

Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi

## THE WORKPLACE HUMOR DEAD-END: AN EXAMINATION OF AGGRESSIVE HUMOR IN THE SPIRAL OF REVENGE INTENTION SELF-ESTEEM AND EMPLOYEE SILENCE

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to examine the relationships between aggressive humor, revenge intention, self-esteem and employee silence. Quantitative research method was used to examine the relationships between research variables. Research data was collected by survey method. The main population of the study consists of employees working in the service sector in Malatya province of Turkey. 391 participants were reached by convenience sampling method. The data obtained in the research were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling. According to the research findings, as a result of direct effect analyses, it was seen that aggressive humor displayed in the workplace positively affects employees' revenge intention. It was also seen that aggressive humor negatively affects employees' self-esteem; self-esteem negatively affects revenge intention. According to the results of indirect effect analyses, it was seen that self-esteem partially mediates the relationship between aggressive humor and revenge intention. In addition, it was determined that employee silence has a moderating role in the relationship between self-esteem and revenge intention. It is evaluated that the research findings will make an original contribution to the literature on the concepts of humor, revenge intention, self-esteem, and employee silence in the workplace.*

**Keywords:** Humor, Aggressive Humor, Revenge Intention, self esteem, Employee Silence

**JEL Classification:** M10, M54, J24

## İŞYERİNDE MİZAH ÇIKMAZI: İNTİKAM NİYETİ ÖZ SAYGI VE ÇALIŞAN SESSİZLİĞİ SARMALINDA AGRESİF MİZAHIN İNCELENMESİ

### ÖZET

*Bu çalışmanın amacı agresif mizah, intikam niyeti, öz saygı ve çalışan sessizliği arasındaki ilişkileri incelemektir. Araştırma değişkenleri arasındaki ilişkileri incelemek amacıyla nicel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırma verileri anket yöntemi ile toplanmıştır. Araştırmanın ana kütlesini Türkiye'nin Malatya ilinde bulunan hizmet sektörü çalışanları oluşturmaktadır. Kolayda örnekleme yöntemi ile 391 katılımcıya ulaşılmıştır. Araştırmada elde edilen veriler Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesi ile analize tabi tutulmuştur. Araştırma bulgularına göre, doğrudan etki analizleri sonucunda, iş yerinde sergilenen agresif mizahın çalışanların intikam niyetini olumlu yönde etkilediği görülmüştür. Ayrıca agresif mizahın çalışanların öz saygısını olumsuz yönde etkilediği; öz saygının da intikam niyetini*

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*olumsuz yönde etkilediği görülmüştür. Dolaylı etki analizleri sonuçlarına göre, öz saygının agresif mizah ile intikam niyeti arasındaki ilişkiye kısmen aracılık ettiği görülmüştür. Ayrıca, çalışan sessizliğinin öz saygı ile intikam niyeti arasındaki ilişkide düzenleyici bir rolünün olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Araştırma bulgularının ışığında mizah, intikam niyeti, öz saygı ve çalışan sessizliği kavramları ile ilgili literatüre özgün katkı sağlayacağı değerlendirilmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mizah, Agresif Mizah, İntikam Niyeti, Öz Saygı, Çalışan Sessizliği

**JEL Sınıflandırması:** M10, M54, J24

## 1. Introduction

In our modern lifestyle, a significant portion of people's daily time is spent at work. The relationships that occur between employees in the intense tempo of the workplace affect organizational performance as well as employees' behaviors towards the job, organization and other employees, either positively or negatively. While positive employee behaviors contribute to organizational performance, negative behaviors are not desired by either organizations and managers. For this reason, negative employee behaviors from an individual and organizational perspective are increasingly being researched. One of the negative behaviors that has recently attracted attention in organizational life is aggressive humor. According to Bompar et al. (2018), the humor generally includes the use of verbal skills such as jokes, word games, wit, irony or sarcasm. Humor, which is an indispensable part of business life, is a useful communication tool for creating team spirit in the workplace (McGhee, 2013). However, aggressive humor is a harmful sort of humor in which aggressive messages are conveyed to the other party with a selfish humiliation method and communication style (Dozois et al., 2013).

One of the behaviors that is evaluated negatively in organizational life is the revenge intention. Revenge, which is considered a human instinct, is the desire of an individual to respond to injustice, unfairness or mistreatment that he/she has encountered. In the revenge intention, there is a motivation to respond in a voluntary and planned manner to the person known to be responsible for the damage (Kaya & Parlak, 2020). The revenge intention, which is an action aimed at correcting perceived injustice, is one of the main reasons for many negative organizational behaviors (Özer et al., 2014). There may be many individual and organizational factors that lead employees to the revenge intention. In addition to the employee's perception of injustice, negative situations such as humiliation, helplessness, and being in a shameful situation can trigger the revenge intention (Çiçek, 2021).

The characteristics of employees play an important role in negative behaviors experienced at work. Self-esteem is an important employee characteristic in directing interactions within the organization. Self-esteem is the sum of the individual's feelings, thoughts, and attitudes towards evaluating his/her own self in the light of social values (Guindon, 2009). While many harmful employee behaviors can negatively affect employees' self-esteem, self-esteem can also prevent employees from exhibiting undesirable behaviors. One of the issues that employees exhibit in workplace relations and that researchers have been interested in recently is employee silence. Employee silence occurs at a collective level and is the reluctance or avoidance of employees to tell their thoughts about the organization they are in or the work they do (Morrison & Miliken, 2000).

In this study, it was aimed to reveal the effect of aggressive humor on revenge intention, the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between these two variables, and the role of employee silence in the effect of self-esteem on revenge intention. No study examining the research variables together was found during the literature review. Therefore, a quantitative research was conducted on service sector employees.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Aggressive Humor**

Humor is a funny interaction style that elicits positive emotions and perceptions in individuals, groups or organizations. The most important sign that something can be seen as humor is that the message conveyed is followed by laughter or smiling behaviors or positive interaction (Çiçek, 2021). The humor is often conceptualized as an individual characteristic of employees that includes cognitive, behavioral, and emotional components and can affect daily routines and well-being, but it can also be defined as a social structure, group or organizational level characteristic as part of the nature of social interaction (Martin, 2004; Trif & Fodor, 2019).

Humor is a very important aspect of being human. Jokes and laughter, which are important tools of humor, are fun behaviors that give people joy and pleasure. When people start their lives as babies and start to socially interact with their environment, one of the first things they do is laugh at the actions of other people. Although what is funny or ridiculous varies from society to society, humor is seen in daily life and in relationships with other people in all societies (Martin, 2007). Humor has a purpose and function as an interpersonal signal in social interactions. Laughing at a joke is a sign of appreciating friendship, and we laugh more in the presence of others than when we are alone. Humor also signals that the person does not perceive the other person as a threat. Trying to joke with someone can be a way to see if the relationship is friendly. Humor, however, is more than just friendship; it is the product of intelligence and a creative mind (Pinker, 1997). In general, humor is negatively related to anxiety and stress while it is positively related to self-esteem, positive assessment of the true self, and our reactions to events we encounter in life (Fasoli et al., 2022). Therefore, humor can be seen as a “coping strategy” that allows people to reconsider a situation they perceive negatively. Humor is a strategy for coping with stressful situations and can also be used in different places and for different purposes (Carrol & Shmidt 1992; Kuiper et al., 2004).

Humorous behaviors in the workplace contribute to reducing work-related stress, establishing emotional bonds between employees, ensuring open communication, increasing organizational trust, overcoming obstacles between managers and subordinates, and the emergence of employee creativity (McGhee, 2013). Humor, which breaks down the boundaries of the hierarchical organizational structure and makes the organization flatter, increases organizational commitment and productivity. An individual’s humorous abilities is seen as a positive employee quality by employers for hiring (Çiçek, 2021). Although humor has many positive aspects, it also has negative aspects. Aggressive humorous discourses that attack people’s beliefs and ethnicities, are racist, sexually oriented, and are made without considering how others will perceive them can have serious negative consequences on individuals, groups, and organizations (Friedman & Friedman, 2018; Anderson, 2015). Therefore, it should be known that even if it is made for a positive purpose, a simple joke can lead to serious consequences, may not always be understood by people, and not everyone has the same sense of humor.

When the literature is examined, different humor classifications are seen, but the classification made by Martin et al. (2003) stands out. Researchers have classified humor under four headings: *self-enhancing*, *affiliative*, *self-defeating* and *aggressive* humor. *Self-enhancing humor* is a sort of humor that allows individuals to maintain positive attitudes, especially when under stress in daily life, and helps them regulate their emotions by maintaining their perspective in a humorous way (Kuiper et al., 1993). *Affiliative humor* is a sort of humor that is used to improve social interactions with others, is non-hostile and non-threatening, improves relationships through jokes and friendly conversations, and reduces anxiety. Affiliative humor is positively related to self-esteem, extroversion, and positive feelings. *Self-defeating humor* is humor that is used to entertain others in a social environment, to be accepted by others by making fun of oneself or allowing others to make jokes about oneself. Those who display this type of humor may take on the role of a “*class clown*” or may elicit negative emotions. *Aggressive humor* is a sort of humor that is used to mock, victimize or humiliate others and involves hostile behavior (Martin et al., 2003).

People who use aggressive humor tend to criticize others by sarcasm, mocking, and making silly, funny jokes. This type of humor also includes frightening or strange behaviors, as well as word and intelligence games (Rahman et al., 2022). It is possible to explain aggressive humor with the superiority theory. Superiority theory refers to a person's superiority over others by boosting their ego during social interaction. Within the scope of the theory, an employee may try to increase their own value by engaging in social comparison processes by using a communication style that belittles and ridicules other employees in the workplace (Trif & Fodor, 2019).

Studies on aggressive humor in the literature have generally focused on the negative consequences of the concept. Aggressive humor is a phenomenon that devalues the interlocutor during communication, delays problem solving, and empowers the person who uses humor as a communication tool during social interaction (Anderson & DiTunnariello, 2016). Due to behavioral imitation, aggressive humor can spread throughout the organization, causing organizational processes to lose their functionality and preventing employees' social relations and cooperation (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Since aggressive humor disrupts social interactions between individuals, it can increase the stress level (Romero & Arendt, 2011) and burnout (Avtgis & Taber, 2006) of the person exposed to humor. Although the literature mostly focuses on the negative results of aggressive humor, some researchers think that aggressive humor also has positive aspects. When the person exposed to humor reacts carelessly, aggressive humor can help to establish friendships. Aggressive humor can provide a basis for participation in social relationships and establishing closeness with others. Aggressive humor is seen as a means of socialization and entertainment by employees in organizations (Anderson & DiTunnariello, 2016).

## 2.2. Revenge Intention

In general, revenge is an intense mood that is based on a person's perception of being wronged and requires relief (Marquette & Oliveira, 2019). Revenge is a reaction to a situation that involves injustice or inequality. This reaction aims to harm or punish the other party. If the individual has the revenge intention, he/she thinks that justice will be served (Şantas et al., 2019). The revenge intention can be defined as the feelings and opinions that occur in a

person against the injustice or mistreatment that a person has suffered. In addition, revenge can contribute to the healing of an employee's damaged psychological state and increase work performance. From this perspective, although there are views in the literature that revenge is a beneficial behavior, it is often seen as a harmful behavior because it is a cycle that harms the normalization of social relations, keeps the individual captive to his past and is not virtuous (Kaynak, 2021; Bies & Tripp, 1998).

The revenge intention is one of the most important reasons why people exhibit aggressive behavior. The main factors that cause revenge behavior are humiliating behaviors towards themselves, their loved ones or the group they belong to, the perception of injustice, the feeling of humiliation, the feeling of helplessness, and being exposed to embarrassing situations (Çiçek, 2021). Revenge can be displayed against an individual as a form of behavior aimed at correcting perceived injustice, or it can be displayed against the organization itself. Many studies show that most harmful employee behaviors are aimed at revenge (Akin et al., 2012). Employees can exhibit revenge behavior in the workplace, covertly or overtly. While gossiping, ignoring, stealing, slowing down work, and damaging organizational resources are covert revenge behaviors (Jackson et al., 2019), humiliation, embarrassment, and reporting are overt revenge behaviors (Tripp et al., 2002).

The revenge process consists of several steps. When injustice is perceived or harmful behavior is exhibited towards the individual, revenge motivation develops in the individual. This motivation is then activated in the form of revenge behaviors such as sabotage, violence or bad language (Bordia et al., 2014). Expectations of employees in the workplace, accountability and anger can motivate the revenge intention (Nayir, 2016). Employees generally engage in revenge intention when they are exposed to injustice in the workplace. Employees expect injustice caused by managers or other employees in the organization to stop, and as this expectation increases, employees' revenge intention increases, while employees can often give up their revenge intention if the injustice is resolved (Şener, 2017). Revenge is a negative employee behavior that reduces the organizational efficiency and increases costs in organization (Karaca et al., 2017).

Aggressive humor is a communication tool that disregards, belittles and devalues the person being addressed during social interactions, and can trigger the other party's intention to take revenge. *Emotional Contagion Theory* suggests that individuals unconsciously observe other people's behaviors and body language and may experience the same emotions as a result of these observations (Hochschild et al., 1983). When considered within the scope of the theory, aggressive humor directed at a person's self, identity, values or the group they belong to can create negative emotions such as inferiority, devaluation, and humiliation in a person. These situations can also trigger revenge intention. In a study conducted by Çiçek (2021), it was observed that aggressive humor positively affects revenge intention. In this context, the following hypothesis was developed.

***H<sub>1</sub>: Aggressive humor positively affects revenge intention.***

### **2.3. Self-Esteem**

According to Rosenberg (1965), one of the important theorists of the field, self-esteem is an individual's positive or negative perception of himself. Self-esteem, which expresses the

evaluative and attitudinal aspect of the self, includes the sense of value that develops as a result of the individual's awareness of his abilities and feedback from his environment (Dhillon et al., 2016). Self-esteem, one of the basic psychological factors in explaining social interactions and human behavior, is seen as a subjective attitude that emerges as a result of the individual loving, accepting himself and evaluating his self-respect (Çiçek & Kaynak, 2022).

According to *Sociometer Theory*, self-esteem emerges due to an individual's basic need to belong. In evolutionary history, the acceptance of an individual by the group he/she belongs to is necessary for survival, and therefore self-esteem is a sociometric measure that expresses the individual's level of social acceptance (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). There are different classifications in the literature about the dimensions of self-esteem. According to one classification, *self-judgment* and *emotional reactions* constitute the two basic dimensions of self-esteem. *Self-judgment* refers to the individual's thoughts about whether he/she sees himself/herself as valuable in different areas of life; *emotional reactions* refer to the feelings an individual feels while evaluating himself/herself (Eryılmaz, 2015). According to another classification made by Tafarodi & Swann (1995), *self-liking* and *self-competence* are the dimensions of self-esteem. *Self-liking* refers to the individual's perception of himself/herself as valuable, approving and accepting himself/herself in social interactions; *self-competence* refers to the individual's feeling competent, effective and in control of events and situations in his/her life.

Studies on self-esteem reveal that self-esteem is dynamic and variable throughout life. While an individual's self-esteem increases due to their successes in life rather than their expectations, a low perception of success will cause the individual to evaluate themselves negatively and their self-esteem to decrease. While an employee who has been successful throughout their life may lose their self-esteem when they are fired from their job due to a negative situation, they will begin to regain their self-esteem when they get a new job (Baldwin & Hoffmann, 2002). Due to the variable nature of self-esteem, demographic characteristics and organizational factors can affect self-esteem. Factors such as feeling valued, being able to reveal their potential, being accepted, wanting to be liked, and being able to accept their personality traits are effective in the formation of self-esteem. However, self-esteem may also vary depending on gender and age (Coopersmith, 1967). Studies shows that self-esteem begins to form and increase in adolescence and youth, continues to increase in the middle age group, reaches its peak between the ages of 50 and 60, and gradually reduces in elderly (Orth & Robins, 2014; Trzesniewski et al., 2013). Personality traits, along with genetic differences that affect individual behavioral tendencies and emotions, are also important factors in the development of self-esteem (Sahidan & Hashim, 2018).

Organizational factors such as job insecurity, unfair competition processes and job dissatisfaction cause employees' self-esteem to decrease, which in turn leads to negative employee behaviors (Çiçek & Kaynak, 2022). If employees are regularly exposed to negative, degrading and disrespectful behaviors in organizational life, their self-esteem may decrease or they may despair of regaining their self-esteem (Telfer, 2010). Humor is an important concept in terms of contributing to the individual's personal development and psychological well-being. In addition to having a high sense of humor, being exposed to positive humorous interactions in daily life and organizational environments increases optimism, self-acceptance, self-confidence, autonomy and self-esteem in the individual (Çakmak et al., 2015). However, aggressive humor, which is displayed in the organizational environment and is seen as a harmful type of humor



criticizes, manipulates and uses coercive expressions in social relationships without considering others (Yue et al., 2017). In this context, the following hypothesis was developed.

***H<sub>3</sub>: Aggressive humor negatively affects self-esteem.***

Self-esteem, which is the result of an individual's self-evaluation, can be low or high in an individual. Low self-esteem occurs when an individual has a lot of negative feelings and thoughts about themselves. Individuals with low self-esteem have problems coping with stress and difficulties and accepting criticism directed at them (Ayaz & Doğan, 2023). Low self-esteem can cause negative behaviors in individuals such as seeing themselves as physically inadequate, constantly and unnecessarily criticizing themselves, not being able to focus on work, feeling low about success and avoiding social relationships. (Turgut & Çınar, 2021). An individual's optimum positive evaluation of themselves and feeling good are signs of high self-esteem. High self-esteem makes it easier for an individual to cope with stress and increases their level of psychological well-being. Individuals with high self-esteem live healthier lives, both psychologically and physically, than those with low self-esteem (Ayaz & Doğan, 2023).

The concept of revenge, one of the basic human instincts, refers to the desire to punish or injure in return for a perceived mistake from a sociological perspective (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992). A person with revenge intention has a desire to take revenge, to retaliate, to turn the shame experienced into pride, and to harm in a similar way (Şener & Coşkun, 2015). Many factors in the workplace can positively or negatively affect employees' revenge intentions. One of these factors may be self-esteem. Individuals with high self-esteem make positive evaluations about themselves, avoid exhibiting aggressive behaviors and feel good (Reisoğlu et al., 2013). Individuals with high self-esteem see themselves as valuable. However, they do not see themselves as more valuable than others (Rosenberg, 1965). Therefore, self-esteem, which includes feelings of self-respect and self-acceptance, does not include feelings of narcissism and superiority (Ackerman et al., 2011). In a quantitative study on self-esteem, it was observed that competition within the organization reduces self-esteem, while self-esteem reduces jealousy towards other employees within the organization (Çiçek & Kaynak, 2022). When the results of research on self-esteem are examined in general, it is seen that self-esteem prevents the individual from harmful behaviors and in this context, an employee with self-esteem can avoid revenge intention, which is a harmful organizational behavior; however, it is seen that aggressive, negative and harmful behaviors seen in the workplace, such as aggressive humor, negatively affect self-esteem. In this context, the following hypotheses were developed.

***H<sub>3</sub>: Self-esteem negatively affects revenge intention.***

***H<sub>4</sub>: Self-esteem mediates the relationship between aggressive humor and revenge intention.***

## **2.4. Employee Silence**

Silence, which is a desired state by many people, generally refers to a peaceful, and calm environment. Silence can include not only the absence of verbal communication, but also nonverbal communication behaviors expressed through body language, such as not showing interest, and not caring during communication (Topçuoğlu, 2021). Organizational silence, first defined in the literature by Hirschman (1970), refers to employees not speaking out against

the problems they encounter in the workplace and accepting the current situation. Employee silence, which is also used instead of organizational silence in the literature, is the conscious hiding and not voicing of employees' thoughts, recommendations, and concerns about current problems in the organization. Employee silence is a collective phenomenon and organizational behavior that prevents the positive development and change of the organization (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

In other words, employee silence can be described as the intentional unsuccess of employees to state their true thoughts, evaluations and concerns on organizational issues to managers or other individuals who direct organizational change (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). In this context, employee silence within the organization can manifest itself through collective behaviors such as not attending meetings and interviews, not expressing opinions or low participation (Yüncü & Fidan, 2020). Employee silence may occur because the employee wants to protect themselves against possible negative consequences or intentionally does not express the information he has (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Therefore, employee silence can have a complex and multidimensional structure that can be associated with different feelings, intentions and cognition within the framework of positive or negative conditions within the organization. From this perspective, employee silence can be exhibited with a strategic or proactive approach (Van Dyne et al., 2003).

Employee silence has three different dimensions: *acquiescent*, *defensive* and *prosocial*. *Acquiescent silence* is a submissive and passive behavior that occurs when employees accept the current situation within the organization as it is and do not try to change it (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). *Defensive silence* is a conscious and proactive behavior in which employees evaluate existing alternatives in order to avoid organizational situations that threaten them and to protect themselves (Van Dyne et al., 2003). *Prosocial silence* is a conscious behavior, like defensive silence, and is a behavior that focuses on protecting other employees and organizational interests within the organization rather than protecting themselves (Al-Alwani & Tüfekçi, 2022).

Individual characteristics such as gender, age and position can be effective in employee silence (Yeşilaydın et al. 2016). In two different studies, it was observed that as employees' age and work experience increase, their voices on organizational issues become louder; on the other hand, young and inexperienced employees tend to remain silent in expressing their ideas (Çakıcı, 2008; Özgen & Sürgevil, 2009). Individual characteristics of employees such as locus of control, risk-taking tendency, identification with the group and self-esteem can also be effective in employee silence. In particular, employees may prefer to remain silent in their social interactions at work, as well as express themselves, considering their own self-esteem and self-impressions within the group (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Organizational factors such as fear that the expressed opinion will not be taken into consideration; desire not to be seen as a whistleblower or complainer; avoiding losing trust in social relationships; anxiety about losing one's job, receiving punishment; the organization's positive reception of remaining silent; hierarchical organizational structure, fear of taking risks and anxiety about receiving negative feedback can trigger employee silence (Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Kılınç, 2018). However, in environmental conditions where information is insufficient, complexity and chaos are intense, individuals who feel threatened may prefer to remain silent in order to adapt to the environment. In addition, general cultural



characteristics of societies such as communication, conflict management, power distance and avoiding uncertainty can be effective in employee silence (Sargut, 1994).

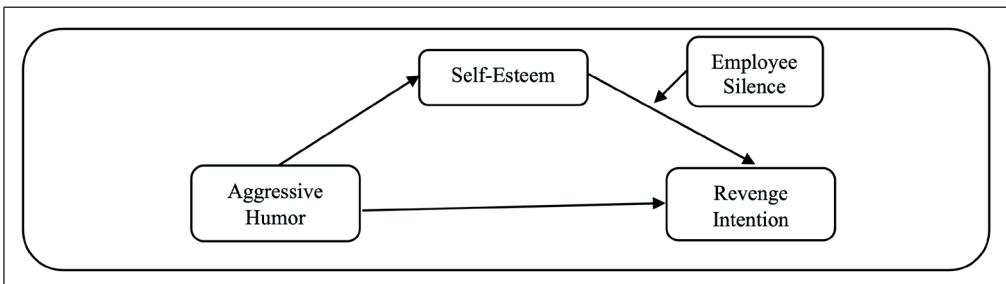
Employee silence can have five basic dual effects that are opposite to each other on organizational processes. Silence can bring employees together or push them away from each other; it can both improve and harm human relations; it can reveal information or prevent it from being revealed; silence is a sign of tense thought or lack of thought, and finally silence is a sign of both acceptance and opposition (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Although employee silence has some positive results in terms of reducing communication conflicts within the organization and preventing the disclosure of confidential information, employee silence is generally seen as a harmful behavior in terms of individual and organizational aspects (Erigüç et al, 2014). When the factors affecting employee silence in the literature are examined in general, it is seen that employees may raise their voices or select to stay silent on organizational issues in order to protect their self-esteem. However, employees mostly tend to remain silent to protect themselves and not to encounter a negative situation. For this reason, employees may give up their revenge intention by remaining silent in order to protect themselves. In this context, the following hypothesis has been developed.

*H<sub>5</sub>: Employee silence moderates the relationship between self-esteem and revenge intention.*

### 3. Methodology

It was aimed to determine the relationships between aggressive humor, revenge intention, self-esteem, and employee silence in this study. Ethics committee approval was received for the study on 28.07.2023 with the decision number E-35841939-050. The quantitative research method was adopted and the data were collected by survey method in this study. Besides, descriptive and multiple causal statistical methods were employed for analyzing the data. Descriptive analyzes were used in the data screening process, and the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), one of the multiple causal statistical analysis techniques, was used to determine the multiple relationship presented in the research model in Figure 1. The two main reasons for choosing SEM are that SEM can test multiple variables together (Russell et al., 1998) and that it can produce more effective results in mediation analysis (Little et al., 2007). SPSS v26 program was used in the study to analyze the data, present descriptive statistics, and perform tests such as normality and common method bias. According to the SEM approach, AMOS v24 program was used to establish and test the measurement and structural model.

**Figure 1: Research Model**



3.1. Sample

The population of the study consists of service sector employees in Malatya province of Turkey. Employees were selected from service sectors such as education, health, telecommunication, tourism and banking sectors where there is one-to-one contact with customers. Convenience sampling method was used to sample the population. The reason for adopting this sampling method is that it offers advantages such as geographical proximity, accessibility at a certain time and voluntary participation due to being an improbable method (Etikan et al., 2016). The survey forms were distributed to the participants by hand at intervals using the drop-and-collect method and then collected. 408 survey forms were collected from the participants during the three-month data collection period covering January and March 2024. 17 of these forms that were incomplete and invalid were canceled and a total of 391 survey forms were included in the analysis process. The demographic features of participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Features of Participants

N: 391		N	%		N	%	
Sex	Female	196	50.1		Less than 1	81	20.7
	Male	195	49.9		2-5	83	21.2
Age	18-24	99	25.3	Working Time (Year)	6-10	66	16.9
	25-34	192	49.1		11-15	64	16.4
	35-44	73	18.7		16-20	64	16.4
	45-54	15	3.8	Marital Status	21 and over	33	8.4
	55 and over	12	3.1		Married	81	20.7
					Single	310	79.3

3.2. Measurement Tools

The measurement tools of the research variables are presented below, respectively.

**Aggressive Humor:** The aggressive humor dimension of the humor styles scale developed by Martin et al. (2003) was used to measure aggressive humor, which is the independent variable of the study. This scale consists of 8 items. Items 2, 4, 6 and 8 of the scale were reverse coded. The scale was employed in Turkish culture in a study conducted by Çiçek (2021).

**Revenge Intention:** The scale developed by Bradfield & Aquino (1999) was employed for measuring revenge intention, which is the dependent variable of the study. The scale consists of 7 items and a single dimension. The scale in question was used in a study by Çiçek (2021).

**Self-Esteem:** The self-esteem scale developed by Rosenberg (1989) was used to measure self-esteem, which is the mediator variable of the study. The scale consists of 7 items and a single dimension. The 3rd and 5th items of the scale were reverse coded.

**Employee Silence:** A one-dimensional, five-item employee silence scale developed by Tangirala & Ramanujam (1989) was used to measure employee silence. In a study conducted by Aboramadan et al. (2021), it was found that the scale had good fit.

While adapting both the self-esteem and employee silence scales to Turkish, the parallel blind technique suggested by Brislin (1980) was used. In this context, the scale items were translated independently by two experts who were proficient in Turkish and English. Then, the experts compared the translation differences and finalized the scale items. The structure of the scales was 5-Likert type and the response ranges were arranged as 1-Strongly Disagree and 5-Strongly Agree.

### 3.3. Measurement Model

The two-step approach suggested by Anderson & Gerbing (1988) was adopted in the analysis of research data. In this context, in the first step of the analysis, a measurement model was established to test the validity and reliability of the construct. In the model, firstly the normality of distribution was reviewed and it was determined that the skewness and kurtosis values of the data were between -1.5 and +1.5. Accordingly, the distribution was accepted as normal (Hair et al., 2010). Then, Harman's single factor test method was followed to observe the common method variance error. Since the value obtained from a single variance with this method was 21%, it was concluded that there was no common method variance error (Harman, 1976). At this stage, confirmatory factor analyses including alternative models were conducted to test the suitability of the established model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The results of this analysis presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Factor Analysis**

Model	Factor	$\chi^2$	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	RMSEA	IFI	TLI	CFI
<b>Main Model</b>	<b>Four Factor Research Model</b>	386.41	128		0.072	0.910	0.944	0.918
<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Three Factor Model:</b> Employee silence and revenge intention are grouped under one factor.	611.21	168	224.8 p=.000	0.092	0.886	0.884	0.844
<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Two Factor Model:</b> Self-esteem, employee silence, revenge intention	886.44	171	500.03 p=.000	0.104	0.818	0.810	0.811
<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Single Factor Mode:</b> All variables were collected under a single factor.	928.18	171	541.77 p=.000	0.116	0.796	0.803	0.788

As seen in Table 2, the four-factor main model has the best goodness of fit values ( $\chi^2/df = 3.019$ , AGFI = 0.910, GFI = 0.944, CFI = 0.918, SRMR = 0.077, RMSEA = 0.072). According to these results, it was determined that the main model was suitable for analysis (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In order to further test the discriminant validity, the steps suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981) were followed. Accordingly, the square root of the variance (AVE) generated from the variables should be higher than the correlation coefficients of the variables. In addition, for the convergent validity, the value of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) should exceed 0,50 and 0,70 respectively. These results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Measurement Model Analysis

Scales	Items	Factor Load	AVE	CR	Alpha
Aggressive Humor	AggressiveH1	0.786	0.548	0.906	0.898
	AggressiveH2 (R)	0.741			
	AggressiveH3	0.684			
	AggressiveH4 (R)	0.813			
	AggressiveH5	0.699			
	AggressiveH6 (R)	0.584			
	AggressiveH7	0.831			
	AggressiveH8 (R)	0.753			
Revenge Intention	RevengeI1	0.903	0.595	0.910	0.906
	RevengI2	0.596			
	RevengI3	0.886			
	RevengI4	0.641			
	RevengI5	0.683			
	RevengI6	0.839			
	RevengI7	0.795			
Self-Esteem	SelfE1	0.549	0.556	0.895	0.889
	SelfE2	0.781			
	SelfE3 (R)	0.836			
	SelfE4	0.777			
	SelfE5 (R)	0.654			
	SelfE6	0.891			
	SelfE7	0.673			
Employee Silence	EmployeeS1	0.541	0.545	0.854	0.856
	EmployeeS2	0.865			
	EmployeeS3	0.728			
	EmployeeS4	0.769			
	EmployeeS5	0.749			

R: Reverse coded item.

As seen in Table 3, all calculated values meet the convergent validity criterion. The descriptive statistics of measurement model are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Standard Deviation	Mean	1	2	3	4
<b>1. Aggressive Humor</b>	1.141	3.38	<b>(0.740)</b>			
<b>2. Self-Esteem</b>	0.884	3.41	-0.141*	<b>(0.746)</b>		
<b>3. Employee Silence</b>	0.938	2.86	0.354***	-0.232**	<b>(0.771)</b>	
<b>4. Revenge Intention</b>	0.941	3.79	0.441***	0.128*	-0.186**	<b>(0.738)</b>

\*p<0.05; \*\*p <0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

It was determined that the correlation coefficients between the variables were significant. In addition, it was observed that all Fornell & Larcker (1981) criteria are met in the model. Thus, it was concluded that the measurement model is valid in terms of all measurement criteria.

### 3.4. Structural Model Analysis

In the second stage of the research, a structural model was established to test the hypotheses posited in line with the research model. The goodness of fit values of the model are as follows:  $\chi^2/df = 3.604$ , AGFI = 0.912, GFI = 0.904, CFI = 0.941, SRMR = 0.061, RMSEA = 0.076. These values met the goodness of fit criteria (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The results from structural analysis are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Direct Effect Analysis**

Hypotheses	$\beta$	Critical Ratio
<b>Aggressive Humor <math>\rightarrow</math> Revenge Intention</b>	0.535***	5.381
<b>Aggressive Humor <math>\rightarrow</math> Self-Esteem</b>	-0.198*	-2.986
<b>Self-Esteem <math>\rightarrow</math> Revenge Intention</b>	-0.235**	-3.148

\*\*\*p<0.001; \*\*p<0.01; \*p<0.05

As a result of the hypothesis tests, it was seen that aggressive humor had a positive and significant effect on revenge intention ( $\beta = 0.535$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and a negative and significant effect on self-esteem ( $\beta = -0.198$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). It was determined that self-esteem had a negative and significant effect on revenge intention ( $\beta = -0.235$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). With these findings of the research, the hypotheses  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$  and  $H_3$  were supported.

In the study, the steps suggested by Baron & Kenny (1986) were followed to determine the mediating role of the self-esteem variable. Although this method is quite successful, it remains incomplete because it cannot determine the power of the indirect effect analysis. Therefore, the bootstrapping method suggested by Mallinckrodt et al. (2006) was used to determine the indirect effect power. This method can calculate the indirect effect by creating a confidence interval for the population parameter. In the analyses, the bootstrap population parameter sample size was calculated as 2000 and the confidence interval as 95%. The indirect effect analysis results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Indirect Effect Analysis

Hypothesis	Total Effect	p	Direct Effect	p	Indirect Effect	p	Mediation Status
Aggressive Humor → Self-Esteem → Revenge Intention	0.582	0.000	0.535	0.000	0.047	0.025	Partial Mediation

As a result of the indirect effect analysis, since the indirect effect coefficient obtained with the bootstrap mass parameter of the path is significant, it was concluded that self-esteem has a partial mediating effect between aggressive humor and revenge intention. According to this result, the hypothesis  $H_4$  was supported.

The  $H_5$  hypothesis of the study predicts that employee silence will have a moderating effect on the relationship between self-esteem and revenge intention. The hierarchical regression analysis results obtained from the model established to determine this relationship are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Moderating Effect Analysis

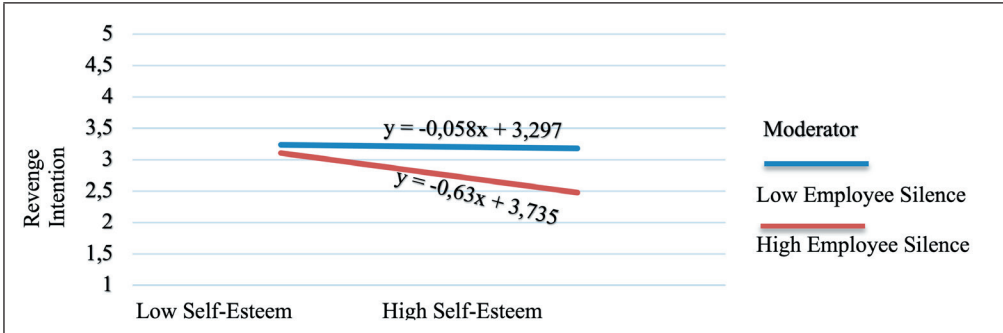
Variables <sup>a</sup>	1st Step		2nd Step		3rd Step	
	$\beta$	S.h.	$\beta$	S.h.	$\beta$	S.h.
Constant	2.186*	.114	1.986*	.116	1.931*	.116
Self-Esteem	0.181**	.071	-0.165**	.071	-0.172**	.070
Employee Silence			-0.202***	.069	-0.210***	.069
Self-Esteem X Employee Silence					-0.143*	.084
$R^2$	8.1		11.3		14.6	
$\Delta R^2$	8		11.3		14.4	
F	8.194		12.486		16.485	

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable = Revenge Intention; N = 391; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

The first step of the hierarchical regression analysis conducted to determine the moderator effect aims to reveal the effect between the dependent and independent variables. This step of the analysis is significant with an explanation percentage of the model  $R^2 = 8\%$  ( $F(1, 389) = 8.194$ ). The moderator variable was also added to the model in the second step. The second step is significant with an explanation percentage of the model  $R^2 = 11.3\%$  ( $F(2, 388) = 12.486$ ). Finally, in the third step, the interaction term was added to the model. This step of the analysis is significant with an explanation percentage of the model  $R^2 = 14.4\%$  ( $F(3, 387) = 16.485$ ). According to the results of the moderation effect model, it was concluded that self-esteem ( $\beta = -0.172$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), employee silence ( $\beta = -0.210$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and the interaction term formed by taking the product of self-esteem and employee silence ( $\beta = -0.143$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) have a negative and significant effect on revenge intention. It is recommended to draw a regression curve in order to make a more detailed examination of the direction of the significant relationship and to see the significance of the relationship between the variables in detail (Aiken & West, 1991). The slope test analysis graph conducted for this purpose is presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Slope Test Analysis**



As seen in Figure 2, the fact that the lines are not parallel to each other indicates that there is a moderation effect. It was observed that employee silence has a reverse moderation effect. This situation can be interpreted as, while the revenge intentions of individuals with high self-esteem decrease, increasing employee silence within the organization reduces the revenge intention even more. Based on these results, the hypothesis established within the scope of the research,  $H_5$  was supported.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to determine the relationships between aggressive humor, revenge intention, self-esteem and employee silence. In this context, in the first part of the study, the variables were examined conceptually by conducting a literature review and the hypotheses of the study were developed by considering the relationships between the variables. In the second part of the study, the findings of a quantitative study conducted with the participation of employees in the service sector in Malatya province of Turkey were presented.

When the hypothesis tests of the study were examined, it was seen that aggressive humor positively affected the revenge intention according to the  $H_1$  hypothesis test result. The concept of humor, which is an important aspect of being human and desired in most cultures, includes behaviors that entertain and give pleasure to people (Martin, 2007). Humorous behaviors in organizational life can contribute to the reduction of job stress; organizational commitment, creativity, productivity, organizational trust, confidence and open communication (McGhee, 2013; Çiçek, 2021). However, aggressive humor, which is a type of humor used to belittle, mock, devalue and humiliate others, has negative organizational consequences. (Martin, 2007; Trif & Fodor, 2019). Aggressive humor can cause negative consequences such as damage to organizational relationships, stress and burnout (Romero & Arendt, 2011; Avtgis & Taber, 2006). The revenge intention is a behavior exhibited as a reaction to behaviors such as injustice, contempt, and humiliation displayed towards oneself or people one values (Çiçek, 2021). Therefore, it is possible for an employee who is exposed to aggressive humor in the workplace to want to retaliate and take revenge.

According to the  $H_2$  hypothesis test result, aggressive humor has been found to negatively affect self-esteem. Self-esteem emerges as a result of the individual's need to belong to a social group and shows the individual's level of social acceptance (Leary & Baumeister,

2000). Being exposed to injustice at work, not being valued, being worried about being fired (Mumulu Karanfil & Doğan, 2023), and being exposed to negative and disrespectful behaviors can reduce employees' self-esteem (Çiçek & Kaynak, 2022; Telfer, 2010). Aggressive humor, which is displayed without thinking of others in an organizational environment and damages organizational relationships, can damage individuals' self-perception and self-esteem in social interactions (Yue et al., 2017: 2). Because the degrading and humiliating style of aggressive humor will probably lead the individual to see himself/herself as inadequate and evaluate himself/herself negatively.

According to the  $H_3$  hypothesis test result, it was seen that self-esteem negatively affects revenge intention. An individual's self-esteem can be low or high. Individuals with low self-esteem have low self-confidence, the ability to cope with stress and difficulties, and the level of accepting criticism (Ayaz & Doğan, 2023; Reisoğlu et al., 2013). However, individuals with high self-esteem live healthier lives both physically and psychologically. Since they cope with stress and difficulties more easily, their subjective well-being levels are generally high (Ayaz & Doğan, 2023). It is not possible to see behaviors such as superiority, narcissism, and jealousy in individuals with high self-esteem who accept themselves as they are (Ackerman et al., 2011; Çiçek & Kaynak, 2022). Therefore, it can be seen as a natural finding that self-esteem will reduce revenge intention, which is a harmful organizational behavior.

According to the  $H_4$  hypothesis test result, it was seen that self-esteem mediates the relationship between aggressive humor and revenge intention. According to this result, it is understood that employees with high self-esteem hesitate to engage in revenge intention in situations where they are exposed to aggressive humor displayed to humiliate, degrade or devalue them in the workplace. According to the  $H_5$  hypothesis test result, which is the last hypothesis of the research, it was seen that employee silence has a moderating role in the relationship between self-esteem and revenge intention. This result shows that the intention to take revenge decreases in employees with high self-esteem, and that self-esteem combined with employee silence contributes to the tendency for the revenge intention to decrease. Therefore, it is possible to say that employee silence has a triggering effect on the decrease in revenge intention. It is possible to interpret this situation as the silence within the organization makes employees passive and isolates them to the extent that they do not feel revenge even in situations such as injustice, bullying, etc. done to them. According to the findings, it is seen that the  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ ,  $H_3$ ,  $H_4$  and  $H_5$  hypotheses developed in the research are accepted. It is thought that the research findings are generally consistent with the research findings in the literature (Martin et al. 2003; Ackerman et al.; 2011 Yue et al., 2017; Friedman & Friedman, 2018; Çiçek & Kaynak, 2022; Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Within the framework of the research findings, some suggestions for organizational practices can be offered.

- Humor is a part of social interaction in the workplace as a part of human nature, however aggressive humor is seen as an employee behavior that harms organizational relationships. Therefore, managers should clearly determine and follow organizational ethics and communication styles against aggressive humor, rudeness or harmful communication styles.
- The self-esteem that employees feel for themselves will directly affect their organizational performance. Self-esteem originating from the workplace can lead to positive performance.

Therefore, both managers and all employees should avoid humiliating and degrading behaviors such as aggressive humor, condescension, disregard, and disregard that will damage the self-esteem of others.

- All employees should not forget that the revenge intention can be a destructive behavior due to the results it can bring. Otherwise, employees who act with the revenge intention can turn the organization into a battlefield in order to ensure their own justice. In order not to cause this situation, it is essential for managers to be fair in all their practices.
- Employee silence is likely to have contradictory results in organizational relations. Silence can be a sign of both acceptance and fear. For this reason, managers in particular need to analyze the reasons why employees remain silent. Finding the root cause behind silence can be useful in suggesting the right solutions to organizational issues and problems.
- Training programs can be developed in organizations to improve employees' use of humor and communication skills and to prevent harmful behaviors such as revenge. These training programs can be given first at the basic level and then as refresher training at certain intervals. In these programs, work procedures within the framework of organizational and ethical values can be emphasized.

In this study, there may be limitations due to social desirability and common variance errors that may arise due to the fact that the research was conducted with the participation of a certain number of employees in the service sector in Malatya province and the data belonging to the variables were collected at the same time. In order to overcome these limitations, future studies can be conducted by associating the research variables with different variables on different samples. In this context, it can be investigated whether both aggressive humor and employee silence have possible positive organizational results despite being two negative employee behaviors. It is evaluated that the study findings will contribute to the literature on the concepts of aggressive humor, revenge intention, self-esteem and employee silence and shed light on future studies.

#### **Contribution Ratio Statement**

The first author's contribution is 50%, and the second author's contribution is 50%.

#### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

There is no conflict of interest among the authors of the study.

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