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On feeling humiliated

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

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Chapter 5

General Discussion

If hope is confidence, humiliation is impotence, an emotion that stems above all from the feeling that you are no longer in control of your life either collectively, as a people, a nation, or a religious community, or individually, as a single person (Moïsi, 2009, p. 56).

When people are asked to name the first emotion that spontaneously comes to mind, “humiliation” may not be the most frequently given answer. Humiliation has a highly aversive character and for many people it seems to reflect an extreme instance, more remote from daily life incidents than other emotions. Nevertheless, humiliation can be a very significant part of the emotional life of individuals as well as groups. This is evident not only from clinical and social psychological literature; other disciplines, notably political science, sociology, religion studies and philosophy (e.g., Cook, 2004; Margalit, 1996; Moïsi, 2009; D. Smith, 2008; Stern, 2003, 2004; Zavaleta Reyles, 2007) attest to the significant role of humiliation—whether as an act or a feeling—in people’s lives. Moreover, popular culture as reflected in media, politics, literature, art and film abounds with examples of humiliation and its sometimes destructive consequences.

Humiliation may manifest itself in an interpersonal, intragroup, or intergroup context.³³ Interpersonal humiliation is the most studied type of humiliation, in both clinical and social psychological emotion research. This research shows that humiliation is a highly negative, intense emotional experience with a complex structure, consisting of appraisals, feelings, and behavioural tendencies related to shame and embarrassment on the one hand and anger on the other (e.g., Combs, Campbell, Jackson, & Smith, 2010; Elison & Harter, 2007; Fernández, Saguy, &

³³ Note that these contexts do not solely determine whether individual or group-based humiliation is experienced. The type of humiliation that is experienced also depends on factors such as the target and nature of the humiliative act, which may affect whether the individual- or the group-self becomes salient. For example, humiliation in an intragroup context may be experienced as individual humiliation when only one individual is targeted, but it may be experienced as group-based humiliation when a whole group is targeted and the humiliator is considered to be part of an out-group.

Halperin, 2015; Harter, 2012; Hartling, 2007; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Klein, 1991; Otten & Jonas, 2014; R. H. Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002).

In an intragroup context, humiliation may become institutionalized in a group. One of the most frequently mentioned examples of humiliation in an intragroup context is the practice of *hazing* in fraternities, sports clubs, or the army (e.g., Hoover, 1999; Keating et al., 2005; Klein, 1991; Winslow, 1999). Because such practices are seen as instrumental for group formation and cohesion, we labelled this type of humiliation “intragroup humiliation.” Although humiliation is often mentioned as part of hazing rituals, there is, to our knowledge, no empirical research focusing specifically on experiences of humiliation during these rituals.

A third context in which humiliation can be experienced is the intergroup context. Although people can experience interpersonal humiliation in an intergroup context—depending on whether their individual or their group-identity is salient—we specifically focused on instances of group-based humiliation; that is, humiliation felt on behalf of a group with which one identifies. This may occur either in small groups (a soccer team) or large groups (a whole nation – see for example Doosje, Jasini, Jonas, & Sveinsdóttir, 2016). Group-based humiliation has not received much empirical attention, but is regarded as an important motive for violence (e.g., Baumeister, 2002; Lickel, 2012; Lindner, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006, 2009; Staub, 1989; Stern, 2003, 2004). Lindner (2002) argues that experienced humiliation can set in motion a series of retaliations creating a “cycle of humiliation.” In Moïsi’s (2009) socio-political account of humiliation, intense and prolonged experiences of humiliation may turn into a dominating framework over time, affecting the way people view the world and their individual place in the world, thus creating a “culture of humiliation.”

In the present dissertation, we studied humiliation in these three different contexts, offering a broad perspective on the phenomenon of humiliation. We studied contextual determinants of interpersonal humiliation (Chapter 2),

determinants and consequences of intra- and intergroup humiliation (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) and focused in all chapters on emotional correlates of humiliation. In this final chapter, we first present an overview of the main empirical findings. This is followed by a discussion of theoretical and practical implications of these findings and suggestions for future research on humiliation. We also address some important limitations of our research.

Overview of Main Findings

In Chapter 2 we built upon research on interpersonal humiliation (e.g., Combs et al., 2010; Elison & Harter, 2007; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; R. H. Smith et al., 2002), and focused on the potential impact of a specific social-contextual determinant of humiliation, namely the presence of an audience. Previous studies showed that the (imagined) presence of an audience increases reports of humiliation (Combs et al., 2010; Elison & Harter, 2007; Fernández et al., 2015; R. H. Smith et al., 2002). Thus, the mere public nature of a humiliating episode may increase the experience of humiliation. In addition, participants in Elison and Harter's (2007) study indicated that a typical humiliating situation involves an audience that shows hostile intent. However, these previous studies did not manipulate the *behaviour* of the audience in order to assess its effect on humiliation. An audience witnessing a potentially humiliating situation, such as an insult, may react in different ways: it may show a mocking reaction, for example by laughing at the victim, but it may also offer support to the victim, or it may not show any reaction at all. We expected that a laughing audience would have an adverse effect by increasing the intensity of humiliation, whereas social support from the audience would provide a buffer against those feelings.

In Chapter 2 we report the results of three scenario studies tapping into these issues. Participants read descriptions of insulting episodes in which the reaction of an audience was manipulated. As expected, in Study 2.1 we found that participants

reported more humiliation when they read a scenario in which the audience laughs than when they read a scenario in which the audience does not react. Although participants also reported more shame and marginally more anger after audience laughter, the effect was strongest for humiliation. However, unexpectedly, scenarios in which someone from the audience offers support to the humiliated victim, did not decrease participants' reported experience of humiliation.

Study 2.2 and Study 2.3 focused on different self-related values with regard to the effect of audience laughter on humiliation; we presented scenarios in which the insults were targeted either at the autonomous- or at the social-relational self in the presence of an audience that either laughs or does not respond. Study 2.2 replicated the finding that imagined audience laughter intensifies reports of humiliation (but not shame and anger). However, this only applied to scenarios describing threats to the autonomous self and not to scenarios describing threats to the social-relational self. Importantly, because the participants in this study were all from the Netherlands—a Western, individualistic culture—the results could reflect the fact that for Dutch people autonomy values are more relevant than social-relational values. A third study therefore further explored the role of culture in the effect of audience laughter on humiliation after threats to these different self-related values. Participants from a collectivistic culture (India) and an individualistic culture (the United States) were included in that study. The results showed that a description of a laughing audience increased reports of humiliation for both Americans and Indians when the autonomous self was threatened. Thus, for such self-related values, audience laughter may be an important determinant for humiliation not only for people from a Western, individualistic culture, but also for people from a more collectivistic culture. When the social-relational self was threatened, however, reported intensity of humiliation did not depend on audience laughter for Indians, and only marginally for Americans. Interestingly, Indians' ratings of humiliation were, both after audience laughter *and* after no audience reaction, as high as

Americans' ratings after audience laughter. This could indicate that when social-relational values are at stake, members of a collectivist culture may not consider explicit audience laughter an important determinant of humiliation. That is, audience laughter may not be seen as a necessary element—beyond the mere presence of an audience—to make an episode (more) humiliating. Clearly, more cross-cultural research is needed to examine the role of cultural self-related values in humiliation.

Humiliation is familiar to almost everyone, but most people do not experience it on a daily basis. Still, there are certain contexts in which humiliation is seen as “normal” or “part of the game.” Chapter 3 focused on the experience of humiliation in such a context, namely initiation rituals in fraternities and sororities. These rituals often contain hazing, which may include practices such as being mocked and laughed at, being tied up, being forced to undress or dress ridiculously, eat or drink repulsive substances, or drink large amounts of alcohol. These practices can be perceived as humiliating, rather than as a funny game. We were interested in the function—if any—of such humiliating practices with regard to group affiliation. Although we asked people about their individual experiences of humiliation, which made the individual self salient, we focused on experiences in an intragroup context.

Three studies using very different methods provided evidence that, in line with previous research (e.g., Lodewijkx & Syroit, 1997, 2001) and contrary to what is often assumed, perceived severity of an initiation is not related to more, but actually to *less* affiliation with fellow group members. Importantly, our research showed that this negative connection could be explained by experienced humiliation (Study 3.1). Furthermore, reported humiliation was strongly related to a tendency to withdraw from the group. Thus, the experience of humiliation may be particularly counterproductive in creating strong group-bonding among novices. Additionally, we found that reported humiliation was higher when participants were derogated (Study 3.2) or imagined to be initiated (Study 3.3) as an individual in front the group, than when they were derogated or imagined to be initiated together with the other

group members. In the latter case, the group may form a buffer against experiences of humiliation because it triggers higher expectations of social support. We observed a similar pattern of results for a tendency to withdraw from the group. Thus, when participants were derogated (Study 3.2) or imagined to be initiated (Study 3.3) as an individual in front of the group, reports of withdrawal tendencies were stronger than when they were derogated or imagined to be initiated as a whole group. Our findings suggest that the use of humiliating practices in an initiation ritual, especially when novices are targeted individually rather than as a group, is counter-productive when it comes to group formation and cohesion.

In Chapter 4 we switched our focus from the intragroup to the intergroup context. Intergroup Emotion Theory (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; E. R. Smith, 1993, 1999) posits that when one self-categorizes as a member of a certain group, and identifies with that group, emotions can be experienced on behalf of the group, depending on whether an event is appraised as relevant to one's own group in relation to an out-group. Group-based humiliation is thus the feeling of humiliation on behalf of one's group. Starting point for this chapter was the theoretical claim that group-based humiliation causes intergroup aggression (e.g., Atran & Stern, 2005; Baumeister, 2002; Fontan, 2006; Klein, 1991; Lickel, 2012; Lindner, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006, 2009; Scheff, 1994; Staub, 1989; Stern, 2003, 2004; Volkan, 1997, 2004). Although such claims often concern aggression against the humiliating out-group, they may also concern aggression towards other groups, or *scapegoats* (e.g., Baumeister, 2002). We were especially interested in aggressive tendencies toward groups other than those involved in the humiliation-evoking event. Thus, we studied a form of displaced aggression (or scapegoating) as a result of group-based humiliation.

Results of all three studies indicated a positive relation between group-based humiliation and aggressive tendencies towards an unrelated out-group. This is in line with the abovementioned theories and with findings by Jonas, Doosje, Lobel, and Pyszczynski (2016), but contradicts research by Ginges and Atran (2008), who

showed that humiliation is associated with inertia in Palestinian participants. However, there are two important differences between our own studies and the research by Ginges and Atran. First, our studies included American participants, who may have more favourable views of their groups' status, and are from a more powerful group than Palestinians. Second, we studied the reaction towards an out-group *other* than the one causing the humiliation, whereas Ginges and Atran (as well as Jonas et al., 2016) studied the reaction towards the humiliator. Both these aspects may explain an aggressive reaction to humiliation rather than a response of inertia.

In line with IET (Mackie et al., 2000; E. R. Smith, 1993, 1999), we showed that in-group identification was positively related to reported group-based humiliation and aggressive tendencies. Moreover, reported humiliation could partially explain the relation between in-group identification and aggressive tendencies (Study 4.1). Interestingly, when we replaced the measure of in-group identification (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995) by measures of in-group attachment and glorification (Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006), we found that only glorification was positively related to humiliation, whereas attachment was unrelated to humiliation. Furthermore, glorification predicted aggressive tendencies towards the out-group, whereas attachment did not. The relationship between glorification and aggressive tendencies could be partially explained by humiliation and, in turn, out-group hate. Thus, people who strongly glorify their in-group seem to feel stronger humiliation about a past defeat of their group. In turn, they experience more out-group hate and are more likely to react aggressively towards the out-group, even when that group is unrelated to the source of the humiliation.

In the next section of this chapter we turn to more general theoretical implications that we can draw on the basis of our own studies in relation to earlier research. We discuss contextual determinants of, and action tendencies associated with, humiliation and address the question whether humiliation should be regarded as a distinctive emotional experience.

Theoretical Implications

Contextual Determinants of Humiliation

We know that humiliation is felt when people appraise a situation as a strong devaluation of the self that is unjust (e.g., Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). Such situations may entail getting negative attention, for example, being teased, harassed, ridiculed or put down (Elison & Harter, 2007; Elshout, Nelissen, & Van Beest, 2016; Harter, 2012), or being neglected, excluded or ostracised (Elshout et al., 2016; Hartling, 2007; Veldhuis, Gordijn, Veenstra, & Lindenberg, 2014). In our own studies, some descriptions of antecedent events evoked moderate to intense reports of humiliation. These descriptions included, for instance, being insulted after hesitating to answer a question during a group-discussion, and being mocked for coming up with an idea that turns out to be unoriginal (scenarios Study 2.2). In Study 3.1, respondents who had been initiated to become a member of a fraternity or sorority reported such antecedent events themselves. For example, a female respondent wrote that she had to walk naked through a sauna-complex with the other (female) novices, while the board-members, including the male board-members and male novices, were watching. Another (male) respondent wrote that, at the first day of camp, he had to put his chin on a stage in front of 250 novices after which the board-members emptied ten glasses of beer on his “arrogant shithead.”

Such descriptions and reports all reflect antecedents of humiliation. In the current dissertation, we focused specifically on social-contextual factors that may increase or decrease experiences of humiliation during such episodes. We found that one factor, (imagined) audience laughter, intensifies reports of humiliation, possibly depending on the self-related value that is under threat and the cultural background of the person reporting on humiliation (Chapter 2). These findings are in line with literature showing that smiling and laughter are not always positive but can be related to negative emotions, such as contempt (e.g., Darwin, 1872; Ekman & Friesen, 1986; Izard & Haynes, 1988; Ruch & Proyer, 2008; Wagner, 2000) or *Schadenfreude*

(e.g., Ruch & Proyer, 2008; van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, Nieweg, & Gallucci, 2006). Although previous studies have taken into account the role of a public versus private context in self-conscious emotions (e.g., Combs et al., 2010; R. H. Smith et al., 2002), not much research has specifically focused on whether and how laughter can cause or intensify negative emotions in others (for an exception, see recent findings on the neuro-cognitive processing of audience laughter during insults by Otten, Mann, Van Berkum, & Jonas, 2016).

It is interesting that laughter, an emotional display that is usually interpreted as positive and affiliative, and is universally recognized as a signal of joy and amusement (Sauter, Eisner, Ekman, & Scott, 2010), can in other situations trigger negative feelings such as humiliation. An intriguing question is *how* this actually happens. It is most likely that individuals not only respond to the smile as such, but consider this in the context of their own emotions (negative) and the event accompanying the laughter (see also Hess & Fischer, 2013; Van Kleef, 2009).

We also showed that a potentially humiliating event that is experienced together with others, as shared victims, results in lower reports of humiliation compared to an event that is experienced as an individual in front of a group (Chapter 3). We found some evidence suggesting that expectations of social support explain this difference. However, other mechanisms may be at work as well. For example, the fact that the whole group is targeted may make individual feelings of inferiority less salient. If one observes that others are humiliated in the same way as oneself, it is easier to make external, rather than internal attributions. For example, one could argue that the humiliator is frustrated and simply derogates everyone within his or her vicinity. On the other hand, when one is picked out of a group and humiliated in front of the others, this may lead to more self-doubt and the feeling that it is really something about the self that is defective, provoking this derogation.

Action Tendencies in Humiliation

In previous research, humiliation has been associated with both tendencies to avoid others and tendencies to aggress against others (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Fernández et al., 2015). The research in this dissertation corroborates these findings in different contexts. For example, in Chapter 3 we found that higher reports of experienced humiliation were strongly related to reported tendencies to withdraw from the group, but also to more aggressive tendencies towards the humiliator or hazer (as reported in footnote 18). An explanation for these ostensibly opposite reactions is that they were aimed at different targets: The withdrawal concerned the group as a whole, whereas the aggressive response was only targeted towards the humiliator. Another potential explanation for the occurrence of both action tendencies is that they may occur at different moments in time, for example, when one first only feels shame, which is later replaced by anger towards the humiliator.

In Chapter 4 we found that reports of group-based humiliation were related to tendencies to aggress against an unrelated out-group, which may be similar to displaced aggression in interpersonal and intergroup contexts. In that study we did not measure withdrawal tendencies, because withdrawal from an out-group that is not involved—either as a perpetrator or as an audience—would seem unlikely. Additional research is needed to answer the question whether withdrawal from the *humiliator* may be a result of group-based humiliation and, if so, under which conditions that would be the case. Whether withdrawal is more likely than aggression as a response to humiliation is possibly dependent on the power- or status relation between the humiliator group and the humiliated group. As discussed in Chapter 4, the humiliated group may show withdrawal tendencies (or inertia, as was the case in the study of Ginges & Atran, 2008) toward the humiliator group, if that group has more power or status.

Although, in Chapter 4, we did not find an effect of (primed) status, we did find that in-group glorification was positively related to humiliation and to

aggressive tendencies as a result of the confrontation with a humiliating defeat. A similar pattern could be present for withdrawal. Thus, high glorifiers may be less inclined to withdraw from the humiliator-group than low glorifiers. In sum, it may be that high perceptions of status simultaneously lead to stronger aggression towards and less withdrawal from the humiliator.

Our findings with regard to perceived status touch upon broader notions of self-esteem and threat. For example, it is argued that people and groups who either have very low, *or* inflated self-concepts (i.e., narcissists) are more prone to perceive a threat against the self or the group (e.g., Staub, 1989). This would mean that both low self-esteem and narcissism are positively related to experiences of humiliation. However, in line with Bushman and Baumeister (1998), we argue that it is particularly the narcissist, or high glorifier, who responds aggressively to humiliation. People or groups with low self-esteem may be more likely to respond by withdrawing as a result of humiliation. On the other hand, it has been suggested that groups with stable low status (e.g., Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006) or groups with low power or low group efficacy (e.g., Tausch et al., 2011) more easily use violence, because they have nothing to lose. If this is true, the relation between perceived status and aggression would follow a u-curve whereby low perceived status is associated with aggression (“nothing to lose”), but inflated status perceptions are also related to aggression (“too much to lose”). The middle (lower) part of the curve could reflect groups who have average to high status or power and are less inclined to use aggression because they have “something to lose,” namely damaging their in-group’s image (see Jiménez-Moya, Spears, Rodríguez-Bailón, & de Lemus, 2015). This pattern may also characterize the relation between perceived status, humiliation and aggressive tendencies in an interpersonal context, when the individual self is salient. In sum, humiliation may entail different types of action tendencies, depending on one’s coping potential and the focus of the target.

Is Humiliation a Unique Emotion?

Our research shows that the ingredients and consequences of humiliation relate to both shame and anger. This is in line with previous studies that have found positive relations between humiliation, shame, and anger and, to a lesser degree, embarrassment (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Fernández et al., 2015; Leidner, Sheikh, & Ginges, 2012). The analysis of emotional correlates of humiliation, whether in terms of appraisals, feelings or consequences, touches upon the question whether humiliation is a distinctive and unique emotion. In the General Introduction of this dissertation, we already mentioned that humiliation consists of a blend of anger and shame and should therefore be considered a mixed emotion. However, humiliation seems to encompass some unique elements as well. For example, humiliation is associated with specific events, such as being teased, harassed, ridiculed, put down, or socially excluded (Elison & Harter, 2007; Elshout et al., 2016; Harter, 2012; Hartling, 2007; Veldhuis et al., 2014). Although these situations may elicit anger and shame as well, they seem to be more distinctive for humiliation. In our own research we found that a contextual factor, the presence of a laughing audience, had stronger effects on humiliation than on shame or anger (Chapter 2). Thus, not only the presence of an audience (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007), but also audience laughter may be more prototypical for feelings of humiliation than for feelings of shame or anger. Finally, the distinct nature of humiliation is also evident from language use. In many languages, there is a specific word for humiliation (both for the emotion and the act). Thus, rather than saying: "I feel angry and ashamed," people say: "I feel humiliated." Furthermore, the act of humiliating someone is clearly something specific that differs from (although relates to) shaming someone.

Because of the frequently reported relations between humiliation, anger, and shame, in the current studies (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4), we also analysed emotional correlates of humiliation (that is, correlates between the emotion labels) and these other emotions to investigate their relations in different contexts. We found a mixed

pattern. In Chapter 2, studying the interpersonal context, in which the individual self was salient, we found moderate correlations between humiliation and anger (r 's of .30, .41, and .27) and significantly higher correlations between humiliation and shame (r 's of .58, .69, and .55) in Study 2.1 and Study 2.2. In Study 2.3, we found strong correlations between humiliation and shame (r 's of: .68, .64, .87, .85), but also between humiliation and anger (r 's of: .79, .67, .89, .85). In Chapter 4, in which we studied group-based humiliation, all studies indicate very strong connections between humiliation and both shame and anger. These strong relations have important consequences, as, for example, they make it difficult (and sometimes impossible) to test whether humiliation can predict aggression above and beyond shame and anger.

On the basis of these and previous findings, we conclude that humiliation, shame, and anger share many elements. Whether humiliation is more strongly associated with shame or with anger depends on the context. Especially in an intergroup context, when the group-self is salient, humiliation may become more closely tied to anger, presumably because of perceived in-group strength (Mackie et al., 2000). Although we did not find that in these intergroup contexts the connection between humiliation and anger becomes *stronger* than the connection between humiliation and shame, we do not preclude this possibility in some situations. For example, instances of humiliation that are not the result of a norm violation by the in-group, but connected to (perceived) unequal treatment of the in-group by an out-group, may not elicit strong feelings of shame. It is more likely that these events elicit strong perceptions of unfairness and thereby increase the connection between humiliation and anger. The specific constellation of shame and anger as part of humiliation, depending on the situation, should be addressed in future studies. On the basis of the current studies we conclude that in an interpersonal context, the connection between humiliation and shame is stronger than the connection between

humiliation and anger, whereas in an intergroup context these relations are equally strong.

Practical Implications

There are also some practical implications that we can draw from the current research. We discuss these implications in line with our distinction between humiliation in an interpersonal, an intragroup, and an intergroup context.

In an interpersonal context, humiliation can take many forms. It can take place in close relationships, at work, at school, or randomly, in public space. As discussed in the General Introduction of this dissertation, clinical research has emphasized the aversive effect humiliation can have on the victim and takes into account its severe consequences (e.g., Farmer & McGuffin, 2003; Gilbert, 1997; Harter, 2012; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Kendler, Hettema, Butera, Gardner, & Prescott, 2003; Klein, 1991; Torres & Bergner, 2010; Walker & Knauer, 2011). Some special attention has been paid to the potential role of humiliation in *school-shootings*, mass shootings at a school or university by one or more of its students (e.g., Elison & Harter, 2007; Harter, 2012; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003; Torres & Bergner, 2010). In many of these cases the perpetrators had been bullied and they felt strongly rejected, humiliated, and excluded by their classmates and sometimes by a romantic partner. In line with this, it is often the case that the school shooter specifically targets those students and teachers that they felt had caused their humiliation (e.g., Leary et al., 2003).

Although in our studies we did not focus on such grave and prolonged incidents of humiliation, we think that some of our findings may be helpful in combatting humiliation and its consequences. For example, the finding that audience laughter may often increase humiliation, combined with previous findings that the presence of an audience is typical for humiliation (Elison & Harter, 2007), may be helpful for schools or organisations trying to prevent bullying and its negative effects. When someone is bullied, bystanders may underestimate the effect of their

own behaviour on the victim. For example, they may have the idea that their laughter is harmless, or that their laughing response is not really targeted at the victim, that is, they just laugh about a joke made by the humiliator. However, the victim may interpret this laughter as a sign that everyone agrees with the derogatory remarks made by the humiliator. This not only increases feelings of humiliation, but may also instil a sense of loneliness. When other people refrain from laughing when a bully makes fun of someone, this may at least prevent the victims' feeling that others support the humiliator.

Another finding with important practical implications is that (imagined) social support did not reduce reported humiliation in this context. We do not think that support fails to reduce humiliation in every situation. To the contrary, we think that many forms of support are paramount to prevent feelings of depression or aggression in these instances. However, the kind of support that we manipulated, calling on the humiliator directly after the humiliating episode, may not be helpful. In some instances this may even increase humiliation in the victim, because it suggests that the victim is unable to stand up for him or herself. These insights may, together with previous research, be important for bystanders and other people to fully grasp the effect of their behaviour (or lack of behaviour) in a bullying situation.

With regard to the intragroup context we focused on the effect of humiliation in fraternities. However, humiliation also often happens as part of soldiers' training in the army (e.g., Winslow, 1999). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the goals that are pursued by fraternities and the army may differ in important ways. Although in the army there is also a focus on creating strong bonds between recruits, another goal is to toughen the recruits, not only physically but also emotionally. For example, the Dutch documentary "The chosen ones" ("De uitverkorenen", Lassche, 2012) shows how recruits of the marine corps—an elite-unit of the Dutch army—are trained. This training is not only physically tough, but also, at times, very humiliating. Especially those who make mistakes or slow the group down are harshly derogated. This seems

cruel, but the recruits are fully aware that this is part of their training and they seem to agree on its functionality. For example, one of them explains: “[...] the shouting..., it is part of it. They have to discipline you and this is how they do it. You have to be able to endure stress. That’s why they do it. If you cannot cope with stress and you are in a war situation, you are not of any use.” Thus, in such situations humiliation may have a clear function, namely to toughen recruits physically and mentally and to filter out recruits who turn out to be unable to cope with severe physical and mental stress. Nevertheless, trainers should be aware of the different effects of humiliating people individually in front of the group, and humiliating the whole group. The first seems much more detrimental in terms of group affiliation, which, as mentioned before, is also an important aim of the army training.

The current research also points to some practical implications with regard to the intergroup context. An important finding of the present research is that in-group glorification is positively related to humiliation and to a potential aggressive reaction following this humiliation, whereas attachment is unrelated to humiliation and aggressive tendencies. This indicates that it is not the sense of belonging to one’s group or having a good feeling about one’s group that triggers (a proneness for) humiliation and aggressive tendencies. Instead, feelings of superiority of the group over other groups predict these feelings and tendencies. Awareness of this distinction can help combat the negative effects of potentially humiliating incidents on some vulnerable groups in society. For example, in the Netherlands, some intervention programs are focused on preventing radicalisation in young Muslims (e.g., SIPI, Foundation for Intercultural Participation and Integration³⁴). These youngsters often suffer from feelings of discrimination and humiliation of their group in the Netherlands and of the wider Muslim community in the world (*Ummah*). Such interventions programs would do well to address feelings of in-group superiority, rather than trying to prevent in-group attachment in these youngsters.

³⁴ See: <http://www.s-ipi.nl/>

Of course, we do not think that people should never feel humiliated after unfair treatment, discrimination, or other potentially humiliating incidents, only because this could lead to aggression. However, we do think that when such incidents happen to one's group, emotions such as anger and indignation, rather than humiliation, could be effective to change an unequal status quo. For example, anger is related to normative collective action such as protests (Tausch et al., 2011). This could be more effective than showing (non-normative) aggression or retaliation, which may instigate or perpetuate a "cycle of humiliation" (Lindner, 2002).

Future Directions

In the previous sections we have already suggested some avenues for future research. In this section we focus more specifically on a few routes that we think may be pursued in future studies. An important aspect that received some attention in this dissertation, but needs further study, is the role of culture. In Chapter 2, we explored whether different self-related values play a role in the intensity of humiliation depending on audience laughter. As our data include participants from only two countries, India and the United States, and one language, English (which has clear advantages, but also some disadvantages), broad generalizations with respect to culture cannot be made. However, one conclusion from this study could be that, depending on culture (e.g., individualistic versus collectivistic), specific determinants of humiliation, such as audience laughter, become more important *only* when the value that is under threat is more distant from the self-concept of the victim. That is, for values that play a more central role in certain cultures (e.g., family values in India), audience laughter seems less required to evoke the (or a stronger) experience of humiliation, whereas in other cultures these determinants *do* affect humiliation. Note that this idea goes somewhat against our initial expectations in Chapter 2, which were that elements of humiliation, such as a hostile audience reaction, are more important when the humiliating episode is related to values that are more

(rather than less) central to the self. It might turn out that this actually depends on the culture people are from. This should be further investigated, ideally with people from different individualistic and collectivistic cultures to also address the potential role of other cultural dimensions (e.g., equality versus hierarchy or power distance).

More generally, questions that have been raised in the study of cultural differences and similarities in (self-conscious) emotions also pertain to humiliation. Although humiliation seems to be recognized and experienced in many different cultures (e.g., Ginges & Atran, 2008; Leidner et al., 2012), it is not clear whether and how culture impacts the appraisals of humiliating events or situations. For example, humiliation seems a more prevalent part of emotional life in honour cultures (e.g., Fattah & Fierke, 2009; Fontan, 2006; Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman, & Orehek, 2009; Miller, 1993; Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002), because of the larger emphasis on one's reputation and social status (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Concepts of honour may include aspects such as masculinity (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996) or the preservation of a woman's purity (Fontan, 2006; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2002), which are less significant in more individualistic cultures. Because of the stronger emphasis on one's integrity and reputation, people from honour cultures may appraise events more readily as humiliating than people from other cultures.

Concepts of honour could also be relevant with regard to the consequences of humiliation. For example, Cohen and colleagues (1996) showed that people from honour cultures react more aggressively to insults than people from non-honour cultures. Research by Rodriguez Mosquera, Fischer, Manstead, and Zaalberg (2008) indicated that shame felt after an insult was associated with verbal disapproval towards the wrongdoer among people for whom honour was a core cultural value, but not among people who were not strongly concerned with honour. Finally, Doosje et al. (2016) studied national humiliation (which is close to group-based humiliation). These researchers found that people from Albania (an honour culture), Hong Kong,

and India (face-keeping cultures) reported more national humiliation after reading scenarios in which their nation is degraded than people from the Netherlands (a dignity culture). Furthermore, Albanians reported more aggressive tendencies following this humiliation than Dutch people. In contrast, people from Hong Kong and India reported more withdrawal tendencies than the Dutch.

Thus, in honour cultures, aggressive tendencies and behaviour such as taking revenge may be a more common reaction to humiliation than withdrawal (tendencies). This aggression is perceived as instrumental to restore the injured honour and pride, whether individually or at the group level (see also Fattah & Fierke, 2009; Fontan, 2006). Withdrawal, on the other hand, may be interpreted as weak or as a sign of acknowledgment of the humiliation as justified or as congruent with one's self-concept. However, in face-keeping cultures, withdrawal may be a more common and valued response to humiliation, because people from these cultures are more concerned with maintaining harmonious relations with others.

Another cultural dimension that may be related to humiliation is power distance. Power distance refers to the degree to which members of a society accept an unequal power-distribution in institutions and organisations within that society (Hofstede, 1985). Countries with a large power distance include Malaysia, the Philippines, Panama and Guatemala (Hofstede, 1985). There are two potential directions of an effect of this cultural value on experienced humiliation. On the one hand, people from a culture with a large power distance may be more accepting of inequalities and therefore feel less humiliated after a humiliation-evoking incident than when the same incident would happen in a culture with a small power distance. On the other hand, humiliation may be more prevalent in high power-distance cultures because people from such cultures are more often confronted with humiliation-evoking events. This may lead to strong experiences of humiliation, in particular when people become familiar with global notions of human rights (e.g.,

Lindner, 2001a). Future research might fruitfully examine the validity of these two options.

Another open question concerns differences in consequences of interpersonal versus group-based feelings of humiliation. Speculating on this, we would argue that, in line with our ideas about the emotional correlates of humiliation in different contexts, group-based humiliation may be more strongly related to aggressive tendencies against the humiliator than interpersonal humiliation. One reason for this is that the perceived efficacy or strength of one's group may be higher than the perceived efficacy of the self as an individual. As a consequence, the use of aggression may be seen as a more successful strategy after group-based humiliation. This could also depend on cultural factors. For example, people from individualistic cultures may feel less humiliated and react with less aggression or withdrawal after group-based humiliation than people from collectivistic cultures (e.g., Doosje et al., 2016), but such a difference may be less pronounced when it concerns interpersonal humiliation. In sum, some (cultural) contexts or causes of humiliation may elicit more avoidance, whereas others elicit more aggression, either towards the humiliator or other people present in the situation, or towards people or groups not associated with the humiliating act(s). Future studies should address these potential consequences of humiliation in different contexts.

Limitations

The current research adds to the existing literature in several ways. However, there are also some important limitations that we should address. First, although we also used other methods, a large part of the data reported in this dissertation is based on scenario studies. The choice for scenarios is partly borne out of ethical issues tied to the study of humiliation. One should be very careful with manipulating these kind of extreme, negative emotions. In Study 3.2 we manipulated a mild form of humiliation. Even then, such studies should be conducted with great care and

attention and are thus time-consuming. Furthermore, it is generally more difficult to manipulate self-conscious emotions in the lab than it is to manipulate basic emotions. One reason for this is that the elicitors of self-conscious emotions are more psychologically complex and more dependent on individual differences than the elicitors of basic emotions (Tracy & Robins, 2007).

Although we think scenarios are a valid way to study emotions and the results of our scenario studies are in line with results of other methods (see Chapter 3), we acknowledge that we should be careful with direct generalizations of these results to real-life emotional experiences (see Parkinson & Manstead, 1993). However, even if we assume that the scenarios did not actually manipulate *feelings* of humiliation, our results are still informative, because they reflect people's *expectations* about what makes them feel humiliated in a given situation.

A second limitation is that, in all studies, we used self-report measures of humiliation and other emotions. Although we have no reason to assume that people are unable to judge what they would feel or (want to) do during or after a given emotional episode, we do think that they may underreport the intensity of their actual feelings of humiliation in a given situation. However, a difference in intensity does not necessarily imply a difference in nature. Furthermore, we should emphasize that it is difficult, if not impossible, to study humiliation without relying on verbal reports of internal experience. For example, there is no clear way to identify humiliation via a discrete facial expression. Although there is some evidence for different patterns of brain activity in participants after reading humiliating scenarios compared to scenarios inducing shame, anger or happiness (Otten & Jonas, 2014), it is also unlikely that discrete emotions are represented by specific regions in the brain (e.g., Barrett, 2009). Therefore, we think that relying on self-reports of humiliation is, to date, the most valid way to measure this emotion.

A third limitation is that we only considered humiliation "on the spot" and not the development of humiliation and its related action tendencies over time. For

example, right after a humiliating incident, the victim could feel ashamed and strongly inclined to withdraw. However, after a period of rumination this person could start to feel angrier and develop a wish to take revenge. With the current studies we could not investigate this issue, but it would be worthwhile to address this in future research.

Together these issues limit what we can conclude about humiliation in real life. Nevertheless, we think that the present research gives some important insights on the basis of which future studies could be developed. Ideally, such studies should include carefully designed lab-experiments as well as longitudinal research focusing on the development of humiliation and its related action tendencies over time.

Concluding Thoughts

Humiliation is an intensely aversive and complex emotional experience. The quote in the beginning of this chapter refers to humiliation as the feeling of a loss of control over one's life. This perceived loss can be experienced collectively, as a nation or community, or individually, as a single person. Whether humiliation is experienced collectively or individually is likely dependent on the context—interpersonal or intergroup—in which the event takes place. This dissertation focused on several aspects of humiliation in interpersonal and intergroup-contexts, and additionally focused on humiliation in an intragroup context.

Taken together, our findings suggest that humiliation is a maladaptive emotional experience, at least when it comes to forming and maintaining good relationships, either between individuals, within a group, or between groups. Future research should take into account cultural aspects in the experience of humiliation, study whether and how the constellation of feelings and action tendencies generally associated with humiliation depend on the context, and focus on the development of humiliation and its consequences over time.