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### On feeling humiliated

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

Mann, L.

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## Chapter 2

### When Laughing Hurts: Humiliation, Audience Behaviour, and the Self

This chapter is based on:

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Humiliation seems to be a “darker” and more profound emotional experience than many other emotions, underlying psychological and relational as well as societal problems. The examples quoted in the General Introduction of this dissertation show the intense character and the potentially dramatic consequences of humiliation, and they raise questions about its nature and the circumstances in which humiliation is elicited.

Despite this, humiliation as a specific emotion has been largely ignored by emotion researchers, although there is a recent increase of research interest (e.g., Combs, Campbell, Jackson, & Smith, 2010; Doosje, Jasini, Jonas, & Sveinsdóttir, 2016; Elison & Harter, 2007; Elshout, Nelissen, & Van Beest, 2016; Fernández, Saguy, & Halperin, 2015; Ginges & Atran, 2008; Harter, 2012; Jasini, Doosje, Jonas, & Fischer, 2012; Jonas, Doosje, Lobel, & Pyszczynski, 2016; Leidner, Sheikh, & Ginges, 2012; Otten & Jonas, 2014; Otten, Jonas, Doosje, & Erbas, 2016; Veldhuis, Gordijn, Veenstra, & Lindenberg, 2014). On the other hand, social and clinical psychologists and criminologists have described the consequences of sometimes severe and prolonged experiences of humiliation, such as low self-esteem, depression, general anxiety disorder, suicidal intentions, homicide and (domestic) violence (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Farmer & McGuffin, 2003; Gilbert, 1997; Harter, 2012; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Kendler, Hetteema, Butera, Gardner, & Prescott, 2003; Klein, 1991; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003; Torres & Bergner, 2010; Walker & Knauer, 2011). These and other studies consistently show that humiliation is an extremely painful and maladaptive emotional experience. They also suggest that humiliation is complex in terms of its constellation of feelings and action tendencies. For example, humiliation has been frequently related to the self-conscious emotions of shame, guilt and embarrassment (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; H. B. Lewis, 1971; M. Lewis, 1992; Miller, 1993; R. H. Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002; Tracy & Robins, 2004), but also to anger, aggression and (a desire for) revenge (e.g., Combs et al., 2010; Elison & Harter, 2007; Gilbert, 1997; Harter, 2012; Hartling, 2007;

Jackson, 2000; Klein, 1991; Leary et al., 2003; Lindner, 2001a, 2001b; Torres & Bergner, 2010; Trumbull, 2008).

Given the complex nature of humiliation and its negative implications, we believe it is important to obtain more insight in factors that may intensify or weaken this emotion. There are two social-contextual factors that we assume will affect humiliation. First, the presence of others witnessing the event seems prototypical for the experience of humiliation (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Klein, 1991). However, an audience may enhance or decrease humiliation, depending on the nature of its actions. An audience can basically act in two ways: (join in) mocking the target, which would enhance humiliation, or help or support the target, which would decrease feelings of humiliation. Second, humiliation is considered an emotion in which the core self and one's most important values are under threat (e.g., Klein, 1991). However, depending on culture and context, different aspects of the self can be relevant or become active. We propose that the type of self-related value that is under threat in a humiliating episode affects the relevance of a situation, which may promote or block a potential audience effect on humiliation.

In three scenario studies, we examine the role of these factors. In all studies the effect of imagined audience laughter during a humiliating episode on reported humiliation is studied. In addition, in Study 2.1 we test whether imagined social support during the episode reduces reported humiliation. In Studies 2.2 and 2.3 we examine how a laughing audience effect might depend on the type of self-related value that is under threat during a humiliating episode, using data from participants of different cultural backgrounds (Study 2.3).

### **The Nature of Humiliation**

Linguistically, *humiliation* refers both to the *act* of humiliating someone and the *feeling* of humiliation experienced by a person. In the present chapter, we refer to humiliation as a feeling which is the result from a *perceived* act of humiliation by

another person or group in which one's core-self or global aspects of the self are threatened. Literally, humiliation means lowering or humbling a person, pushing him or her to the earth (*humus*), and thus humiliation has been defined as "the emotional response to a demeaning reduction of status" (Lacey, 2011, p. 89).

The experience of humiliation can result from being the centre of negative attention, as is the case when being teased, harassed, ridiculed or put down (Elison & Harter, 2007; Elshout et al., 2016; Harter, 2012), or being neglected, excluded or ostracised (Elshout et al., 2016; Hartling, 2007; Veldhuis et al., 2014). These actions by others may be the result of a transgression or norm violation by the victim. In that case, humiliation is typically regarded as a form of punishment, although it is often judged as unfair and disproportional and may not have the intended results (Combs et al., 2010). However, a strong norm violation is not a prerequisite for being humiliated. People can be humiliated merely by being "different" or judged by others as inadequate. For example, at school, youngsters are sometimes bullied, harassed or laughed at by their peers because of their appearance or lack of social or athletic skills (Harter, 2012).

As mentioned before, humiliation is associated with other emotions. On the basis of previous theorizing and empirical evidence (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Fernández et al., 2015; Harter, 2012; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Veldhuis et al., 2014), we argue that humiliation is a mixed, but discrete emotion that is distinct from, but related to shame and anger, and to a lesser degree embarrassment.

Of these emotions (shame, anger and embarrassment), humiliation is most often associated with shame (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; H. B. Lewis, 1971; M. Lewis, 1992; Lindner, 2009; Miller, 1993). Indeed, humiliation and shame share a number of feelings, appraisals and action tendencies (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Fernández et al., 2015; Leidner et al., 2012). They are both negative and global emotions that refer to the self (Zavaleta Reyles, 2007) and may arouse a wish to hide from others (Harter, 2012). The most important difference between these emotions, however, is that

shame entails a judgment or criticism on the self by the *self*, whereas humiliation means to be put down by *another*, which leads to an appraisal of unfairness (Gilbert, 1997; Harter, 2012; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Jackson, 2000; Klein, 1991). Indeed, unfairness seems to be a central aspect of humiliation (Combs et al., 2010; Elison & Harter, 2007; Harter, 2012; Jackson, 2000; Klein, 1991; Torres & Bergner, 2010) and it is empirically shown to differentiate humiliation from shame and connecting it to anger (Fernández et al., 2015).

In addition to shame, Elison and Harter (2007) found some overlap between humiliation and embarrassment, but they and others also note important differences between these emotions, especially in terms of others' intention and, related to that, intensity. That is, humiliation is a more intense emotion than embarrassment and this may be the result of perceived hostile intent by others, which is theorized and shown to be a key feature of humiliation (e.g., Combs et al., 2010; Elison & Harter, 2007; Harter, 2012). Again, this is an element that seems to differentiate humiliation from other self-conscious emotions and connects it more closely to anger and aggression. Indeed, a relation between humiliation and anger, aggression, and a desire for revenge was empirically demonstrated by several researchers (e.g., Combs et al., 2010; Elison & Harter, 2007; Fernández et al., 2015; Leidner et al., 2012; R. H. Smith et al., 2002). An extreme, but very relevant example of aggression in relation to humiliation is the phenomenon of *school-shootings*, the (attempted) mass killing and injuring of students and teachers at school or university by one or more students of that institution. The shootings are (at least partly) considered to be the result of the humiliation that is experienced by these perpetrators (Elison & Harter, 2007; Harter, 2012; Leary et al., 2003; Torres & Bergner, 2010).

In sum, humiliation can be associated with shame and embarrassment on the one hand and anger on the other. The (strength of the) connection between these emotions likely depends on personal, situational, and cultural factors. In all contexts, however, humiliation is a very painful emotion, characterized by a devaluation of the

self, a possible loss of status, appraisals of hostile intent of the other(s), and perceived unfairness.

### **Contextual Determinants of Humiliation**

Although we know that one of the antecedents of humiliation is the perception of an unfair and intentional attack by another, the question under which specific conditions feelings of humiliation are elicited or intensified is not fully answered. A first factor that may play a role is the presence of other people during a humiliating episode. According to Klein (1991) the “triangle of humiliation” involves a humiliator, a victim and a witness. Thus, in this view the presence of a witness or audience is a key element of the process of humiliation. More generally, R. H. Smith et al. (2002) argue that “public exposure of any sort of behaviour, and the evaluative implications of public scrutiny, may be an especially powerful ingredient of the socially constructed self” (p. 146). Supporting this argument, these researchers show evidence that public exposure of a wrongdoing leads to stronger reports of shame, humiliation and embarrassment than when the wrongdoing remains private. In addition, a study by Combs et al. (2010) showed that participants who read scenarios about a person being punished for a moral transgression reported stronger humiliation when the reprimand was given in public rather than privately. A similar finding was shown by Fernández et al. (2015): Descriptions of a demeaning episode that were made public led to higher ratings of humiliation than when the episode stayed private. In line with Klein’s theorizing, Elison and Harter (2007) further show that the presence of an audience displaying hostile intent is judged as prototypical for humiliation. They also found that when participants imagined being put down or violating a norm in the presence of an audience, they indicated to feel worse about themselves than when there is no audience, and they reported to feel worse if that audience shows hostile intent (i.e., condescending looks and mocking) than when it reacts sympathetically.

Although these results are important, they do not show a direct causal link between (imagined) audience behaviour and perceived humiliation, as feeling badly about oneself concerns a much broader negative affect than feeling humiliated. Furthermore, these results keep us in the dark with regard to the *type* of hostility displayed by the audience. We are especially interested in the effect of laughter on humiliation.

Although laughter has a clear positive and prosocial function in many situations (see e.g., Scott, Lavan, Chen, & McGettigan, 2014), and is cross-culturally recognized as an expression of joy (Sauter, Eisner, Ekman, & Scott, 2010), in some contexts it can be a signal of negative emotions as well (see e.g., Niedenthal, Mermillod, Maringer, & Hess, 2010, who distinguish three different types of smiles). For example, contempt is often accompanied by a smile, referred to as the unilateral lip curl (e.g., Darwin, 1872; Ekman & Friesen, 1986; Izard & Haynes, 1988; Wagner, 2000) and can be expressed with scornful and derisive laughter (Ruch & Proyer, 2008). *Schadenfreude*—the enjoyment of others' misfortune (van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, Nieweg, & Gallucci, 2006)—is also associated with laughter. For example, *Schadenfreude* is often used as the basis of TV shows (Ruch & Proyer, 2008) in which people are laughed at and ridiculed for their (poor) performances, appearances or norm-deviant behaviour. In such instances, laughter is not friendly or supportive, but rather derogative and implies that we *laugh at* rather than *with* someone. In the case of humiliation, we therefore expect that laughter is a clear signal of degradation, derision or bullying.

### The Current Research

Our first set of hypotheses thus relates to the role of an audience. In particular, we hypothesize that the presence of a laughing audience during a humiliating episode intensifies feelings of humiliation. Based on earlier research and theory (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Harter, 2012; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Klein, 1991), we

expect that humiliation is closely related to shame and anger. However, because public degradation is a prototypical feature of humiliation (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007), we expect audience behaviour to be more strongly linked to humiliation than to shame and anger.

In addition, we examine the effect of a contrasting reaction, namely the target of humiliation being socially supported by an individual from the audience, which may reduce humiliation. Social support has, to our knowledge, never been experimentally studied in the specific context of humiliation. That being said, research on classroom bullying showed that so-called *peer support systems* (e.g., Cowie & Hutson, 2005; Naylor & Cowie, 1999)—trained youngsters who offer friendship and support to victims of bullying, and promote a pro-social atmosphere in and around the classroom—reduce the negative impact of bullying on the victims (Cowie & Hutson, 2005). In line with this, we argue that social support after a humiliating event helps the victim to cope with the event and therefore reduces feelings of humiliation.

Our second set of hypotheses is more explorative and relates to which aspects of the self should be threatened in order to give rise to feelings of humiliation. As mentioned previously, the presence of an audience showing hostile intent is regarded as prototypical for humiliation (Elison & Harter, 2007). As we argue that laughter is one way of showing hostile intent, we predict that potentially humiliating situations involving such laughter are seen as more humiliating than similar events without audience laughter. However, an audience effect may also depend on the relevance of the situation for the victim. If a potentially humiliating episode does not (strongly) touch upon one's concerns (Frijda, 1986), people may not only feel less humiliated, they may also care less about other people's responses. As humiliation is described as "an invasion of the self" (Klein, 1991, p. 98), we argue that when a humiliating episode entails a threat to central and stable aspects of one's identity, i.e., one's core or autonomous self, a strong concern is activated. In turn, other people's

(negative) response matters more to the victim and evokes stronger humiliation.

What is considered one's core self, however, may depend on the social and cultural context. The notion of a stable and agentic self-construal has been shown to be more crucial in Western individualistic cultures compared to collectivistic cultures, where social and situational flexibility of the self is considered more focal (Cross, Harding, & Gercek-Swing, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, we argue that the effect of a laughing audience on 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. To our knowledge, no research studied self-related values and culture in relation to humiliation. In the current studies, we therefore explore these issues to provide a basis for further research in this area.

Finally, based on Elison and Harter's (2007) conclusion that the dynamics of humiliation apply to both genders, we have no reason to expect gender differences. However, previous research on gender differences in subjective emotions often have shown more intense reports of emotions by women (Fischer & Evers, 2013), and one study showed higher reports of humiliation by women than by men (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). Thus, we do control for gender in all studies.

We report three studies focusing on these ideas. In Study 2.1 we examine whether descriptions of public insults after a norm violation in the presence of an audience increase reports of humiliation when the audience laughs compared to when there is no audience reaction (Hypothesis 1), whereas this is not (or less) the case for shame and anger (Hypothesis 2). We also expect that including social support from someone witnessing the episode in such a description decreases reports of humiliation (Hypothesis 3). In Studies 2.2 and 2.3 we explore whether an audience effect on reported humiliation is more pronounced when one's autonomous and independent self is threatened than when the social-relational self is threatened, or

whether this depends on the cultural background of participants. We confirm that we report all data exclusions, all measures and all manipulations in the three studies.

### **Study 2.1**

In Study 2.1 we manipulated the reaction of an audience during a hypothetical humiliating episode. We constructed a scenario that describes a person being insulted for violating a norm in the presence of others (the audience) who either laugh after the insult or show no reaction. Participants were requested to imagine themselves as the protagonist in the story and to indicate their expected emotional reaction. We predicted that reports of humiliation would be higher when the audience laughs at the protagonist than when there is no such reaction (Hypothesis 1). We also expected that this audience effect would be more pronounced for humiliation than for anger and shame (Hypothesis 2). Finally, we predicted that support offered after this episode would decrease the reported intensity of humiliation (Hypothesis 3).

### **Method**

#### **Participants and Procedure**

A total of 160 participants took part in this study. Data were collected online by mailing the student mailing list of an English-speaking international university in Germany. Additionally, we collected data (paper and pencil) in and around the University of Amsterdam and via a snowball procedure in the United Kingdom.

As the current study was not focused at testing cultural differences in these situations (as in Study 2.3), we aimed for a culturally homogeneous group of people from Western Europe. However, 28 international students of the German university were born and raised in non-Western, collectivistic countries (i.e., Africa, Latin America, and Asia). For ethical reasons we did not exclude students based on nationality, but we analysed only the results of a culturally homogenous (i.e.,

Western) group of participants. Importantly, when we included the data of the non-Western participants we found the same patterns of significant results. Data of another 17 participants were excluded for other reasons.<sup>4</sup> Thus, 115 participants remained (72 female, 42 male, 1 gender missing). Their mean age was 27.34 years ( $SD = 10.81$ , range: 14-64).

Participants read the scenario and completed the questionnaire called "Emotions in Daily Life." Depending on their country of origin, a Dutch or an English version was presented (see below for translation procedures).

### **Design and Scenario**

The scenario and questions were first written in Dutch and then translated into English by the researchers. These translations were inspected and where necessary corrected by a native speaker. It was made sure that the translation did not compromise the content of the scenarios so that they were fully comparable.

We used a 2 (Audience Reaction: No Reaction versus Laughter)  $\times$  2 (Social Support: No Support versus Support) between-participants design with Gender as a covariate. In all conditions we first presented the following text:

You are participating in a discussion on politics, hosting people with different backgrounds. At a certain moment the discussion turns to a sensitive subject for some people. The discussion leader happens to be aware that you know a lot about this subject and he asks you a question about it. When you hesitate a little to answer his question, the person who sits next to you says in a sneering tone: "If you are not even able to give an honest and open opinion, then what are you doing here?"

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<sup>4</sup> Because (a) they did not participate in a serious manner ( $n = 8$ ); (b) their responses were incomplete ( $n = 5$ ); or (c) they scored too high on the item "happiness" (4 or 5 on a five-point scale), which was intended as a control variable to test the effectiveness of the scenario ( $n = 4$ ).

Subsequently, in the Laughter condition the sentence: "Some of the other participants start to laugh," was added to the text. This manipulation was checked in a pilot-study in which we asked participants to indicate the reaction of the other people present in the situation. In the Support condition the sentence: "Then, another participant tells the person next to you: 'Don't act so stupid, have some respect!'" was added.

## Measures

Participants indicated their agreement with statements on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Emotions were measured with four items, each starting with the sentence: "In this situation I would experience...", and followed by one of the four emotion labels: "humiliation," "anger," "shame," and "happiness."<sup>5</sup> To check our manipulation of social support we asked the following question: "Do you feel the participants were on your side?" (felt support).

## Results

### Manipulation Check

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed with Social Support and Audience Reaction as factors and participants' rating of the extent they would feel that the other discussants were on their side (felt support) as dependent variable. There was no main effect of Social Support. However, there was a significant interaction between Audience Reaction and Social Support,  $F(1, 111) = 14.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .113$ . When the audience did not react after the insult, there was no difference in felt support in the two conditions ( $M_{\text{Support}} = 3.04, SD = 0.94; M_{\text{No Support}} = 3.35, SD =$

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<sup>5</sup> Happiness was included as a control measure. If participants scored high on this item (4 or 5), their data were excluded from the analyses, because in these instances we considered the manipulation of humiliation as failed. When happiness was included in the analyses, we found an effect of Social Support. Participants scored higher on happiness when support was offered than when no support was offered after the humiliating episode. Happiness was related to humiliation ( $r = -.23, p = .012$ ), anger ( $r = -.31, p = .001$ ), and shame ( $r = -.18, p = .057$ ). We also measured contempt with one item. There were no main effects and no interaction of Audience Reaction or Social Support on this measure. Contempt was significantly related to anger ( $r = .21, p = .024$ ), but not to the other emotions.

0.63). When the audience laughed after the insult, however, support resulted in higher scores on felt support than when no support was given ( $M_{\text{Support}} = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ;  $M_{\text{No Support}} = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ). These results suggest that the manipulation of support was successful, even though the extent to which people indicated to feel support depended on the presence of audience laughter.

## Main Analyses

**Emotions.** A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with Audience Reaction and Social Support as between-subjects factors, humiliation, shame and anger as dependent variables, and Gender as a covariate showed a significant multivariate effect for Audience Reaction,  $F(3, 104) = 3.63$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .095$ . Univariate analyses showed that this effect was significant for humiliation,  $F(1, 106) = 8.37$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .073$ , and shame,  $F(1, 106) = 5.99$ ,  $p = .016$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .053$ , and marginally significant for anger,  $F(1, 106) = 3.75$ ,  $p = .056$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .034$ . When scenarios included audience laughter, scores on these emotions were higher than when there was no audience reaction after the insult (see Table 2.1), supporting Hypothesis 1. Although audience laughter had an effect on both humiliation and shame (and a marginal effect on anger), the effect was strongest for humiliation, as indicated by the higher numerical value of the effect size, which is in line with Hypothesis 2.

There was also a significant multivariate effect for Social Support,  $F(3, 104) = 6.37$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .155$ . Univariate analyses revealed only an effect on anger,  $F(1, 106) = 17.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .139$ . When scenarios described support being offered by a person from the audience, reports of anger decreased compared to when no support was offered (see Table 2.1). There was no effect on shame,  $F(1, 106) = 1.49$ ,  $p = .225$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .014$ , and, contrary to Hypothesis 3, support did not decrease reports of humiliation,  $F(1, 106) = 0.07$ ,  $p = .786$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .001$ . However, in line with our hypothesis, there was a significant negative relation between felt support and humiliation,  $r = -.21$ ,  $p = .025$ , indicating that the stronger participants believed that the other discussants were on their side, the less strongly they reported humiliation. This

relationship was not significant for shame ( $r = -.15, p = .119$ ) or anger ( $r = -.08, p = .400$ ). There was no significant interaction between Audience Reaction and Social Support.

Table 2.1

*Means and Standard Deviations for Emotions, separated for Audience Reaction (No Reaction versus Laughter) and Social Support (No Support versus Support), Study 2.1*

Emotion	Audience Reaction		Social Support	
	No Reaction <i>M (SD)</i>	Laughter <i>M (SD)</i>	No Support <i>M (SD)</i>	Support <i>M (SD)</i>
Humiliation	2.22 (1.14) <sup>a</sup>	2.85 (1.09) <sup>b</sup>	2.59 (1.21) <sup>a</sup>	2.52 (1.09) <sup>a</sup>
Shame	1.90 (1.03) <sup>a</sup>	2.40 (1.08) <sup>b</sup>	2.07 (1.07) <sup>a</sup>	2.29 (1.09) <sup>a</sup>
Anger	2.94 (1.17) <sup>†</sup>	3.40 (1.12) <sup>†</sup>	3.59 (1.04) <sup>a</sup>	2.73 (1.14) <sup>b</sup>

*Note.* Means in the row No Reaction vs. Laughter and No Support vs. Support with different superscripts differ at least at  $p < .05$ . † indicates means that differ at  $p < .10$ .

### Correlations

Reported anger and shame were both significantly and positively related to reported humiliation ( $r = .30, p = .001$ , and  $r = .58, p < .001$ , respectively), but not to each other ( $r = .08, ns$ ). The relation between humiliation and shame was significantly stronger than the relation between humiliation and anger,  $t(110) = -2.80, p = .003$ .

### Discussion

The results of Study 2.1 support the idea that audience laughter during a public insult leads to stronger humiliation compared to the same insult without audience laughter. We found that the increase in reported humiliation was accompanied by higher reports of shame and marginally higher reports of anger. Thus, all three emotions were affected by imagined audience laughter. However, this effect was strongest for humiliation—as indicated by its effect size—suggesting that public mocking in the form of laughter is a key feature of humiliation, more so than

of shame or anger. This notion is also supported by the negative relationship between participants' feeling that the other discussants were on their side and humiliation. The less participants indicated to feel that others supported them, the more humiliation they reported.

Contrary to Hypothesis 3, a description of social support by someone from the audience did not reduce reports of humiliation after the insult, nor did it reduce reported humiliation after descriptions of audience laughter. Yet, it did temper reports of anger. The question is whether this would be a very positive result. If an act of support does not affect humiliation and shame, but only lowers anger, the end result may be an experienced loss of control and a strong tendency to withdraw from the scene. We may explain the absence of an effect of support on humiliation by the fact that receiving social support can actually emphasize one's vulnerable and low status. Moreover, the involvement of others also stresses the public nature of the degradation, which may, in some cases, lead to an unintended *negative* effect of social support (although we did not find such an effect in the current study). We will discuss the role of social support further in the General Discussion.

### Study 2.2

Study 2.1 supported Hypothesis 1 that descriptions of public insults including a laughing audience are perceived as more humiliating than when the audience does not react. In Study 2.2 we further examined whether laughing would be perceived as especially painful in response to specific types of threats to the self. Previous research has shown that values reflecting one's autonomy and stable personality are more central to people from Western-European countries than values related to one's connectedness with others (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). We therefore explored whether in the current (Dutch) sample, descriptions of audience laughter would enhance perceptions of humiliation in particular when one's autonomous self, e.g., one's independence or honesty, is at stake rather than when the social-relational self

is threatened. Again, we expected that this effect would be more pronounced for humiliation than for anger and shame (Hypothesis 3).

To this end, we created six scenarios describing a public insult targeted either at the autonomous or social-relational self. We asked participants to read the six scenarios and imagine themselves as protagonist. The response of the audience (laughter or no response) was manipulated in the same manner as in Study 2.1.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were 101 students from two universities in Amsterdam. They had different ethnic backgrounds, but Dutch was their mother tongue. Data of two participants were not analysed because they did not participate in a serious manner. Thus, 99 participants remained. Their mean age was 21.92 ( $SD = 4.41$ , range: 18-42, 71 female).

Students came to the lab and participated in return for credits. In addition, participants were approached at the university campus. As a small token of appreciation they were offered a candy bar. Participants read the scenarios and completed the questionnaire called "Social Situations."

### Scenarios and Dependent Measures

In all six scenarios the protagonist is insulted by someone on the basis of a self-related value in the presence of other people who either laugh or do not react. Three scenarios described threats to values related to autonomy (honesty/openness, independence, and originality), and three scenarios described threats to social-relational values (respect for tradition/family, respect for elderly, and helpfulness). These values were selected on the basis of Schwartz' (2006) research on cultural values. For the exact wording of the scenarios, see Appendix A. Before presenting the scenarios, we measured endorsement of the autonomy values (i.e., honesty, independence, and originality) and social-relational values (i.e., respect for elderly,

respect for tradition, helpfulness) by asking participants to rate their importance. These questions could be answered on a scale ranging from 1 (*not important at all*) to 7 (*very important*). After each scenario, three items measured whether participants think they would feel ashamed, angry, and humiliated in the following way: “In this situation I would feel [respective emotion label].” These questions could be answered on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).<sup>6</sup>

## Results

### Endorsement of Autonomy and Social-Relational Values

We created two scales of value endorsement (autonomy and social-relational value endorsement). However, the reliability of these scales was very low (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .20$  and  $.58$  respectively). Therefore we could not use the scales in further analyses (e.g., to test a mediation of value endorsement). Nevertheless, participants scored higher on the autonomy values scale ( $M = 5.86$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) than on the social-relational values scale ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ),  $t(98) = 5.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .50$ . This indicates that participants thought the autonomy values were more important for them than the social-relational values.

### Main Analyses

To control for the idiosyncratic element of each scenario, we standardised emotion ratings by computing z-scores of the means. We then collapsed scores for humiliation, shame, and anger for the autonomy and social-relational scenarios.<sup>7</sup> Because the design prevented us from analysing the scenarios as within-subject

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<sup>6</sup> We also measured sadness (with one item). There were no main effects of Audience Reaction and Social Support, and no interaction, on this measure. Sadness was significantly related to humiliation ( $r = .67$ ,  $p < .001$ ), shame ( $r = .57$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and anger ( $r = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ ) for the autonomy scenarios, and also to humiliation ( $r = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ), shame ( $r = .64$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and anger ( $r = .40$ ,  $p < .001$ ) for the social-relational scenarios.

<sup>7</sup> For the three autonomy scenarios, correlations for the items measuring humiliation ranged from:  $r = .48$  ( $p = .001$ ) to  $r = .49$  ( $p = .001$ ), for shame they ranged from:  $r = .19$  ( $p = .060$ ) to  $r = .36$  ( $p = .001$ ), and for anger they ranged from:  $r = .13$  ( $p = .191$ ) to  $r = .32$  ( $p = .001$ ). For the three social-relational scenarios, correlations for the items measuring humiliation ranged from:  $r = .33$  ( $p = .001$ ) to  $r = .46$  ( $p = .001$ ), for shame they ranged from:  $r = .21$  ( $p = .035$ ) to  $r = .25$  ( $p = .015$ ), and for anger they ranged from:  $r = .21$  ( $p = .035$ ) to  $r = .31$  ( $p = .002$ ).

factor, and the scenarios contained very different situations, we analysed the autonomy- and social-relational scenarios separately.

**Autonomy scenarios.** We conducted a MANOVA with Audience Reaction (No Reaction versus Laughter) as between-subjects factor, Gender as a covariate, and perceived humiliation, shame and anger as dependent variables. There was a significant multivariate effect for Audience Reaction,  $F(3, 94) = 2.92, p = .038, \eta_p^2 = .085$ . This was only significant for humiliation,  $F(1, 96) = 7.99, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .077$ , indicating that, in line with Study 2.1 and Hypothesis 1, participants who read scenarios in which the audience laughed reported stronger humiliation than participants who read scenarios without audience laughter (see Table 2.2). In support of Hypothesis 3, we only found this effect for humiliation and not for shame,  $F(1, 96) = 2.47, p = .119, \eta_p^2 = .025$ , or anger,  $F(1, 96) = 0.08, p = .779, \eta_p^2 = .001$ .

**Social-relational scenarios.** A similar MANOVA was conducted for the social-relational scenarios. No multivariate,  $F(3, 94) = 0.75, p = .526, \eta_p^2 = .023$ , or univariate effects for Audience Reaction were found. For means and standard deviations see Table 2.2.

## Correlations

Correlations between reported humiliation, shame and anger were positive and significant for both types of scenarios (see Table 2.3). As shown in Table 2.3 and replicating findings from Study 2.1, correlations between reported humiliation and shame were higher than those between reported humiliation and anger for both autonomy scenarios,  $t(96) = -3.27, p < .001$ , and social-relational scenarios,  $t(96) = -4.79, p < .001$ .

Table 2.2

*Z-scores of the Means and Standard Deviations for Emotions after reading Autonomy- or Social-Relational Scenarios, separated for Audience Reaction (No Reaction versus Laughter), Study 2.2*

Emotion	Autonomy Scenarios		Social-Relational Scenarios	
	No Reaction <i>M (SD)</i>	Laughter <i>M (SD)</i>	No Reaction <i>M (SD)</i>	Laughter <i>M (SD)</i>
Humiliation	-0.22 (0.78) <sup>a</sup>	0.18 (0.79) <sup>b</sup>	-0.05 (0.68) <sup>a</sup>	0.04 (0.86) <sup>a</sup>
Shame	-0.10 (0.70) <sup>a</sup>	0.09 (0.73) <sup>a</sup>	0.00 (0.70) <sup>a</sup>	-0.01 (0.71) <sup>a</sup>
Anger	-0.01 (0.64) <sup>a</sup>	0.02 (0.73) <sup>a</sup>	-0.08 (0.77) <sup>a</sup>	0.09 (0.65) <sup>a</sup>

*Note.* Means in one row (for Autonomy- or Social-Relational scenarios) with different superscripts differ at least at  $p < .05$ .

Table 2.3

*Correlations between Z-Scores of the Means for Humiliation, Shame, and Anger for Autonomy (Aut) and Social-Relational (SR) scenarios, Study 2.2*

	Scenario	Humiliation		Shame		Anger	
		Aut	SR	Aut	SR	Aut	SR
Humiliation	Aut	—					
	SR	.57 <sup>***</sup>	—				
Shame	Aut	.69 <sup>***</sup>	.50 <sup>***</sup>	—			
	SR	.55 <sup>***</sup>	.77 <sup>***</sup>	.63 <sup>***</sup>	—		
Anger	Aut	.41 <sup>***</sup>	.27 <sup>**</sup>	.33 <sup>**</sup>	.26 <sup>*</sup>	—	
	SR	.28 <sup>**</sup>	.43 <sup>***</sup>	.24 <sup>*</sup>	.33 <sup>**</sup>	.45 <sup>***</sup>	—

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

Study 2.2 replicated the results from Study 2.1 and found that the presence of a laughing audience in descriptions of a public insult intensified reported humiliation, but not shame and anger. However, this was only true for the insults threatening the autonomous self, but not the social-relational self. Importantly, because the method we used did not allow us to compare both types of value threats

in one analysis, we cannot draw conclusions about a possible difference between a laughter effect for the two types of threat, although we can conclude that there was an effect of audience laughter for the autonomy values, but not for the social-relational values. This supports the idea that—even though threats to all these values evoke considerably strong reports of humiliation—imagined audience laughter enhances humiliation in particular when stable, positive personality characteristics, that is, aspects of the autonomous self are threatened.

It is important to emphasize that these results were found for respondents living in an individualistic culture, where people generally adhere more strongly to autonomy-related than to social-relational values, and this pattern was observed in the present sample. This emphasis on autonomy may have caused enhanced reports of humiliation after audience laughter. If this is true, people from collectivistic cultures with more social-relational self-construals should feel more humiliated after audience laughter when their social-relational self is threatened. Indeed, there is evidence for cultural differences in antecedents of certain emotions, for example shame and anger (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002), and in the importance of situations eliciting emotions (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mesquita, 2001). Thus, an alternative hypothesis is that *only* people from individualistic cultures are more vulnerable to audience laughter after a threat to the autonomous self. To test this idea, in Study 2.3 we compared responses of people from India and the United States who read descriptions of humiliating threats to autonomous versus social-relational aspects of the self, with and without audience laughter.

### Study 2.3

A third scenario study investigated the role of an audience and self-related values in humiliation for participants with different cultural backgrounds, namely Indians and Americans. These two groups are especially suitable for the current

research for two reasons. First, they represent typical examples of individualistic (American) and collectivistic (Indian) cultures, which differ in terms of independent versus interdependent self-construals (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991<sup>8</sup>). Americans, in general, put stronger emphasis on the autonomous self, such as standing out, being different from others and making one's own decisions. Indians generally value the social-relational self more strongly; respect for family, obedience and group harmony are of prime importance (e.g., Kapoor, Hughes, Baldwin, & Blue, 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Schwartz, 2006). However, these groups are more similar in other domains. For example, on the horizontal-vertical dimension (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfland, 1995), which emphasizes equality versus hierarchy, both groups are considered vertical or status-oriented (e.g., Harter, 2012; Sivadas, Bruvold, & Nelson, 2008). This means that status differences are emphasized and respected in both cultures. Because humiliation is linked to power and status differentials (e.g., Lacey, 2011), different ways of perceiving and dealing with status might impact humiliation. Thus, by comparing groups that are more similar in this respect, we control for possible bias.

A second reason for comparing these two groups is that English is a main language for both (it is one of the official languages in India, see e.g., Scollon, Diener, Oishi, & Biswas-Diener, 2004), which makes it possible to use the exact same scenarios, thereby overcoming potential translation biases. Thus, the Indian and the American cultures differ on important dimensions, but they are more similar in domains that we did not want to affect the results.

We aimed to replicate the results of Study 2.1 and Study 2.2 that imagined audience laughter would increase reports of humiliation (Hypothesis 1), but we explored whether this would be only the case when the autonomous self is threatened (as in Study 2.2), or whether the effect would be found for Americans

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<sup>8</sup> Although these authors focus on differences between Americans and Japanese to a large extent, they also discuss research that has compared Americans and Indians.

when the autonomous self is threatened, but for Indians when the social-relational self is threatened. If audience laughter generally intensifies humiliation *only* when one's autonomy is at stake, no differences between the respondents of the two countries would emerge. We also explored possible differences between both groups in reported emotions overall.

Finally, in Study 2.1 and 2.2 we used single-item measures of emotions for practical reasons, but these may not generalize well to the full spectrum of emotions. Thus, in Study 2.3 we used more elaborated scales of emotions including items tapping feelings, appraisals and action tendencies.

## Method

### Participants

In total, 344 participants completed the questionnaire, which was administered online. Five participants did not pass the language-check (see below). Thus, a total of 339 participants remained. Hundred and sixty-seven participants (91 female, 70 male, 6 missing) were from the United States. They were aged 19 to 72 ( $M = 33.76$ ,  $SD = 12.00$ ). Hundred seventy-two (60 female, 99 male, 13 missing) participants were from India. They were aged 19 to 65 ( $M = 31.27$ ,  $SD = 10.16$ ). Participants were recruited via the Amazon-website *Mechanical Turk*.<sup>9</sup> They were paid 0.50 dollars.

### Design and Scenarios

Based on Schwartz' classification of cultural values (e.g., Schwartz, 2006) and Study 2.2, we constructed two scenarios describing a threat to autonomy concerns and two scenarios describing a threat to social-relational concerns. In the autonomy scenarios the protagonist is humiliated (by means of a public insult) because he/she is accused of (1) not having an independent opinion or (2) not being very creative. In

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<sup>9</sup> Mechanical Turk can be considered a valid alternative to traditional ways of data-collection, see for example Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz (2012) and Paolacci, Chandler, and Ipeirotis (2010).

the social-relational scenarios the protagonist is accused of (1) not caring for family or (2) not taking into account their parents' opinion. In all scenarios the insult is followed by audience laughter or not (see Appendix B for the exact wording of the scenarios).<sup>10</sup>

About half of the participants read the two autonomy scenarios and the other half read the social relational scenarios (this was randomly distributed). Because the design prevented us from analysing the scenarios as between-subjects factor and the content of the scenarios was very different (as in Study 2.3), we analysed the autonomy- and social-relational scenarios separately. Thus, for both the autonomy and the social-relational scenarios, this resulted in a 2 (Country of Residence: India versus United States) x 2 (Audience Reaction: Laughter versus No Reaction) between subjects design.

## Procedure

We administered the questionnaire in English to all participants and checked for English proficiency by asking them to write a short story. These stories were inspected for language and clarity.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, participants were requested to read brief scenarios about "Social Situations," to imagine that they were the protagonists in each scenario and to complete a series of questions about their expected response in these situations.

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<sup>10</sup> We also created "counterparts" of each scenario, meaning that for every autonomy scenario we created a social-relational version and vice versa. To this end we used the same situation and changed the threat in the opposite direction. For example, in Scenario 1 (Appendix B), instead of changing his/her opinion in line with the group-norm, the protagonist sticks to his/her opinion, which is then criticized by others and thus becomes a threat to the social-relational self instead of to the autonomous self. We asked participants to read these stories and answer the same questions as for the other scenarios. This enabled us to compare the autonomy and social-relational threats with each other (between participants) and see if there was an effect of Type of Threat or an interaction between Type of Threat and the other independent variables on emotions. We did not find any of these effects.

<sup>11</sup> Our instruction for this check-question read: "First we would like to know a little bit more about you, so please give a short description of (some aspects of) your daily life. For example, where do you live? What kind of work do you do? What are your interests or hobbies? In this way we get a more general idea of the daily lives of our respondents. Please keep in mind that this survey is strictly anonymous, so please don't give us your name or any other information with which we could identify you."

## Measures

**Endorsement of autonomy and social-relational values.** Two scales of both four items were constructed to measure participants' endorsement of the self-related values that were at stake in the scenarios. The items started with the sentence: "How important do you rate the following values?" For Autonomy values the items were: "Having an opinion of my own," "Being unique and different from others," "Making my own choices, independently of what others think," and "Having the freedom to live my own life." For social-relational values the items were: "Being obedient to my parents," "Taking care of parents or friends who are in need," "Conforming to the opinions or behaviors of my friends," and "Being similar to others, not standing out." Both scales were reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$  and  $.71$  respectively). However, reliability dropped for the social-relational scale when we inspected it separately for Americans and Indians (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  autonomy scale: Americans:  $.77$ , Indians:  $.78$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  social-relational scale: Americans:  $.56$ , Indians:  $.61$ ). The correlation between the scales was positive, but low ( $r = .13$ ,  $p = .019$ ).

**Emotions.** For each scenario, imagined humiliation, shame, and anger were measured with combined scales of feelings, appraisals, and action tendencies. Unless mentioned otherwise, all items were answered on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

**Humiliation.** Four emotion labels from Hartling and Luchetta's (1999) *Humiliation Inventory* were selected based on their relevance to the scenarios (i.e., "discounted," "excluded," "put down," "scorned"). To these items we added the explicit emotion label: "humiliated." Each item started with the sentence: "After what happened in this situation, I would feel [respective emotion label]." In addition, two appraisals were created on the basis of theoretical definitions of humiliation (e.g., "After what happened in this situation, I would think..." "that an important part of my identity was harmed" and "that I could not do anything in this situation"). As a wish to take revenge is often associated with humiliation, we also

included three action tendencies measuring a desire for revenge (e.g., “After what happened in this situation, I would want to...” “get back at the insulter,” “think about taking revenge,” and “think about making the insulter suffer”). The humiliation scale was highly reliable for all four scenarios (Alpha’s  $\geq .85$ ).

**Shame and anger.** For these emotions, we selected items from or based on research by Frijda, Kuipers, and Ter Schure (1989), Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz (1994), R. H. Smith et al. (2002), and Tracy and Robins (2006). Anger was measured with three emotion labels (i.e., “After what happened in this situation I would feel...” “angry,” “irritated,” “resentful”), two appraisals (i.e., “After what happened in this situation I would think...” “of how unfair the others’ reaction was,” “that the others were to blame for the situation”), and three action tendencies (e.g., “After what happened in this situation I would...” “feel like hitting someone,” “feel the desire to say something nasty,” “feel like yelling”). Reliability was high for all four scenarios (Alpha’s  $\geq .85$ ).

Shame was also measured with three emotion labels (i.e., “After what happened in this situation I would feel...” “ashamed,” “embarrassed,” “small”), two appraisals (i.e., “After what happened in this situation I would think...” “that the reaction of the others was my own fault,” “that this situation is uncontrollable”), and three action tendencies (i.e., “After what happened in this situation I would feel the desire to...” “hide,” “disappear,” “be alone”). This scale also showed high reliability for all four scenarios (Alpha’s  $\geq .85$ ).

**Other measures.** To get more insight in participants’ evaluation of the situation, apart from their emotional response, we asked them for each scenario to rate the appropriateness of the behaviour of the protagonist and insulter, and (only for participants in the audience laughter condition) how appropriate they thought it was that the others laughed and how bad they felt about the reaction of the others. Answers ranged from 1 (*totally inappropriate/not bad at all*) to 7 (*very appropriate/very bad*).

## Results

### Endorsement of Autonomy and Social-Relational Values

We conducted a mixed design analysis with Values (Autonomy versus Social-Relational) as within subjects factor and Country of Residence (U.S. versus India) as between subjects factor. A significant Values  $\times$  Country of Residence interaction showed that for autonomy values, there was no difference between groups ( $M_{\text{Americans}} = 5.78$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ;  $M_{\text{Indians}} = 5.79$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ), but for social-relational values, Americans scored much lower than Indians ( $M_{\text{Americans}} = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ;  $M_{\text{Indians}} = 5.31$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ),  $F(1, 318) = 118.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .272$ . This indicates that, although autonomy values were equally endorsed by Indians and Americans, the groups differed with regard to endorsement of social-relational values, in line with their cultural background.

### Main Analyses

To control for the idiosyncratic element of each scenario, we standardised ratings for emotions, appropriateness and other feelings for the four different scenarios, by computing z-scores of the means.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, we collapsed the standardised scores for the two autonomy scenarios and the two social-relational scenarios. For both types of scenarios, we carried out a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with Country of Residence and Audience Reaction as independent variables, reported humiliation, shame, and anger as dependent variables and Gender as a covariate.

#### Autonomy scenarios.

**Emotions.** There was a multivariate trend for Audience Reaction,  $F(3, 151) = 2.41$ ,  $p = .069$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .046$ . This effect was significant for humiliation  $F(1, 153) = 4.56$ ,  $p = .034$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .029$  and marginally significant for shame,  $F(1, 153) = 3.65$ ,  $p = .058$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .023$ . There was no effect on anger,  $F(1, 153) = 0.79$ ,  $p = .374$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .005$ . Scores were

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<sup>12</sup> For the two autonomy scenarios, the correlation between the humiliation scales was:  $r = .59$  ( $p < .001$ ), between the shame scales it was:  $r = .50$  ( $p < .001$ ), and between the anger scales it was:  $r = .59$  ( $p < .001$ ). For the two social-relational scenarios, the correlation between the humiliation scales was:  $r = .65$  ( $p < .001$ ), between the shame scales it was:  $r = .59$  ( $p < .001$ ), and between the anger scales it was:  $r = .67$  ( $p < .001$ ).

higher for humiliation and marginally higher for shame when the audience laughed ( $M_{\text{humiliation}} = 0.17, SD = 0.83; M_{\text{shame}} = 0.28, SD = 0.83$ ) than when it did not react ( $M_{\text{humiliation}} = -0.13, SD = 0.94; M_{\text{shame}} = 0.02, SD = 0.88$ ). There was no effect of Country of Residence and no interaction. Thus, in line with Studies 2.1 and 2.2, and Hypothesis 1, both Indians and Americans reported stronger humiliation and marginally stronger shame in response to audience laughter after threats to the autonomous self.

**Appropriateness.** ANOVAs with Country of Residence and Audience Reaction as independent variables and the items measuring perceived appropriateness as dependent variables showed that Indians ( $M = 0.55, SD = 0.82$ ) rated the comment of the insulter as more appropriate than Americans ( $M = -0.36, SD = 0.67$ ),  $F(1, 153) = 54.52, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .263$ . Furthermore, of the participants in the audience laughter condition, Indians ( $M = 0.47, SD = 0.88$ ) judged this laughter as more appropriate than Americans ( $M = -0.37, SD = 0.52$ ),  $F(1, 76) = 25.77, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .253$ . There were no effects on perceived appropriateness of the behaviour of the protagonist ( $p = ns$ ) or feeling bad about the reaction of the audience ( $p = ns$ ).

#### **Social-relational scenarios.**

**Emotions.** There was no main effect for Audience Reaction,  $F(3, 155) = 0.69, p = .557, \eta_p^2 = .013$ . There was a multivariate main effect for Country of Residence,  $F(3, 155) = 20.18, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .281$ , which was significant for anger,  $F(1, 157) = 14.90, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .087$ , indicating higher scores for Americans ( $M = 0.33, SD = 0.84$ ) than for Indians ( $M = -0.16, SD = 0.79$ ), and for shame,  $F(1, 157) = 13.67, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .080$ , indicating higher scores for Indians ( $M = 0.36, SD = 0.75$ ) than for Americans ( $M = -0.13, SD = 0.90$ ). There was no main effect of Country of Residence on humiliation,  $F(1, 157) = 1.85, p = .176, \eta_p^2 = .012$ .

However, the effect of Country of Residence was qualified by a significant interaction with Audience Reaction,  $F(3, 155) = 3.08, p = .029, \eta_p^2 = .056$ . This interaction was marginally significant for humiliation,  $F(1, 157) = 3.13, p = .079, \eta_p^2 =$

.020 (see Figure 2.1). When the audience laughed there was no difference between Indians ( $M = 0.08$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) and Americans ( $M = 0.10$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ), but when the audience did not react, Indians ( $M = 0.24$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) reported more humiliation than Americans ( $M = -0.20$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ),  $F(1, 163) = 5.28$ ,  $p = .023$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .015$ . Furthermore, Americans, but not Indians, tended to report more humiliation in the Laughter condition than in the No Reaction condition,  $F(1, 163) = 2.52$ ,  $p = .114$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .008$ . For Indians, both ratings were as high as Americans' rating in the audience laughter condition.

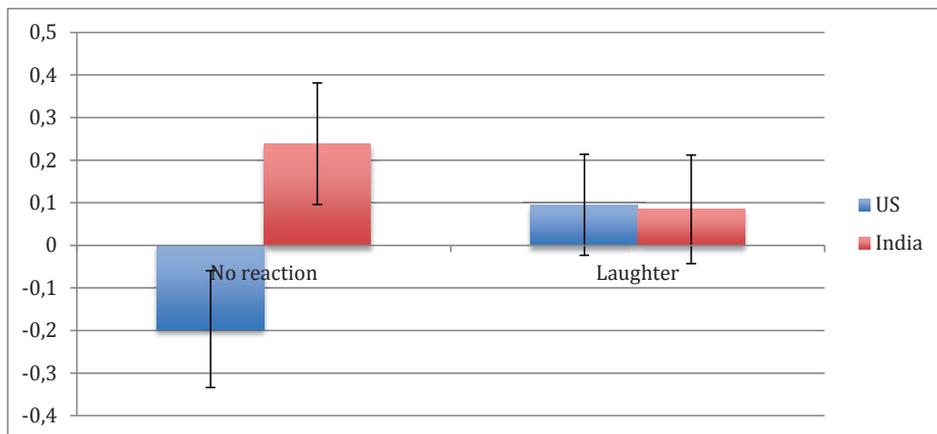
The Audience Reaction x Country of Residence interaction was also significant for shame,  $F(1, 157) = 6.14$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .038$ , and showed the same pattern as for humiliation. When the audience laughed, Indians ( $M = 0.28$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) and Americans ( $M = 0.09$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) reported the same amount of shame, but when the audience did not react, Indians ( $M = 0.44$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) reported more shame than did Americans ( $M = -0.37$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ),  $F(1, 163) = 19.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .056$ . Americans also reported significantly less shame when there was no audience reaction than when the audience laughed  $F(1, 163) = 4.77$ ,  $p = .030$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .014$ , whereas this was not the case for Indians. Again, their ratings did not differ from Americans' ratings in the audience laughter condition.

**Appropriateness.** Similar ANOVAs were performed as described for the autonomy scenarios. Indians ( $M = -0.31$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) rated the behaviour of the protagonist as less appropriate than Americans ( $M = 0.23$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ),  $F(1, 157) = 20.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .116$ . Indians ( $M = 0.63$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) rated the comment by the insulter as more appropriate than Americans ( $M = -0.48$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ),  $F(1, 157) = 88.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .362$ . Furthermore, of the participants in the audience laughter condition, Indians ( $M = 0.49$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) rated the laughter as more appropriate than Americans ( $M = -0.36$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ),  $F(1, 80) = 12.96$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .139$ . Lastly,

Americans ( $M = 0.31$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) indicated to feel worse about the audience laughter than Indians ( $M = -0.28$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ),  $F(1, 80) = 7.60$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .087$ .<sup>13</sup>

## Correlations

Table 2.4 shows the relationships between reported humiliation, shame, and anger for both groups after reading autonomy or social-relational scenarios. For both Americans and Indians, humiliation was strongly related to anger and shame. For Indians, the relationship between anger and shame was also strong and significantly stronger than for Americans for both the autonomy scenarios ( $z = 3.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the social-relational scenarios ( $z = 3.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ).



*Note.* Scores are calculated z-scores of the means. Error bars represent standard errors of the means.

*Figure 2.1.* Humiliation rated by Indians and Americans as a function of Audience Reaction (No Reaction versus Laughter) after an Insult, for Social-Relational scenarios, Study 2.3.

<sup>13</sup> We also asked participants if they “felt laughed at,” but did not use this measure in the end as we think it does not add to the general story. However, for both autonomy and social-relational scenarios we did find and Audience Reaction  $\times$  Country of Residence interaction, indicating that when there was no audience reaction, Americans and Indians scored equally high on this item, whereas when the audience laughed, Americans indicated to feel more laughed at than Indians. This is in line with the finding of Americans’ stronger sensitivity to audience laughter in the social-relational scenarios.

Table 2.4  
*Correlations between Humiliation, Shame, and Anger, separated for Indian and American participants, Study 2.3*

Country of Residence	India			United States		
<b>Autonomy Scenarios</b>						
<i>Emotion</i>	Humiliation	Shame	Anger	Humiliation	Shame	Anger
Humiliation	—			—		
Shame	.87***	—		.68***	—	
Anger	.89***	.73***	—	.79***	.36**	—
<b>Social-Relational Scenarios</b>						
<i>Emotion</i>	Humiliation	Shame	Anger	Humiliation	Shame	Anger
Humiliation	—			—		
Shame	.85***	—		.64**	—	
Anger	.85**	.64**	—	.67**	.14	—

Note. \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

Study 2.3 showed that imagined audience laughter intensifies reports of humiliation when autonomy values are under threat. This effect emerged for Americans and Indians. Thus, although the analyses were exploratory, they suggest that audience laughter after a threat to the autonomous self increases humiliation for individuals from both individualistic and collectivistic cultures. In line with Study 2.1 and 2.2, this effect most clearly emerged for humiliation. There was a trend for shame and no effect on anger.

After threats to one's social-relational self, imagined audience laughter elicited somewhat stronger reports of humiliation (this effect was marginal) and stronger reports of shame in Americans, but not in Indians. In fact, in both audience conditions, Indians reported levels of humiliation and shame to the same extent as Americans did after audience laughter. We can only speculate about the reason for this effect, but one explanation could be that for Indians, audience laughter is not an

important determinant of humiliation (or shame) when values related to their social-relational self are under threat. Indians may be more concerned about these threats (which is also reflected in higher reports of shame for Indians than for Americans in general) and have internalized norms and standards related to these values more strongly. Therefore audience laughter may not be necessary for Indians to evoke similar levels of humiliation as for Americans.

An alternative explanation could reside in our finding that Indians rated the audience laughter as more appropriate than Americans and they rated the behaviour of the protagonist as less appropriate than Americans. However, this was the case for both autonomy and social-relational scenarios and is thus at odds with the fact that there *was* an audience effect for Indians when autonomy-related values were at stake.

The finding that Indians generally reported more shame than Americans after threats to their social-relational self may reflect a stronger proneness to shame for people in collectivistic, interdependent cultures than for people in individualistic, independent cultures (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), even though we only found this effect for the social-relational scenarios. For these scenarios, we also found that Americans reported more anger than Indians. This supports previous findings that these groups differ in emotional reactions as a result of their independent versus interdependent self-construal (e.g., Anolli & Pascucci, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and fits with the idea that anger is considered detrimental to group cohesion in collectivistic cultures.

### **General Discussion**

The current research first of all supports the idea that the social context in which a potentially humiliating event takes place can affect the response to this event. More specifically: Audience laughter after a humiliating insult leads to stronger feelings of humiliation than when there is no such reaction. Although previous research emphasized the presence of an audience showing hostile intent as

an antecedent of humiliation, this is, to our knowledge, the first study that shows a direct causal relationship between (imagined) audience laughter and reported humiliation.

On a more exploratory basis, we found that this mocking audience reaction has an effect when the humiliating situation entails a threat to the autonomous self. This was the case for people from an individualistic culture (The Netherlands, United States) as well as for people from a more collectivistic culture (India). When the humiliating situation concerns a threat to the social-relational self, the results are somewhat less clear. In that case, audience laughter had no effect on humiliation for Dutch people (Study 2.2), had a marginal effect on humiliation for Americans (Study 2.3), and had no effect on humiliation for Indians (Study 2.3).

It seems that for people from India audience laughter does not make a situation more humiliating when this situation concerns a threat to social-relational aspects of the self. Indians' ratings of humiliation were, both after audience laughter *and* after no audience reaction, as high as Americans' ratings after audience laughter. Possibly Indians' stronger internalization of norms and standards when social-relational values are at stake explains this finding. According to Niedenthal, Krauth-Gruber, and Ric (2006): "When societal and familial standards for appropriate behaviour have been internalized, self-conscious emotions can be experienced even in the absence of a physical audience" (p. 80).

However, we acknowledge that we should be very cautious in generalizing these findings. First of all, the studies were explorative. We did not have clear hypotheses beforehand. Second, people from only two countries participated. These countries are not fully representative of broad cultural dimensions such as individualism-collectivism. Third, we used one language, namely English, for both groups of participants. This has the advantage of circumventing translation-related problems, but the disadvantage is that the English language could have primed Indians with a more "Western" state of mind. As a consequence we may have found

smaller differences than we would have otherwise, which means that we used a conservative test of possible cultural differences.

In Study 2.1, we found an unexpected but important null-result with regard to social support. Whereas a negative audience reaction intensifies reports of humiliation, helping behaviour after the humiliating incident does not seem to reduce reported humiliation. An explanation may reside in the “dark” side of social support. Although helping is generally regarded as positive and prosocial, it can also be interpreted as asserting dominance over an individual or a group (e.g., Nadler, 2002) and producing status differences between helper and recipient (e.g., Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012). Receiving help and being in need of help can make people feel dependent on and inferior to the helper. This can in turn lower their self-esteem (e.g., Nadler & Fischer, 1986) by keeping an unequal power relation in place, rendering the receiver unable to take control over the situation. This is relevant because a lack of control seems to be an important feature of humiliation. The humiliating incident itself probably causes a lowered self-esteem in the victim which may be further reduced, or at least not restored, by the support, and as such does not diminish feelings of humiliation.

As expected, we found that both reports of anger and shame are related to humiliation, although in the first two studies humiliation is associated more strongly with shame than with anger. This may be due to the nature of the situations we have used in the scenarios, which was always public (i.e., there were always other people present). Other situations, for example those without an audience present, may evoke stronger appraisals of unfairness and thereby cause more anger rather than shame in addition to humiliation. Yet, the effect of a laughing audience seems most specific to humiliation and to a lesser extent to shame. In Study 2.1, the audience effect also emerged for shame, but the effect was stronger for humiliation. In Study 2.2, we only found an effect of audience laughter on humiliation and not on shame and anger. In Study 2.3, the audience effect was present for humiliation and shame.

This supports the idea that audience laughter is a more central aspect of humiliation than of shame and anger.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

A limitation of the present research is the use of scenarios. Although this is an often used and valid method for measuring *imagined* or *expected* emotions, it is difficult to determine whether people really *feel* certain emotions as a result of reading such a scenario. Nevertheless, we think that people's concepts of humiliation provide us with a good gauge of how humiliation may be caused and experienced in reality. Moreover, research by Otten and Jonas (2014) showed that scenarios designed to induce either humiliation, shame, anger, or happiness evoked different patterns of brain activity (using EEG) in participants. Although this does not prove that the "real" emotion is indeed felt, the fact that these scenarios differently affected the brain adds to their validity in distinguishing these emotions. Still, we think it is important to develop other methods to examine the causes and effects of humiliation, such as inducing feelings of humiliation in the laboratory, in the presence of an audience. This approach, although ethically challenging, allows for a more controlled examination of antecedents and consequences of humiliation.

In addition, we consider it important to examine long-term relationships between humiliation, shame, and anger, but also fear in different (cultural) contexts. One of the consequences of repeated episodes of humiliation may be the development of social anxiety, or more in particular, a strong fear of situations involving an audience. Such anxiety may eventually turn into *gelotophobia*, a fear of being laughed at (e.g., Titze, 2009), and prevent people from interacting with others in satisfying ways.

Not only fear, but also anger may become more strongly associated with humiliation over time, and thoughts about revenge could develop as a result of enhanced opportunities to ruminate about the humiliating episode. Moreover, the

strong hypothesized link between humiliation and revenge (e.g., Lickel, 2012) may become apparent only after repeated incidents of humiliation. Being (or perceiving to be) frequently humiliated over a longer period of time, creates the opportunity for the victim to develop feelings of rage and revenge instead of, or next to, shame and fear. This process of rumination leading to revenge may also be an important element of group-based humiliation, a phenomenon that received much theoretical attention but is lacking empirical evidence.

Researching humiliation is difficult, not only because of the complexity of the emotion, but also because of its aversive character rendering people unwilling to think and talk about it. Furthermore, there are ethical issues tied to the study of humiliation; one can only manipulate low levels of this emotion in the laboratory, which seems paradoxical as humiliation appears to be extreme almost by definition. Having said that, humiliation seems to be an important motivator for aggression and violence on the one hand and shame and social phobia on the other, so it is important to find out in what specific ways contextual and cultural factors add to its intensity. In this light, all steps towards more insight into the depths of an emotion that is still largely unexplored are valuable.

## Appendix A

### *Scenarios Study 2.2*

Two different versions of the questionnaire were created to counterbalance the order of audience laughter versus no audience reaction in each scenario. In version 1 the audience laughed in the social-relational scenarios, and in version 2 the audience laughed in the autonomy scenarios.

#### **Autonomy scenarios:**

1. You are participating in a discussion on politics, hosting people with different backgrounds. At a certain moment the discussion turns to a sensitive subject for some people. The discussion leader happens to be aware that you know a lot about this subject and he asks you a question about it. When you hesitate a little to answer his question, the person who sits next to you says in a sneering tone: "If you are not even able to give an honest and open opinion, then what are you doing here?" (Some of the other discussants start to laugh.)
2. You are in a café talking to some friends. The conversation is about politics. You make a comment about politician X, saying that you think he did some good things for his voters. All your friends disagree with you on this. You didn't expect this and quickly add: "Yeah, you are right, he did made a lot of mistakes." Then, one of your friends says: "You really don't have your own opinion." (The rest of the group starts to laugh.)
3. You are joining a workgroup in which you are supposed to make an assignment and present it afterwards with other students. You thought of a nice idea for this assignment and start to explain your idea enthusiastically to the rest of the group. Suddenly, another group member starts to laugh out loud: "Well, that is not very original, I heard them propose the same idea in the other group. I thought you would come up with something more exiting!" (The rest of the group also starts to laugh.)

**Social-relational scenarios:**

1. It is Friday morning and you have a lot of work to do. However, it is your aunt's birthday today and she will give a big party that starts in the afternoon. You really want to finish some work before you leave and at 17:30 you clean your desk to go to the party. You explain to your colleagues that you are in a hurry because the party has already started. Then, one of your colleagues gives you a serious look and says: "How unkind of you to arrive that late at your aunt's birthday, you could at least have helped her with preparations." (Some other colleagues start to laugh.)
2. You are telling a story to your colleagues that you find very funny. It is about your very old uncle whom you were visiting a while ago in the care home where he lives. Your uncle asked you every five minutes what kind of job you have and kept on telling you the story about the boat-tour he made last week. You have to laugh very hard about this. Suddenly, a colleague looks at you and says: "You really have no respect for elderly people, how would you feel if people didn't take you seriously anymore at that age!" (Your other colleagues start to laugh.)
3. You are sitting in a tram full of people, when a disabled woman with crutches enters the vehicle. Nobody stands up for the woman, neither do you. This is not because you don't want to but actually you don't feel well and you're sure that someone else will offer his seat to her. Then an older gentleman behind you offers his seat to the woman. He looks at you disdainful and says: "Can't you even show some respect to somebody else!" (Some of the other passengers start to laugh.)

## Appendix B

### *Scenarios Study 2.3*

#### **Autonomy-scenarios:**

1. You are in a café talking to some colleagues. The conversation is about politics. You make a comment about politician X, saying that you think he did some good things for his voters. All your friends appear to disagree with you, however. You didn't expect this and quickly add: "Yeah, you are right, he did make a lot of mistakes." Then one of your friends says meanly: "You never have your own opinion, you are always just echoing what we say, you're such a follower!" (The rest of the group bursts into laughter.)
2. You and some of your colleagues organize a fundraising party to collect money for homeless people. The most important goal right now is to have a creative idea that will attract a lot of people to the party. Three of your colleagues present ideas that are all quite in line with each other. When it is your turn, you say that you like the idea of your colleagues very much and couldn't think of something better yourself. Then, one of the group members looks viciously at you and says: "Well you are never very original are you, can't you even think of something creative yourself?" (Some of the group members begin to laugh.)

#### **Social-relational scenarios:**

1. You are talking to some acquaintances about your father who is old and could use some help. You explain to them that you actually decided to bring him to a home for elderly where he is taken care of all day. This was no easy decision but you really have too much work and other obligations to take care of him yourself. Then, one of your acquaintances looks viciously at you and says: "It

is clear that you do not care about your father when you just lock him up somewhere!" (All of your friends start laughing.)

2. You are having a discussion with some friends about romantic relationships. You tell them that your father doesn't like your partner at all and that he hopes you will break up because he disapproves of this relationship. You tell your friends that you think your father's opinion is totally ridiculous and that you would never break up with your partner to please your father. Then one of your friends says maliciously: "No of course you would never do that because you don't have any respect for your father, you always know everything better!" (The others start laughing).