

SELF-DEHUMANIZATION

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Dehumanization has been a topic of great interest within social psychology over the past decade. Much of this research has examined how and when dehumanization may become evident in how we view others. Our perceptions of others, however, are not the sole province of dehumanization. In this paper we review a series of studies showing that dehumanization can also be found in our perceptions of self. This may be the result of harmful treatment by others, or it may be triggered by our own harmful behavior. Self-dehumanization also has consequences for feelings and behavior. Experiencing self-dehumanization is associated with aversive self-awareness, cognitive deconstructive states and feelings of shame, guilt, sadness and anger. Self-dehumanization may also motivate behavior aimed at reparation, perhaps in an attempt to regain humanity lost. Self-dehumanization is an important concept for understanding the impact of, and responses to, harmful interpersonal behavior.

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Being human is a good thing! Humanity is an important determinant of whether you are considered to have moral rights or moral value. As such, it comes with responsibility and accountability, yet may also serve to ameliorate retribution (Bastian, Laham, Wilson, Haslam, & Koval, 2011). Being human may even provide a convenient excuse for your flaws — allowing you to pass off your slipups as “only human” (Koval, Laham, Haslam, Bastian, & Whelan, 2012). It is no wonder then that most of us are wary of losing our humanity, and that denying humanity to others has a range of devastating consequences.

There is now a large body of work providing valuable insights into the causes and consequences of dehumanization. Specifically, this work has focused on the conditions under which people dehumanize others, and the implications that this dehumanization may have for how those others are treated. Dehumanization may be a consequence as well as a cause of harmful and immoral behavior. Being viewed by others as less human is often a key determinant in reducing affordances of care and concern from others (Bastian et al., 2011; Gray, Gray, & Wegner, 2007; Gray & Wegner, 2009; Gray, Young, Waytz, 2012; Haslam, Bastian, Laham, & Loughnan, 2011) and, when harmful behavior does occur, dehumanization may be used to ameliorate feelings of guilt within the perpetrator (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Čehajić, Brown, & Gonzalez, 2009; McAlister, Bandura, & Owen, 2006; Osofsky, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2005).

Denying humanity to others has implications for their status as social actors, but this analysis only captures half of the story. Do those who dehumanize others, and treat them poorly,

also lose a sense of their own humanity? What about those who are dehumanized by others? Would such treatment seep into one's sense of self, rupturing perceptions of one's own humanity? These questions have motivated myself and my colleagues to pursue a program of research on self-dehumanization. Our aim has been to determine whether situational factors may affect the extent to which a person sees themselves as possessing humanity. Moreover, we have sought to determine the possible causes and consequences of self-dehumanization. In this work we have taken a relational perspective on dehumanization (Bastian, Jetten, & Haslam, 2014), aiming to understand how humanity may be maintained, lost, and regained within interpersonal interactions.

SELF-DEHUMANIZATION AND THE NEED TO BELONG

Our first investigation into self-dehumanization began by looking at the potential links between ostracism and dehumanization. There is now an abundance of work showing that when people's fundamental motivation to belong is frustrated it has a range of destructive consequences. These may include a reduced sense of belonging, or a reduced sense that a person has control over their lives, and it may also undermine one's self-esteem and sense of meaning in life (Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004). Beyond frustrating this network of existential needs, being ostracised or excluded from others increases aggression (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), reduces pro-social behavior (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007), and impairs self-regulation (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005). This work has clearly demonstrated that social rejection or ostracism — an interpersonal experience which frustrates the need to belong — is not only profound, but also surprisingly generalized in its effects. As such, we wondered whether the experience of being ostracized by others might tap into a sense of ourselves as human. That is, just as ostracism is argued to tap into a primal alarm signal that serves to alert the individual to isolation from the group — a likely death sentence in earlier stages of human evolution (Williams, 2007) — perhaps this interpersonal experience also serves to disrupt a sense of ourselves as members of an interconnected human community. On this basis we asked the question of whether being ostracized by others may be a dehumanizing experience.

To test this question we ran two studies (Bastian & Haslam, 2010). In the first study we used a classic recall paradigm to induce feelings of social exclusion (Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004). Participants were randomly allocated to one of three conditions. They were either required to write an essay about an experience of social exclusion, an experience of social inclusion, or an everyday experience. This allowed us to compare any effects of social exclusion to an everyday experience (base-line), as well as the effects of being included and having one's fundamental needs satisfied. After writing the essay (10-15 minutes), participants then rated themselves on 40-traits that assess the two dimensions of humanness (Haslam, Bain, Bastian, Douge, & Lee, 2005). These two dimensions relate to "human nature": qualities that are considered core human attributes (e.g., friendly, curious), or to "human uniqueness": qualities that distinguish us from animals (e.g., broadminded, polite). If being excluded leads to feeling dehumanized we would expect participants to rate themselves lower on traits associated with humanness. In our experimental design we also controlled for valence to ensure that it was not simply that people saw themselves as less positive, but that they saw themselves as less human.

What we found was that when people recalled an episode of ostracism they saw themselves as less human compared to those who recalled an everyday experience or a time when they were included. This was only the case for human nature traits, however. People's ratings of human uniqueness did not vary across conditions.

We set out to replicate this effect using a popular behavioral induction of ostracism — Cyberball (Williams & Jarvis, 2006). This involves a simple virtual ball-toss computer game in which the ball is passed around between three players. Participants are led to believe they are playing with other students in another lab located elsewhere. In fact, they are always playing against a computer where the other “players” are programmed to behave in certain ways. In the inclusion condition, the participant is passed the ball by either of the other two players about one third of the time. In the exclusion condition, they get the ball twice at the beginning and then never again. Thus, they are left to sit watching the two other players passing the ball to each other, but never to them.

At the end of the game, we again asked participants to rate themselves on the same 40 humanness traits as in the first study. This time, we also included twelve new questions developed to directly measure perceptions of humanness. These directly tapped the key constructs related to each type of humanness, and conversely, each type of dehumanization. They included straightforward questions like “I felt that I was emotional, like I was responsive and warm” (high Human Nature), or “I felt like I was refined and cultured” (high Human Uniqueness). There were also questions related to low Human Nature (“I felt like I was an object, not a human”) and low Human Uniqueness (“I felt like I was less than human, like an animal”).

We replicated our finding from the first study, showing that people rated themselves as less human when they had been ostracized compared to when they had been included. For the trait ratings, this effect was again evident for human nature traits, but this time it was also evident for human uniqueness traits. That is, people saw themselves as lacking both core human attributes, as well as those attributes that distinguish humans from animals. Focusing on the new questions we also found evidence for dehumanization, but only on the human nature items, and not on the human uniqueness items. The fact that people adjusted their self-ratings in response to ostracism was particularly interesting given the direct and explicit nature of these questions.

Overall, our findings from these studies indicate that being ostracized is a dehumanizing experience, impacting on self-perceptions of humanity. The evidence suggests that this effect may be most evident in the case of core human attributes, with people feeling these attributes are diminished after being ostracized. Findings were more mixed for those attributes that distinguish us from animals, defining our human uniqueness, but remained consistent with a general pattern of dehumanization.

EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING DEHUMANIZED

Our work on ostracism demonstrated that being excluded by others not only has implications for how we act and feel in that context, but impacts on broad self-perceptions relating to our own humanness. This led us to wonder whether other kinds of maltreatment, beyond instances of rejection or ostracism, such as experiences of humiliation or exploitation, might have a similar dehumanizing signature. Moreover, if maltreatment in general is understood as dehumanizing for

targets, what might the implications of these dehumanizing experiences be? We set out to test these questions across two studies (Bastian & Haslam, 2011).

In our first study, we surveyed a wide range of sources to develop a taxonomy of 26 different types of maltreatment. These included humiliation, exploitation, ostracism, and betrayal in the context of everyday interactions. For each type of treatment we developed two short vignettes which asked the reader to imagine that the maltreatment was happening to them. We next asked participants to rate each of the maltreatment vignettes on a list of attributes. These attributes were designed to reflect the two dimensions of humanness (i.e., HN and HU; Haslam, 2006) and were framed in such a way as to reflect what the experience would be like if the participant were to experience the maltreatment themselves. Specifically, the questions asked them to consider how the perpetrator of the maltreatment might view them personally (e.g., “The other person sees me as immature” or “The other person sees me in a superficial way”). Participants also rated a number of questions related to how they would react cognitively and emotionally to each type of maltreatment. Cognitive reactions included cognitive deconstructive states (e.g., “I would find it hard to think clearly”) as well as states of aversive self-awareness (e.g., “I would feel self-conscious”). Emotional reactions included seven emotions which, when factor analyzed, formed two factors relating to anger/sadness and shame/guilt.

When we factor analyzed the dehumanization ratings we found two factors relating to human nature and human uniqueness. This provided evidence that not only are interpersonal maltreatments understood as having dehumanizing consequences, but these dehumanizing consequences fit current models of dehumanization (cf. Haslam, 2006). This suggests that some maltreatments may be especially likely to dehumanize people by degrading their core human qualities (denial of human nature), while others may be especially likely to dehumanize people by degrading those qualities that distinguish them from animals (denial of human uniqueness). This two dimensional pattern also played out in the cognitive and emotional effects of each type of maltreatment. Those maltreatments associated with a denial of human nature were associated with cognitive deconstructive states (such as reduced clarity of thought) as well as feelings of anger and sadness. Maltreatments associated with a denial of human uniqueness were associated with self-conscious cognitive states and feelings of shame and guilt.

Our first study showed that interpersonal maltreatments are perceived as dehumanizing and that perceived dehumanization predicts cognitive and emotional consequences. The evidence however, relied on people rating hypothetical scenarios. We therefore ran another study, this time asking people to recall experiences (using a writing task) that were dehumanizing in one of two ways: either relating to a loss of human nature or a loss of human uniqueness. We then asked them to indicate their cognitive and emotional responses to these experiences to see whether we could replicate this same pattern of responses from our first study. Consistent with our first study, we found that participants who recalled experiences where they were denied human nature reported more cognitive deconstructive states, whereas participants who recalled an experience of being denied human uniqueness reported feeling more self-conscious. Also consistent with our first study, participants reported feeling more sadness and anger when experiencing a maltreatment that diminished their core human attributes (denial of Human Nature). Although marginal, we also found increased shame and guilt when experiencing a maltreatment that diminished participants uniquely human qualities (denial of Human Uniqueness), also consistent with our first study.

Taken together, our findings thus far supported the notion that interpersonal maltreatments — ranging from ostracism to exploitation — can be dehumanizing and this is evident in the self-perception of victims. Moreover, that dehumanizing maltreatments not only have implications for self-perception but also for other cognitive and emotional states: being dehumanized leads to cognitive deconstructive states (i.e., states of mental apathy) and aversive self-awareness. Furthermore, the experience of dehumanization also has emotional implications, leading to experiences of anger, sadness, shame and guilt.

SELF-DEHUMANIZATION AND THE PERPETRATORS REMORSE

It seems that people's perceptions of their own humanity are sensitive to the treatment they receive from others. Thus, we now have a more complete picture of dehumanization, showing that not only do perpetrators of abuse dehumanize their victims (or perpetrate abuse because they fail to recognize their victims humanity in the first place), but that this dehumanization seeps into the self-perception of victims. What remains unclear from this evidence, however, is how perpetrators view themselves in these instances. Does the act of harming another individual have dehumanizing consequences for perpetrators?

What we *do* know is that people tend to view perpetrators of harmful behavior as less than human (Bastian, Denson, & Haslam, 2013). This seems relatively straightforward: if you act in inhumane ways, people are less likely to see you are a shining example of humanity — they will hold a dehumanized perception of you. But how and when does this dehumanization enter the self-perception of perpetrators? The answer to this question is a little less straightforward than it might at first seem. Consider a hardened criminal who has killed many people and has few regrets. From a third party perspective this individual is likely to be viewed as lacking in humanity — harming people and not caring much about it is certainly not an example of what we consider it means to have humanity. Consider now a criminal who has killed people but who solemnly regret their actions. So much so, they have dedicated themselves to volunteer work aimed at helping the victims of their crimes. Although tarnished, this perpetrator is likely to be less dehumanized than the brazen un-repenting perpetrator. Yet this tells us little about how these perpetrators are likely to view themselves, leaving open the question of who is likely to see themselves as most dehumanized.

An interesting case example here is Anders Breivik, who, in 2011, killed more than 100 people and injured 97 others in bomb and shooting attacks in Norway. Prior to his attacks he acknowledged on his internet blog that people would label him as the biggest Nazi-monster since WWII. It seems he was accurate, people saw him as a cold-hearted killer who had little concern for his victims. Nonetheless, Breivik himself certainly did not agree with these views. In contrast, he appeared to be largely unaffected by his own actions. He referred to his killings as “necessary” (Townsend & Tisdall, 2011) and even demanded a medal for his actions during his court hearing (Amland, 2012). We argue that it was exactly Breivik's failure to see *himself* as a monster that made him appear so cold-hearted, beastly, and lacking any semblance of humanity to those who observed his actions. Breivik maintained a view of himself as a defender of humanity. Indeed, this is consistent with the notion that psychopaths rarely see themselves as tarnished by the harm they perpetrate against others (Hare, 1996).

This example suggests two things. First, it is quite likely that perceptions of one's own humanity in response to the maltreatment of others are unlikely to align with onlookers' perceptions. That is, people view perpetrators who fail to accept what they have done as less human, however perpetrators are perhaps most likely to view themselves as less human when they accept they have done wrong. Second, if there is in fact a link between the perceived immorality of one's actions and a tendency to self-dehumanize, then acknowledging a loss of humanity may be a good thing — it may be an appropriate and socially desirable response when people cause harm to others. It is the failure to see oneself as less human that is most concerning and pathological.

We set out to explore the links between causing harm to others and the self-dehumanization of perpetrators. To observe whether perpetrators would self-dehumanize in response to their own immoral behavior, and what the causes and consequences of this self-dehumanization might be, we investigated the effects of ostracizing others on self-perception (Bastian, Jetten, et al., 2013). In the first study, we asked a group of participants to recall a time they had socially excluded or ostracized another person. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, this was not all that difficult for participants to do. We created a baseline by asking another group of participants to recall an everyday interaction with another person. Next, all participants indicated how immoral they felt their actions were (three items; e.g., "I felt like what I did was very immoral"). Participants then rated themselves on eight of the explicit dehumanization questions adapted from Bastian and Haslam (2010), assessing the attribution of Human Nature (four items; e.g., "I felt like I was open minded, like I could think clearly about things," "I felt that I was emotional, like I was responsive and warm"), and Human Uniqueness (four items; e.g., "I felt like I was refined and cultured," "I felt like I was rational and logical, like I was intelligent"). These items formed a unitary factor and therefore we collapsed across both dimensions of humanity in examining self-perception in this context.

We found that participants both rated their actions as more immoral in the ostracism condition compared to the everyday interaction condition, and that they also saw themselves as less human in the ostracism condition. Mediation analysis revealed that the perceived immorality of the action helped to explain why people self-dehumanized. That is, to the extent that people viewed their behavior as immoral they also viewed themselves as less human. This not only further established the close association between perceptions of humanity and perceptions of morality (Bastian et al., 2011), but that self-dehumanization occurs to the extent that people acknowledge their actions as morally wrong. This finding provided some support to our intuition that it is repentant and regretful perpetrators who are most likely to acknowledge a loss of humanity.

In a second study, we sought to provide converging evidence for this self-dehumanization effect. This time, rather than relying on personal recollections of past events, we manipulated ostracism in the laboratory. We achieved this by reconstructing the Cyberball paradigm within the lab. We tested two participants at a time and used a confederate who posed as a third participant. The two actual participants were informed that the experiment was focused on the effects of ostracism and that a third participant would soon enter the laboratory. They were informed that in the ostracism condition they would be required to ignore the other participant by not speaking to them. They were also provided with a ball which they were required to casually pass back and forth between themselves, but not to the third participant — therefore excluding them. In the inclusion condition they were required to speak to the participant as well as pass the ball to them —

therefore including them. Each pair of participants were given the choice of which condition they would like to be in, therefore increasing a sense of personal responsibility for the outcomes of their actions. This sense of choice was somewhat illusory, as the experimenter indicated that they needed more participants in a certain condition, but that they were still free to choose. All participants chose the experimenter's preferred option.

We replicated the findings of our first study: participants self-dehumanized more in the ostracism condition than the inclusion condition. Moreover, this self-dehumanization was in part explained by how immoral they felt their actions had been. In this study, we also measured state self-esteem and positive and negative affect. When controlling for a general tendency to view the self negatively, or affective reactions to the experience, we still found the self-dehumanization effect.

Our next step was to examine the implications of this tendency to self-dehumanize in response to immoral behavior. In a third study, we again asked participants in a writing task to either recall a time they had ostracized another person, or an everyday interaction. We again measured state self-esteem and current affect. At the end of the study, participants were informed that there was another experiment run by another experimenter in a different building that would be starting immediately and that they could volunteer for it if they wished, but that they would not receive any reward for doing so. Participants either indicated that they were willing (*yes*) or were not willing (*no*) to participate in the experiment.

We again found that after recalling an episode of ostracism, participants rated themselves as less-human. Most interesting was the finding that this tendency to self-dehumanize mediated a corresponding tendency to volunteer to help another experimenter. This pathway from self-dehumanization to pro-social behavior following ostracism, remained when controlling for self-esteem and current affect.

The findings of our third study not only supported our first two studies by demonstrating that engaging in the act of ostracizing another person, compared with having an everyday interaction, can be a self-dehumanizing experience for perpetrators. Our third study also extended this analysis by demonstrating that when people feel that their actions have diminished their own humanity, they are more likely to engage in pro-social behavior (i.e., volunteer for a different study).

We set out to replicate this effect in a fourth study, using a behavioral induction of ostracism. This time we relied on the "silent treatment" used in previous studies (Ciarocco, Sommer, & Baumeister, 2001), to induce an experience of ostracism in victims. Here, we asked the perpetrators to either ignore another participant (who was actually a confederate) for three minutes, or to talk to them. Participants were again given the illusion of choice, with all participants agreeing to participate in the experimenter's preferred condition. After either talking normally to the confederate, or completely ignoring their attempts at conversation for three minutes, participants again rated their self-humanity, their state self-esteem and current affect. At the end of the study, participants were again informed that there was another experiment run by another experimenter in a different building that would be starting immediately and they could volunteer for it if they wished. They were invited to volunteer for either, 15, 30, 45, or 60 min.

The findings of our fourth study replicated those of our previous three studies. After ostracizing another person, participants viewed themselves as less-human. Moreover, they were also more likely to act in pro-social ways (by volunteering their time) and this was in part explained by diminished perceptions of their own humanity.

The findings of these studies are provocative. They not only provide an interesting twist on dehumanization — showing that our own actions can diminish our self-perceived humanity — they also point to a functional account. Dehumanizing the self in response to one's unethical behavior motivates a tendency to engage in pro-social responses. Although our data stop there, we believe that the underlying motivation to behave pro-socially is to restore humanity in the eyes of others, as well as within self-perception. As we argued at the beginning possessing humanity is a good thing. When it is lost, this would be expected to motivate attempts to restore it.

SELF-DEHUMANIZATION AND CYBER VIOLENCE

In our quest for understanding the triggers for self-dehumanization, we have shown that bringing harm to others has self-dehumanizing consequences. Moreover, this is linked to a clear acknowledgement that the harm was morally wrong. This raised the question of boundary conditions. Could these effects also be evident in contexts where people engage in aggressive and violent actions, but where no real harm is done? Such a finding would further link the tendency to self-dehumanize to self-perception theories such as those of Bem (1972). Simply observing one's own violent behavior — independent of its consequences — could be sufficient to change self-perceived humanity. The possibility that simply priming violence can lead to dehumanization of others has been demonstrated in other research (Delgado, Rodríguez-Pérez, Vaes, Leyens, & Betancor, 2009). Could engaging in violent actions, even when there is no harm associated with that violence, be sufficient to produce self-dehumanization? We tested this possibility across two studies focusing on video game violence (Bastian, Jetten, & Radke, 2012).

In our first study, we asked a group of participants to play a violent video game (Mortal Kombat) and compared them to a group who played a competitive but non-violent game (Spin Tennis). Participants played the video game for 15 minutes against another player who was seated in a cubical next to them. At the end they rated themselves on the same questions regarding their self-perceived humanity as we used in the studies on ostracism. Again, here, we found evidence for a unitary factor and therefore collapsed across both dimensions of humanness. We found that after playing the violent video game, participants rated themselves as less human compared to those who played the non-violent game. There were a couple of weaknesses in our first study which we aimed to overcome in a second study. One was that Mortal Kombat involves choosing a character that is often not very human in appearance. In our second study, we used a first person shooter style game so that any dehumanization could be not argued to arise simply because people were controlling non-human avatars. A second weakness was that participants were still playing against another individual who was seated in another cubical next to them. Perhaps they felt that each punch was in some way having actual consequences for their co-player. We wondered whether perpetrating violence against other avatars that are controlled by a computer, rather than another person, would also lead to self-dehumanization. If so, this would provide more convincing evidence that simply enacting such behaviors is sufficient for self-dehumanization, quite apart from any implications of those actions.

In our second study, we had a group of participants play Call of Duty 2 — a first person shooter game set in a war zone. We again compared this group to another group of participants who played Top Spin Tennis. As before, we found that participants who played the violent game

rated themselves as less human compared to those who played the non-violent game. This time we also measured participants' state self-esteem as well as their current affect. As with our other studies, negative self-evaluation or negative (or positive) affect did not account for the effects of playing a violent video game on self-dehumanization. This work shows that simply engaging in violent and aggressive acts, even when these are directed at computer generated avatars, is sufficient to make individuals see themselves as less human.

It would appear that perpetrators may use behavioral episodes to make internal attributions about their own qualities and characteristics, consistent with self-perception theory (Bem, 1972). When people engage in violent and aggressive behavior, it affects their perceptions of their own humanity.

CONCLUSIONS

The possibility that interpersonal maltreatment may have a range of dehumanizing consequences is captured in the Bantu language of South Africa. The word *Ubuntu* literally means "I am because we are." It highlights the fact that we cannot exist independent of our relationships with others. When people destroy, harm or hinder the life of others, they not only reduce the humanity of those others, but diminish their own humanity in the process.

Our work on self-dehumanization reflects the sentiment of Ubuntu by demonstrating that our perceptions of others are not the sole province of dehumanization. The way we treat others not only has implications for how human they see themselves, but also for how human we see ourselves. These findings point to an interpersonal and dynamic understanding of dehumanization. Our humanity may be less attached to our own individual identities and more a product of our interactions with others. Those interactions may elevate our humanity, but when destructive, they become important sources of dehumanization.

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