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On feeling humiliated

The experience of humiliation in interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup contexts

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Chapter 1

General Introduction

Her height and her voice made her different. Karen was the tallest girl in her high school class, even towering over most of the boys, and had a deep baritone voice that stood out from the cacophony of other teenage girls' high-pitched blabber. These qualities that set her apart also made her a target of bullying. Her classmates called her a horse. Some of the mean boys made a game of tugging at her bra straps or raising her skirt to expose her underwear. Most people in her class just laughed. A few others cast disapproving looks but did nothing. (Kristine, 2012)

In their zeal to join a fraternity at Towson University [U.S.], Brad Notaro and his fellow pledges submitted to a battery of humiliation and abuse. At the direction of students they hoped would make them brothers at Pi Lambda Phi, they ran and performed jumping jacks for hours on end, crouched under a cold shower holding a bag of ice, ate raw flour and drank a bitter concoction that made them vomit. Now it was Hell Week — the culmination of the pledge process — and Notaro, 18, was nearing a breaking point. For three days, he said, the brothers forbade him from sleeping and forced him to drink alcohol. To cope with the stress, Notaro said in a recent interview, he took anti-anxiety medication — and collapsed inside Towson's Albert S. Cook Library. According to a police report, paramedics found him "unconscious ... not moving and exception[ally] pasty and pale." (Wells, 2014)

What America is tasting now, is something insignificant compared to what we have tasted for scores of years. Our nation (the Islamic world) has been tasting this humiliation and this degradation for more than 80 years. Its sons are killed, its blood is shed, its sanctuaries are attacked, and no one hears and no one heeds. (Bin Laden, 2001)

These quotes all contain strong examples of humiliation. The experience of humiliation is intensely negative and can have very dramatic (inter) personal consequences such as low self-esteem, depression, general anxiety disorder, suicide, homicide and (domestic) violence (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Farmer & McGuffin,

2003; Gilbert, 1997; Harter, 2012; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Kendler, Hettema, Butera, Gardner, & Prescott, 2003; Klein, 1991; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003; Torres & Bergner, 2010; Walker & Knauer, 2011). At the group level, experienced humiliation is often mentioned as playing a role in intractable conflicts and it is associated with war, mass crime, genocide and terrorism (e.g., Atran & Stern, 2005; Baumeister, 2002; Fontan, 2006; Klein, 1991; Kristof, 2002; Lickel, 2012; Lindner, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006, 2009; Pettigrew, 2003; Scheff, 1994; Staub, 1989; Stern, 2003, 2004; Volkan, 1997, 2004). Such grave consequences may suggest that humiliation is an exceptional emotion that is only rarely experienced and under specific circumstances, but surprisingly, this is not the case. Humiliation is familiar to almost everyone and it is a significant emotional experience in different cultures (e.g., Ginges & Atran, 2008; Leidner, Sheikh, & Ginges, 2012).

Although in clinical psychology and psychiatry some attention has been devoted to the consequences of severe and prolonged experiences of humiliation, still not much is known about what exactly constitutes humiliation and the circumstances in which it is elicited, in particular in the general, non-clinical population. The current dissertation focuses on the experience of humiliation. In three empirical chapters this emotion is studied in different contexts: the interpersonal, the intragroup, and the intergroup context. The aim of these studies is to get more insight in the determinants, strength, emotional correlates and consequences of experienced humiliation in these different settings.

In the current chapter we first present a theoretical overview of the nature and consequences of (mainly interpersonal) humiliation and we review the empirical research on humiliation conducted thus far. Next, based on psychological theories of emotion and intergroup conflict, we address the aspects relating to humiliation that we will specifically focus on in the current dissertation. These are the social contextual determinants of humiliation in interpersonal and intragroup contexts and the potential consequences of humiliation in an intergroup context. Finally, we

present a short overview of the research reported in each of the empirical chapters (Chapter 2-4) of this dissertation.

The Nature of Humiliation

The word *humiliation* stems from the Latin *humilis* (low) and *humus* (earth). The word both refers to the act of humiliating (to humble, degrade or depriving one of self-esteem) and to the feeling of humiliation (a state of disgrace or loss of self-respect). In the current dissertation, humiliation is studied from a psychological perspective, leaving aside normative perspectives (e.g., Margalit, 1996; see also Neuhäuser, 2011). Thus, we focus on the *subjective feeling* of humiliation, which not necessarily implies that there always is an objective *act* of humiliation (see also Lickel, 2012). In addition, acts of humiliation that are not experienced as such are not the focus of this dissertation.

From this psychological perspective, we follow Hartling and Luchetta (1999) in defining humiliation as “the deep dysphoric feeling associated with being, or perceiving oneself as being unjustly degraded, ridiculed, or put down—in particular, one’s identity has been demeaned or devalued” (p. 264). The emphasis on identity (threat) seems essential in this and other definitions of humiliation. Klein (1991), for example, explains humiliation as the experience of a loss of face and an “invasion” of the self, which he defines as the violation of personal boundaries and a breach of personal space (p. 98). In general, feelings of humiliation can result from receiving negative attention, such as when one is being teased, harassed, ridiculed or put down (Elison & Harter, 2007; Elshout, Nelissen, & Van Beest, 2016; Harter, 2012), but the experience may also result from being neglected, excluded or ostracised (Elshout et al., 2016; Hartling, 2007; Veldhuis, Gordijn, Veenstra, & Lindenberg, 2014).

Humiliation belongs to the family of self-conscious emotions such as shame, guilt, pride and hubris. These emotions are all based on self-related processes (i.e., self-awareness and self-representations) which are necessary for self-evaluation

(Tracy & Robins, 2007). However, humiliation is distinct in two ways. It is a *complex* emotion and it is a very *intense* emotion.

Humiliation is Complex

To be sure, all self-conscious emotions are complex, because they “require a fairly sophisticated level of intellectual development. To feel them, individuals must have a sense of self as well as a set of standards. They must also have notions of what constitutes success or failure, and have the capacity to evaluate their own behavior” (M. Lewis, 1995, p. 68). However, humiliation’s complexity also stems from its conceptualization as a “mixed” emotion, that is, an emotion consisting of a blend of other emotions, namely shame and embarrassment on the one hand and anger and rage on the other hand. Although these emotions are univalent in the sense that they are all negative, they are related to different action tendencies (e.g., Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). Shame and embarrassment are associated with a tendency to hide the self, disappear from the scene, or a wish to become invisible (i.e., avoidance tendencies), whereas anger and rage are associated with a tendency to attack or take revenge (i.e., approach tendencies).

A review of the literature shows that, theoretically, humiliation has been most often related to shame (e.g., Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; H. B. Lewis, 1971; M. Lewis, 1992; Lindner, 2009; Miller, 1993); sometimes the two emotions are even equated (for example in Thomaes, Stegge, Olthof, Bushman, & Nezlek, 2011). Indeed, both emotions are negative and concern the self (Zavaleta Reyles, 2007) and both are the result of global attributions; i.e., a focus on the total or core self, rather than on specific aspects of the self, such as is the case with guilt (M. Lewis, 1995). Furthermore, they both arouse a wish to hide from others (Harter, 2012). In some instances, humiliation is seen as a specific variant of shame. For example, Allpress, Brown, Giner-Sorolla, Deonna, and Teoni (2014) regard humiliation as a form of “image shame” — as opposed to “moral shame.”

However, humiliation and shame differ from each other in important domains. First, unlike shame, humiliation always requires a (perceived) action of *another* person or (group of) persons. Shame is inflicted by the self—although it often relates to others—and is also usually accepted by the self, that is, someone who feels ashamed believes there is a good reason for this feeling. Humiliation in contrast is not, or less, accepted, and feels therefore undeserved (e.g., Gilbert, 1997; Harter, 2012; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Jackson, 2000; Klein, 1991). This leads to a second important difference between these emotions, namely an appraisal of unfairness. Humiliation often feels unfair, whereas shame does not.

Like shame, embarrassment is closely related to humiliation. However, in contrast to humiliation, embarrassment may be non-evaluative, because it can be merely a result of self-exposure rather than self-evaluation, for example, when one is aware that one is being looked at or when receiving a compliment (M. Lewis, 1995). Furthermore, people can often (at least afterwards) laugh about their own embarrassing behaviour or feelings. Thus, embarrassment is not necessarily negative, whereas humiliation is always negative.¹ Furthermore, embarrassment is not always very intense. One can feel slightly embarrassed, but not somewhat humiliated. Related to these points, a perceived hostile intent by others is a key feature of humiliation (e.g., Harter, 2012), but not a necessary condition for embarrassment. This perception of hostile intent may increase the appraisal of unfairness in humiliation. In sum, both shame and embarrassment share the negative appraisal of the global self with humiliation, but they differ from humiliation in their lack of an appraisal of unfairness or injustice, which is empirically shown to be a core aspect of humiliation (Combs, Campbell, Jackson, & Smith, 2010; Elison & Harter, 2007).

Finally, many scholars have connected humiliation to anger, rage and (a desire for) aggression or revenge (e.g., Combs et al., 2010; Elison & Harter, 2007; Fattah & Fierke, 2009; Fontan, 2006; Gilbert, 1997; Harter, 2012; Hartling, 2007; Jackson, 2000;

¹ Although it may be sought after and lead to positive arousal in sadomasochistic people or people practicing bondage (BDSM), which we leave aside in the current dissertation.

Klein, 1991; Lacey, 2011; Leary et al., 2003; Lindner, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2002; D. Smith, 2008; Stern, 2003, 2004; Torres & Bergner, 2010; Trumbull, 2008). This seems remarkable because anger and humiliation clearly differ. Anger is a basic emotion that is felt because an important goal is blocked, which not necessarily implies a threat to the self, whereas humiliation always involves a devaluation of the self. However, it is theorized and empirically shown that the appraisal of unfairness differentiating humiliation from shame and embarrassment, connects it to anger (e.g., Fernández, Saguy, & Halperin, 2015).

Other empirical research has also emphasized the mixed nature of humiliation, suggesting that it contains aspects of both shame and embarrassment and anger and aggression. Elison and Harter (2007), for example, reported overlap between humiliation and embarrassment, and to a lesser degree shame, but they found that these emotions diverge in terms of intensity. They concluded that humiliation is as intense as shame, but more intense than embarrassment. Further, the appraisal of another's hostile intent is more typical for humiliation than for shame and embarrassment. In support of this, Combs et al. (2010) found evidence that perceived intentionality of a negative act intensifies reports of humiliation, but not shame. In their study, humiliation and shame were moderately correlated, but they also showed that humiliation was related to anger and a desire for revenge, whereas these relations were not, or less strongly, present for shame. Elison and Harter further reported evidence showing that experiences of humiliation are strongly linked to self- and other-directed anger and that humiliation mediates the relationship between being bullied and anger, suicidal- and violent ideation.

Other research also confirmed the connection between humiliation and anger and aggression. In a study on recollected experiences of shame and guilt, R. H. Smith, Webster, Parrott, and Eyre (2002) found that whereas shame was weakly correlated with hostile feelings, a much stronger correlation existed between humiliation and hostility. Corroborating these findings, Leidner et al. (2012) showed

that recollected experiences of group-based humiliation were similar to anger (and dissimilar to shame) in terms of high levels of other-directed outrage and low levels of guilt. However, they were more similar to shame (and dissimilar to anger) in terms of feelings of powerlessness. Lastly, Fernández et al. (2015) showed that humiliation is closer to shame and embarrassment than to anger in the appraisal of accepting a devaluation of the self (although the effect of such acceptance is stronger for shame and embarrassment than for humiliation), but it differs from these emotions and is closer to anger in an appraisal of injustice. In terms of action tendencies, they showed both approach- and avoidance tendencies to be associated with humiliation, whereas shame and embarrassment were only related to avoidance tendencies, and anger was only related to approach tendencies. In their research, the association between humiliation and approach tendencies was as strong as the relation between humiliation and avoidance tendencies, but this likely depends on the context, cultural factors and individual differences (e.g., low versus high, unstable self-esteem, humiliation proneness) and may thus differ in other settings.

Humiliation is Intense

As indicated, the second important feature of humiliation is that it is a very intense emotional experience that “sticks out” and is more pervasive than many other emotions. Leidner et al. (2012) suggest that this pervasiveness can be explained by the conflicting action tendencies associated with humiliation. These conflicting action tendencies could foster greater accessibility of humiliating experiences in memory. That is, humiliating incidents may be remembered better and/or over a longer period of time than other negative emotional episodes. Indeed, according to Klein (1991), humiliating experiences remain vivid in the minds of victims, “no matter how many years have passed” (p. 96). Consider, for example, the following account by one of the victims of abuse in the Catholic Church in the Netherlands: “I have been raped four times. That is terrible, but worst of all is the humiliation. From 6 until 16 years old: humiliate, just humiliate. That is the very worst” (“Nieuwsuur”,

2011). The fact that after many years, an abused person still recalls humiliation as the core feeling of a traumatic experience illustrates its intense character and profound impact.

There is also empirical research supporting this claim. For example, Otten and Jonas (2014) present electrophysiological evidence showing that humiliation is an intrinsically intense experience consuming attention and cognitive resources. They asked participants in the lab to read scenarios that induce humiliation (for example: “You see your internet-date at the arranged location. Your date takes one look at you, turns around and quickly walks away”). Other scenarios were designed to induce anger, happiness or shame. After reading the scenarios, participants were instructed to think about their own emotional reaction in these situations. Meanwhile the electrical brain activity of these participants was measured using the Electro-Encephalogram (EEG). It was found that people reading and thinking about the humiliating scenarios showed brain activity that was more indicative of a negative perception of the scenarios than people reading anger or happiness-inducing scenarios. Furthermore, people reading humiliation-inducing scenarios showed higher intensity of cortical activation, which is related to the processing of information, than people reading anger-, happiness- or shame-inducing scenarios. This suggests that humiliation is a more intense emotional experience in terms of neuro-cognitive and emotional processing than other approach-related emotions, such as anger and happiness, and avoidance-related emotions, such as shame.

Social-Contextual Determinants of Humiliation

In sum, previous social psychological emotion research showed that humiliation is an intense and complex emotion, which is related to shame and embarrassment as well as to anger and rage. In addition, clinical research has shown that humiliation can have severe consequences. However, there are still questions that need to be answered to obtain a more complete understanding of humiliation.

For example, although we know what constitutes humiliation very generally (e.g., negative attention, exclusion, ostracism), we do not have a clear idea yet of more specific social-contextual determinants of humiliation, that is, elements that enhance experiences of humiliation.

One social-contextual determinant of humiliation could be the presence of other people and their behaviour in a potentially humiliating situation. According to Klein (1991), other people—besides the humiliator and the victim—are an integral part of humiliation. He describes humiliation not just as an experience, but as a dynamic process involving a humiliator, a victim and a witness. Such a witness or multiple witnesses (i.e., an audience) may accidentally be present during a humiliating episode, or their presence may be of a more active nature, that is, they may choose to witness the event and even engage in mocking the victim. Therefore, an important question is: What is the effect of an audience during a humiliating episode? Does its mere presence make an insult or degrading comment more humiliating for the victim?

Some research indeed indicates that humiliation is felt more strongly when a potentially humiliating episode is public rather than private, or when an audience is present showing hostile intent (Combs et al., 2010; Elison & Harter, 2007; Fernández et al., 2015; R. H. Smith et al., 2002). For example, Elison and Harter (2007) asked participants to judge different scenarios describing emotional episodes. They found that the presence of an audience displaying hostile intent is judged as prototypical for humiliation. If this is true, the presence of a hostile audience in a situation in which someone is, for example, insulted, should lead to more humiliation than when an audience shows no hostile intent, because this situation is more typical for humiliation. Hostility or mocking can be expressed in different ways, but we are especially interested in the potential effect of *laughter* by an audience, as a sign of hostile intent. Although laughter is usually considered and recognized as something positive (e.g., Sauter, Eisner, Ekman, & Scott, 2010; Scott, Lavan, Chen, &

McGettigan, 2014), in the context of a humiliating episode, we predict that a laughing audience has a negative effect in the sense that it intensifies experienced humiliation (Chapter 2).

On the other hand, there are probably also factors relating to an audience that may decrease or attenuate experiences of humiliation, for example, showing support to the victim of humiliation. The positive role of social support has been demonstrated in several domains. For example, Cohen and Wills (1985) showed that the perceived availability of social support attenuates the adverse effects of stress on psychological well-being. Furthermore, Noh and Kaspar (2003) found that seeking social support after experiencing discrimination was associated with reduced levels of depression. In relation to humiliation, there is some research showing that a *peer support system* helps victims of bullying in school (e.g., Cowie & Hutson, 2005; Naylor & Cowie, 1999). In line with this, we expect that social support after a humiliating episode decreases feelings of humiliation. We address this hypothesis in Chapter 2 as well.

As noted before, the presence of a hostile audience is regarded as prototypical for humiliation (Elison & Harter, 2007). Thus, we expect that audience laughter during a humiliating episode intensifies feelings of humiliation. However, this effect may also depend on the relevance of the episode to the victim. When people are humiliated or insulted about something that is of little importance to them, they may not care very much about others' response. This leads to the question which types of threats are important when it concerns humiliation. On the basis of previous definitions (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Klein, 1991) we consider humiliation a threat to the core self and to values that are central to the self-concept of a person. Building on this idea, we argue that when a humiliating episode entails a threat to central and stable aspects of one's identity, or one's core or autonomous self, this episode becomes more relevant and other people's (negative) response matters more to the victim, leading to stronger feelings of humiliation. Thus, the effect of a laughing

audience (as one of the contextual determinants of humiliation) on experiences of humiliation may be especially strong after threats to autonomous aspects of the self.

However, what is important for people's self-concept may depend on their cultural background. Cultures can be differentiated on the basis of several dimensions, the most prominent being collectivism versus individualism. Generally, in individualistic cultures one's behaviour is seen as the product of a stable, unique, and independent self rather than determined by circumstances. In collectivistic cultures, on the other hand, there is a stronger emphasis on the collective, the group, and the interdependence between individuals. The individual self is thus less central to the self-concept and social and situational flexibility of the self is considered more focal (Cross, Harding, & Gercek-Swing, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). This could imply that the effect of a laughing audience on experienced humiliation may be especially strong when the autonomous self is threatened, but only in individualistic cultures. In more collectivistic cultures, audience laughter may have an effect in particular when it concerns a threat to the social-relational self. In Chapter 2, we explore whether audience laughter increases reports of humiliation after threats to the autonomous self (and not the social-relational self), and whether this depends on the cultural background of participants.

With or without an audience, humiliation can be experienced in different settings. One specific context in which humiliation is often felt is during initiation rituals, for example in fraternities, sports teams or the army. *Hazing* is the term that is used to describe initiation practices that are humiliating, degrading, abusive or dangerous, regardless of a person's willingness to participate (Hoover, 1999). It is often thought that these hazing practices, including humiliation, lead to stronger affiliation among the novices in a group. This idea is based on previous social psychological research indicating that severe initiations to become a member of a group lead to more liking of the group than mild initiations or no initiations (i.e., the *severity-attraction hypothesis*, Aronson & Mills, 1959). Furthermore, the same effect—of

group liking as a result of initiation severity—is predicted by the *severity-affiliation-attraction hypothesis* based on research by Schachter (1959). According to this idea, perceived or anticipated severity of an initiation to become member of a group (specifically a fraternity or sorority) leads to stronger attraction to the group because of a stronger need for affiliation amongst the group members (e.g., Lodewijckx & Syroit, 1997, 2001; Lodewijckx, Van Zomeren, & Syroit, 2005).

However, as humiliation is related to tendencies to withdraw (as well as tendencies to attack), we predict that when initiation rituals contain hazing practices that evoke humiliation, this is not associated with more, but rather with *less* group affiliation (Chapter 3). We also predict that when people are hazed together, within a group, rather than alone in front of a group, there will be a stronger expectation of social support from the other group members, which, in turn, leads to an decrease in feelings of humiliation.

Humiliation as a Group-Based Emotion

So far, we mainly discussed theories and research dealing with the experience of humiliation in interpersonal and, with regard to hazing, intragroup contexts. However, humiliation is also regarded an important group-based emotion. That is, humiliation can be experienced as a result of identification with a group one belongs to. A combination of insights obtained from Self Categorization Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and appraisal theories of emotions (e.g., Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 1991) led to the development of Intergroup Emotions Theory (IET; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; E. R. Smith, 1993, 1999). Based on IET, it has been shown that when one's group membership is salient, emotions can be felt on behalf of the group, depending on the degree of identification with that group. Such group-based emotions can be experienced even if they are not felt on a personal level, and they are only felt if one's group-identity is salient. Thus, group-based

emotions are different from their personal counterparts and this is also likely the case for humiliation.

As indicated before, group-based, or collective,² humiliation has been described as playing an important role in intergroup conflict. These conflicts may become intense and severe when they involve humiliation. An example that is often mentioned to illustrate this point is the deep humiliation felt by many Germans as a result of the loss of the First World War and the degrading *Treaty of Versailles*. This wounded pride seemed fertile ground for the rise of fascism and violent anti-Semitism (e.g., Baumeister, 2002; Lindner, 2001a, 2002; Staub, 1989).

However, conflicts in which group-based humiliation plays a role may also be less intense. These conflicts happen on a frequent basis all over the world and are often extensively covered by the media. Consider a headline in one of the Dutch big newspapers: “*Italy feels humiliated*” (Mesters, 2011). According to the accompanying article, the European Union offended the proud Italians’ dignity by legally restraining Italy as the biggest risk factor in the Eurozone. Furthermore, the Italian president was publicly mocked by other European leaders including Merkel and Sarkozy: “The French and German leaders – now dubbed ‘Merkozy’ – exchanged glances and smiled when asked if they were confident Berlusconi would come up with reforms, prompting a gale of laughter from journalists” (Mesters, 2011). This incident created anger and indignation among the Italian population, even amongst Berlusconi’s opponents. For example, Pier Ferdinando Casini, the head of the opposition UDC party said: “No one is authorised to ridicule Italy, even after Berlusconi’s obvious and embarrassing delays in tackling the crisis,” and he added: “I didn’t like Sarkozy’s sarcastic smile” (Kington, 2011). Other examples of group-based humiliation covered in the media often relate to sports games (e.g., the Dutch 5 to 1 victory over Spain in the World Cup soccer games of 2014) or public

² Group-based and collective emotions are not the same. Collective emotions are emotions that are shared by group members for different reasons, whereas group-based emotions are emotions felt as a result of identification with a group (Bar-Tal, Halperin, & de Rivera, 2007). However, it is quite often the case that group-based emotions are shared and thus become collective emotions as well.

condemnation or shaming of people who represent a group or nation (e.g., the arrest of Dominique Strauss-Kahn after he was accused of sexually assaulting a hotel employee was regarded a humiliation for France as a whole, see also Jonas, Otten, & Doosje, 2014).

Not much empirical work has been conducted on group-based humiliation, but several studies have suggested that people can feel humiliated on behalf of their group. For example, one study (Veldhuis et al., 2014) has shown that participants who observed rejection of an in-group member felt as humiliated as participants who were personally rejected, and they felt significantly more humiliated than participants who observed the rejection of an out-group member. These researchers also found a strong connection between humiliation and anger and not between humiliation and fear or shame (Veldhuis et al., 2014). Although this research focused on vicarious humiliation, rather than group-based humiliation, the two are probably related. Thus, this may indicate that, on a group level, humiliation is more strongly connected to anger than to shame. In line with these findings, Jonas, Doosje, Lobel, and Pyszczynski (2016) found that humiliation was related to harsh treatment of an out-group. However, Ginges and Atran (2008) did not find an effect of humiliation on anger or aggressive tendencies. Instead they found an *inertia* effect, showing that Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza who felt more humiliation as a result of the Israeli occupation were *less* supportive of suicide attacks against Israelis, although they were also less supportive of peace deals. These mixed findings are puzzling. Possibly group-based humiliation leads to aggression only under certain conditions. For example, feelings of powerlessness could be an explanation of the inertia effect found by Ginges and Atran. In the current dissertation we specifically focus on perceived group-status in feeling and acting upon humiliation. We predict that when people are from a high status group, or perceive this to be the case, they feel more humiliated when confronted with a humiliating loss of their group than when they belong to a low(er) status group. We also predict that this humiliation in

turn leads to aggression towards out-groups, even if the out-group is not associated with the humiliation evoking event (Chapter 4).

Overview of Empirical Chapters

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, we study the role of an audience during a humiliating episode. We use scenarios to investigate whether (imaginary) audience laughter intensifies reported humiliation. We also study a contrasting audience reaction, namely helping behaviour, in order to investigate whether a supportive audience reduces reports of humiliation. In addition, we examine whether audience laughter is perceived as particularly humiliating when the humiliating or insulting episode entails a threat to central and stable aspects of one's identity, i.e., one's core or autonomous self, or whether this depends on the cultural background of participants. To this end, we ask participants from an individualistic culture (i.e., The Netherlands and the United States) and a collectivistic culture (i.e., India) to read scenarios describing insulting episodes—including an audience that either laughs or does not react—and to indicate whether they would feel humiliated in such a situation.

Chapter 3 is focused on the role of humiliation during initiation rituals and we specifically focus on initiation rituals in fraternities and sororities (Study 3.1 and 3.3). We present three studies in which we use very different methods. In Study 3.1 we report results from a questionnaire among (former) members of fraternities and sororities investigating relations between experiences of humiliation, severity of the initiation and affiliation. In Study 3.2 we simulate a humiliating ritual in the lab and investigate whether experiencing this together with others in a group or alone in front of the group differently affects feelings of humiliation, withdrawal tendencies, affiliation and expected social support. Study 3.3 aims to replicate findings of Study 3.1 and 3.2, using scenarios in which typical hazing rituals are described.

In Chapter 4 we explore the role of group-status in relation to group-based humiliation and examine the relation between experienced group-based humiliation and aggressive tendencies toward an out-group that is unrelated to the humiliation evoking event. We present three studies in which we aim to evoke group-based humiliation and measure whether people respond with aggression towards another, unrelated group, as a way to enhance their threatened group identity. We investigate whether (perceived) high group-status enhances feelings of humiliation and in turn aggressive tendencies towards an unrelated out-group.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents a summary of the main empirical findings reported in this dissertation. On the basis of these findings, we outline general conclusions with regard to the nature and consequences of humiliation in different contexts (interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup). We further discuss theoretical and practical implications of this research. In addition, we discuss some important limitations of the research that is presented and we propose avenues for further research.³

³ Note that the empirical chapters (Chapter 2 to 4) were submitted to scientific journals almost in their current state. Therefore, some overlap exists between these chapters and both the General Introduction (Chapter 1) and the General Discussion (Chapter 5).