

HUMANIZING OUTGROUPS DOES NOT LEAD TO STRESS BUT TO SCHADENFREUDE

JACQUES-PHILIPPE LEYENS

BREZO POZO CORTES

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LOUVAIN AT LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE

JULIE COLLANGE

UNIVERSITY PARIS V

EUGÉNIE DE RENESSE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LOUVAIN AT LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE

In the present set of studies, we speculated that attributions of uniquely human emotions to ingroup and outgroup members would create an emotional burden that would reduce people's well-being. This hypothesis proved to be incorrect. In fact, the more uniquely human negative emotions participants attributed to the outgroup, the better they felt. The contrary happened for positive uniquely human emotions: the more positive attributions to the outgroup, the worse participants felt. No such effect was obtained on the ingroup or when non-uniquely human emotions were at stakes. We discuss our findings in the light of the literature on Schadenfreude.

Key words: Infracommunication; Schadenfreude; Well-being; Intergroup relations.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jacques-Philippe Leyens, Université Catholique de Louvain at Louvain-La-Neuve, Place Cardinal Mercier 10, 1348 Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium. Email: Jacques-Philippe.Leyens@uclouvain.be

Dehumanization has become a fashionable research topic and is no longer restricted to extreme situations such as genocides or torture. It can take place in everyday life. Haslam (2006) distinguished two forms of dehumanization: animalistic and mechanistic. Animalistic dehumanization is inspired by the infracommunication theory (Leyens et al., 2000). According to this theory, the ingroup is somewhat more human than the outgroup and the latter lacks uniquely human characteristics. The denial of uniquely human characteristics associates outgroup members with animals more than with full human beings. Mechanistic dehumanization corresponds to a lack of human nature in which the other is treated as a robot or machine. The present paper centers on infracommunication effects (Leyens, Demoulin, Vaes, Gaunt, & Paladino, 2007).

Infracommunication is a subtle, often unconscious, way to improve the human value of the ingroup (Vaes & Paladino, 2010) and to derogate the outgroup by stressing its link with animals. There are many ways to measure infracommunication (Demoulin, Rodriguez, et al., 2004; Leyens et al., 2007). In classical paradigms, people attribute more positive (e.g., love, admiration) and negative (e.g., disdain, guilt) uniquely human emotions to the ingroup than to the outgroup. No

such difference is evidenced on positive and negative non-uniquely human emotions (e.g., rage, happiness) because these emotions are shared with animals.

In the first theorization of the effect, Leyens and colleagues (2000) speculated that experiencing a lot of uniquely human emotions may constitute an unhealthy burden for people. A common example of this overload is what happens in oncology wards. Nurses and physicians who empathize too much with patients are prone to suffer from burnout (Leyens, 2014; Vaes & Muratore, 2013). An obvious protection against this overload is to restrict the number of uniquely human emotions attributed to groups and to restrict it to the experience of ingroup members. In line with this argument, personnel of hospitals might infrahumanize symbolic strangers, like victims of AIDS or of obesity, to keep away the danger of burnout. Similarly, the 2004 Tsunami is a crude instance of the difference between the ingroup and the outgroup. The media showed numerous devastated places with Occidental tourist victims (e.g., Phuket in Thailand), and simultaneously ignored whole countries (India, Burma, Indonesia) in which tourism is much less developed (“The Impossible,” 2012).

If the above theorization is correct, then one could hypothesize that the attribution of uniquely human emotions to others (ingroup and outgroup members alike), because of the burden it creates, negatively affects people’s well-being. Alternatively, one could speculate that, as far as the ingroup is concerned, the impact of uniquely human emotion attributions on well-being would depend on emotions’ valence. Indeed, because the ingroup is considered as part of the self, positive events occurring to ingroup members should positively affect one’s well-being while the occurrence of negative events should be associated with negative affects.

HYPOTHESES

In the present set of studies, we presented positive or negative events that had occurred to ingroup or outgroup members. Then, in a memory test, participants were asked to select the words that they thought had been presented before. Among these words, five uniquely and five non-uniquely human emotions were introduced (in Study 5, they had to select up to six uniquely and six non-uniquely human emotions). Importantly, there was no actual mention of these emotions in the events’ presentation. Finally, participants rated their well-being.

We tested our hypotheses in five studies. First, we expected more errors of commission (Studies 1-4) and attributions (Study 5) of uniquely human emotions for the ingroup than for the outgroup. This would reflect the classical finding of infrahumanization. Second, we expected that negative (positive) events occurring to the ingroup would trigger less (more) well-being than the same negative (positive) events happening to the outgroup. This result is classical in the intergroup literature (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009; Suzuki-Crumly & Hyers, 2004). Third, because the experience of many uniquely human emotions may constitute an unhealthy burden, we expected a negative correlation between the uniquely human emotion inferences and well-being (Studies 3-5). Finally, we assessed the alternative hypothesis that the link between uniquely human emotions’ inferences depends on the valence of the event occurring to ingroup and outgroup members.

Procedure

Testing took place in small groups (1 to 10). Participants saw 10 critical vignettes and 10 fillers. *The fire woke up the whole street. X's house was in flames. The parents and two of their children were saved by the arrival of the fire-fighters. These worked relentless, sometimes imprudently, but the cries of the mother calling her youngest one were unbearable* is an example of critical event. *In accordance with various scientific studies the country is far from respecting directives in the matter of pollution* is a filler event. Participants were instructed to imagine that the events had occurred close to them, in their Belgian ingroup, or far from them, to unknown English foreigners, the outgroup. In Studies 1 ($n = 56$) and 2 ($n = 37$), the events were negative, whereas they were positive in Studies 3 ($n = 34$) and 4 ($n = 38$). Subsequently, participants saw 40 words that supposedly had appeared within the events. Ten words were emotional terms (five uniquely and five non-uniquely human emotions; Demoulin, Leyens, et al., 2004) and had not been mentioned before (Appendix A). The other 30 words were fillers. Twenty of them were non-emotional words (e.g., *fire*) appearing in the events; 10 other words did not appear in the events (e.g., *truck*). Participants had to infer the words they thought they had seen in the vignettes. In Study 5 ($n = 55$), the material and the design differed from the other studies. Participants saw a soundless excerpt of a Second-War film that supposedly took place in Belgium or England, and participants had to select up to six (and six non-) uniquely human emotions experienced by the victims (Appendix B). Study 5 also included a third condition in which the excerpt was described as having occurred to Belgian's allies, thereby creating a common ingroup-identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Finally, participants in Studies 2, 4 and 5 rated their well-being on 7-point scales (Appendix C). We used the same measure in Studies 2 and 4 (adapted from Batson, 1991; $\alpha = .91$); in Study 5, we used a measure adapted from Batson et al. (1997; $\alpha = .92$).

RESULTS

In none of the studies there were differences between ingroup and outgroup for non-uniquely human emotions; thus, we report only the results for uniquely human emotions.

Inferences of emotions. We hypothesized that participants would infer more uniquely human emotions for the ingroup than for the outgroup, that is, they will believe that more uniquely human emotions were expressed in the ingroup vignettes than in the outgroup ones (errors of commission). Table 1 provides the means and tests of significance for the five studies. Because the total number of words selected for the ingroup did not differ from the one of the outgroup, raw scores are reported. All data significantly support the hypothesis. That is, participants committed more errors of commission in the attribution of uniquely human emotions to ingroup than outgroup members. In Study 5, contrasts show that the Ally group, that is, the common ingroup-identity, felt between the two other groups but did not differ significantly either from the ingroup or from the outgroup.

Well-being. We hypothesized that the well-being of the participants would vary as a function of events' valence and the type of group to which it occurred. In line with our hypothesis, Table 2 shows that people felt significantly worse in the ingroup condition than in the outgroup one when events were negative (Studies 2 and 5). The opposite pattern was obtained when the

events were positive (Study 4). In Study 5, participants in the Ally condition reported higher well-being than those in the ingroup condition. The Ally and outgroup conditions did not differ significantly from one another.

TABLE 1
 Mean inferences (Studies 1-4) and attributions (Study 5) of uniquely human emotions to the victims as a function of the victim's group membership. Standard deviations are in parentheses

Study	Ingroup	Outgroup	Common Ingroup	
1	2.17 (1.53)	0.46 (0.65)		$t(54) = 5.27, p < .001$
2	2.85 (1.35)	1.88 (1.11)		$t(35) = 2.36, p < .025$
3	1.67 (1.08)	0.37 (0.72)		$t(32) = 4.04, p < .001$
4	3.29 (0.84)	1.00 (0.89)		$t(36) = 8.04, p < .001$
5	0.47 _a (0.12)	0.37 _b (1.04)	0.43 _{ab} (0.12)	$F(2, 52) = 3.54, p < .04$

Note. For Study 5, the different letter indicates that the two means are significantly different, $p < .05$.

TABLE 2
 Means reported well-being as a function of the victim's group membership. Standard deviations are in parentheses

Study (valence)	Ingroup	Outgroup	Common ingroup	
2 (negative)	3.98 (0.21)	5.10 (1.54)		$t(35) = 2.35, p < .025$
4 (positive)	5.22 (0.91)	4.02 (1.24)		$t(36) = 3.32, p < .002$
5 (negative)	3.69 _a (1.08)	5.30 _b (1.04)	4.92 _b (1.28)	$F(2, 52) = 9.84, p < .0001$

Note. For Study 5, the different letter indicates that the two means are significantly different, $p < .05$.

Inferences and well-being. We computed the correlations between the number of emotional inferences and well-being for each groups. No correlations were significant when inferences of non-uniquely human emotions were involved. We had hypothesized that, because of the unhealthy burden it creates, inferences and attributions of uniquely human emotions to victims would negatively affect participants' well-being. In the ingroup conditions, correlations between inferences of uniquely human emotions and well-being were nonsignificant. If people give lesser uniquely human emotions to the outgroup because a large amount of them would be stressful, we should therefore predict a significant negative correlation between well-being and the number of inferences of uniquely human emotions attributed to the outgroup. This effect should hold independently of whether the events are positive or negative. This prediction was not verified. In Studies 2 and 5, when events were negative, the correlation was significantly positive, $r(17) = 0.64, p < .005$ and $r(18) = 0.59, p < .01$, respectively for Studies 2 and 5. In Study 4, when the events were positive, the correlation was significantly negative, $r(21) = -0.50, p < .02$.

DISCUSSION

The measure of infrahumanization in Study 5 resembles the classic procedure, that is, attribution of emotions to groups (Demoulin, Rodriguez, et al., 2004), and the results replicate the usual infrahumanization findings. The measure in Studies 1 to 4 is different from the usual one. The procedure induces participants to make false inferences, or errors of commission. More errors of commission of uniquely human emotions occurred in the ingroup condition as compared to the outgroup one. No such difference occurred on commission errors concerning non-uniquely human emotions. *Psychologie-sociale.com* called this result “mort kilométrique” (“the mileage death”; “Le phénomène”). They meant that “the media give importance to victims of drama as a function of the distance with TV viewers, listeners or readers.” This reality is a conceptual variant of what we said earlier about the 2004 Tsunami. In sum, people preferentially attribute humanness to the ingroup, whose members are close, than to the outgroupers who are far away.

Results obtained on the well-being measure are not surprising. Scores were more extreme for the ingroup than for the outgroup but their direction depended on the type of events. People felt worse when the events happening in their group were negative, and better when the events were positive.

The real originality of the studies starts with the link between errors of commission and participants' well-being. In the introduction, we postulated a significant negative correlation, especially in the outgroup condition. We speculated that an overload of uniquely human positive or negative emotions would raise stress (Leyens, 2014). The results were quite different from our prediction. Correlations involving the ingroup were not significant. This lack of findings is not crucial for our reasoning. In the introduction, we did not insist on the correlation of inferences of uniquely human emotions and well-being for the ingroup. Indeed, we had no precise hypotheses about this correlation. Several reactions were plausible. Some people may have reacted like outgroupers, resenting many uniquely human emotions. On the contrary, other participants may have felt good when there were many positive inferences and may have felt bad in the case of negative inferences. These different possibilities occurring in the ingroup condition prevented us to make a specific prediction.

With respect to the outgroup, the correlation was negative in only one study out of the three in which this correlation was calculated. This result does not mean that we were correct in our prediction once out of three times. In fact, the three correlations form a consistent pattern. The more people attributed negative uniquely human emotions to the outgroup, the better they felt whereas they felt worse when the inferred emotions were positive. In other words, the more people humanize the negative side of the outgroup, the better they feel. By contrast, the more they humanize the positive side of the outgroup, the worse they feel.

The present findings have important implications. Numerous studies have shown that people do not only infrahumanize the outgroup but also behave badly toward it (e.g., Pereira, Vala, & Leyens, 2009). This finding is so frequent that it has become trivial (Leyens et al., 2007). Some research has also shown that infrahumanization mediates the link between groups and negative behavior (e.g., Esses, Veenvliet, Hodson, & Mihic, 2008). The discovery in the present studies is different. What we found does not explain and justify bad behaviors in general, nor is it a bad complement to infrahumanization. We revealed a light sign of hostility that depends upon the number and kind of emotions attributed to the outgroup, irrespective of what happens to the

ingroup. Importantly, participants' well-being was not affected by the attribution or inference of non-uniquely human emotions.

The present findings are reminiscent of the Schadenfreude effect (Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Dossje, 2003). Ingroups that feel inferior sometimes show pleasure when superior or successful groups fail in a task (Leach & Spears, 2008). Research has often used sports to show Schadenfreude. An excellent example in the political arena is given by the French reactions when the U.S. military forces encountered repeated failures in Iraq and when the motives for the war proved to be lies. Support for the Schadenfreude idea comes from the outgroup we selected, that is, Great Britain. We elected this country as outgroup because it is a powerful country that is disliked because of its presumed arrogance and anti-Europe spirit (e.g., Hannan, 2012). In the Stereotype Content Model (Cikara & Fiske, 2011, 2012), Great Britain was associated with envy because it is perceived as both competent and disliked. We did not study outgroups varying in competence and liking because Schadenfreude was not part of our initial predictions but became a plausible interpretation of the data. The common ingroup identity of Study 5 is relevant for the action of Schadenfreude; no sign of hostility, or Schadenfreude, shows when the outgroup is close to the ingroup.

What is particularly interesting is that the correlation between emotions and well-being appears only with uniquely human emotions. The correlation between emotions and well-being is absent when emotions are non-uniquely human. The reaction does not take place for emotions that are shared with animals; it is restricted to the humanness attributed to the outgroup. This specification has something in common with what Vaes, Paladino, Castelli, Leyens, and Giovannazzi (2003) found; people dislike that outgroupers spontaneously use uniquely human emotions because it implies that outgroupers claim the same humanity than the ingroup. Rejection does not appear for groups characterized by non-uniquely human emotions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank heartily Stéphanie Demoulin for her constant help and comments.

REFERENCES

- Batson, C. D. (1991). *The altruism question: Toward a social psychological answer*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Batson, C. D., Sager, K., Garst, E., Kang, M., Rubchinsky, K., & Dawson, K. (1997). Is empathy-induced helping due to self-other merging? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *73*, 495-509. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.73.3.495
- Cikara, M., & Fiske, S. T. (2011). Bounded empathy: Neural responses to outgroup targets' (mis)fortunes. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, *23*, 3791-3803. doi:10.1162/jocn_a_00069
- Cikara, M., & Fiske, S. T. (2012). Stereotypes and Schadenfreude: Affective and physiological markers of pleasure at outgroup misfortunes. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *3*, 63-71. doi:10.1177/1948550611409245
- Demoulin, S., Leyens, J.-Ph., Paladino, M. P., Rodriguez, R. T., Rodriguez, A. P., & Dovidio, J. F. (2004). Dimensions of "uniquely" and "non-uniquely" emotions. *Cognition and Emotion*, *18*, 71-96. doi:10.1080/02699930244000444
- Demoulin, S., Rodriguez, R. T., Rodriguez, A. P., Vaes, J., Paladino, M. P., Gaunt, R., Cortes, B. P., & Leyens, J.-Ph. (2004). Emotional prejudice can lead to inhumanization. In W. Stroebe & M. Hewston (Eds.), *European Review of Social Psychology* (Vol. 15, pp. 259-296). London, UK: Psychology Press.

- Esses, V. M., Veenvliet, S., Hodson, G., & Mihic, L. (2008). Justice, morality, and the dehumanization of Refugees. *Social Justice Research, 21*, 4-25. doi:10.1007/s11211-007-0058-4
- Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (2000). *Reducing intergroup bias: The Common Ingroup Identity Model*. Philadelphia, PA: The Psychology Press.
- Hannan, D. (2012, October 18). The case against EU membership. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/danielhannan/100184934/the-case-against-eu-membership>
- Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An integrative review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 10*, 252-264. doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_4
- Haslam, S. A., Jetten J., Postmes, T., & Haslam, C. (2009). Social identity, health and well-being: An emerging agenda for applied psychology. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 58*, 1-23. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.2008.00379.x
- Leach, C. W., & Spears, R. (2008). "A vengefulness of the impotent": The pain of in-group inferiority and Schadenfreude toward successful out-groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95*, 1383-1396. doi:10.1037/a0012629
- Leach, C. W., Spears, R., Branscombe, N. R., & Doosje, B. (2003). Malicious pleasure: Schadenfreude at the suffering of another group. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 932-943. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.84.5.932
- Le phénomène du "mort kilométrique" [The phenomenon of "the mileage death"]. *Psychologie-sociale.com*. Retrieved from http://www.psychologiesociale.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=219&Itemid=77
- Leyens, J.-Ph. (2014). Humanity forever in medical dehumanization. In P. Bain, J. Vaes, & J.-Ph. Leyens (Eds.), *Humanness and Dehumanization* (pp. 167-185). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Leyens, J.-Ph., Demoulin, S., Vaes, J., Gaunt, R., Paladino, M. P. (2007). Infrahumanization: The wall of group differences. *Social Issues and Policy Review, 1*, 139-172. doi:10.1111/j.1751-2409.2007.00006.x
- Leyens, J.-Ph., Paladino, M. P., Rodriguez, R. T., Vaes, J., Demoulin, S., Rodriguez, A. P., & Gaunt, R. (2000). The emotional side of prejudice: The role of secondary emotions. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 4*, 186-197. doi:10.1207/S15327957PSPR0402_06
- Pereira, C., Vala, J., & Leyens, J.-Ph. (2009). From infrahumanization to discrimination: Mediation of symbolic threat needs egalitarian norms. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 45*, 336-344. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2008.10.010
- Suzuki-Crumly, J., & Hyers, L. L. (2004). The relationship among ethnic identity, psychological well-being, and intergroup competence: An investigation of two biracial groups. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 10*, 137-150. doi:10.1037/1099-9809.10.2.137
- "The Impossible": film-hommage aux survivants du tsunami 2004 ["The Impossible": homage film to the survivors of the tsunami]. (2012, November 19). *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Retrieved from <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/monde/20121119.FAP5595/the-impossible-film-hommage-aux-survivants-du-tsunami-2004.html>
- Vaes, J., & Muratore, M. (2013). Defensive dehumanization in the medical practice: A cross-sectional study from a health care worker's perspective. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 52*, 180-190. doi:10.1111/bjso.12008
- Vaes, J., & Paladino, M. P. (2010). The uniquely human content of stereotypes. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 13*, 23-39. doi:10.1177/1368430209347331
- Vaes, J., Paladino, M. P., Castelli, L., Leyens, J.-Ph., & Giovanazzi, A. (2003). On the behavioral consequences of infrahumanization: The role of uniquely human emotions on intergroup relations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85*, 1016-1034. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.85.6.1016

APPENDIX A

Negative events (Study 1 and Study 2)

Non-uniquely human emotions: panique [panic], effroi [fright], surprise [surprise], tristesse [sadness], émotion [emotion].

Uniquely human emotions: chagrin [sorrow], deuil [mourning], nostalgie [nostalgia], désespoir [despair], sentiment [sentiment].

Positive events (Study 3 and Study 4)

Non-uniquely human emotions: joie [joy], satisfaction [satisfaction], excitation [excitation], plaisir [pleasure], and émotion [emotion].

Uniquely human emotions: soulagement [easing], bonheur [bliss], jubilation [rejoicing], amour [love], sentiment [sentiment].

APPENDIX B (Study 5)

Non-uniquely human emotions: crainte [apprehension], épuisement [exhaustion], panique [panic], peur [fear], souffrance [suffering], terreur [terror].

Uniquely human emotions: accablement [despondency], découragement [discouragement], désolation [distress], épouvante [dread], indignation [indignation], révolte [revolt].

APPENDIX C

Well-being

Studies 2 and 4: at ease, serene, troubled, relaxed, irritated, dissatisfied, angry, excited, feeling spite, and gloomy ($\alpha = .91$).

Study 5: grieved, perturbed, worried, upset, distressed, disturbed, troubled, and alarmed ($\alpha = .92$).

Note. For the two measures of well-being (Appendix C), scores on negative adjectives were reversed such that a higher score meant higher well-being.