

DEHUMANIZATION AS A DISTINCT FORM OF PREJUDICE

VERA KATELYN WILDE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES

KARIN D. MARTIN
JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND THE GRADUATE CENTER
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

PHILLIP ATIBA GOFF
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES

Racial equity scholars and advocates confront a defining paradox in contemporary racial inequality. Explicit prejudice has declined, while outcome disparities persist, a disconnect previously referred to as the Attitude, Inequality Mismatch (AIM) problem (Goff, 2013). This article helps explain the AIM problem by distinguishing different forms of prejudice — both conceptually and predictively — and focusing on dehumanization, which predicts the worst of intergroup outcomes. Pinpointing the distinct causes and consequences of dehumanization as a distinct category rather than simply an extreme form of prejudice is important for future social psychology research and action regarding intergroup conflict.

Key words: Prejudice; Dehumanization; Infrahumanization; Implicit and explicit stereotypes.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Phillip Atiba Goff, University of California at Los Angeles, 4552B Franz Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA. Email: goff@psych.ucla.edu

Racial equity scholars and advocates confront a defining paradox in contemporary racial inequality. Explicit racial prejudice has abated significantly in the past half-century while racial disparities in outcomes persist (Bobo, 1988; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Jones, 1972; Kinder & Sears, 1981), a disconnect known as the Attitude, Inequality Mismatch (AIM) problem (Goff, 2013). The decline of explicit attitude prejudice contrasts with a persistent implicit (associational and response time) bias in the attitudinal realm, and with persistent carceral, educational, health, and other significant life outcome inequalities in institutional contexts. This AIM problem challenges social psychologists to provide new explanations for intergroup conflict that move beyond simple narratives of prejudice causing inequality.

We posit that distinguishing dehumanization from other forms of prejudice can help address the AIM problem. Much as recent innovations in implicit cognition have created a scientific consensus that implicit attitudes are distinct from explicit ones (i.e., they have distinct causes and consequences); we suggest that dehumanization is similarly distinct from traditional forms of intergroup prejudice. Intergroup prejudice is generally an affective evaluation of an individual on the basis of his or her social group membership (Allport, 1954), typically involving a stereotype — or a belief about negative attributes of the group. The cognitive process of recognizing a person's mem-

bership in a particular social category underpins this affective evaluation. In this way, we usually think of prejudice as being predicated on the tacit recognition that the subject of the prejudice is indeed a person. By contrast, dehumanization entails not seeing another individual as a person at all.¹

Dehumanization denies full humanness to others. While this denial might sound extreme, and some research suggests it can predict extreme violence toward outgroups, emerging evidence suggests dehumanization is also an everyday social phenomenon — and not simply an extreme form of prejudice (Haslam, 2006; Haslam, Loughnan, Reynolds, & Wilson, 2007). The value of disambiguating dehumanization as a distinct kind of prejudice is that persistent dehumanization may help explain persistent racial inequalities that are literally a matter of life or death, even as traditional forms of prejudice decline. Thus, given the recent developments in dehumanization research, we advance the argument that dehumanization is one subcategory among the heterogeneous phenomena that constitute prejudice. Specifically, research suggests: 1) dehumanization processes predict violent behaviors that society otherwise prohibits (e.g., killing and violence toward children), and 2) neither explicit prejudice nor implicit attitudes predict these outcomes.

We proceed as follows. First, we synthesize recent social psychology research supporting this distinction between dehumanization and other forms of prejudice. Then, we present concrete examples of empirical phenomena that dehumanization predicts outside laboratory settings; to this aim, we will review the evidence on how the long duration of dehumanizing racial stereotypes in particular has enduring consequences in criminal justice. Most notably, recent research examines dehumanization's effects on police use of force against children and capital sentencing. Finally, we delineate how future research might build on this work in order to further refine our understanding of the causes, consequences, and boundary conditions of dehumanization as a distinct form of prejudice.

DEFINING DEHUMANIZATION

Dehumanization is a process by which distinct senses of humanness (in particular, human nature and unique humanness) are denied to others by representing them as objects (in mechanistic dehumanization) or animals (in animalistic dehumanization), or through treating them as less than human via the reduced attribution of secondary emotions (infrahumanization; Haslam, 2006; Leyens et al., 2000). The consequent “moral exclusion” (Opatow, 1990) is widely regarded as a necessary precursor for extreme intergroup conflict, although dehumanization does not necessarily generate extreme mistreatment of dehumanized outgroups. These processes can be automatic and different in kind rather than degree from other sorts of prejudice. In the sections that follow, we review where dehumanization occurs, and distinguish it from other forms of prejudice.

POSITIVE CONTEXT OF DEHUMANIZATION

Traditional socio-psychological accounts of dehumanization cast the phenomenon as a necessary condition of violence, associated with extreme negative evaluations of individuals or groups, and conceptualized it as a motivated rather than a cognitive phenomenon (Haslam, 2006). These associations of dehumanization with paradigmatic and extreme forms of racial/ethnic discrimination and violence, including colonialism, genocide, and immigration, are well-documented,

historically (Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990; Jahoda, 1999; Kelman, 1973; O'Brien, 2003). But dehumanization also occurs in a broader range of contexts. Recent research shows that, at both conscious and unconscious levels, subtle forms of dehumanization can color everyday perceptions and interactions (Haslam et al., 2007). Rather than inextricably associating the phenomenon with violence, extreme negative evaluations of others, and intentional processes, this research tends to support the idea of dehumanization as a perceptual phenomenon in which some forms of social reasoning are disengaged (Harris & Fiske, 2011; Opatow, 1990).

In one conceptualization of dehumanization, namely *infracommunication*, people attribute fewer secondary emotions (more cognitively complex and, thus, more human) to outgroup than to ingroup members (Leyens et al., 2000, 2003). Lay people report understanding that primary emotions can be experienced also by non-humans, but secondary emotions are uniquely human (Demoulin et al., 2004); this finding suggests that disparities in the attribution of emotions are a form of dehumanization. Both research using questionnaires and research using implicit techniques support the *infracommunication* effect (Paladino et al., 2002). Overall, just as explicit and implicit prejudice differ, and there is broad social psychological agreement that endorsing a stereotype differs from engaging in motivated reasoning, ingroup favoritism, or symbolic racism, so too is dehumanization a distinct form of prejudice. Other forms of prejudice also occur in many of the same contexts, yet dehumanization has its specific causes and consequences.

DEHUMANIZATION IS DISTINCT FROM INTERGROUP EMOTIONS

In the domain of intergroup reparations — or the willingness to compensate an outgroup member for harm — intergroup emotions and dehumanization processes are unique predictors. For instance, dehumanization and motivated reasoning, related to guilt, independently hinder reparation policies (Zebel, Zimmermann, Viki, & Doosje, 2008). People also have a greater tendency to dehumanize others in response to primes of human violence, even when their own groups are uninvolved in the violence (Delgado, Rodríguez-Pérez, Vaes, Leyens, & Betancor, 2009). Similarly, guilt alone does not underpin the process of dehumanization (see Delgado et al.'s findings). Taken together, these results suggest that dehumanization is not simply an emotionally motivated mechanism.

DEHUMANIZATION IS DISTINCT FROM INGROUP FAVORITISM

The most robust evidence for ingroup favoritism is provided by the long tradition of the so-called “minimal groups” paradigm (Brewer, 1979; Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961; Turner, 1999). In this paradigm, individuals are randomly assigned to a group, being generally aware of the random nature of assignment. As a consequence of the ad-hoc categorization, individuals quickly form ingroup allegiances and preferences. Importantly, it is possible to create these ingroup preferences without analog outgroup derogation. This positive-negative asymmetry in social discrimination demonstrates that minimal group paradigms are insufficient to produce “essential” notions about groups (Mummendey, Otten, Berger, & Kessler, 2000). By contrast, dehumanization requires that people conceive of ingroup members as sharing an underlying

common essence — not a superficial characteristic or behavior, but an innate quality central to full humanity — that outgroup members lack (Demoulin et al., 2009). So ingroup favoritism can be artificially generated where no group identifications exist; it affects the allocation of scarce resources, and may be reduced by working together toward common goals (Brewer, 1979; Harvey et al., 1961; Mummendey et al., 2000; Turner, 1999). By contrast, dehumanization cannot easily be generated under similar conditions, because the process of conceiving of essential differences between group members is a different process. This suggests that conditions sufficient to provoke ingroup favoritism are insufficient to provoke dehumanization.

DEHUMANIZATION IS DISTINCT FROM EXPLICIT PREJUDICE

Conceptually, disliking someone or some group is not the same thing as believing an individual or group is not human. Functionally, research on the stereotype content model (SCM) demonstrates that individuals or groups perceived as both hostile and incompetent (e.g., drug addicts and homeless individuals) are targeted by neurologically distinct responses (Harris & Fiske, 2006). Specifically, while prejudice toward other outgroups recruits the social cognition regions of the brain (particularly the medial prefrontal cortex, mPFC), dehumanized outgroups do not recruit these regions. This differential neurological foundation of prejudice versus dehumanization suggests that dehumanization is neurologically a distinct phenomenon from traditional forms of prejudice. Importantly, even despised outgroups in other quadrants of the SCM model do not provoke similar neurological responses, suggesting that dehumanization is not simply an extreme form of explicit prejudice.

DEHUMANIZATION'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

Dehumanization predicts distinct social and political outcomes that other forms of prejudice do not. At the social level, people are less likely to help dehumanized people who express their needs in terms of secondary emotions, that is, emotions that people do not attribute to dehumanized groups (Gaunt, Leyens, & Sindic, 2004; see also Vaes, Paladino, Castelli, Leyens, & Giovanazzi, 2003).

Dehumanization's political institutional effects are even more extreme. In carceral institutions such as police departments and courtrooms, unintentional dehumanization can have life or death consequences. At the cognitive level, these consequences derive from automatic schemas (as measured by implicit associations). In particular, visual processing is shaped by schemas including, for instance, associations between Blacks and crime (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004) and Blacks and apes (Goff et al., 2008). At the behavioral level, a growing body of social science evidence shows that dehumanization can result in severe and potentially fatal forms of discrimination and differential treatment. Most chillingly, this discrimination can be seen in the context of the police use of force against children. Lab, field, and multimethod studies show that Whites tend to perceive Black boys as essentially older and less innocent than their White counterparts (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014; Graham & Lowery, 2004; Rattan, Levine, Dweck, & Eberhardt, 2012).

Similarly, researchers theorize that unconscious biases may influence the allocation of limited public defense resources (Richardson & Goff, 2013). In particular, racial bias might systematically disadvantage Black defendants. This disadvantage might disproportionately affect Black defendants who belong to other traditionally disadvantaged subgroups, such as individuals with disabilities, in the phenomenon of intersectional bias (in which the intersection of different identity categories such as Black and disabled can generate quantitatively and qualitatively distinct prejudice). Such systematic disadvantages could contribute to persistent racialized disparities in carceral outcomes such as plea bargaining, conviction, and sentencing.

Finally, despite the contemporary disappearance of pervasive, explicit depictions of Blacks as ape-like, the old colonial-era schema of “dark” people, including Irish and Africans, as ape-like (Lebow, 1976) continues to orient our attention (Rattan & Eberhardt, 2010) and persists in some form in American courtrooms today. Specifically, implicit associations between Blacks and apes persist, as does media coverage of capital cases in which Blacks are implicitly portrayed as ape-like (Goff et al., 2008). This persistence can have life-or-death consequences; in fact, the implicit courtroom depictions of Blacks as ape-like predict subsequent executions. Schemas, in this case, can kill by unconsciously dehumanizing outgroup members at neurological and cognitive levels in ways that predict discriminatory behaviors, including racialized imposition of police use of force against children and the death penalty against convicted criminals.

CONCLUSION

We propose that conceptualizing dehumanization as one distinct form of prejudice among many, rather than as an extreme form of prejudice defined as a unidimensional phenomenon, is important for future social psychology research and action regarding intergroup conflict. Moreover, making this distinction helps explain the puzzling disconnect between decreasing explicit racial prejudice on the one hand and persistent racial outcome disparities (the AIM problem) on the other. Dehumanization, the denial of full humanness to others, is a common rather than exceptional process with different causes and consequences than other forms of prejudice.

Conceptually, that process differs from motivated phenomena. Specifically, guilt and horror do not drive the cognitive process of dehumanization, so we know that it is not simply an emotionally motivated mechanism. Dehumanization cannot be easily generated through random assignment to groups, nor can it be ameliorated through intergroup collaboration; it is, therefore, distinguished from ingroup favoritism. Finally, some evidence suggests dehumanization has a distinct neurological basis that differentiates it from explicit prejudice. These conceptual distinctions hold empirically: dehumanization predicts different outcomes from explicit or implicit prejudice. The outcomes that dehumanization predicts, including police use of force against children (Goff et al., 2014), have broad social and political impacts, making research into dehumanization’s causes and consequences an important frontier in social psychology research on prejudice.

NOTE

1. Neuroimaging provides stark evidence of this aspect of dehumanization. Harris and Fiske (2006) show that extreme outgroup members, such as drug addicts and the homeless, fail to stimulate the part of the

brain associated with recognizing people. Moreover, in a series of studies examining the implicit association between Black men and apes, Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, and Jackson (2008) find that dehumanization can occur without explicit knowledge or endorsement of this association.

REFERENCES

- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Bobo, L. (1988). Group conflict, prejudice, and the paradox of contemporary racial attitudes. In P. A. Katz & D. A. Taylor (Eds.), *Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy* (pp. 85-116). New York, NY: Plenum Press.
- Brewer, M. B. (1979). In-group bias in the minimal intergroup situation: A cognitive-motivational analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, *86*, 307-324. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.86.2.307
- Chalk, F., & Jonassohn, K. (1990). The conceptual framework. In F. Chalk & K. Jonassohn (Eds.), *The history and sociology of genocide: Analyses and case studies* (pp. 3-53). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Delgado, N., Rodríguez-Pérez, A., Vaes, J., Leyens, J.-Ph., & Betancor, V. (2009). Priming effects of violence on infrahumanization. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *12*, 699-714. doi:10.1177/1368430209344607
- Demoulin, S., Cortes, B. P., Viki, T. G., Rodriguez, A. P., Rodriguez, R. T., Paladino, M. P., & Leyens, J.-Ph. (2009). The role of ingroup identification in infrahumanization. *International Journal of Psychology*, *44*, 4-11. doi:10.1080/00207590802057654
- Demoulin, S., Leyens, J., Paladino, M., Rodriguez-Torres, R., Rodríguez-Pérez, A., & Dovidio, J. (2004). Dimensions of “uniquely” and “non-uniquely” human emotions. *Cognition & Emotion*, *18*, 71-96. doi:10.1080/02699930244000444
- Eberhardt, J. L., Goff, P. A., Purdie, V. J., & Davies, P. G. (2004). Seeing Black: Race, representation, and visual perception. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *87*, 876-893. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.87.6.876
- Gaunt, R., Leyens, J.-Ph., & Sindic, D. (2004). Motivated reasoning and the attribution of emotions to ingroup and outgroup. *International Review of Social Psychology*, *17*, 5-20.
- Goff, P. A. (2013). A measure of justice: What policing racial bias research reveals. In F. C. Harris & R. C. Lieberman (Eds.), *Beyond discrimination: Racial inequality in a postracist era* (pp. 157-185). New York, NY: Russell Sage Press.
- Goff, P. A., Eberhardt, J. L., Williams, M., & Jackson, M. C. (2008). Not yet human: Implicit knowledge, historical dehumanization, and contemporary consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *94*, 292-306. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.94.2.292
- Goff, P. A., Jackson, M. C., Di Leone, B. A. L., Culotta, C. M., & DiTomasso, N. A. (2014). The essence of innocence: Consequences of dehumanizing Black children. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *106*, 526-545. doi:10.1037/a0035663
- Graham, S., & Lowery, B. S. (2004). Priming unconscious racial stereotypes about adolescent offenders. *Law and Human Behavior*, *28*, 483-504. doi:10.1023/B:LAHU.0000046430.65485.1f
- Greenwald, A. G., McGhee, D. E., & Schwartz, J. L. K. (1998). Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: The implicit association test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *74*, 1464-1480. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.74.6.1464
- Harris, L. T., & Fiske, S. T. (2006). Dehumanizing the lowest of the low: Neuroimaging responses to extreme out-groups. *Psychological Science*, *17*, 847-853. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01793.x
- Harris, L. T., & Fiske, S. T. (2011). Dehumanized perception: A psychological means to facilitate atrocities, torture, and genocide? *Zeitschrift Für Psychologie*, *219*, 175-181. doi:10.1027/2151-2604/a000065
- Harvey, O. J., White, B. J., Hood, W. R., & Sherif, C. W. (1961). *Intergroup conflict and cooperation: The Robbers Cave experiment* (Vol. 10). Norman, OK: University Book Exchange.
- Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An integrative review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *10*, 252-264. doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_4
- Haslam, N., Loughnan, S., Reynolds, C., & Wilson, S. (2007). Dehumanization: A new perspective. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *1*, 409-422. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00030.x
- Jahoda, G. (1999). *Images of savages: Ancients [sic] roots of modern prejudice in Western culture*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Jones, J. M. (1972). *Prejudice and racism*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishers.
- Kelman, H. G. (1973). Violence without moral restraint: Reflections on the dehumanization of victims and victimizers. *Journal of Social Issues*, *29*, 25-61. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1973.tb00102.x
- Kinder, D. R., & Sears, D. O. (1981). Prejudice and politics: Symbolic racism versus racial threats to the good life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *40*, 414-431. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.40.3.414

- Lebow, R. N. (1976). *White Britain and Black Ireland: The influence of stereotypes on colonial policy*. Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Leyens, J.-Ph., Cortes, B., Demoulin, S., Dovidio, J. F., Fiske, S. T., Gaunt, R., ... Vaes, J. (2003). Emotional prejudice, essentialism, and nationalism. The 2002 Tajfel Lecture. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 33*, 703-717. doi:10.1002/ejsp.170
- Leyens, J.-Ph., Paladino, P. M., Rodríguez-Torres, R., Vaes, J., Demoulin, S., Rodríguez-Pérez, A., & Gaunt, R. (2000). The emotional side of prejudice: The attribution of secondary emotions to ingroups and outgroups. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 4*, 186-197. doi:10.1207/S15327957PSPR0402_06
- Mummendey, A., Otten, S., Berger, U., & Kessler, T. (2000). Positive-negative asymmetry in social discrimination: Valence of evaluation and salience of categorization. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26*(10), 1258-1270. doi:10.1177/0146167200262007
- O'Brien, G. (2003). Indigestible food, conquering hordes, and waste materials: Metaphors of immigrants and the early immigration restriction debate in the United States. *Metaphor and Symbol, 18*, 33-47. doi:10.1207/S15327868MS1801_3
- Opatow, S. (1990). Moral exclusion and injustice: An introduction. *Journal of Social Issues, 46*, 1-20. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1990.tb00268.x
- Paladino, M. P., Leyens, J.-Ph., Rodríguez, R., Rodríguez, A., Gaunt, R., & Demoulin, S. (2002). Differential association of uniquely and non uniquely human emotions with the ingroup and the outgroup. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 5*, 105-117. doi:10.1177/1368430202005002539
- Rattan, A., & Eberhardt, J. L. (2010). The role of social meaning in inattention blindness: When the gorillas in our midst do not go unseen. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 46*, 1085-1088. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2010.06.010
- Rattan, A., Levine, C. S., Dweck, C. S., & Eberhardt, J. L. (2012). Race and the fragility of the legal distinction between juveniles and adults. *PLoS ONE, 7*, e36680. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0036680
- Richardson, L. S., & Goff, P. A. (2013). Implicit racial bias in public defender triage. *The Yale Law Journal, 122*, 2626-2649.
- Turner, J. C. (1999). Some current issues in research on social identity and self-categorization theories. In N. Ellemers, R. Spears, & B. Doosje (Eds.), *Social identity: Context, commitment, content* (pp. 6-34). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Vaes, J., Paladino, M. P., Castelli, L., Leyens, J.-Ph., & Giovanazzi, A. (2003). On the behavioral consequences of infrahumanization: The implicit role of uniquely human emotions in intergroup relations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85*, 1016-1034. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.85.6.1016
- Zebel, S., Zimmermann, A., Viki, G. T., & Doosje, B. (2008). Dehumanization and guilt as distinct but related predictors of support for reparation policies. *Political Psychology, 29*, 193-219. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00623.x