

A Brief Taxonomy of Humiliation¹

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¹ Adapted from Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2000). *The Anatomy of Humiliation and Its Relational Character: The Case of the Victim*. Oslo: University of Oslo, unpublished manuscript.
Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2000). *The Relational Anatomy of Humiliation: Perpetrator, Victim, and Third Party*. Oslo: University of Oslo, unpublished manuscript.

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Humiliation and its elements seen from the humiliator's (or actor's) perspective

In the following section, small vignettes illustrate a brief taxonomy of humiliation. First, humiliation is described in eight scenarios as seen from the point of view of the humiliator. Secondly, another eight scenarios paint a picture of the situation as it is seen from the humiliated victim's point of view. The scenarios are summarized in two tables, the first one, Table 1, pertaining to the humiliator's perspective, the second, Table 2, addressing the humiliatee's point of view.

The taxonomy of humiliation 1: Humiliation and its elements seen from the humiliator's (or actor's) perspective:

- 1.1: If you humiliate me, I humiliate you!
- 1.2: If you humiliate me, I humiliate you – if only I had the means!
- 1.3: I humiliate you simply because my honour requires it.
- 1.4: I humiliate you simply to enfeeble you.
- 1.5: I get you two into humiliating each other just to enfeeble you.
- 1.6: Sorry, I could not control myself and humiliated you!
- 1.7: Sorry, but I didn't know that I humiliated you!
- 1.8: I ought to humiliate myself!

The taxonomy of humiliation 2: Scenarios of humiliation analysed from the humiliated party's perspective:

- 2.1: I feel humiliated without a clear humiliator.
- 2.2: Don't think you can make me feel humiliated!
- 2.3: I feel humiliated by your help and understanding!
- 2.4: You are right in making me feel humiliated.
- 2.5: I feel humiliated and I am addicted to it.
- 2.6: I feel humiliated when others watch.
- 2.7: Don't feel humiliated in my place!
- 2.8: I don't understand, why do you feel humiliated in my place?

Table 1, the one pertaining to the perspective of the humiliator, differentiates the eight scenarios by using the following questions:

- Is the desire to humiliate present in the humiliator, yes (+) or no (-)?
- Is the intention to humiliate present in the humiliator, yes (+) or no (-)?
- Is a humiliating act present, yes (+) or no (-)?
- What is the intended outcome of the humiliating act?
- What is the satisfaction flowing from the humiliating act?
- How would a human rights campaigner evaluate the humiliating act?

Table 2, the table that summarizes the eight scenarios that discuss the humiliatee's perspective, asks the following questions:

- Is there a desire or intention to humiliate on the part of the humiliator, yes (+) or no (-)?
- Is there an act of humiliation on the part of the humiliator, yes (+) or no (-)?
- What is the intended outcome of the humiliating act for the humiliator?
- What is the satisfaction flowing from the humiliating act for the humiliator?
- How does the humiliatee perceive the humiliator's intention to humiliate?
- Does the humiliatee perceive that an act of humiliation is happening or only a third party in her place?
- Does the humiliatee suffer, or only a third party in her place?
- How does a third party observer judge this case of humiliation? Is the humiliatee morally right to feel unduly victimized by humiliation, or is the humiliatee misusing the victim status?

Scenario 1.1: If you humiliate me, I humiliate you!

“I hate my wife! She treats me so badly and humiliates me every day. Now I want to humiliate her; I want to see her suffer. I thought up a plan of how to proceed, and I carry it out whenever I see a chance.”

- desire to humiliate +
- intention to act +
- act +
- the intended outcome is the suffering of the humiliated person or party
- the satisfaction is entailed in the suffering of the humiliated party as direct compensation for the suffering of the humiliator.

Scenario 1.2: If you humiliate me, I humiliate you – if only I had the means!

“My boss bullies me continuously. I have a thousand fantasies about how I could humiliate him. But since I depend on the job, I can do nothing and feel utterly helpless. I almost choke on my fury.”

- desire to humiliate +
- intention to act +
- act -
- the intended outcome would be the suffering of the humiliated person or party
- the satisfaction, if achieved, would be entailed in the suffering of the humiliated person. That would function as direct compensation for the suffering of the humiliator.

Scenario 1.3: I humiliate you simply because my honor requires it.

“I am a gang leader; my followers are all about sixteen years old. When a guy from another gang humiliates us, I have to humiliate them, not because I particularly hate them, but because I have to maintain my status. The degree of their suffering is equal to the extent of my power and honour.”

- desire to humiliate -/+
- intention to act +
- act +,
- the intended outcome is the suffering of the humiliated party
- the satisfaction is the suffering of the humiliated party which is a means to support the honorable status of the humiliator.

Scenario 1.4: I humiliate you simply to enfeeble you.

“I try to humiliate my colleague at work; not that I hate him, no, and I have no desire to humiliate him, but I would like to snatch some of his customers from him and I reckon that humiliating him weakens him.”

- desire to humiliate -
- intention to act +
- act +
- the intended outcome is the weakening of the humiliated person or party
- the satisfaction is entailed in obtaining resources that may be freed after weakening the humiliated person.

Scenario 1.5: I get you two into humiliating each other just to enfeeble you.

“I want to become the leader of my party. I will weaken my opponents by telling each of them how the other is humiliating them.”

- desire to humiliate -
- intention to act -
- act -
- the intended outcome is the weakening of the humiliated parties
- the satisfaction sought is an increase in power and influence for the actor through the weakening of the humiliated parties.

Scenario 1.6: Sorry, I could not control myself and humiliated you!

“I do not want to humiliate my wife, but sometimes I cannot control myself: I beat her, I shout at her, and I try everything to humiliate her.”

- former desire to humiliate +, today’s desire to humiliate -
- former intention to act +, today’s intention to act -
- act +
- the outcome was the suffering of the humiliated party; not condoned today
- the satisfaction was the suffering of the targeted person as direct compensation for the suffering of the humiliator; not condoned today.

Scenario 1.7: Sorry, but I didn't know that I humiliated you!

“I recognize that I inadvertently humiliated my best friend; I did not have the intention to do so, but obviously I must have done it.”

- desire to humiliate -
- intention to act -
- act +
- no intended outcome
- no satisfaction.

Scenario 1.8: I ought to humiliate myself!

“My husband beats me when he is drunk. I left him, although I love him. Now I have decided to go back to him. My friends are shocked and beg me not to humiliate myself. But I love my husband, I will swallow my pride, I will humiliate myself, make myself very humble, and go back to him. I am a good woman! This is love and loyalty!”

- desire to humiliate +
- intention +
- act +
- the intended outcome is the maintenance of a love relationship
- the satisfaction stems from the maintenance of the love relationship.

The scenarios 1.1 to 1.8 are collected in Table 1 (HR means Human Rights):

Humiliation and Its Elements Seen from the Humiliator's Perspective

Scenarios	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.8
Desire to humiliate present (+) or not (-)	+	+	-/+	-	-	-/+	-	+
Intention present (+) or not (-)	+	+	+	+	-	-/+	-	+
Act present (+) or not (-)	+	-	+	+	-	-/+	+	+
Intended outcome of humiliating act	the humiliated person shall suffer	the humiliated person shall suffer	the humiliated person shall suffer	the humiliated person shall be weakened	the humiliated persons shall be weakened	The humiliated persons shall suffer; not condoned	no intended effect, misunderstanding	maintaining dependence
Satisfaction from humiliating act	compensation for hurt feelings of humiliator	compensation for hurt feelings of humiliator	gaining of advantages	gaining of advantages	gaining of advantages	Compensation for hurt feelings, not condoned	no satisfaction, misunderstanding	maintaining dependence
HR evaluation of humiliating act	actor could be right or wrong	actor is right	actor is wrong	actor is wrong	actor is wrong	actor is wrong	actor is wrong	actor neither right nor wrong, but weak

Table 1: Humiliation and its elements seen from the humiliator's (or actor's) perspective

Scenarios of humiliation analyzed from the humiliated party's perspective
Scenario 2.1: I feel humiliated without a clear humiliator.

“I feel humiliated by my neighbor; I feel he is looking down on me without having any right to do that; if I only knew why he does that and whether he does it intentionally. The whole thing could also be a misunderstanding.”

We do not know what is really happening on the actor's side:

- desire to humiliate + or -
- intention to act + or -
- act + or -
- intended outcome is the neighbor's humiliation + or -
- satisfaction stemming from neighbor's humiliating + or -

From the humiliated party's perspective the actor is difficult to judge:

- the actor's desires and intentions are indiscernible for the perceiver, desire and intention + or -
- it is uncertain whether there is an act of humiliation at all, act + or -
- the perceiver is unsure whether s/he is to suffer or not, yet, s/he suffers +.

Scenario 2.2: Don't think you can make me feel humiliated!

“My wife tries to humiliate me constantly; as far as I understand it, she feels justified in doing so; but I think that her behavior is unjustified; she should accept me like I am. All her attempts to humiliate me do not really touch me.”

We have reason to conclude on the actor's side:

- desire to humiliate +
- intention to act +
- act +
- intended outcome is the suffering of the humiliated person or party

On the humiliated party's side we find:

- perception of desire and intention to humiliate on the actor's side +
- perception of humiliating acts coming from the actor +
- but perceiver's suffering -.

Scenario 2.3: I feel humiliated by your help and understanding!

“My mother is so dominating; she only wishes the best for me, she wants to help me, but her patronizing way of treating me humiliates me.”

On the actor's side we find:

- desire to humiliate -
- intention to act -

- act -
- intended outcome and satisfaction is helping the daughter.

On the humiliated party's side we find:

- perception of humiliating intention -
- perception of humiliating acts +
- perceiver's suffering +.

Scenario 2.4: You are right in making me feel humiliated.

“My neighbors try to humiliate me whenever they meet me; I am an alcoholic and I hit my wife when I am drunk, it is terrible; I know I am a bad person; they are right to look down on me, I deserve no better; their humiliation only adds to the guilt and shame I feel myself.”

On the actors' side we find:

- desire to humiliate +/-
- intention to act +/-
- act +
- intended outcome is the suffering of the targeted person,
- satisfaction is entailed in the compensation for the suffering of the wife. Hurt feelings through humiliation can be differentiated further into hurt feelings of the humiliator or hurt feelings of a third person.

On the humiliated party's side we find:

- perception of humiliating intention +,
- perception of humiliating act +,
- suffering +.

Scenario 2.5: I feel humiliated and I am addicted to it.

“My brother is addicted to humiliation; he is a ‘professional’ victim of humiliation. I was the sweetheart of my mother and my poor brother was systematically degraded and humiliated by her. Now, as an adult, he perpetuates his victim status actively: if he is not humiliated, he imagines it or provokes it. He has let down and humiliated his wife, children and friends, they are the real victims today; however, as soon as they protest he accuses them of being the perpetrators. Whoever meets him for the first time and is taken in by his talent to depict himself as pitiable victim, and even makes the mistake to trust and love him, will end up doubly hurt and humiliated, first let down by him and then accused of having humiliated him. He abuses everybody of humiliation by maneuvering him or her into an imagined position of a perpetrator of humiliation. His satisfaction is when he can lament to the world about what pitiable victim of humiliation he is. To get there he damages and destroys the lives of his family and friends and his own.”

On the actor's, the son's side, we find:

- desire to humiliate -

- intention to act -
- act +
- intended outcome is to create situations that can be misrepresented as humiliating,
- satisfaction is entailed in the acknowledgement and recognition of suffering and victim status.

On the humiliated party's, the family and friends' side, we find:

- perception of humiliating desire and intention +/-
- perception of humiliating act +
- suffering +.

Scenario 2.6: I feel humiliated when others watch.

“My mother is humiliating me by quarrelling with me in front of my friends; if she quarrels with me when we are alone, it does not affect me, but to do this in front of others, that is humiliating.”

On the actor's side we find:

- desire to humiliate – or +
- intention to act - or +
- act - or +
- no intended outcome, just lack of sensitivity on the actor's side
- no satisfaction sought, just lack of sensitivity on the actor's side, or satisfaction from suffering of the humiliated person.

On the humiliated party's side we find:

- perception of humiliating intention +
- perception of humiliating act +
- suffering +.

Scenario 2.7: Don't feel humiliated in my place!

“My wife sometimes has a harsh way of talking to me; my friends tell me that her behavior humiliates me, they ask me not to accept her behavior, but I just do not feel humiliated, I love her.”

On the actor's side we find therefore:

- desire to humiliate – or +
- intention to act - or +
- act - or +
- intended outcome -, or suffering of the humiliated person or party
- satisfaction -, or suffering of the humiliated person or party

On the humiliated party's side we find:

- perception of humiliating intention -
- perception of humiliating act -

- suffering -
- perception of humiliating intention and act only by third persons +, third persons suffer in the target person's place.

Scenario 2.8: I don't understand, why do you feel humiliated in my place?

“This teacher of ours, he is so arrogantly convinced that he knows everything. But in fact he tells us nonsense most of the time. He is completely blind to the fact that he is humiliating himself in our eyes.”

On the actor's side we find therefore:

- desire to humiliate -
- intention to act -
- act -
- intended outcome -
- satisfaction –.

On the humiliated party's side (identical with the actor) we find blindness, lack of social abilities:

- perception of humiliating desire and intention -
- perception of humiliating act -
- suffering -
- Third party feels the humiliation he should feel:
- perception of humiliating desire and intention by third party +
- perception of humiliating act by third party +
- suffering by third party +.

The scenarios 2.1 to 2.7 are being collected in Table 2:

Scenarios of Humiliation Analyzed from the Humiliated Party's Perspective

Scenarios		2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8
Actor	Desire / Intention	+ or -	+	-	+	-	- or +	- or +	-
	Act	+ or -	+	-	+	+	- or +	- or +	-
	Intended outcome of humiliating act	- or victim's suffering	victim's suffering	Help	victim's suffering	to get recognition for victim status	- or +	- or victim's suffering	-
	Satisfaction from humiliating act	+ or -	Compensation for hurt feelings	Help	compensation for hurt feelings of a third person	recognition for victim status	- or any kind of hurt	- or any kind of hurt	-
Humiliated Party	Humiliated party perceives humiliator's intention to humiliate as	+ yet, not sure	+	-	+	+ or -	+	- third person +	- third person +
	Humiliated party perceives humiliating act as	+ yet, not sure	+	+	+	+	+	- third person +	- third person +
	Humiliated party's suffering	+	-	+	+	+	+	- third person +	- third person +
Observer	Observers judge	observer is uncertain	Humiliated party may be right or wrong	humiliated party mostly right	humiliator is right	humiliator is wrong	depending on humiliator's intentions	humiliated party is wrong	humiliated party is right

Table 2: Scenarios of humiliation analyzed from the humiliated party's perspective