate service employees’ perceptions of how other people view their jobs, and the downstream effects that these perceptions may present. Once you exit this survey, please return to Module 2.
APPENDIX C

FOCAL MEASUREMENT ITEMS USED IN THIS RESEARCH
### Occupation-based Metaperceptions (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree)

1. Stereotypes about flight attendants have affected me personally.
2. Most people who are not flight attendants have a lot more negative thoughts about flight attendants than they actually express.
3. Most people who are not flight attendants have a problem viewing flight attendants as equals.

### Coworker Support (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree)

1. My coworkers are willing to listen to my problems.
2. I can rely on my coworkers.
3. My coworkers and I have confidence in one another.

### Self-esteem (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree)

1. I have high self-esteem.

### Occupational Identification (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree)

1. When someone criticizes flight attendants, it feels like a personal insult.
2. When I talk about flight attendants, I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’.
3. When someone praises flight attendants, it feels like a personal compliment.
4. If a story in the media criticizes flight attendants, I would feel embarrassed.

### Work Meaningfulness (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree)

1. The work that I do is important.
2. I have a meaningful job.
3. The work that I do makes the world a better place.
4. What I do at work makes a difference in the world.

### Work Engagement (1 = Never to 7 = Always)

1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy.
2. I am enthusiastic about my job.
3. I am immersed in my work.

### Emotional Exhaustion (1 = Never to 7 = Always)

1. I feel emotionally drained from my work.
2. I feel used up at the end of the work day.
3. I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.
4. I feel burned out from my work.