

The Paradox of Humiliation: The Acceptance of an Unjust Devaluation of the Self

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Abstract

Despite growing attention the study of humiliation is receiving, there is little consensus as to how humiliation differs from other related emotions. We here argue that humiliation shares central characteristics with anger, shame, and embarrassment, but also differs from these emotions in meaningful ways. In Study 1, participants read about a professor who demeaned a student's work. We manipulated key appraisals of this scenario and measured humiliation, shame, anger, and embarrassment, as well as the tendencies for approach and avoidance. Results indicated that humiliation arises from accepting a devaluation of the self, which, simultaneously, is appraised as unjust. Moreover, humiliation is associated with tendencies for approach and avoidance simultaneously. We replicated these results in Study 2 in which participants referred to actual experiences in their lives during which they felt humiliated, ashamed, or angry. Taken together, results provide evidence of the unique nature of humiliation as a distinct, self-conscious emotion.

Keywords

humiliation, shame, anger, embarrassment, appraisals

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Humiliation is a phenomenon of wide interest that previous research has associated with destructive outcomes, such as violent ideation and desire for revenge (Elison & Harter, 2007; Thomaes, Stegge, Olthof, Bushman, & Nezelek, 2011), terrorism (Bloom, 2005; Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman, & Orehek, 2009; Lindner, 2006), school shootings (Larkin, 2009), and even genocide and mass murder (Lindner, 2002). Paradoxically, previous research has further suggested that humiliation evokes avoidance reactions, such as the tendency to suppress rebellious actions among oppressed groups (Ginges & Atran, 2008), feelings of powerlessness (Leidner, Sheikh, & Ginges, 2012), and a state of helplessness that can result in suicide (Farmer & McGuffin, 2003; Rich, Sherman, & Fowler, 1990; Torres & Bergner, 2012).

Despite the growing attention humiliation is receiving, a review of the existing literature reveals a lack of a clear consensus about what exactly humiliation is and how it differs from other related emotions (Elison & Harter, 2007). The main goal of the present research, therefore, is to clarify the concept of humiliation by providing evidence of how humiliation relates to and differs from three different emotions: shame, anger, and embarrassment. To accomplish our goal, we have adopted a cognitive appraisal perspective (Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Roseman, 1991; Scherer, 1984) and investigated the nature of humiliation by identifying (a) the distinctive pattern of appraisals that are associated

with humiliation and (b) the action tendencies that are associated with humiliation.

The Nature of Humiliation

Most authors define humiliation as a self-conscious emotion of particularly high intensity that arises when a person feels demeaned, put down, or exposed (Elison & Harter, 2007; Ginges & Atran, 2008; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Leidner et al., 2012; Otten & Jonas, 2014; Torres & Bergner, 2012; Walker & Knauer, 2011). Nevertheless, in studies of self-conscious emotions, which often address shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride (see Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007), humiliation is rarely included. A review of the research in which humiliation is considered shows that most of the work deals, in one way or another, with two basic components that seem to be critical for the experience of humiliation.

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The first component has to do with the acceptance, or internalization, of a *devaluated identity* (Klein, 1991; Torres & Bergner, 2012). The devaluated identity is a result of a loss of value, forced by someone who is in the necessary position to damage the humiliated (Torres & Bergner, 2012). This idea of damaging the victim's self via a hostile process has been emphasized by Klein (1991), who defined humiliation as "what one feels when one is ridiculed, scorned, held in contempt, or otherwise disparaged for what one *is* rather than what one *does*" (p. 90, emphasis added). As such, we suggest that when feeling humiliated, the victim internalizes, assimilates, or accepts devaluation imposed on him or her. In this regard, humiliation relates to both shame and embarrassment, which also imply threats to the self (Tracy & Robins, 2007).

The second core element that is included in most discussions of humiliation is the appraisal that such devaluation of the self is unjust (Combs, Campbell, Jackson, & Smith, 2010; Ginges & Atran, 2008; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Klein, 1991; Walker & Knauer, 2011). In this sense, we posit that humiliation relates to anger, as the appraisal of injustice is central for this emotion as well (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989).

Nevertheless, despite these important insights, most of the evidence regarding humiliation is correlational or observational, resulting in little consensus on the characteristics that give rise to humiliation in particular, and differentiate it from other related emotions (Elison & Harter, 2007; Torres & Bergner, 2012). The present research sought to bridge this gap by providing experimental evidence regarding the appraisals that drive humiliation and that distinguish it from shame, anger, and embarrassment. Drawing on and integrating the research reviewed above, we suggest that humiliation is the result of accepting a devaluation of the self that is simultaneously appraised as unjust or unfair. We, therefore, propose that humiliation, as with shame and embarrassment, implies the acceptance of a devaluation of the self. However, unlike shame and embarrassment, humiliated victims further view the cause of the devaluation as unjustly inflicted on them by others. As such, we claim that the appraisal of being a victim of injustice is the key variable that differentiates humiliation from shame and embarrassment. Extending this analysis, we also posit that the injustice appraisal is an important variable that links humiliation to anger, because a core appraisal theme underlining anger is injustice (De Cremer, Wubben, & Brebels, 2008; Frijda et al., 1989). The main difference between humiliation and anger would be that anger, contrary to humiliation, is not characterized by an internalization of a devaluation of the self (Neumann, 2000).

Apart from studying the core appraisals underlying humiliation (i.e., acceptance of a devaluation of the self and injustice), in the present research, we further explored the role of two additional variables that were identified in previous research as relevant to the experience of humiliation: *publicity* and *status of the perpetrator*. Being devaluated or

demeaned in public is often considered an important antecedent of humiliation (Combs et al., 2010; Torres & Bergner, 2012), and only those who have the necessary status or personal relevance to the victims are considered able to humiliate them (Torres & Bergner, 2012). Nevertheless, empirical evidence for the role of publicity and status in humiliation is scarce, and the reason for why they should drive humiliation is unclear. In the current research, in addition to examining the role that publicity and status might play in humiliation, we further explored whether being devaluated in public would link humiliation to embarrassment. Because embarrassment always implies the presence of a real or imagined audience (Miller, 2007), we examined whether, in those cases in which humiliation is accompanied by the appraisal of being publicly devaluated (vs. in private),¹ a feeling of embarrassment would also appear.

The Outcomes of Humiliation

Our hypothesis that humiliation shares core appraisals with shame, anger, and embarrassment can further help resolve the apparent contradiction in the findings that relates humiliation to both avoidance and approach tendencies. Indeed, previous research has associated humiliation with tendencies to aggress and with desire for revenge (Elison & Harter, 2007; Thomaes et al., 2011; Torres & Bergner, 2012), and also with withdrawal tendencies in the form of inaction and helplessness (Ginges & Atran, 2008; Leidner et al., 2012). For example, Leidner et al. (2012) found that humiliating experiences triggered intense other-directed outrage. However, they also found that humiliating events evoked feelings of powerlessness. This interesting mixture of outrage and powerlessness finds expression in what Ginges and Atran (2008) defined as an *inertia effect*. Based on research conducted in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, these authors found that humiliating experiences did not foster violent reactions among Palestinians but led to apparent inertia, reflecting a form of quiet rage. Similarly, Torres and Bergner (2012) also emphasized a tendency for hopelessness, helplessness, and suicide among victims of humiliation, which may coincide with powerless rage and extremely aggressive behavior.

In line with the notion that humiliation shares central characteristics with shame, anger, and embarrassment, we posit that humiliation would lead simultaneously to action tendencies typically associated with feeling ashamed and embarrassed (i.e., avoidance tendencies), as well as with action tendencies typically associated with feeling angry (i.e., approach tendencies). In the current research, while considering appraisals that are underlining shame and embarrassment (i.e., acceptance of a devaluation of the self), and anger (i.e., viewing the source of the devaluation as unjust), we can examine whether these appraisals also underlie the seemingly contradictory action tendencies associated with humiliation.

To test our hypothesis, we ran two studies. In Study 1, we presented participants with a scenario about a student who was devaluated by his professor and manipulated the way this student appraised the situation. We measured the extent to which participants expected him to feel humiliation, shame, anger, and embarrassment, and how they expected him to behave. In Study 2, we asked participants to recall and describe an episode in their lives in which they felt one of the target emotions (humiliation, shame, or anger) and we measured, rather than manipulated, the way they appraised that situation and how they behaved.

Study 1

In Study 1, participants read a scenario describing a psychology student who received a very negative evaluation from his professor. We manipulated the student's appraisal of the feedback to reflect the two appraisals that we hypothesized would differentiate humiliation from shame, anger, and embarrassment: an appraisal of accepting a devaluation of the self and an appraisal of such devaluation being unjust. In addition, we manipulated the two other appraisals that have been pointed out in the literature as relevant for humiliation: the status of the perpetrator and the extent to which the devaluation is perceived to be public. Participants then rated the extent to which they expected the student to feel humiliation, shame, anger, and embarrassment and whether the student would react with approach or avoidance behaviors.

Method

Participants. Participants were 543 undergraduate psychology students at National University of Distance Education (UNED) in Spain (420 females, 123 males, $M_{\text{age}} = 33.29$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.85$) who voluntarily took part in this study.

Procedure. We adapted the method known as the *imagined responses to criteria-based scenario simulations* (Scherer, 1987; see also Halperin, 2008). To recruit participants, we published a call for volunteers among undergraduate students at the university. Students who agreed to participate were directed to a website specifically created to host the study. Across conditions, participants first read a description of a student named Juan, who received a negative evaluation from his professor:

Juan is a psychology student. For Juan, studying psychology is a crucial aspect of his life and something that adds to his identity. He was instructed in class to write an essay with the following title: "What does psychology mean for you? Why did you choose to study it?" Juan did this task as best he could. The essay was, however, very negatively evaluated by his professor and marked with a grade of 1 on a scale of 10. The professor included the following handwritten remark in the feedback he returned to Juan: "Shows an alarming lack of competence in crucial domains and very low assimilation of basic concepts. This text is naïve

and does not reflect the educational level of a university student. In my opinion, a person who writes like this has very little chance to become a good psychologist. Maybe you should seriously consider doing another thing."

Participants then read a description of how Juan appraised this situation. This description varied across four dichotomous independent variables: acceptance versus non-acceptance of the devaluation of the self (acceptance), just versus unjust treatment by the professor (injustice), high versus low status of the perpetrator (status), and private versus public devaluation (publicity). Table 1 shows the specific texts we used to manipulate each of these variables. We programmed the web page to randomly select one particular combination of the four independent variables for each participant. Participants then rated the extent to which they expected Juan to feel different emotions and to undertake different action tendencies. We, therefore, had a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Acceptance \times Injustice \times Status \times Publicity) between-participants factorial design.

Measures. All items in all studies were rated on a scale ranging from 0 = *not at all* to 6 = *extremely*.

Discrete emotions. To assess the discrete emotions, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they thought that Juan would feel humiliated, ashamed, angry, and embarrassed.

Action tendencies. To assess approach tendencies, participants rated the extent to which they thought Juan would like to (a) hurt the professor physically, (b) hurt the professor verbally, and (c) publicly ridicule the professor. To assess avoidance tendencies, participants indicated the extent to which they thought Juan would (a) reduce the time he invested in studying psychology, (b) reduce his interest in psychology, and (c) stay at home doing nothing. A principal factor analysis using oblique rotation revealed two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. The three items assessing approach all had factor loadings greater than .84 on the first factor and no factor loadings greater than .25 on the second factor. The three items assessing avoidance all had factor loadings greater than .57 on the second factor and no factor loadings greater than .19 on the first factor. The interfactor correlation was .22. We, therefore, computed composite measures of approach ($\alpha = .82$) and avoidance ($\alpha = .76$) by averaging the appropriate items.

Results

Data analysis strategy. Because we were mainly interested in the way these four appraisals differentiated the extent to which participants expected Juan to feel humiliation versus the other three emotions (anger, shame, and embarrassment), our data analysis strategy involved a mixed-model ANOVA

Table 1. Variants of the Text Used to Manipulate the Appraisals in Study 1.

Appraisal	Text
Acceptance	Juan thinks about what he wrote in his essay and he . . .
Acceptance	. . . begins to doubt himself, thinking that maybe his professor is actually right. He thinks about what psychology means for him and that the reason he had to study it could be indeed quite silly.
No-acceptance	. . . comes to the conclusion that his professor is not right. He thinks about what psychology means for him and that the reasons he had to study it are not silly at all.
Injustice	Juan thinks about the way the professor has behaved and comes to the conclusion that, independent of the negative content of the evaluation he has received, the behavior of the professor toward him during this incident has been . . .
Unjust	. . . absolutely unjust. He thinks that no matter what a professor should never address his students in the tone the professor used in his remarks.
Just	. . . the behavior of the professor toward him during this incident has been just. He thinks that the professor has done his job when writing his remarks and that the professor's behavior has been, in general, just.
Publicity	Juan thinks about whether the professor has shared the evaluation with other professors or students. Juan comes to the conclusion that the professor has . . .
Public	. . . indeed shared the evaluation he did of Juan's work with other professors and students.
Private	. . . not shared the evaluation he did of Juan's work with other professors or students.
Status	Juan thinks about the professor who did the evaluation. He thinks that this professor is . . .
High	. . . an important professor at the university.
Low	. . . not an important professor at the university.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Measured Variables in Study 1 ($N = 543$).

Variable	Descriptive		Correlations					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Humiliation	3.55	1.70	—					
2. Shame	2.67	1.83	.45***	—				
3. Embarrassment	3.01	1.71	.44***	.49***	—			
4. Anger	3.30	1.70	.43***	.13**	.11*	—		
5. Approach	1.65	1.33	.33***	.17***	.15***	.31***	—	
6. Avoidance	2.57	1.34	.32***	.47***	.35***	.03	.21***	—

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

in which the four manipulated appraisals were the between-participants variables and the difference between humiliation and anger, shame, and embarrassment, respectively, was the within-participants variable. This approach enabled us to test our hypothesis regarding the role that each manipulated appraisal played in differentiating humiliation from the other three emotions, as well as to explore the possible interactions among the appraisals. In addition, we tested whether the manipulated appraisals exerted a direct causal effect on the action tendencies and, finally, a mediational model in which we specified the manipulated appraisals as independent variables, the action tendencies as dependent variables, and the emotions as mediators.

Descriptive statistics and correlations. Descriptive statistics of all measures and the zero-order correlations are presented in Table 2. In general (independent of the manipulated variables), the mean of humiliation was significantly higher than the means of shame, anger, and embarrassment, $t(542) > 3.13$,

$ps < .002$, $ds > .27$. Anger was significantly higher than shame and embarrassment, $t(542) > 3.05$, $ps < .002$, $ds > .26$, and embarrassment was significantly higher than shame, $t(542) = 4.37$, $p < .001$, $d = .37$. The mean of avoidance tendencies was significantly higher than the mean of approach tendencies, $t(542) = 12.75$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.09$. Humiliation was strongly correlated with shame, anger, and embarrassment. Shame and embarrassment were also strongly correlated. Anger was also correlated with shame and embarrassment, but to a lower extent.

Differentiating humiliation from other emotions at the appraisal level. To test which appraisals differentiated among humiliation, shame, anger, and embarrassment, we ran three mixed-design ANOVAs. The first considered humiliation versus shame as a within-participants variable and the four manipulated appraisals as between-participants variables. The second ANOVA was similar with the only difference being that humiliation versus anger was the within-participants variable.

Table 3. Means (SDs) of Emotions as a Function of Appraisals' Levels in Study I.

Dependent variable	Acceptance		Injustice		Publicity		Status	
	Acceptance	No-acceptance	Unjust	Just	Public	Private	High	Low
Humiliation	3.73 (1.69)	3.39 (1.70)	4.07 (1.48)	3.04 (1.76)	3.72 (1.68)	3.37 (1.71)	3.44 (1.76)	3.69 (1.63)
Shame	3.37 (1.67)	2.04 (1.74)	2.73 (1.78)	2.61 (1.88)	2.78 (1.81)	2.55 (1.85)	2.68 (1.83)	2.65 (1.84)
Embarrassment	3.33 (1.64)	2.71 (1.72)	3.15 (1.74)	2.87 (1.68)	3.29 (1.64)	2.71 (1.72)	2.99 (1.65)	3.03 (1.78)
Anger	3.08 (1.68)	3.51 (1.70)	3.93 (1.52)	2.70 (1.66)	3.45 (1.73)	3.16 (1.67)	3.06 (1.69)	3.60 (1.68)

In the third ANOVA, humiliation versus embarrassment was the within-participants variable. Results are reported below separately for each pair of emotions.

Humiliation versus shame. The analysis yielded two significant interactions between the within-participants variable (i.e., humiliation vs. shame) and the appraisals. One interaction involved the within-participants variable and injustice, $F(1, 527) = 29.07, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$, and the second interaction involved the within-participants variable and acceptance, $F(1, 527) = 43.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$. These interactions indicated that these appraisals affected the two emotions differently and, therefore, were important to differentiate humiliation from shame. As shown in Table 3, humiliation was significantly higher in the unjust as compared with the just condition, $t(542) = 7.37, p < .001, d = .63$, whereas the effect of injustice on shame was nonsignificant, $p = .439$. Acceptance was also an important variable to differentiate humiliation from shame: Both emotions were significantly higher in the acceptance as compared with the no-acceptance condition, but this effect was stronger for shame, $t(542) = 9.01, p < .001, d = .78$, than for humiliation, $t(542) = 2.33, p = .020, d = .20$. The interaction between the within-participants variable and status was marginally significant, $F(1, 527) = 3.35, p = .068, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Inconsistent with previous theorizing, humiliation tended to be higher in the low as compared with the high status condition, $t(542) = 1.70, p = .089, d = .15$, whereas the effect of status on shame was nonsignificant, $p = .859$. The interaction between the within-participants variable and publicity was nonsignificant, $p = .407$, and so were the rest of the potential three-, four-, and five-way interactions in the model, $ps > .198$.

Humiliation versus anger. Results of the mixed ANOVA revealed one significant interaction between the within-participants variable (i.e., humiliation vs. anger) and acceptance, $F(1, 527) = 26.26, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Accepting the devaluation increased humiliation, $t(542) = 2.33, p = .020, d = .20$, whereas it decreased anger, $t(542) = -2.95, p = .003, d = -.25$. A second interaction between the within-participants variable and status was marginally significant, $F(1, 527) = 3.87, p = .050, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Anger was significantly higher when the perpetrator was appraised as a low status professor than when appraised as a high status professor, $t(542) = -3.71,$

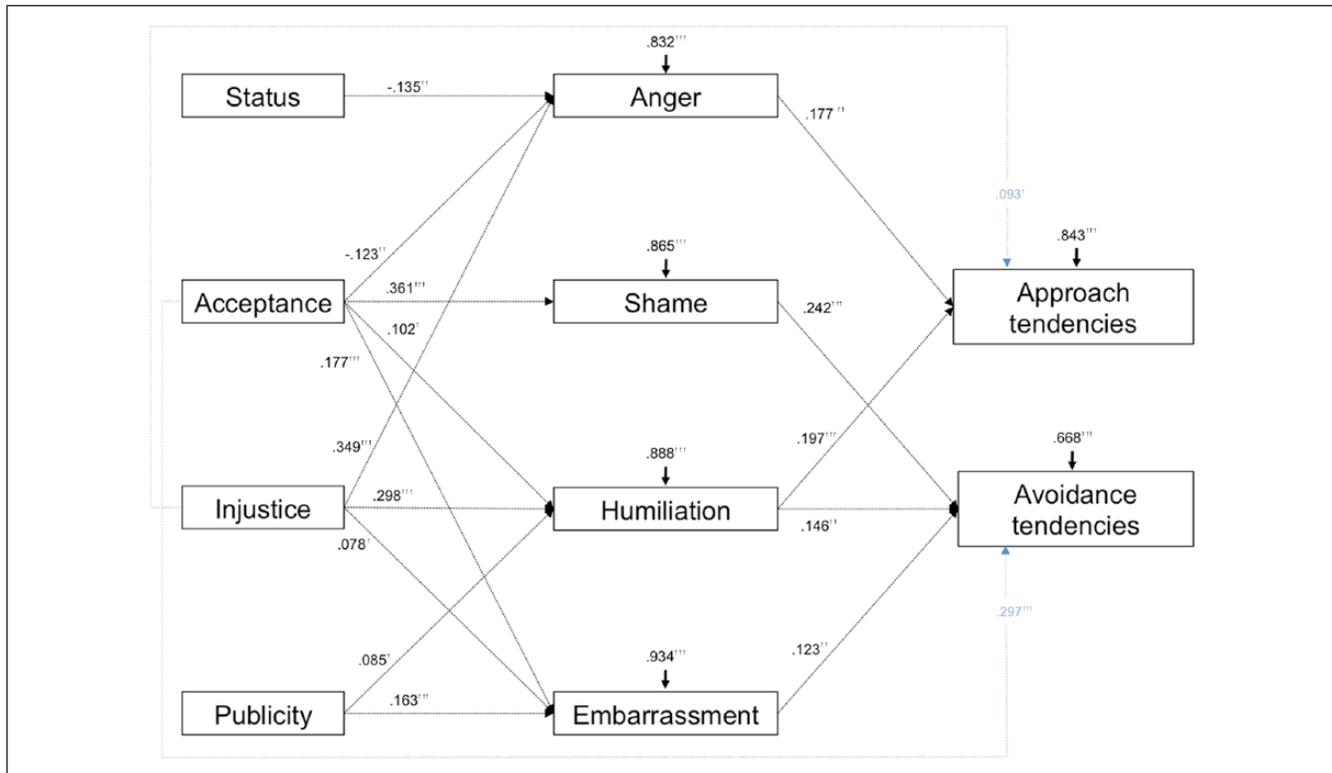
$p < .001, d = -.32$; as indicated above, humiliation was only marginally higher in the low as compared with the high status condition. The interactions between the within-participants variable and injustice and publicity were nonsignificant, $ps > .414$, and so were the rest of the potential three-, four-, and five-way interactions in the model, $ps > .082$.²

Humiliation versus embarrassment. Results of the mixed ANOVA revealed one significant interaction between the within-participants variable (i.e., humiliation vs. embarrassment) and injustice, $F(1, 527) = 19.38, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$. Injustice had a positive effect on both emotions. However, the effect of injustice on humiliation was significant and strong, $t(542) = 7.37, p < .001, d = .63$, whereas the effect of injustice on embarrassment was marginally significant and weak, $t(542) = 1.89, p = .059, d = .16$. The interaction between the within-participants variable and acceptance was marginally significant, $F(1, 527) = 3.53, p = .061, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Both emotions were significantly higher in the acceptance as compared with the no-acceptance condition, but this effect was stronger for embarrassment, $t(542) = 4.27, p < .001, d = .37$, than for humiliation, $t(542) = 2.33, p = .020, d = .20$. The interactions between the within-participants variable and publicity and status were nonsignificant, $ps > .142$, and so were the rest of the potential three-, four-, and five-way interactions in the model, $ps > .262$.

Action tendencies. To establish whether the manipulated appraisals exerted a direct causal effect on the action tendencies, we conducted two ANOVAs with the four manipulated appraisals as the independent variables, one considering approach tendencies as the outcome and one considering avoidance tendencies (see Table 4 for means and standard deviations). The results of the ANOVA on approach tendencies yielded a significant main effect of injustice, $F(1, 527) = 27.30, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$, with more approach tendencies when the target appraised the behavior of the professor as unjust than when he appraised it as just, and a main effect of status, $F(1, 527) = 4.01, p = .046, \eta_p^2 = .01$, with more approach tendencies when the professor had low status than when he had high status. The main effects of acceptance and publicity were nonsignificant, $ps > .795$, and so were the two-, three-, and four-way interactions in the model, $ps > .299$.

Table 4. Means (SDs) of Action Tendencies as a Function of Appraisals' Levels in Study 1.

Dependent variable	Acceptance		Injustice		Publicity		Status	
	Acceptance	No-acceptance	Unjust	Just	Public	Private	High	Low
Approach tendencies	1.66 (1.35)	1.65 (1.31)	1.95 (1.30)	1.37 (1.30)	1.66 (1.38)	1.64 (1.28)	1.54 (1.29)	1.79 (1.36)
Avoidance tendencies	3.17 (1.29)	2.03 (1.14)	2.65 (1.31)	2.50 (1.36)	2.63 (1.29)	2.52 (1.39)	2.63 (1.34)	2.50 (1.33)

**Figure 1.** Saturated path model tested in Study 1 with standardized coefficients.

Note. Only significant and marginal paths are depicted. The dichotomous independent variables were coded as follow: 1 = acceptance, 0 = no-acceptance; 1 = unjust, 0 = just; 1 = public, 0 = private; 1 = high status, 0 = low status. The residual variance components (error variances) indicate the amount of unexplained variance. Thus, for each observed variable, $R^2 = (1 - \text{error variance})$. The model shows that injustice elicited primarily humiliation and anger. Acceptance elicited humiliation, shame, and embarrassment, whereas it reduced anger. Publicity elicited embarrassment and humiliation. Finally, a high status perpetrator reduced anger. With regard to the action tendencies, humiliation was positively associated with both approach and avoidance tendencies. Anger was positively associated with approach tendencies. Shame and embarrassment were associated only with avoidance tendencies. ['] $p < .10$. ^{''} $p < .05$. ^{'''} $p < .01$. ^{''''} $p < .001$.

The results of the ANOVA on avoidance tendencies yielded a significant main effect of acceptance, $F(1, 527) = 117.73, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$, with more avoidance when the target accepted the devaluation than when he did not accept it, and a main effect of injustice, $F(1, 527) = 4.21, p < .041, \eta_p^2 = .01$, with more avoidance when the target appraised the behavior of the professor as unjust than when he appraised it as just. The main effect of status was marginally significant, $F(1, 527) = 3.43, p = .065, \eta_p^2 = .01$, with more avoidance when the professor had high status than when he had low status. The Injustice \times Publicity interaction on avoidance was also significant, $F(1, 541) = 4.06, p = .044, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Follow-up tests indicated that, in the unjust condition, avoidance tended to be higher when the devaluation was public

($M = 2.79, SD = 1.20$) than when it was private ($M = 2.50, SD = 1.41$), $t(265) = 1.79, p = .074, d = .22$, whereas in the just condition, there was no significant difference in avoidance between the public ($M = 2.46, SD = 1.36$) and the private ($M = 2.53, SD = 1.37$) conditions, $p = .659$. The other interaction effects in the model were nonsignificant, $ps > .096$.

Appraisals, emotions, and action tendencies. Next, we used path analysis to examine the full model leading from appraisals to action tendencies via the emotions. Using Lisrel 8.7, we fitted a model in which the four dichotomous manipulated appraisals were defined as exogenous independent variables, the four emotions were defined as mediators, and the two action tendencies were the dependent variables. Figure 1 depicts the

Table 5. Specific Indirect Effects (95% Bootstrapped Confidence Interval) of Each Independent Variable (i.e., Acceptance, Injustice, Publicity, and Status) on Each Dependent Variable (i.e., Approach and Avoidance Action Tendencies) via Each Emotion (i.e., Humiliation, Shame, Anger, and Embarrassment) in the Saturated Path Model Depicted in Figure 1 in Study I.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	
	Approach tendencies	Avoidance tendencies
Indirect effects via humiliation		
Acceptance	.053 [.012, .117]	.040 [.008, .095]
Injustice	.156 [.072, .265]	.116 [.041, .212]
Publicity	.044 [.008, .104]	.033 [.004, .087]
Status	-.026 [-.078, .014]	-.020 [-.068, .007]
Indirect effects via shame		
Acceptance	.049 [-.047, .144]	.234 [.142, .350]
Injustice	.005 [-.004, .039]	.025 [-.024, .084]
Publicity	.007 [-.005, .039]	.032 [-.016, .092]
Status	.002 [-.008, .031]	.010 [-.041, .068]
Indirect effects via anger		
Acceptance	-.058 [-.122, -.020]	.014 [-.012, .056]
Injustice	.164 [.077, .276]	-.039 [-.129, .043]
Publicity	.031 [-.002, .081]	-.008 [-.040, .005]
Status	-.064 [-.127, -.023]	.015 [-.015, .056]
Indirect effects via embarrassment		
Acceptance	.011 [-.033, .064]	.058 [.017, .121]
Injustice	.005 [-.012, .038]	.026 [.001, .074]
Publicity	.010 [-.032, .056]	.053 [.016, .117]
Status	.000 [-.011, .016]	.006 [-.029, .033]

Note. Significant indirect effects are in boldface.

resulting saturated model (only significant paths are drawn). As shown in Figure 1, accepting the devaluation of the self increased humiliation, shame, and embarrassment, whereas it decreased anger. The effect of acceptance on shame was significantly higher than on humiliation and embarrassment, $\chi^2(1) > 21.48$, $ps < .001$; the effect of acceptance on embarrassment was marginally stronger than on humiliation, $\chi^2(1) = 3.20$, $p = .074$. Appraising the event as unjust increased both humiliation and anger. These two effects did not differ significantly from one another, $p = .267$. Injustice had a marginally significant positive effect on embarrassment, although this effect was significantly weaker than the effect of injustice on humiliation and anger $\chi^2(1) > 32.27$, $ps < .001$. Publicity increased embarrassment and humiliation. This effect was stronger on embarrassment as compared with humiliation, $\chi^2(1) = 6.52$, $p < .011$. Status reduced anger and did not affect humiliation.

In regard to the associations between the emotions and the action tendencies, humiliation was associated with both approach and avoidance tendencies. These paths did not differ significantly, $p = .427$. In common with humiliation, anger showed a positive association with approach tendencies. The paths from humiliation and anger to approach did not differ significantly, $p = .791$. Contrary to humiliation, anger was not associated with avoidance tendencies. Shame and embarrassment, like humiliation, were positively associated with avoidance. The paths from humiliation, shame, and

embarrassment to avoidance did not differ significantly, $ps > .133$. Contrary to humiliation, shame and embarrassment were not associated with approach tendencies.

We used the MEDIATE macro (Hayes, 2013) in SPSS 22 to calculate the bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs) for all the specific indirect effects of the model (i.e., the 32 potential indirect effects that the four appraisals could have on both types of action tendencies via one of the four emotions considered independently). Table 5 shows the results of these calculations. For each indirect effect, we have provided the unstandardized coefficient together with the 95% CI in Table 5.

Consistent with predictions, of the 32 possible indirect effects, 6 effects via humiliation were significant. These effects were (a) the indirect effect of acceptance on approach tendencies via humiliation, (b) the indirect effect of injustice on approach tendencies via humiliation, and (c) the indirect effect of publicity on approach tendencies via humiliation. The additional three effects via humiliation that resulted significant involved the parallel paths, leading to avoidance tendencies as an outcome (i.e., the indirect effects of acceptance, injustice, and publicity on avoidance tendencies via humiliation). As for shame, the only significant indirect effect was the one associating acceptance to avoidance tendencies via shame. As for anger, there were three significant indirect effects: the one associating injustice with approach action tendencies via anger, the one associating acceptance, negatively, with approach action tendencies via anger, and the one

associating status, negatively, with approach action tendencies via anger. These four indirect effects involving shame and anger are consistent with prior work. In addition, there were three positive indirect effects of acceptance, injustice, and publicity on avoidance tendencies via embarrassment. The remaining potential indirect effects were nonsignificant. In summary, the indirect effects that showed significance were those and only those depicted in Figure 1, that is, all indirect effects of one appraisal on one action tendency via one emotion that are interconnected in Figure 1 with drawn (i.e., significant) paths.

Discussion

Results of Study 1 supported our main hypothesis regarding the centrality of two appraisals in differentiating humiliation from anger, shame, and embarrassment: accepting a devaluation of the self and the appraisal that such devaluation was unjust. These two appraisals turned out to be sufficient to differentiate humiliation from its most closely related emotions.

As for the appraisals of status and publicity, results indicated that publicity had a significant effect on humiliation. As predicted, this effect linked humiliation to embarrassment, which is an emotion that arises when the public self (in contrast to the core self) is threatened (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). However, the results also indicated that publicity was not essential to differentiate humiliation from shame, embarrassment, and anger. Status had no significant effect on and was not essential to differentiate humiliation from the other three emotions.

Results of Study 1 also supported our hypotheses regarding the commonalities and the differences between humiliation, shame, anger, and embarrassment at the level of the action tendencies: As expected, our mediational model showed an association between humiliation and both approach and avoidance tendencies, whereas anger was positively associated only with approach, and shame and embarrassment were associated only with avoidance tendencies. The pattern of indirect effects between the manipulated appraisals and the action tendencies via the four emotions also supported our hypothesis. Indeed, humiliation was the only emotion through which the indirect effects from the manipulated appraisals to both action tendencies were significant and positive.

Although the present study is a well-powered experiment that confirmed our main hypothesis, it has two limitations: First, participants' responses were based on hypothetical scenarios and not on a personal experience. Second, given that the emotions and the action tendencies were measured in Study 1, the correlations among them could be potentially inflated due to shared method variance and other unobserved variables, biasing the strength of such associations and of the subsequent indirect effects (Bullock, Green, & Ha, 2010). Also, although theoretically it is more plausible that emotion precedes approach and avoidance tendencies, we cannot dismiss reverse causality. Study 2 addressed these two limitations by, first,

having participants report about emotions, appraisals, and action tendencies of situations experienced by them in their own lives and, second, by manipulating the focus of the emotional experience, rather than measuring all emotions simultaneously.

Given that the role of publicity and status in humiliation was less central than the role of acceptance and injustice, in Study 2, we focus on the two core appraisals (i.e., acceptance and injustice) and further examined our predictions that these two appraisals were key to differentiate humiliation from the related emotions. Because these two core appraisals had similar effects on shame and embarrassment, we omitted embarrassment from Study 2 and focused, instead, on the distinction between humiliation, shame, and anger.

Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to replicate the findings of the previous study, overcoming the limitations of the scenario-based methodology used in Study 1. To this end, we adapted the *emotional event recall method* (Tangney et al., 1996) and randomly assigned participants into three conditions: humiliation, shame, and anger. In each condition, participants described an episode in their lives in which they were certain to have felt the respective emotion. Then participants answered a questionnaire including items assessing how they appraised the described situation and how they behaved during that episode.

Method

Participants. Participants were 163 undergraduates at the UNED who voluntarily took part in the study. We later excluded 13 participants (6 from the humiliation condition, 5 from anger, and 2 from shame) from the analysis because they were not able to recall any episode in which they felt the target emotion. The final sample, therefore, included 150 participants (126 females, 24 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.58$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.01$).

Procedure. We randomly assigned participants to one of the three conditions: humiliation, shame, or anger. For each condition, we first asked participants to use their own words to define the target emotion and then to briefly describe a situation or episode in their lives in which they felt that particular emotion. We specified in the instructions that it did not matter when this episode happened or what kind of situation elicited the emotion, as long as they were sure of having felt the target emotion. On completion of the writing task, participants answered a questionnaire with the measures listed below.

Measures. The questionnaire had two blocks of items. All items were randomized in each block.

Key appraisals. First, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with statements referring to how they

appraised the situation they had described (on a scale from 0 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*). The following three statements measured acceptance: “The event described negatively affected the idea I had about me,” “My self-esteem was reduced,” and “I was forced to internalize a devaluated idea of myself.” The following three statements measured injustice: “I was unjustly treated by others,” “Others treated me with hostility,” and “I was a victim of an aggression (moral or otherwise) perpetrated by others.” A principal factor analysis on these six items using oblique rotation revealed two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. The three items assessing injustice all had factor loadings greater than .87 on the first factor and no factor loadings greater than .17 on the second factor. The three items assessing acceptance all had factor loadings greater than .83 on the second factor and no factor loadings greater than .18 on the first factor. The interfactor correlation was .12. We, therefore, averaged the appropriate items to create composite measures of acceptance ($\alpha = .80$) and injustice ($\alpha = .86$).

Action tendencies. Participants were then presented with a list of six actions and asked to indicate the extent to which they considered engaging in each of these actions when they were in the situation they had described (on a scale from 0 = *not at all* to 6 = *very much*). For each action, participants were asked to indicate, using a “yes” (coded as 1) versus “no” (coded as 0) format, whether they actually performed the action. The following three actions assessed approach tendencies: “Insulting other people involved in the situation,” “Telling the people involved in the situation what you thought of them,” and “Having a strong argument with the people involved in the situation.” The following three actions assessed avoidance tendencies: “Escaping as soon as possible from the scenario,” “Trying to hide and be alone,” and “Disappearing from the place as soon as possible.” A principal factor analysis using oblique rotation was conducted with the answers to the first question (i.e., the extent to which participants considered engaging in the actions) and revealed two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. The three items assessing avoidance all had factor loadings greater than .80 on the first factor and no factor loadings greater than .10 on the second factor. The three items assessing approach all had factor loadings greater than .85 on the second factor and no factor loadings greater than .06 on the first factor. The interfactor correlation was .01. We, therefore, averaged the appropriate items to create composite measures of intentions to avoid ($\alpha = .83$) and approach ($\alpha = .82$).

We conducted a principal factor analysis of categorical variables using PRELIS with the answers to the second question (i.e., whether participants actually performed the actions or not). The results yielded a two factors solution similar to the one we obtained with the answers to the first question, and so, we also averaged the dichotomous items to create composite measures of actual (as compared with intended) avoidance ($\alpha = .77$) and approach ($\alpha = .70$).

Results

As a general data analysis strategy, we first ran a one-way ANOVA on each dependent variable. We then followed these omnibus effects with two planned contrasts: humiliation versus shame and humiliation versus anger.

Acceptance appraisal. The one-way ANOVA revealed a marginally significant omnibus effect of condition on acceptance of the devaluation, $F(2, 145) = 2.94, p = .056, \eta_p^2 = .04$. The follow-up of planned contrasts (i.e., humiliation vs. shame and humiliation vs. anger) revealed that, as expected, the level of acceptance was significantly higher among participants who wrote about humiliation ($M = 4.03, SD = 1.76$) compared with those who wrote about anger ($M = 3.21, SD = 2.03$), $t(91) = 2.09, p = .039, d = .44$, whereas participants who wrote about humiliation did not differ significantly in level of acceptance than those who wrote about shame ($M = 3.93, SD = 1.56$), $p = .758$.

Injustice appraisal. The one-way ANOVA revealed a significant omnibus effect of condition on injustice, $F(2, 145) = 37.43, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .34$. The follow-up contrasts revealed that, as expected, injustice was significantly higher among participants who wrote about humiliation ($M = 4.82, SD = 1.32$) compared with those who wrote about shame ($M = 2.07, SD = 2.01$), $t(102) = 8.16, p < .001, d = 1.62$, whereas those who wrote about humiliation did not differ significantly in the level of injustice from those who wrote about anger ($M = 4.33, SD = 1.01$), $p = .126$.

Approach tendencies. The one-way ANOVA on intentions to approach revealed a significant omnibus effect of condition, $F(2, 140) = 33.50, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$. The follow-up contrasts revealed that the intention to approach was significantly higher among participants who wrote about humiliation ($M = 3.90, SD = 1.86$) than among those who wrote about shame ($M = 1.38, SD = 1.79$), $t(98) = 6.90, p < .001, d = 1.39$, whereas those who wrote about humiliation did not differ significantly in the level of intent to approach from those who wrote about anger ($M = 4.04, SD = 1.78$), $p = .712$. In regard to participants' actual approach, the omnibus ANOVA was also significant, $F(2, 140) = 18.17, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$. The follow-up contrast indicated that, as with intent to approach, those who wrote about humiliation were more likely to approach ($M = 0.33, SD = 0.35$) than those who wrote about shame ($M = 0.10, SD = 0.24$), $t(98) = 3.89, p < .001, d = .78$. However, contrary to intent to approach, those who wrote about humiliation were less likely to approach than those who wrote about anger ($M = 0.50, SD = 0.37$), $t(90) = -2.17, p = .033, d = -.46$.

Avoidance tendencies. The one-way ANOVA on intention to avoid revealed a marginally significant omnibus effect of condition, $F(2, 140) = 2.35, p = .099, \eta_p^2 = .03$. The

follow-up contrasts revealed that the intention to avoid was somewhat higher among participants who wrote about humiliation ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.89$) than among those who wrote about anger ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 2.16$), $t(1, 90) = 1.72$, $p = .090$, $d = .36$, whereas those who wrote about humiliation did not differ significantly in the level of intent to avoid than those who wrote about shame ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.88$), $p = .798$. In regard to actual avoidance, the omnibus ANOVA was nonsignificant, $p = .639$, and so were the pairwise comparisons between those who wrote about humiliation ($M = 0.46$, $SD = 0.40$) and those who wrote about shame ($M = 0.53$, $SD = 0.42$) and anger ($M = 0.53$, $SD = 0.43$), $ps > .40$.

Discussion

Results of Study 2 replicated most of the findings of Study 1. Importantly, in Study 2, participants referred to their actual emotional experiences, rather than to hypothetical scenarios. In line with Study 1, humiliation experiences reported by participants differed from shame experiences in the appraisal of injustice, which was significantly higher among participants who wrote about humiliation than those who wrote about shame. Humiliation and anger experiences differed in the appraisal of accepting a devaluation of the self, such that this acceptance was significantly higher among participants who wrote about humiliation relative to those who wrote about anger. Humiliation and shame experiences shared the appraisal of accepting a devaluation of the self, whereas humiliation and anger experiences shared the appraisal of injustice.

The findings for the action tendencies also replicated the results of Study 1. Humiliation and shame differed in the level of approach tendencies, which was significantly higher in the humiliation as compared with the shame condition. Humiliation and anger tended to differ in the level of intent to avoid, which was marginally higher in the humiliation than in the anger condition. Humiliation and shame shared high levels of intent to avoid, whereas humiliation and anger shared high levels of intent to approach. Interestingly, whereas the level of intent to approach did not significantly differ between the humiliation and anger conditions, the level of actual approach was significantly higher in the anger as compared with the humiliation condition. As we will further discuss below, this result suggests that humiliated victims may tend to imagine or wish to approach their perpetrator but that they may not always fulfill those wishes in actual behavior.

General Discussion

The present research offers an empirical approach to the study of the nature of humiliation from a cognitive appraisal perspective. We provide evidence that humiliation is perceived as a distinct emotional phenomenon that shares core appraisals with shame, embarrassment, and anger but that

also differs from these emotions in crucial aspects. Whereas previous work has documented the similarities and differences between humiliation, anger, and shame at the level of the action tendencies (Leidner et al., 2012), the current research begins to identify the particular pattern of appraisals that differentially lead to humiliation as compared with anger, shame, and embarrassment.

Acceptance and Injustice: The Core Appraisals of Humiliation

In Study 1, participants read a scenario in which the work of a student was strongly demeaned by a professor, and we manipulated how the student appraised this situation. Our results showed that the extent to which the student accepted the devaluation and saw it as unjust were the key appraisals that differentiated whether participants expected the student to feel humiliation (when he accepted an unjust devaluation), anger (when he rejected an unjust devaluation), or shame and embarrassment (when he accepted a just devaluation). Publicity and status did not differentiate humiliation from the other three emotions. In Study 2, the same pattern of results emerged when participants described a real episode in their lives in which the predominant emotion they felt was humiliation, shame, or anger, and rated the different appraisals. Participants in the humiliation condition scored high in both acceptance and injustice, whereas participants in the shame condition scored high in acceptance and low in injustice, and participants in the anger condition scored high in injustice and low in acceptance. Moreover, the level of acceptance, which did not differ significantly across the humiliation and shame conditions, was significantly higher in the humiliation as compared with the anger condition. The level of injustice, which did not differ significantly across the humiliation and anger conditions, was significantly higher in the humiliation as compared with the shame condition.

Together, these results confirm our main hypothesis that humiliation shares with shame and embarrassment the core appraisal of accepting (i.e., internalizing or assuming) a devaluation of the self (Frijda, 1986; Lewis, 1971; Tangney, 1993). However, humiliation implies a second core appraisal that differentiates it from shame and embarrassment and relates it to anger: the acknowledgment that the devaluation that one has internalized is unjust. This second appraisal is typical of anger (De Cremer et al., 2008), an emotion that differs from shame and embarrassment in many crucial aspects.

Humiliation Relates to Approach and Avoidance Tendencies

The paradoxical nature of humiliation was also evident with respect to action tendencies. In Study 1, in which participants indicated how they expected the student to behave, we found that humiliation was associated with both approach

and avoidance tendencies. In contrast, shame, anger, and embarrassment were significantly associated only with one type of action tendencies (approach, in the case of anger; avoidance, in the case of shame and embarrassment). Results of Study 2 showed that participants in the humiliation condition intended to approach and actually did approach the perpetrator more than participants in the shame condition. Indeed, the level of intent to approach in the humiliation condition did not differ significantly from the level of intent to approach in the anger condition. Interestingly, though, the level of actual approach was significantly lower in the humiliation as compared with the anger condition. As we discuss below, we think that the different pattern of results in the level of intended action as compared with the actual approach associated with humiliation could indicate that humiliated victims are more ready to imagine revenge and aggressive responses than to actually perform them. Participants in the humiliation condition also scored high in the level of intent to avoid, higher than participants in the anger condition and similar to participants in the shame condition. In general, in both studies, we consistently found that humiliation relates to both tendencies to approach and avoid simultaneously, whereas shame relates only to tendencies to avoid, and anger relates only to tendencies to approach.

Publicity and Status in Humiliation

Our results showed that neither publicity nor status, two variables that have been pointed out in the literature as important for humiliation (Torres & Bergner, 2012), was key measures to differentiate humiliation from shame, embarrassment, and anger. This does not mean, however, that these two appraisals are irrelevant for humiliation. Indeed, publicity had a significant and positive effect on humiliation. But publicity is not what differentiates humiliation from shame, embarrassment, or anger. The level of appraised injustice is what differentiates humiliation from shame and embarrassment; the extent to which this unjust devaluation is accepted makes the difference in whether humiliation or anger is felt. However, whether the victim thinks that others have witnessed this devaluation turned out to be irrelevant for differentiating humiliation from the other emotions.

We found no significant effect of status in evoking humiliation. In fact, we found marginally significant evidence suggesting that humiliation tended to be higher when the perpetrator had lower status. However, this result must be interpreted with caution because it could be due to the particularities of the scenario used in Study 1. Indeed, in both the high and low status conditions, the perpetrator of our scenario was a university professor and the victim was a student, so in both conditions, the perpetrator had academic superiority over the victim.

Limitations and Future Research

The evidence about the relationships between the emotions and the action tendencies in Study 1 was based on correlational

data. Although the indirect effects between the manipulated appraisals and the action tendencies via the respective emotions were in line with our hypotheses, the correlational nature of the associations between the emotions and the action tendencies limits the potential to extract causal conclusions from these indirect effects (Bullock et al., 2010). In Study 2, we replicated the results of Study 1 regarding these associations using non-correlational data and a different method from the one used in Study 1. Although obtaining similar results in both studies increases the confidence in our conclusions, it is important to acknowledge that across studies, we did not manipulate the actual emotional experience but rather relied on people's lay theories of emotions of reported emotions. We, therefore, must be cautious in the conclusion we draw from the results regarding the relationship between humiliation and the action tendencies.

Indeed, although lay theories of emotions have proven to be a valid approach to the study of emotions (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993), it would be important to be able to research humiliation in the future also by eliciting the emotions in the laboratory. To this end, it is necessary to develop a method that could both maintain high ethical standards and successfully evoke relatively low levels of these emotions in a controlled setting. Such method would allow more precise manipulation of the different variables that are of interest in the study of humiliation. Such method would also allow manipulation of the emotions, enabling the establishment of causal relationships between humiliation and the different action tendencies.

A third limitation of the present research, and at the same time one that is also a challenge for future research, is to replicate our findings in different cultural contexts. All our studies were conducted in Spain. It would be interesting to replicate these findings both in other Spanish speaking cultures, such as those in South America, as well as in cultures with different languages.

Beyond these limitations, the present research leaves some interesting questions unresolved, which can well be the focus of future research. For example, although our results showed that humiliation relates equally to both types of action tendencies (i.e., approach and avoidance), we think that there are several questions that need further investigation in this respect. First, results of Study 2 showed that the level of approach responses actually carried out was higher in the anger condition as compared with the humiliation condition. However, the level of intended approach did not differ across these two conditions. This result could suggest that the tendency for aggressive action that is triggered by humiliation may be mostly constrained to violent ideation, without turning into actual aggressive behavior. This conclusion would go in line with previous research that has found that humiliation is typically associated with helplessness and the so-called inertia effect (Ginges & Atran, 2008; Leidner et al., 2012). We have, however, not enough evidence in the present research to draw conclusions about this issue, and therefore, we think that future research should establish whether humiliated victims

may tend primarily to dream or to imagine attacking the perpetrator without actually doing so. Second, it could also well be the case that different variables may moderate the prevalence of one versus the other type of action tendency among humiliated victims. In this respect, we think that humiliated victims who have assimilated a devaluation of the self would have difficulty feeling confident enough to approach the perpetrator, unless they are empowered. The study of the psychological process through which the humiliated victims may be empowered, and its potential consequence in their behavior, is, we think, an important challenge for future research.

Finally, one of the most intriguing aspects of humiliation is how it is possible that, if one thinks that the devaluation posited by others is unjust, one accepts or internalizes this devaluation. The answer to this question is also an interesting line for future inquiry. In this regard, we think that for humiliation to arise, there must be situational or personal variables that moderate the process of accepting an unjust devaluation of the self, making it more or less likely to occur. For example, antecedents that increase the likelihood of making internal attributions of negative outcomes (for instance, a bad record of failures accumulated in the past by the victim or a low self-esteem) may make some people more vulnerable to humiliation than others. All these moderators and their role in humiliation are surely an interesting subject of future research, too.

Conclusion

Our studies showed that humiliation is a complex emotional phenomenon that arises when victims are forced to see themselves as being unjustly treated and demeaned but at the same time accept the personal devaluation posited by the perpetrators. This mixture of appraisal that gives rise to humiliation predisposes victims of humiliation to contrasting behaviors in the form of avoidance reactions with high levels of aggressiveness.

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Notes

1. In most instances of humiliation, publicity is probably better framed as a contextual variable, rather than as an appraisal.

However, we prefer to refer to it as an appraisal because, as with embarrassment, in some circumstances, the presence of an audience can be imagined and not real.

2. In the humiliation versus anger mixed model, the four-way Humiliation versus Anger \times Acceptance \times Publicity \times Status interaction and the five-way interaction resulted in marginal values, $F(1, 541) = 3.04$, $p = .082$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$ and $F(1, 541) = 3.02$, $p = .083$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. The rest of the two- and three-way potential interactions were nonsignificant, $ps > .270$.

Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at <http://pspb.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

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