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### Conceptualising humiliation

Elshout, M.; Nelissen, R.M.A.; van Beest, I.

*Published in:*  
Cognition and Emotion

*DOI:*  
[10.1080/02699931.2016.1249462](https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2016.1249462)

*Publication date:*  
2017

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Elshout, M., Nelissen, R. M. A., & van Beest, I. (2017). Conceptualising humiliation. *Cognition and Emotion*, 31(8), 1581-1594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2016.1249462>

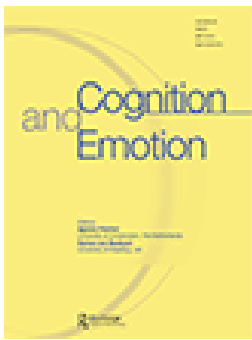
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To cite this article: Maartje Elshout, Rob M. A. Nelissen & Ilja van Beest (2016): Conceptualising humiliation, *Cognition and Emotion*, DOI: [10.1080/02699931.2016.1249462](https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2016.1249462)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2016.1249462>



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Published online: 27 Oct 2016.



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## Conceptualising humiliation

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### ABSTRACT

Humiliation lacks an empirically derived definition, sometimes simply being equated with shame. We approached the conceptualisation of humiliation from a prototype perspective, identifying 61 features of humiliation, some of which are more central to humiliation (e.g. losing self-esteem) than others (e.g. shyness). Prototypical humiliation involved feeling powerless, small, and inferior in a situation in which one was brought down and in which an audience was present, leading the person to appraise the situation as unfair and resulting in a mix of emotions, most notably disappointment, anger, and shame. Some of the features overlapped with those of shame (e.g. looking like a fool, losing self-esteem, presence of an audience) whereas other features overlapped with those of anger (e.g. being brought down, unfairness). Which specific features are present may determine whether the humiliation experience becomes more shame- or anger-like (or a combination thereof).

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 June 2015  
Revised 4 October 2016  
Accepted 10 October 2016

### KEYWORDS

Humiliation; belittlement; shame; anger; emotions; prototype analysis

The experience of humiliation has received little attention in empirical literature. Although theoretical distinctions have been proposed, humiliation is usually equated with shame instead of being treated as a separate emotion (Elison & Harter, 2007; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). This is unfortunate, because experiences of humiliation appear to have profound consequences that are not commonly associated with experiences of shame, such as depression (e.g. Kendler, Hettema, Butera, Gardner, & Prescott, 2003), suicide (e.g. Klein, 1991), and vindictive tendencies (e.g. Elison & Harter, 2007). In fact, violent occurrences such as terrorism (Lindner, 2001) and school shootings (Harter, Low, & Whitesell, 2003) have been attributed to humiliation.

With such severe consequences, humiliation merits further investigation. Current theoretical views on humiliation vary – are sometimes even contradictory – and there is no consensus on which features are critical to the experience of humiliation. We add a different approach to conceptualising humiliation: a prototype approach, which is suitable for complex concepts that are prototypically structured (Rosch, 1973, 1975).

In a prototype analysis, rather than identifying critical features, a list of features is generated, including the representativeness of each feature to the concept. By using the prototype approach, this article provides more insight into the core features of humiliation and presents a first attempt to empirically distinguish humiliation from similar experiences, such as shame.

### Prior conceptualisations of humiliation

Humiliation has been defined as “the experience of some form of ridicule, scorn, contempt, or other degrading treatment at the hands of others” (Klein, 1991, p. 94), “the experience of an emotional reaction to feeling demeaned, put down, or exposed” (Walker & Knauer, 2011), and

a demonstrative exercise of power against one or more persons, which consistently involves a number of elements: stripping of status, rejection or exclusion, unpredictability or arbitrariness, and a personal sense of injustice matched by the lack of any remedy for the injustice suffered. (Leask, 2013, p. 131)

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These definitions reveal no consensus on which features can be linked to humiliation in theoretical literature. For example, it is theorised that victims of humiliation suffer damage to their identity and sense of self (e.g. Klein, 1991; Statman, 2000), yet other theoretical literature on humiliation concludes that humiliation does not involve an internal sense of inferiority (Gilbert, 1997). Furthermore, most features have not been empirically linked to humiliation. Thus, it is not clear whether theoretical views on the features of humiliation correspond with people's actual experiences of humiliation.

Apart from contradictory and untested views on the critical features of humiliation in theoretical literature, it is unclear whether humiliation should be viewed as a separate emotion or is part of an already existing emotion. Humiliation has been associated with anger towards others (Elison & Harter, 2007; Torres & Bergner, 2012), intense fury (Klein, 1991), and rage (Leask, 2013; Walker & Knauer, 2011). Empirical studies have revealed that humiliation and anger indeed correlate (Harter et al., 2003), more so than shame and anger (Combs, Campbell, Jackson, & Smith, 2010). There are remarkable similarities between humiliation and anger in appraisals (blaming another person) and behavioural tendencies (revenge) as proposed in theoretical literature. It has been argued that the difference between these emotions lies in the role of the self: Unlike in cases of anger, in cases of humiliation, the actions of others are experienced as exposing the perceived deficiencies in the self (Negrao, Bonanno, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2005).

Humiliation has also frequently been associated, and even equated, with shame (and sometimes also with the related emotion embarrassment; Elison & Harter, 2007; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Lindner, 2002; Negrao et al., 2005). According to some researchers (e.g. Klein, 1991), the emotions share the negative view on the self (but see Gilbert, 1997). In addition, humiliation and shame are correlated (though moderately; e.g. Combs et al., 2010). There are, however, important theoretical differences between humiliation and shame. Most importantly, it is generally believed that in experiences of shame, people think that they *themselves* are responsible for the situation, whereas in experiences of humiliation, they think that *someone else* is responsible (Gilbert, 1997; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Leask, 2013; Vogel & Lazare, 1990; Walker & Knauer, 2011). As a consequence, people feel that they deserve shame, but

not humiliation (Klein, 1991). It should be noted that, as with most of the features discussed so far, these views have not been empirically tested.

## The prototype approach to conceptualising humiliation

Rosch (1973, 1975) was the first to introduce prototype analysis as an alternative to the classical view on defining concepts. The classical view, dating back to Aristotle, assumes that concepts can be described with necessary and sufficient features (e.g. Smith & Medin, 1981). As such, category membership is all or none: Instances that contain the critical features are members and others are not. As a consequence, all instances of the concept are equally representative of the concept. However, many concepts cannot be described in such a way. Instead, there are prototypical instances of a concept surrounded by other instances that can be ordered in their degree of relatedness to the prototypical instances. For example, anger is a clearer example of the concept emotion than desire is (Fehr & Russell, 1984). Unlike in the classical view on defining concepts, in the prototype approach there are no critical or essential features of a concept; instead, features differ in their relatedness to the concept. The features are commonly present in instances of the concept but do not have to be present in all instances. Clear members of a concept will contain many central features. These clear members of the concept fade into less clear members, which fade into nonmembers. Thus, instead of one clear boundary consisting of critical features (i.e. dividing instances in members of the concept or nonmembers), there are fuzzy boundaries between instances. A good approach for understanding such concepts is the prototype analysis (Rosch, 1973, 1975; Rosch & Mervis, 1975; Russell, 1991; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987).

Prototype analysis has been successfully used to gain a better understanding of the concepts emotion (Fehr & Russell, 1984; Shaver et al., 1987), love (Fehr & Russell, 1991; Regan, Kocan, & Whitlock, 1998), love and commitment (Fehr, 1988), love, hate, anger, and jealousy in close relationships (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993), anger (Russell & Fehr, 1994), relationship quality (Hassebrauck, 1997), respect in close relationships (Frei & Shaver, 2002), intimacy expectations in same-sex friendships (Fehr, 2004), forgiveness (Kearns & Fincham, 2004), modesty (Gregg, Hart, Sedikides, & Kumashiro, 2008), missing a

romantic partner (Le et al., 2008), gratitude (Lambert, Graham, & Fincham, 2009), prayer (Lambert, Fincham, & Graham, 2011), nostalgia (Hepper, Ritchie, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2012), and revenge (Elshout, Nelissen, & Van Beest, 2015a). It may be noted that in their book chapter on humiliation, Elison and Harter (2007) summarised an unpublished study that was presented as a prototype approach, but this study seems an experiential analysis of some aspects of humiliation rather than a prototype analysis.

We employed the prototype approach as a means to identify the central characteristics of humiliation. In Studies 1 and 2 participants listed features of humiliation, which were categorised, and rated their centrality to humiliation. In Study 3 we focused on experiences of humiliation as recalled by participants and compared these to shame and anger experiences.

## Study 1

This goal of this study was to compile a list of features of humiliation (cf. Gregg et al., 2008; Hassebrauck, 1997; Hepper et al., 2012). Participants listed features of humiliation (*Dutch*: vernedering), which were then coded by two independent coders.

## Method

### Participants and design

Participants were 111 Tilburg University students ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.91$ ,  $SD = 2.51$ , 55.0% female), who received course credit or 7 Euros for participating in the study, which was part of an experimental session of unrelated studies.

### Procedure

Participants read the following instruction (adapted from Hassebrauck, 1997):

This questionnaire is part of a larger project on the thoughts that we have when we hear and use words. For example, if you were asked to describe democracy, you might write: freedom, elections, equality. If you were asked to describe a dominant person, you might write: orders others about, take charge, always wants to be right. In your view, which characteristics describe humiliation? Please write in the space below all features that distinguish humiliation. In the next 5 minutes, list as many features as you can think of. There are no right or wrong answers. You are not required to complete all boxes. After 5 minutes have passed, you will be able to continue to the final two questions.

The final two questions assessed gender and age.

## Results and discussion

In total, participants listed 1296 features of humiliation ( $M = 11.68$ ,  $SD = 4.82$ ). Five participants filled all 25 boxes (the maximum) with characteristics. Following the procedure of Hepper et al. (2012), we divided the features into distinct features, each comprised of one “unit of meaning” ( $N = 1311$ ;  $M = 11.81$ ,  $SD = 4.80$ ), because in 15 cases a feature contained two related statements (e.g. “deliberately hurting someone” was divided into “deliberately” and “hurting someone”). Subsequently, two independent coders coded these distinct features by (a) grouping identical features (e.g. anger and anger), (b) grouping semantically related features (e.g. anger and angry), (c) grouping meaning-related features (e.g. rage and fury), and (d) grouping categories of common meaning (e.g. anger and rage). The two coders met to resolve discrepancies by discussion and developed a coding scheme with 104 categories. Note that words that appear opposites (e.g. “power” and “powerless”) fell into the same category because they were about the same concept, only viewed from a different perspective (i.e. victim or perpetrator).

Next, two different raters independently assigned each feature to one of the 104 categories. The inter-rater reliability between these two raters was high ( $\kappa_{12} = .84$ ), as were the inter-rater reliabilities with the coder who developed the coding scheme, who also assigned the features to categories as a third rater ( $\kappa_{31} = .88$  and  $\kappa_{32} = .88$ ). The two raters then met to resolve discrepancies by discussion, leading to a final categorisation. Following other prototype analyses (e.g. Fehr, 1988; Fehr & Russell, 1984; Hassebrauck, 1997; Kearns & Fincham, 2004; Lambert et al., 2009), we discarded categories that were mentioned once (31 categories) or twice (12 categories). Examples are “past”, “legislation”, and “sports”. This resulted in 61 final features. In the remainder of this article, when referring to features, we refer to these 61 final features. These features and their frequencies are listed in Table 1.

None of the features was listed by all participants and only three features (belittling, shame, self-confidence/self-esteem) were listed by more than half of the participants. Humiliation was viewed as an emotional experience, considering the number of specific emotions that were listed (next to the general category *feelings*): shame, anger, sadness, fear, hatred, envy, unhappiness, dismay,

**Table 1.** Prototype features of humiliation, sample exemplars, frequencies (Study 1), and centrality ratings (Study 2).

| Feature                     | Exemplars listed by participants   | Study 1               |                       | Study 2  |           |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------|
|                             |  | <i>N</i> <sub>1</sub> | <i>N</i> <sub>2</sub> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| <i>Central features</i>     |  |                       |                       |          |           |
| Belittling                  | Belittling, patronising, being belittled, belittlement                         | 71                    | 69                    | 6.17     | 1.30      |
| Ridiculing                  | Ridiculing, laughing at someone, mocking, being made a fool                    | 45                    | 35                    | 6.16     | 1.46      |
| Bringing down               | Bringing down, offending, slating  | 17                    | 16                    | 6.00     | 1.51      |
| Bullying                    | Bullying, being bullied  | 22                    | 22                    | 5.91     | 1.45      |
| Wanting to leave            | Wanting to crawl away, wanting to sink through the floor, wanting to disappear | 22                    | 17                    | 5.80     | 1.30      |
| Badmouthing                 | Badmouthing, gossip, others who talk badly about you                           | 5                     | 5                     | 5.72     | 1.51      |
| Feeling small               | Feeling small, feeling little  | 13                    | 12                    | 5.68     | 1.22      |
| Social exclusion            | Ignoring, being thrown out of the group, not belonging, rejection              | 14                    | 13                    | 5.57     | 1.43      |
| Roles                       | Perpetrator, bullies, victim, laughing stock                                   | 10                    | 7                     | 5.54     | 1.45      |
| Negative                    | Negative, annoying, mean, unkind   | 88                    | 50                    | 5.51     | 1.59      |
| Losing honour               | Losing honour, losing face, reputational damage                                | 17                    | 11                    | 5.48     | 1.40      |
| Looking like a fool         | Looking like a fool, looking silly, blunder, failing                           | 31                    | 24                    | 5.46     | 1.38      |
| Shame                       | Shame, embarrassed, ashamed  | 69                    | 64                    | 5.45     | 1.52      |
| Cruel                       | Ruthless, severe, sadistic   | 12                    | 10                    | 5.43     | 1.47      |
| Pain                        | Pain, painful, causing pain, hurting   | 54                    | 43                    | 5.42     | 1.55      |
| Discomfort                  | Uncomfortable, discomfort  | 5                     | 5                     | 5.33     | 1.38      |
| Self-confidence/Self-esteem | Feeling inferior, insecure, decreasing self-esteem, feeling superior           | 91                    | 58                    | 5.33     | 1.53      |
| Power/Powerless             | Power, dominance, submissive, powerless  | 95                    | 50                    | 5.27     | 1.49      |
| Inappropriate               | Inappropriate, unseemly, disrespectful   | 10                    | 8                     | 5.11     | 1.48      |
| Being put in second place   | Disadvantaged, discrimination  | 3                     | 3                     | 5.10     | 1.56      |
| Group/Audience              | In other people's presence, group related, audience                            | 26                    | 23                    | 5.09     | 1.63      |
| Extreme events              | Intense experience, trauma, rape   | 12                    | 11                    | 5.06     | 1.80      |
| Feelings                    | Feelings, emotions, negative feeling   | 32                    | 27                    | 5.06     | 1.63      |
| Abuse                       | Abuse, abusing a situation   | 8                     | 7                     | 4.94     | 1.62      |
| Unfair                      | Unfair, not fair, injustice  | 22                    | 19                    | 4.87     | 1.49      |
| Strength/Weakness           | Strong, weak, difference in strength   | 34                    | 24                    | 4.82     | 1.60      |
| Aggression                  | Aggression, violence, molesting, name calling                                  | 39                    | 26                    | 4.76     | 1.69      |
| Losing trust                | Losing trust in yourself, fear of trusting others                              | 4                     | 3                     | 4.73     | 1.71      |
| Avoiding eye contact        | Head down, looking away, looking down  | 4                     | 2                     | 4.72     | 1.64      |
| Betrayal                    | Deceit, deception  | 4                     | 3                     | 4.71     | 1.54      |
| Deliberate                  | Deliberately, on purpose, consciously  | 9                     | 7                     | 4.67     | 1.65      |
| <i>Peripheral features</i>  |  |                       |                       |          |           |
| Unhappy                     | Unhappy  | 3                     | 3                     | 4.64     | 1.76      |
| Hating                      | Hatred, feelings of hate   | 10                    | 10                    | 4.62     | 1.65      |
| Rumination                  | Not forgetting quickly, rumination, keeps hunting you                          | 6                     | 6                     | 4.60     | 1.65      |
| Useless                     | Useless, needless  | 5                     | 5                     | 4.59     | 1.65      |
| Sadness                     | Sad, crying, sorrowful   | 55                    | 43                    | 4.54     | 1.68      |
| Revenge                     | Vindictive feelings, seeking revenge, vengeance, payback                       | 46                    | 37                    | 4.52     | 1.68      |
| Anger                       | Anger, fury, rage, frustration   | 68                    | 42                    | 4.48     | 1.56      |
| Fear                        | Fear, afraid   | 18                    | 14                    | 4.43     | 1.63      |
| Dismay                      | Dismay, disconcerted   | 9                     | 8                     | 4.43     | 1.70      |
| Red                         | Red, red cheeks, red head  | 5                     | 5                     | 4.38     | 1.64      |
| Battle                      | Battle, quarrel, competition, conflict   | 7                     | 6                     | 4.33     | 1.47      |
| Personal                    | Personal   | 5                     | 5                     | 4.31     | 1.95      |
| Alone                       | Alone, lonely  | 11                    | 9                     | 4.25     | 1.80      |
| Compassion                  | Compassion, pitying  | 17                    | 13                    | 4.17     | 1.58      |
| Incomprehension             | Incomprehension  | 4                     | 3                     | 4.11     | 1.73      |
| Winning/Losing              | Winner, loser, loss, defeat  | 19                    | 16                    | 4.11     | 1.58      |
| Preventing repetition       | Preventing repetition, afraid of repetition                                    | 8                     | 7                     | 4.07     | 1.63      |
| Criticising                 | Criticism, pointing out a negative aspect of someone                           | 4                     | 4                     | 4.02     | 1.81      |
| Guilt                       | Guilt, feeling of guilt  | 4                     | 4                     | 4.02     | 1.57      |
| Envy                        | Envy, jealousy   | 9                     | 8                     | 3.98     | 1.59      |
| Without emotion             | Without emotion, being insensitive to compassion                               | 4                     | 4                     | 3.94     | 1.87      |
| Popularity                  | Popular, macho, being tough  | 6                     | 6                     | 3.88     | 1.73      |
| Not accepting               | Not accepting it, not being able to accept it                                  | 3                     | 3                     | 3.76     | 1.48      |
| Interpretation              | Interpretation, perception   | 3                     | 2                     | 3.68     | 1.55      |
| Disappointment              | Disappointment   | 7                     | 7                     | 3.68     | 1.59      |
| Correction                  | Correcting, reprimanding, adjusting  | 6                     | 5                     | 3.56     | 1.61      |
| Shyness                     | Shy  | 3                     | 3                     | 3.47     | 1.59      |
| Psychosomatic complaints    | Headache, fatigue, depression, insomnia  | 13                    | 10                    | 3.44     | 1.73      |

(Continued)

**Table 1.** Continued.

| Feature |                     | Exemplars listed by participants | Study 1 |       | Study 2 |      |
|---------|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|------|
|         |                     |                                  | $N_1$   | $N_2$ | $M$     | $SD$ |
| Regret  | Regret              |                                  | 7       | 6     | 3.41    | 1.51 |
| Useful  | Useful, good result |                                  | 3       | 3     | 2.08    | 1.37 |

Note:  $N_1$  = frequencies including duplicates,  $N_2$  = frequencies excluding duplicates.

disappointment, regret, and guilt. In addition, participants listed many antecedents of humiliation, such as belittling, ridiculing, bringing down, bullying, bad-mouthing, social exclusion, betrayal, criticism, and discrimination. Interestingly, these were all antecedents in which another person was the perpetrator. Furthermore, people viewed victims as feeling small, weak, alone, uncomfortable, powerless, and inferior. As for potential behavioural tendencies, we found both wanting to leave the situation (avoidance/withdrawal) and seeking revenge.

## Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to determine the centrality of each feature to the concept of humiliation. If humiliation has a prototype structure, features should differ in representativeness to the concept.

### Method

#### Participants and design

Participants were 123 Dutch people who were acquainted with one of the research assistants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 32.47$ ,  $SD = 15.06$ , range: 17–78; 62.6% female). This resulted in a heterogeneous sample and ensured that centrality ratings were not determined by students only.

#### Procedure

Participants read that another sample had identified features of humiliation. Next, they saw a list of the 61 features in a random order, each accompanied by up to four exemplars. A second version of the questionnaire listed the features in reverse order. Participants rated how related each feature was to humiliation on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all related*, 7 = *extremely related*).

### Results and discussion

The descriptives of the features are provided in Table 1. To determine the reliability we computed

the intra-class correlation (ICC). We transposed the data, treating the 61 features as cases and the 123 participants as items. Participants' ratings of the features were very reliable (ICC = .98,  $p < .001$ , 95% confidence interval = .97–.99). The centrality ratings of the features in Study 2 were positively correlated with the frequencies of features of Study 1,  $r = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ .<sup>1</sup>

Following the standard procedure in prototype research, we performed a median split on the centrality ratings to divide the features into 31 central and 30 peripheral features of humiliation. Although centrality is considered a continuum, this division enabled further studies on how the prototype structure affects cognition.<sup>2</sup>

An interesting finding is that shame was the most central emotion in the prototype structure and was in fact the *only* central emotion. All other emotions, including anger and sadness (emotions associated with humiliation), were viewed as peripheral emotions. The behavioural tendencies of shame, avoiding eye contact and wanting to leave, were also central features of humiliation. Moreover, as with shame, people viewed humiliation as involving a sense of a decreased self-esteem. All in all, it appeared that people's view of humiliation was pretty similar to what we know of shame. Different from shame was the clear role of another person as perpetrator. The roles of perpetrator and victim were central as were many antecedents involving another person, such as belittlement and ridicule. Moreover, a sense of powerlessness (likely caused by another person) was a central feature. Finally, people viewed the situation as unfair, which also indicates other-blame.

## Study 3

In Study 3, we used autobiographical recalls to examine the ecological validity of the prototype structure. We contrasted real life situations of humiliation with real life situations of anger and shame, two related emotions (e.g. Elison & Harter, 2007). We expected that particularly the combination of ratings

of central features of humiliation would be higher in real life situations of humiliation than in real life situations of shame and anger.<sup>3</sup>

## Method

### Participants and design

Participants were 90 Tilburg University students ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.79$ ,  $SD = 2.39$ ; 65.6% female), who (depending on the conditions of a series of unrelated studies in which the current study was embedded) received a monetary compensation of 8 Euros, 8.05 Euros, or 10 Euros. Participants were randomly assigned to the humiliation, shame, or anger condition.

### Procedure

Participants in the humiliation condition recalled and described an autobiographical situation in which they felt humiliated, participants in the shame condition recalled and described an autobiographical situation in which they felt shame, and participants in the anger condition recalled and described an autobiographical situation in which they felt angry. After describing the situation, participants rated the extent to which each of the 61 features was present in the situation (e.g. "I felt shame", "I felt inferior", "The situation was inappropriate") on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). We computed average ratings for central ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and peripheral ( $\alpha = .87$ ) features.

## Results and discussion

### Comparing feature ratings across emotions

A 3 (emotion: humiliation vs. shame vs. anger)  $\times$  2 (feature: central vs. peripheral) mixed ANOVA revealed a main effect of emotion,  $F(2, 87) = 5.07$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ , with Tukey post-hoc tests revealing that features were rated higher in the humiliation condition than in the shame condition,  $p = .006$ , and that the anger condition fell in between, not differing from humiliation,  $p = .238$ , or shame,  $p = .272$ . There was also a main effect of feature, with central features rated higher than peripheral features,  $F(1, 87) = 5.83$ ,  $p = .018$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ . However, the expected emotion  $\times$  feature interaction missed significance,  $F(2, 87) = 2.33$ ,  $p = .104$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ .<sup>4</sup> Means (and standard deviations) per condition are displayed in Table 2.

It may be difficult to distinguish humiliation from shame and (particularly) anger because humiliation is an emotion term that is used for specific types of events that may result in either shame or anger (or a

combination thereof). Although the main purpose of Study 3 was not to provide insight into when humiliation results in shame and when it results in anger, correlations of features with shame and anger ratings within humiliation recalls (Table 3) may provide some insights into which features in humiliation experiences are associated with shame and which are associated with anger. It seems that within humiliation experiences, more intense shame was particularly associated with being red, feeling weak, an audience being present, a loss in self-esteem and/or honour, discomfort, looking like a fool, feeling small, fear, wanting to leave, and shyness (also with low aggression and, like anger, with dismay and sadness). More intense anger was particularly associated with feeling negative, hatred, conflict, incomprehension, losing trust, betrayal, disappointment, wanting revenge, inappropriateness, guilt, being brought down, unfairness, sadness, regret, criticism, being put in second place, dismay, deliberateness, the situation being negative, aggression, not accepting the situation, rumination, the situation being personal, envy, losing, badmouthing, belittling, wanting to prevent repetition, and feeling like a victim. This pattern is also apparent from Table 2, in which many of the features associated with more intense shame in humiliation recalls are highly present in both humiliation and shame (but not so much in anger) recalls and many of the features associated with more intense anger in humiliation recalls are highly present in both humiliation and anger (but not so much in shame) recalls. Interestingly, within humiliation recalls shame and anger ratings were uncorrelated ( $r = -.02$ ; Table 3), suggesting that humiliation does not necessarily result in either shame or in anger but that combinations of shame and anger are also possible.

Overall, the features (and correlations) suggest that humiliation is a personal experience, which has quite some overlap with shame (e.g. loss in self-esteem, feeling small). Apart from being an experience, humiliation is also an act (e.g. belittlement), for which – in contrast to shame – the victim blames another person (cf. Klein, 1991). This aspect of humiliation seems to particularly overlap with anger. In line with theoretical reflections on humiliation, the prototypical features of humiliation suggest that the difference between humiliation and shame lies in other people (instead of oneself) being seen as responsible for the situation. From this observation, we would predict that the more the victim blames others (instead of



**Table 2.** Means and standard deviations per condition in Study 3.

| Feature                     | Humiliation |             | Shame    |             | Anger    |             |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|
|                             | <i>M</i>    | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>(SD)</i> |
| Preventing repetition       | 6.13        | (1.22)      | 5.80     | (1.71)      | 5.40     | (1.98)      |
| Feelings                    | 5.55        | (1.62)      | 4.33     | (2.14)      | 5.93     | (0.83)      |
| Negative                    | 5.50        | (1.55)      | 4.33     | (2.14)      | 6.07     | (1.36)      |
| Discomfort                  | 5.40        | (1.33)      | 6.07     | (1.23)      | 4.57     | (1.87)      |
| Unfair                      | 5.23        | (1.91)      | 2.70     | (1.84)      | 5.33     | (2.31)      |
| Wanting to leave            | 5.10        | (1.79)      | 5.70     | (1.54)      | 4.53     | (2.30)      |
| Disappointment              | 5.10        | (1.52)      | 3.60     | (1.99)      | 5.53     | (1.46)      |
| Useless                     | 5.07        | (1.46)      | 3.80     | (2.02)      | 4.30     | (2.05)      |
| Group/Audience              | 4.90        | (2.30)      | 4.70     | (2.45)      | 3.70     | (2.45)      |
| Anger                       | 4.87        | (1.93)      | 2.97     | (1.61)      | 6.30     | (1.09)      |
| Shame                       | 4.87        | (1.87)      | 6.13     | (0.78)      | 2.73     | (1.80)      |
| Roles                       | 4.80        | (1.94)      | 2.93     | (2.39)      | 4.90     | (1.90)      |
| Personal                    | 4.77        | (1.83)      | 4.60     | (2.19)      | 4.47     | (2.13)      |
| Unhappy                     | 4.70        | (1.69)      | 3.57     | (2.34)      | 4.07     | (1.89)      |
| Inappropriate               | 4.63        | (1.99)      | 3.87     | (2.00)      | 4.60     | (1.83)      |
| Fiasco                      | 4.62        | (1.90)      | 5.70     | (1.24)      | 3.23     | (2.06)      |
| Power/Powerless             | 4.55        | (1.80)      | 4.07     | (2.07)      | 4.97     | (2.30)      |
| Dismay                      | 4.52        | (1.88)      | 3.40     | (2.04)      | 4.03     | (1.96)      |
| Sadness                     | 4.43        | (1.70)      | 3.30     | (1.86)      | 4.17     | (1.91)      |
| Strength/Weakness           | 4.23        | (1.68)      | 3.80     | (2.09)      | 3.00     | (1.95)      |
| Losing trust                | 4.17        | (2.09)      | 2.77     | (2.36)      | 4.33     | (2.06)      |
| Self-confidence/Self-esteem | 4.03        | (1.96)      | 3.10     | (2.16)      | 2.83     | (1.93)      |
| Dishonour                   | 3.97        | (1.80)      | 4.07     | (2.00)      | 3.30     | (2.17)      |
| Incomprehension             | 3.97        | (2.18)      | 2.70     | (1.80)      | 4.57     | (2.11)      |
| Feeling small               | 3.90        | (1.90)      | 4.14     | (2.00)      | 2.77     | (1.83)      |
| Bringing down               | 3.86        | (1.96)      | 1.93     | (1.51)      | 2.77     | (2.19)      |
| Criticism                   | 3.79        | (2.11)      | 2.97     | (2.27)      | 4.20     | (2.31)      |
| Winning/Losing              | 3.67        | (1.99)      | 2.80     | (2.01)      | 3.83     | (2.28)      |
| Ridiculing                  | 3.66        | (1.78)      | 2.37     | (1.63)      | 2.30     | (1.97)      |
| Rumination                  | 3.63        | (2.09)      | 3.53     | (2.05)      | 3.03     | (1.81)      |
| Avoiding eye contact        | 3.60        | (2.06)      | 4.73     | (1.84)      | 2.73     | (1.74)      |
| Deliberate                  | 3.57        | (2.36)      | 1.83     | (1.44)      | 4.13     | (2.21)      |
| Red                         | 3.57        | (2.10)      | 4.33     | (2.23)      | 2.17     | (1.70)      |
| Popularity                  | 3.57        | (2.19)      | 2.07     | (1.70)      | 2.33     | (2.04)      |
| Hatred                      | 3.53        | (1.89)      | 1.90     | (1.49)      | 4.13     | (1.98)      |
| Alone                       | 3.53        | (2.08)      | 3.27     | (2.27)      | 3.03     | (1.90)      |
| Battle                      | 3.52        | (2.29)      | 2.00     | (1.70)      | 3.97     | (2.29)      |
| Pain                        | 3.45        | (1.94)      | 2.27     | (1.60)      | 2.77     | (1.92)      |
| Social exclusion            | 3.41        | (2.16)      | 2.47     | (1.81)      | 3.23     | (2.16)      |
| Belittling                  | 3.38        | (1.90)      | 1.60     | (1.28)      | 2.40     | (1.99)      |
| Shyness                     | 3.33        | (1.85)      | 4.87     | (1.68)      | 1.97     | (1.27)      |
| Betrayal                    | 3.31        | (1.93)      | 1.70     | (1.73)      | 3.33     | (1.99)      |
| Not accepting               | 3.30        | (2.05)      | 2.10     | (1.75)      | 4.07     | (2.07)      |
| Discrimination              | 3.28        | (2.12)      | 1.60     | (1.22)      | 3.50     | (2.50)      |
| Correction                  | 3.24        | (1.81)      | 2.83     | (2.00)      | 2.87     | (2.13)      |
| Revenge                     | 3.23        | (2.18)      | 1.47     | (1.17)      | 3.17     | (2.23)      |
| Compassion                  | 3.10        | (1.61)      | 3.77     | (2.03)      | 2.67     | (1.79)      |
| Without emotion             | 3.10        | (1.76)      | 3.03     | (1.79)      | 2.93     | (1.86)      |
| Interpretation              | 3.03        | (1.97)      | 2.10     | (1.79)      | 3.00     | (2.15)      |
| Fear                        | 2.83        | (1.68)      | 2.70     | (1.66)      | 2.60     | (1.85)      |
| Psychosomatic complaints    | 2.83        | (1.86)      | 2.47     | (1.89)      | 2.20     | (1.90)      |
| Badmouthing                 | 2.69        | (1.83)      | 1.83     | (1.46)      | 1.97     | (1.71)      |
| Aggression                  | 2.62        | (1.80)      | 1.87     | (1.66)      | 3.27     | (2.13)      |
| Regret                      | 2.59        | (1.70)      | 1.83     | (1.51)      | 2.43     | (1.70)      |
| Guilt                       | 2.55        | (1.59)      | 1.93     | (1.41)      | 2.27     | (1.72)      |
| Cruel                       | 2.30        | (1.75)      | 1.73     | (1.46)      | 1.97     | (1.61)      |
| Envy                        | 2.28        | (1.93)      | 1.50     | (0.94)      | 1.73     | (1.36)      |
| Abuse                       | 2.28        | (1.81)      | 1.60     | (1.55)      | 2.00     | (1.60)      |
| Useful                      | 2.27        | (1.64)      | 3.00     | (1.70)      | 2.70     | (1.80)      |
| Extreme events              | 2.13        | (1.57)      | 2.13     | (1.59)      | 1.80     | (1.45)      |
| Bullying                    | 2.00        | (1.63)      | 1.37     | (1.00)      | 1.53     | (0.86)      |

**Table 3.** Correlations of features with shame and anger ratings in humiliation recalls of Study 3.

|                             | Shame              | Anger             |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Shame                       | 1.00               | -.024             |
| Red                         | .671***            | .148              |
| Strength/Weakness           | .583***            | .181              |
| Group/Audience              | .567**             | -.128             |
| Self-confidence/Self-esteem | .482**             | .285              |
| Losing honour               | .477**             | .246              |
| Discomfort                  | .452*              | .143              |
| Looking like a fool         | .443*              | .188              |
| Feeling small               | .442*              | .128              |
| Fear                        | .420*              | .259              |
| Wanting to leave            | .396*              | -.056             |
| Shyness                     | .383*              | .168              |
| Avoiding eye contact        | .352 <sup>†</sup>  | -.057             |
| Compassion                  | .317 <sup>†</sup>  | -.032             |
| Unhappy                     | .315 <sup>†</sup>  | .253              |
| Correction                  | -.293              | .251              |
| Useless                     | .243               | .114              |
| Extreme events              | .218               | .200              |
| Without emotion             | -.135              | -.008             |
| Bullying                    | .024               | .023              |
| Anger                       | -.024              | 1.00              |
| Feelings                    | .184               | .747***           |
| Hating                      | .021               | .722***           |
| Battle                      | -.225              | .704***           |
| Incomprehension             | -.072              | .697***           |
| Losing trust                | .147               | .696***           |
| Betrayal                    | .058               | .612***           |
| Disappointment              | .114               | .607***           |
| Revenge                     | -.077              | .576***           |
| Inappropriate               | -.097              | .572***           |
| Guilt                       | -.093              | .559**            |
| Bringing down               | -.165              | .546**            |
| Unfair                      | -.281              | .544**            |
| Sadness                     | .389*              | .536**            |
| Regret                      | -.062              | .536**            |
| Criticising                 | -.357 <sup>†</sup> | .532**            |
| Being put in second place   | -.067              | .530**            |
| Dismay                      | .387*              | .524**            |
| Deliberate                  | -.217              | .511**            |
| Negative                    | .036               | .509**            |
| Aggression                  | -.408*             | .497**            |
| Not accepting               | -.187              | .490**            |
| Rumination                  | .190               | .467**            |
| Personal                    | .222               | .460*             |
| Envy                        | -.253              | .458*             |
| Winning/Losing              | .256               | .456*             |
| Badmouthing                 | -.344 <sup>†</sup> | .428*             |
| Belittling                  | -.139              | .398*             |
| Preventing repetition       | .204               | .388*             |
| Roles                       | .011               | .381*             |
| Abuse                       | -.290              | .344 <sup>†</sup> |
| Interpretation              | -.195              | .337 <sup>†</sup> |
| Pain                        | .165               | .334 <sup>†</sup> |
| Social exclusion            | .155               | .333 <sup>†</sup> |
| Alone                       | .116               | .320 <sup>†</sup> |
| Popularity                  | .288               | .313 <sup>†</sup> |
| Psychosomatic complaints    | .152               | .302              |
| Cruel                       | .023               | .300              |
| Power/Powerless             | .110               | .248              |
| Useful                      | -.191              | .241              |

(Continued)

**Table 3.** Continued.

|            | Shame | Anger |
|------------|-------|-------|
| Ridiculing | .086  | .160  |

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .\*\* $p < .01$ .\* $p < .05$ .<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ .

himself/herself) for the situation, the more the experience will overlap with anger and result in anger responses (e.g. revenge) instead of shame responses (e.g. withdrawal). In case a person is ridiculed for something for which the person also blames himself/herself (e.g. clumsily falling off a stage), there may be more overlap with shame. Future research could further investigate whether the extent to which a person blames others vs. oneself is indeed a crucial factor in how much the experience will overlap with anger and/or shame.

### Comparing centrality and recall ratings

Another interesting observation was that feature ratings of humiliation recalls in Study 3 hardly correlated with the frequencies of Study 1 ( $r = .27$ ) and with the centrality ratings of Study 2 ( $r = .23$ ).<sup>5</sup> Thus, the internal structure based on participants' humiliation recalls did appear to differ from the internal structure based on centrality ratings.<sup>6</sup> To gain more insight into this finding, we sorted the internal structure of Study 3 and compared this structure to the one based on the centrality ratings of Study 2 (Table 4). Moreover, Table 5 shows for each feature whether it is central or peripheral in Study 2 and in Study 3, revealing consistencies and inconsistencies between studies. To explain the low correlation, we focused on the inconsistencies, particularly those with large differences in position between Study 2 and Study 3.

First, we inspected features that were central in Study 2 (prototype centrality ratings) but peripheral in Study 3 (humiliation recall ratings). It is notable that many of these features are antecedents (bullying, badmouthing, belittling, extreme events, abuse, social exclusion, discrimination, betrayal; also note the large negative difference scores of still central features ridiculing and bringing down). In Study 2 (centrality ratings), participants could consider multiple incidences of humiliation at the same time, but in Study 3, participants could only recall a

**Table 4.** Order of means of features in Studies 2 and 3.

| No. | Centrality ratings (Study 2) |      | Autobiographical recalls (Study 3) |      |
|-----|------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|------|
|     | Feature                      | Mean | Feature                            | Mean |
| 1.  | Belittling                   | 6.17 | Preventing repetition              | 6.13 |
| 2.  | Ridiculing                   | 6.16 | Feelings                           | 5.55 |
| 3.  | Bringing down                | 6.00 | Negative                           | 5.50 |
| 4.  | Bullying                     | 5.91 | Discomfort                         | 5.40 |
| 5.  | Wanting to leave             | 5.80 | Unfair                             | 5.23 |
| 6.  | Badmouthing                  | 5.72 | Wanting to leave                   | 5.10 |
| 7.  | Feeling small                | 5.68 | Disappointment                     | 5.10 |
| 8.  | Social exclusion             | 5.57 | Useless                            | 5.07 |
| 9.  | Roles                        | 5.54 | Group/Audience                     | 4.90 |
| 10. | Negative                     | 5.51 | Anger                              | 4.87 |
| 11. | Dishonour                    | 5.48 | Shame                              | 4.87 |
| 12. | Fiasco                       | 5.46 | Roles                              | 4.80 |
| 13. | Shame                        | 5.45 | Personal                           | 4.77 |
| 14. | Cruel                        | 5.43 | Unhappy                            | 4.70 |
| 15. | Pain                         | 5.42 | Inappropriate                      | 4.63 |
| 16. | Discomfort                   | 5.33 | Fiasco                             | 4.62 |
| 17. | Self-confidence/Self-esteem  | 5.33 | Power/Powerless                    | 4.55 |
| 18. | Power/Powerless              | 5.27 | Dismay                             | 4.52 |
| 19. | Inappropriate                | 5.11 | Sadness                            | 4.43 |
| 20. | Discrimination               | 5.10 | Strength/Weakness                  | 4.23 |
| 21. | Group/Audience               | 5.09 | Losing trust                       | 4.17 |
| 22. | Feelings                     | 5.06 | Self-confidence/Self-esteem        | 4.03 |
| 23. | Extreme events               | 5.06 | Dishonour                          | 3.97 |
| 24. | Abuse                        | 4.94 | Incomprehension                    | 3.97 |
| 25. | Unfair                       | 4.87 | Feeling small                      | 3.90 |
| 26. | Strength/Weakness            | 4.82 | Bringing down                      | 3.86 |
| 27. | Aggression                   | 4.76 | Criticism                          | 3.79 |
| 28. | Losing trust                 | 4.73 | Winning/Losing                     | 3.67 |
| 29. | Avoiding eye contact         | 4.72 | Ridiculing                         | 3.66 |
| 30. | Betrayal                     | 4.71 | Rumination                         | 3.63 |
| 31. | Deliberate                   | 4.67 | Avoiding eye contact               | 3.60 |
| 32. | Unhappy                      | 4.64 | Deliberate                         | 3.57 |
| 33. | Hatred                       | 4.62 | Red                                | 3.57 |
| 34. | Rumination                   | 4.60 | Popularity                         | 3.57 |
| 35. | Useless                      | 4.59 | Alone                              | 3.53 |
| 36. | Sadness                      | 4.54 | Hatred                             | 3.53 |
| 37. | Revenge                      | 4.52 | Battle                             | 3.52 |
| 38. | Anger                        | 4.48 | Pain                               | 3.45 |
| 39. | Dismay                       | 4.43 | Social exclusion                   | 3.41 |
| 40. | Fear                         | 4.43 | Belittling                         | 3.38 |
| 41. | Red                          | 4.38 | Shyness                            | 3.33 |
| 42. | Battle                       | 4.33 | Betrayal                           | 3.31 |
| 43. | Personal                     | 4.31 | Not accepting                      | 3.30 |
| 44. | Alone                        | 4.25 | Discrimination                     | 3.28 |
| 45. | Compassion                   | 4.17 | Correction                         | 3.24 |
| 46. | Incomprehension              | 4.11 | Revenge                            | 3.23 |
| 47. | Winning/Losing               | 4.11 | Compassion                         | 3.10 |
| 48. | Preventing repetition        | 4.07 | Without emotion                    | 3.10 |
| 49. | Criticism                    | 4.02 | Interpretation                     | 3.03 |
| 50. | Guilt                        | 4.02 | Fear                               | 2.83 |
| 51. | Envy                         | 3.98 | Psychosomatic complaints           | 2.83 |
| 52. | Without emotion              | 3.94 | Badmouthing                        | 2.69 |
| 53. | Popularity                   | 3.88 | Aggression                         | 2.62 |
| 54. | Not accepting                | 3.76 | Regret                             | 2.59 |
| 55. | Disappointment               | 3.68 | Guilt                              | 2.55 |
| 56. | Interpretation               | 3.68 | Cruel                              | 2.30 |
| 57. | Correction                   | 3.56 | Abuse                              | 2.28 |

*(Continued)***Table 4.** Continued.

| No. | Centrality ratings (Study 2) |      | Autobiographical recalls (Study 3) |      |
|-----|------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|------|
|     | Feature                      | Mean | Feature                            | Mean |
| 58. | Shyness                      | 3.47 | Envy                               | 2.28 |
| 59. | Psychosomatic complaints     | 3.44 | Useful                             | 2.27 |
| 60. | Regret                       | 3.41 | Extreme events                     | 2.13 |
| 61. | Useful                       | 2.08 | Bullying                           | 2.00 |

Note: Sorted by the ratings in each study in a descending order. Feature ratings of Study 3 are those of humiliation recalls only.

single humiliating experience. Therefore, all these antecedents may be prototypical antecedents of humiliation (central features), but they may not occur simultaneously in one incidence of humiliation, which may be why they were less central in the humiliation recalls of Study 3. Indeed, when excluding these features related to antecedents particularly the correlation of feature ratings of humiliation recalls with centrality ratings became much higher ( $r = .49$ ; though the correlation with frequencies did not change much,  $r = .28$ ). In addition, extreme events and related features (cruel, abuse) have gone from central positions in the structure based on prototype centrality ratings to peripheral positions in the structure based on humiliation recalls. These features may be prototypical in that they are clear examples of humiliating events, but they may be less common than other experiences of humiliation, resulting in a lower position in the structure based on humiliation recalls.

Second, we inspected features that were peripheral in Study 2 (prototype centrality ratings) but central in Study 3 (humiliation recall ratings). Most notable is that these features contain many emotions. Disappointment, anger, dismay, unhappiness, and sadness have become central features. There are several potential explanations for this difference. It may be less easy to see the emotional aspect of the experience in a prototype analysis (Study 2) because one can take a more distant perspective, such as that of an observer.<sup>7</sup> In the recall study (Study 3), the participant is the victim, so the experience becomes more emotional. This may also explain why personal has become a central feature. Alternatively, the finding may be related to Robinson and Clore's (2002) notion that we should make a distinction between emotion and beliefs about emotion. At least when it comes to emotions, the prototype centrality ratings may have reflected beliefs about humiliation more ("humiliation is like

**Table 5.** Whether a feature is central or peripheral in Study 2 and Study 3.

|  | Central in centrality ratings (Study 2)  | Peripheral in centrality ratings (Study 2)   |
|--|--|--|
| Central in humiliation recall (Study 3)    | Ridiculing (−27)<br>Bringing down (−23)<br>Unfair (+20)<br>Feelings (+20)<br>Feeling small (−18)<br>Group/Audience (+12)<br>Discomfort (+12)<br>Dishonour (−12)<br>Losing trust (+7)<br>Negative (+7)<br>Strength/Weakness (+6)<br>Self-confidence/Self-esteem (−5)<br>Inappropriate (+4)<br>Fiasco (−4)<br>Roles (−3)<br>Shame (+2)<br>Avoiding eye contact (−2)<br>Power/Powerless (+1)<br>Wanting to leave (−1) | Disappointment (+48)<br>Preventing repetition (+47)<br>Personal (+30)<br>Anger (+28)<br>Useless (+27)<br>Incomprehension (+22)<br>Criticism (+22)<br>Dismay (+21)<br>Winning/Losing (+19)<br>Unhappy (+18)<br>Sadness (+17)<br>Rumination (+4)   |
| Peripheral in humiliation recall (Study 3) | Bullying (−57)<br>Badmouthing (−46)<br>Cruel (−42)<br>Belittling (−39)<br>Extreme events (−37)<br>Abuse (−33)<br>Social exclusion (−31)<br>Aggression (−26)<br>Discrimination (−24)<br>Pain (−23)<br>Betrayal (−12)<br>Deliberate (−1)   | Popularity (+19)<br>Shyness (+17)<br>Correction (+12)<br>Not accepting (+11)<br>Fear (−10)<br>Alone (+9)<br>Revenge (−9)<br>Psychosomatic complaints (+8)<br>Red (+8)<br>Interpretation (+7)<br>Envy (−7)<br>Regret (+6)<br>Battle (+5)<br>Guilt (−5)<br>Without emotion (+4)<br>Hatred (−3)<br>Useful (+2)<br>Compassion (−2) |

Note: The number in parentheses indicates the difference score of the feature's position in the structure based on centrality ratings and its position in the structure based on the ratings from humiliation recalls (i.e. its change in position). For example, *belittling* obtained the first place in the structure based on centrality ratings, but the 40th place in the structure based on the ratings from humiliation recalls, resulting in a difference score of −39 (its position was 39 places lower in the structure based on humiliation recalls).

shame"; note that shame is the most notable emotion in the centrality ratings) than the humiliation recall ratings (e.g. both anger and disappointment are as high or even higher in the structure than shame; Table 4), which may be based more on experiences, providing a more accurate picture of the experiential content of humiliation experiences.

## General discussion

Studies 1 and 2 revealed that humiliation has a prototype structure. Combined with Study 3, which focused on the presence of the features in real humiliation experiences and compared feature ratings in humiliation recalls to those in shame and anger recalls, we gain insight into the core features of humiliation.

Below, we will discuss the results of this empirical investigation in more detail, providing a new definition of (prototypical) humiliation, based on our findings.

## The humiliation prototype

A prototype analysis can identify the core features of humiliation but not determine which features are antecedents, which features are part of the experience itself, and which features are consequences. We can, however, compare the features of people's conceptions of humiliation as identified by the prototype approach to features of humiliation that have been identified in theoretical literature and empirical studies, which we will do below.

Antecedents of humiliation seemed to involve a person being brought down, which was a central feature. Indeed, this seemed the case with more specific antecedents that were mentioned: belittling, ridiculing, bringing down, bullying, badmouthing, social exclusion, betrayal, criticism, discrimination, fiasco, and extreme events, such as rape. Although theoretical literature on humiliation does not offer a clear set of antecedents, some of these have been associated with humiliation, particularly ridicule and social exclusion (e.g. Klein, 1991; Leask, 2013). Most of the antecedents received high centrality ratings, yet were lower in the prototype structure of the experience of humiliation (Table 4). As described before, a possible reason for this is that although the offenses may be very prototypical for humiliation, when describing an experience, one usually experiences only one of these antecedents, resulting in lower ratings for the others.

The experiential content of humiliation seemed to involve feelings of powerlessness (also indicated by feelings of weakness) a loss of self-esteem or status (dishonour), and feeling small, all central features. These findings are in line with prior research, which has linked humiliation to powerlessness (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Klein, 1991; Leidner, Sheikh, & Ginges, 2012) and damage to self-esteem (Elison & Harter, 2007; Statman, 2000). Interestingly, the notion that humiliation involves damage to one's self-esteem is not shared by everyone. For example, Gilbert (1997) argues that damage to self-esteem is a feature of shame and not so much of humiliation. The present empirical findings support theoretical articles that do link humiliation to a damaged self-esteem. It should be noted that many of these features (loss of self-esteem and/or status, feeling small) overlap with features of shame. Unlike shame, but like anger, participants considered the situation unfair, a central feature. This finding is in line with theoretical reflections on humiliation involving other-blame (Klein, 1991).

It appears that at the humiliating situation, often audience members are present, a central feature in the prototype structure based on centrality ratings as well as in the prototype structure based on experiential content (i.e. the humiliation recalls). Theoretical literature has suggested that often three roles are present at the humiliating situation: perpetrator, victim, and audience members (Klein, 1991), which is supported by the present investigation.

As for the emotional experience, there seemed to be a difference between the prototype structure based on

centrality ratings and the prototype structure based on experiential content. In both cases, shame was a central emotion. However, this was the only emotion in the prototype structure based on centrality ratings, whereas quite some other emotions were present in the prototype structure based on experiential content. Most notable were disappointment and anger, which were present to an equal extent as shame (if anything, even more so). The differences in emotions between the two prototype structures may be explained by participants taking a more distant perspective when rating the centrality of features – which is not possible when describing one's own experiences – or by participants being influenced more by their beliefs when rating the centrality of features – “humiliation is like shame” – than when describing their own experiences. Interestingly, that humiliation is like shame is also a popular belief in theoretical literature, in which shame is often considered the most highly associated emotion with humiliation and sometimes even equated with humiliation (cf. Elison & Harter, 2007; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). This once again shows the importance of empirical investigations, as empirical research hints at an association between anger and humiliation of about the same level (Combs et al., 2010), which corresponds with the current findings in the humiliation recall study. In addition to shame, anger, and disappointment, sadness, unhappiness, and dismay were central emotions in the prototype structure based on experiential content. All in all, humiliation seems much more emotionally varied than just involving or being shame.

As for behavioural consequences, it is often argued that humiliation results in revenge (e.g. Bar-Elli & Heyd, 1986; Elison & Harter, 2007; Elshout et al., 2015a, 2015b; Elster, 1990; Frijda, 1994; Gilbert, 1997; Harter et al., 2003; Klein, 1991; Leask, 2013; Lindner, 2001, 2002; Torres & Bergner, 2012; Uniacke, 2000; Vogel & Lazare, 1990; Walker & Knauer, 2011), a behavioural consequence of anger. Perhaps surprisingly considering the views on humiliation being like shame, humiliation has less often been linked to avoidance or withdrawal, a behavioural consequence of shame (but see Mann, Feddes, Doosje, & Fischer, 2016). The present research suggests that avoidance should not be overlooked as a response to being humiliated. Indeed, avoidance features (avoiding eye contact and wanting to leave) were central features in the prototype structure based on centrality ratings as well as in the prototype structure based on experiential content. In contrast, revenge was only a *peripheral*

*feature* in both structures. These findings suggest that although both avoidance and revenge may be behavioural consequences of humiliation, avoidance is a more prototypical response than revenge.

### Overlap with shame and anger

Humiliation overlaps – at least in part – with shame and anger. This becomes apparent from comparisons with theoretical and empirical literature on these emotions, but also from correlations of features with shame and anger ratings within humiliation recalls as well as a similar pattern in means across emotions (Study 3). Like shame, humiliation involves feeling small, a loss of self-esteem, and avoidance. Like anger, humiliation involves appraising the situation as unfair, blaming another person (instead of oneself) for the situation. Thus, humiliation is like shame in some respects and like anger in others (cf. Leidner et al., 2012), indicating that, although there is overlap, the emotion cannot be equated with either emotion.

Many features that overlapped with shame (e.g. looking like a fool, loss of self-esteem and/or honour, feeling weak and/or small) suggested that, like shame, humiliation is a *personal experience*, often stemming at least in part from a sense of inferiority. However, other features that overlapped with anger (e.g. being brought down, badmouthed, or belittled, betrayal, being put in second place, unfairness) suggested that, as is the case with anger, the responsibility for the negative situation may be *placed with other people*. It seems that the role of others is crucial in determining the amount of overlap with shame and/or anger. We predict that the more a person blames others for the situation and the less a person blames himself/herself, the more the experience will be anger-like instead of shame-like. A person may also blame himself/herself for part of the situation (after a personal failure) as well as other people (for ridicule after this failure), which may result in a shame-anger mixed experience.

### Future directions

Future research might focus on identifying which combination of features predicts which action will occur. Can we eventually uncover clear indicators that predict whether humiliation results in avoidance (like shame), in revenge (like anger), or in a combination thereof? Considering the finding that revenge was not a central feature, we expect that there will be more

occasions in which avoidance occurs. However, those relatively rare instances that do result in revenge may have large consequences (Elison & Harter, 2007; Harter et al., 2003; Lindner, 2001), making the effort to predict which action will occur worthwhile.<sup>8</sup>

The present findings can be used to develop or improve specific manipulations and measures of humiliation, so that humiliation can be studied separately from related emotions. For example, Hartling and Luchetta's (1999) humiliation scale only focuses on antecedents of humiliation (e.g. being teased, bullied, scorned), excluding many other central features, such as the emotions (e.g. shame, anger, sadness), and action tendencies (avoidance). It seems even more important to incorporate other central features when developing a state humiliation scale, because victims of humiliation likely experience only one of the antecedents when examining state humiliation. Indeed, we found that when asking for specific experiences of humiliation (Study 3), most antecedents became peripheral, possibly because participants experienced only one – and not all – of them.

An interesting finding of the present research was the lack of (high) correlations between the indices of the internal structure in Studies 1 and 2 and the ratings of features in humiliation recalls in Study 3. This was not coincidental, as revealed by a replication of Study 3 with similar results (see Footnote 6). We offered several potential explanations for this finding. Future research might reveal whether all of these explanations contribute to the finding, whether one or more of these explanations contribute most, or whether there are alternative explanations for the finding.

### Conclusion

Our empirical investigation of the prototypical nature of humiliation allowed us to advance the definition of humiliation. Results showed that humiliation is defined by feeling powerless, small, and inferior in a situation in which one is brought down and in which an audience is present – which may contribute to these diminutive feelings – leading the person to appraise the situation as unfair and resulting in a mix of emotions, most notably disappointment, anger, and shame. Not all these features have to be present at the same time, however. Which features are present – particularly features related to the extent to which one blames oneself vs. other people for feeling inferior – may determine whether the experience is more like shame or like anger.

## Notes

1. To test whether the prototype structure is consistent across samples, we replicated the study with a U.S. sample of 151 workers on Amazon Mechanical Turk ( $M_{\text{age}} = 37.17$ ,  $SD = 12.03$ ; 49.7% female), who received \$1.50 for their participation. We used the exact same procedure. Participants' ratings of the features were again very reliable ( $ICC = .98$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.97, .99]). Importantly, the centrality ratings of this study correlated highly with those of Study 2,  $r = .81$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that the prototype structure is consistent across samples.
2. Two subsequent studies were conducted to validate the prototype structure. The studies revealed that compared to peripheral features, central features were freely recalled and recognized more often (Study 2B) and were classified as humiliation more often and faster (Study 2C), thereby meeting the condition in the prototype approach that the prototype structure should affect cognition (e.g. speed of processing; Rosch, 1975; see also Lambert et al., 2009). For more information on these studies, please contact the first author.
3. Importantly, to prevent that our knowledge of the prototype structure would influence how we presented the features in the recalls, we actually conducted Study 3 before the centrality ratings of each feature was identified (i.e. before Study 2). However, we analysed the data of Study 3 after obtaining the results of Study 2. After all, to divide the features into central and peripheral features we needed the centrality ratings of Study 2.
4. Simple effects did suggest that central features could distinguish humiliation from shame and anger, since central features were rated significantly higher in the humiliation condition compared to the shame condition,  $p = .003$ , and the anger condition,  $p = .039$  (with no difference between shame and anger,  $p = .347$ ). Peripheral features were only rated higher in the humiliation condition than in the shame condition,  $p = .003$ , but not than in the anger condition,  $p = .337$  (with peripheral features also being rated higher in the anger than in the shame condition,  $p = .043$ ).
5. Moreover, the feature ratings did not correlate with other indices of the internal structure, such as (correct and false) recognition (Study 2B) and verification speed (Study 2C) ( $r$ s between .04 and .21).
6. We replicated this study in a study ( $N = 60$  students from Tilburg University,  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.45$ ,  $SD = 2.17$ ; 56.7% female) in which we contrasted humiliation recalls with ordinary day experiences (cf. Hepper et al., 2012). As expected, we found that central and peripheral features were more present in humiliation recalls than in ordinary day recalls. In addition, in humiliation recalls, central features were more present than peripheral features (in ordinary day recalls we found the opposite). Importantly, the correlation between the humiliation recalls of this study and those of Study 3 was very high,  $r = .93$ . Moreover, like Study 3, we found a pattern of low correlations between humiliation recalls and other indices, ranging from .07 to .26.
7. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

8. Moreover, there may still be other reasons why revenge is less associated with humiliation than avoidance. For example, research has shown that revenge often takes a while, taking place weeks or months after the offense (Elshout, Nelissen, & Van Beest, 2015b). As such, it seems a less direct reaction than avoidance/withdrawal. Thus, even though it may occur regularly, because of its delay, it may be less associated with the humiliating event in people's minds.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Madelon Gielen, Emmy Mutsaers, and Anouk Frederiksz for their assistance with the categorisation of features in Study 1 and assisting with Study 2.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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