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Sahil Jilowa
Research Scholars,
Department of Applied
Psychology, Guru
Jambheshwar University of
Science & Technology, Hisar,
Haryana, India

Nisha
Research Scholar, Department
of Applied Psychology, Guru
Jambheshwar University of
Science & Technology, Hisar,
Haryana, India

Pinki
Research Scholar, Department
of Applied Psychology, Guru
Jambheshwar University of
Science & Technology, Hisar,
Haryana, India

Anjali Valecha
Research Scholar, Department
of Applied Psychology, Guru
Jambheshwar University of
Science & Technology, Hisar,
Haryana, India

Rakesh Kumar Behmani
Professor, Department of
Applied Psychology, Guru
Jambheshwar University of
Science & Technology, Hisar,
Haryana, India

Corresponding Author:
Sahil Jilowa
Research Scholars,
Department of Applied
Psychology, Guru
Jambheshwar University of
Science & Technology, Hisar,
Haryana, India

Dehumanization: Forms, consequences, and pathways to rehumanization

Sahil Jilowa, Nisha, Pinki, Anjali Valecha and Rakesh Kumar Behmani

Abstract
Dehumanization is the process of denying individuals or groups their full human status, typically viewing them only as objects, animals, or machines. Historically used to overlook oppression and violence, it works through techniques such as moral detachment. Animalization, demonization, biologization, mechanization and objectification are some of the several kinds, each with major psychological, social, and political ramifications. Empathy training, inclusive education, intergroup contact, legislative safeguards, and therapeutic interventions aimed at promoting self-compassion and meaningful social ties are all necessary to combat dehumanization. These endeavours strive to restore humanity while also promoting well-being and social harmony.

Introduction

Dehumanization refers to the cognitive and emotional processes that deny people or communities full human dignity. This can include viewing others as things or animals, depriving them of the characteristics that distinguish humans, such as identity, agency, and moral worth (Haslam, 2006) [17].

Dehumanization is rooted in a variety of historical and theoretical contexts. It has been used throughout history to legitimize slavery, colonialism, genocide, and other types of systemic brutality and oppression (Kelman, 2017) [21]. For example, during the Holocaust, Jews were portrayed as vermin, allowing for their systematic annihilation (Staub, 1989) [38]. It is theoretically explained by theories such as Social Identity Theory, which proposes that in-group favouring and out-group derogation can lead to the dehumanization of out-groups to retain a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2003) [40].

Dehumanization employs numerous psychological mechanisms. Moral disengagement is a basic technique that permits people to detach themselves from the ethical implications of their conduct toward others (Bandura, 1999) [2, 4]. Individuals who dehumanize others might justify cruelty and violence without feeling guilty or empathetic. Another strategy is the denial of mental states, in which dehumanized individuals are considered to lack complex emotions, thoughts, and intentions, hence allowing their mistreatment (Leyens *et al*., 2001) [27].

Dehumanization refers to the notion that a group of individuals resembles animals rather than humans (Haslam, 2006; Hodson *et al*., 2012; Leyens *et al*., 2000) [17, 19, 26]. This can include objectification, mechanization, and de-individualization (Barnard, 2001; Haslam, 2006; Nussbaum, 1999) [17, 30].

Dehumanization has gotten limited attention in scientific literature. Classical psychology theories often view dehumanization as a source of conflict between individuals or groups. It is a form of ethical exclusion that involve underprivileged people are rejected their essential humanity and deemed unworthy of compassionate treatment (Opotow 1990, 1996) [31, 32]. This is a psychological technique that permits people to overlook their natural barriers to harm others. Dehumanized people are less worthy of moral treatment (Bandura 1999, 2002) [2, 4, 3].

Dehumanization is a form of delegitimization where a group is labeled as non-human, like "savages" or "monsters." This makes it easier to justify extreme aggression against them and prevents conflicts from being resolved (Bar-Tal, 1989) [7].

Struch and Schwartz (1989) [39] believe that dehumanizing judgments stem from observed between-group variations in prosocial ideals or ethics. They revealed that conflict between groups is associated which have greater beliefs of an outgroup's absence of or assault on pro-social values (e.g., helpfulness, forgiveness, and compassion), which increases support for detrimental outgroup behaviour.

However, modern theories suggest that dehumanization can also be more subtle, especially when there isn't major conflict between groups. For example, people often see their own group as more "human" compared to others. This belief means that groups considered less human, or lacking in traits that distinguish people from animals, are seen as less civilized and more animal-like (Haslam, 2006; Leyens *et al*., 2000, 2001) [17, 26, 27].

Infra Humanization theory may be the most influential attribute-based explanation of dehumanization (Leyens *et al*., 2000, 2001) [26, 27]. The authors focus on the assignment of particular human emotions to the ingroup vs the outgroup, discriminating between primary and secondary emotions. Secondary emotions (which include empathy, regret and blame) are commonly regarded to be more advanced levels and unique to humans. Primary emotions, on the other hand, are thought to be primitive in nature and encompass feelings shared by humans and other animals (Demoulin *et al*., 2004) [11].

Dehumanization among Adolescents
The only study on dehumanization in children was by Leyens *et al*. (2000, 2001, 2007) [26, 27, 25]. It found that kids aged 11 to 16 see fewer positive, uniquely human emotions in students from a different school compared to their own school. This dehumanization was linked to more hostility towards the other students (Brown *et al*., 2007) [9]. Another study by Martin *et al*. (2008) [28] showed that younger children aged 6 to 11 also displayed mild dehumanization by assigning more human emotions to their own sports team than to a competing team. These studies suggest that children can recognize differences in human emotions, but they have limitations because they focus on minor social groups and use methods that may not be very accurate (Brown *et al*., 2007) +.

Other forms of dehumanization
1. Animalistic: Animalistic dehumanization means treating people as if they are less than human, like animals, by denying them qualities like reason, maturity, and self-control. People who are dehumanized this way are seen as impulsive and driven by basic instincts, which leads to feelings of shame and humiliation. Those who dehumanize others feel disgust and contempt. Comparing people to animals has been used for a long time to make them seem inferior and to create a sense of human superiority. Depending on how threatening they are seen, dehumanized groups might be treated like domestic animals, with a mix of control and exploitation, or like wild beasts, with scorn and violence (Volpato & Andrighetto, 2015) [43].

Most studies look at the negative effects of comparing humans to animals, but animals can also symbolize power and status. For example, royal emblems often feature strong animals like lions and eagles. Additionally, literature and philosophy use animals to explore human nature and social issues, showing that animal comparisons can have both negative and positive meanings, which deserves more study.

2. Demonization: Demonization happens when people are portrayed as demons, devils, or witches with magical powers to make them seem more dangerous, which can make it easier to justify harming them. This idea comes from the ancient concept of a "monster," which was something strange or unnatural. In ancient times, monsters could symbolize both greatness and danger. However, with the spread of Christianity, the idea of the monster changed to represent the devil, symbolizing pure evil (Le Bras-Chopard, 2000) [22].

3. Biologization: Biologization is when people are compared to diseases or dirt, making them seem like a threat to cleanliness and health. This idea started in 16th-century Spain and grew in the 19th century with the rise of scientific racism and social Darwinism (Volpato & Andrighetto, 2015) [43].

These metaphors compare people to germs, viruses, pests, cancer, or pollution (Douglas, 2003) [12]. Since the Enlightenment, germs have taken the place of demons as hidden dangers. People dehumanized in this way are seen as threats to health and are treated with extreme measures, like elimination, disinfection, or purification.

4. Mechanization: Mechanization is a modern form of dehumanization where people are seen as machines or robots that can't feel emotions or connect with others. They are considered cold, unfeeling, and lacking creativity or depth, and are often viewed as undeserving of sympathy or understanding (Volpato & Andrighetto, 2015) [43].

5. Objectification: Objectification happens when people are seen as objects, tools, or things that serve others. This process breaks a person down into parts that have specific uses for someone else (Gruenfeld *et al*., 2008) [15]. An example is slavery, where people are treated as property. A modern form of this is debt bondage, which still exists today.

Immanuel Kant first used the term "objectification" to describe seeing people as mere sexual tools. Feminist theorists have expanded on this, pointing out how women are often sexually objectified, judged mainly by their physical parts or functions, and valued only as sex objects (Papadaki, 2007) [33].

Nussbaum (1995) + identified seven types of objectifications: being used as a tool, having no independence, lacking activity, being interchangeable, being easily violated, being owned, and being denied personal feelings or experiences. Not all of these traits appear in every case of objectification.

Objectification is different from other forms of dehumanization, like animalization or demonization, which often lead to exploitation or violence. Objectification is more about treating people as commodities or tools. For example, Native Americans were depicted as both savage creatures and demons during the conquest of North America, leading to their forced removal and ethnic cleansing (Stannard, 1992) [37].

Consequences of Dehumanization
Psychological and Emotional Consequences
1. **Trauma and Mental Health Issues:** Dehumanization can cause considerable psychological trauma for victims. Dehumanization frequently leads to increased

anxiety, sadness, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Haslam, 2006) [17]. This trauma is the outcome of not only direct violence but also a pervasive sensation of being treated as less than human.

2. **Internalized Dehumanization:** Victims of dehumanization may internalize unfavourable perceptions, resulting in a lower feeling of self-worth (Bandura, 1999) [2, 4]. Internalization can continue a cycle of abuse and mental health issues by causing people to perceive themselves through the demeaning lens imposed by others.

Social and Interpersonal Consequences
1. **Erosion of Social Bonds:** Dehumanization undermines social cohesion by removing the empathy and understanding required for good interpersonal relationships (Kelman, 2017) [21]. It promotes an environment in which cruelty and exclusion are acceptable, resulting in weakened communal ties and increased social fragmentation.
2. **Increased Aggression and Violence:** Dehumanizing others allows it to be easier to justify aggressive and violent behaviour toward them. This excuse can lead to an upsurge in hate crimes, violence, and even genocide (Staub, 1989) [38]. When humans are viewed as less than human, moral and ethical barriers to injuring them are considerably reduced.

Cultural and Societal Consequences
1. **Normalization of Dehumanization:** Dehumanization frequently manifests in societal norms and practices reinforcing prejudice and inequality. This is evident in systematic racism, sexism, and other forms of institutionalized discrimination. Such normalization reinforces cycles of marginalization and injustice.
2. **Justification of Inequities:** Societies that dehumanize individuals may justify social and economic inequality. Viewing particular groups as less deserving makes it easier to justify policies that exploit or ignore them (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014) [18].

Political and Ethical Consequences
1. **Human Rights Violations:** Dehumanization can result in serious human rights breaches such as slavery, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. Examples from history comprise the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide, and the transatlantic slave trade (Levi, 1988) [24]. In these cases, dehumanization was utilized to deprive individuals of their rights and humanity, laying the groundwork for atrocities.
2. **Moral Disengagement:** Dehumanization promotes moral disengagement, allowing individuals and societies to participate in abhorrent behaviour (Bandura, 2002) [3]. This disengagement can result in widespread cooperation in unethical behaviour and support for harsh policies.

From Dehumanization to Rehumanization
Rehumanization is an endeavour to restore people's feeling of humanity, whereas dehumanization is the rejection of humanity. At the level of society, this might imply destigmatising mental health problems and infusing continuous instruction within schools and workplaces.

Individually, rehumanization interacts with the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (IPTS) in those good relationships with others, opposite frustrated belonging to themselves, along with feeling the purposefulness and purity of life, alleviating perceptions of burdensomeness, may build a sense of connections toward humanity (Joiner, 2005) [20]. This influence has been demonstrated in forgiveness so far, coupled with additional therapeutic consequences such as a reduction in the desire for self-injury (Schumann & Walton, 2022) [36]. Therapeutically, significant relationships, including those with medical professionals, may have blended into already present evidence-based therapy programmes (Fontesse *et al*., 2021) [13]. Also, ethical and value assessments foster more advanced thinking, that can be defined as uniquely human (Haslam, 2006) [17]. These evaluations, when properly identified and validated, may encourage clients to reflect on the ways in which they already display inherently human traits (Haque & Waytz, 2012; Todres *et al*., 2009) [16, 42].

Moreover, those who experience dehumanization may benefit from therapeutic approaches that encourage self-compassion. Being compassionate toward oneself, accepting suffering as a common human experience, and upholding mindful awareness are all components of self-compassion. Its advancement might result in a better self-relationship and higher resistance to meta-dehumanization. According to Chadwick (2019) [10], group-based mindfulness therapies have the potential to humanize people because they help the patient see themselves as a person despite their traumatic experiences and because they help them engage with a community of people. It is possible to adapt dialectical behavioral therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy to place an emphasis on self-compassion, which can assist clients in letting go of any self-dehumanizing ideas they might have. Rehumanization may be facilitated by self-acceptance, redefining suffering, and fostering interpersonal relationships. These strategies may help lessen clinical discomfort.

Some other techniques that can help to overcome or lessen dehumanization.

Psychological Interventions
1. **Empathy Training:** Increasing empathy can help combat dehumanization by encouraging a better knowledge and appreciation of other people's viewpoints. Empathy training programs aim to increase emotional intelligence and the ability to relate to the experiences of others (Batson *et al*., 1997) [8]. Such training has been demonstrated to diminish prejudice while increasing prosocial behaviour.
2. **Perspective-Taking Exercises:** Encouraging people to consider others' points of view can help to lessen dehumanizing attitudes. Perspective-taking entails placing oneself in the shoes of another person, which can help to humanize them and lessen intergroup biases (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000) [14].

Educational and Societal Interventions
1. **Inclusive Education:** Teaching diversity, inclusion, and critical thinking can help to reduce dehumanization. A curriculum that emphasizes the importance of other cultures, histories, and views helps promote mutual tolerance and understanding (Banks, 2008) [5]. Teaching about the dangers of dehumanization, as well as

historical examples of its consequences, might help to improve awareness and resilience.

2. **Media Literacy Programs:** The media can reduce the dehumanizing prejudices. Media literacy programs teach people how to critically assess media messages, identify dehumanizing content, and comprehend its implications (Potter, 2013) [34]. These programs enable people to challenge and resist dehumanizing narratives.

Community and Interpersonal Interventions

1. **Intergroup Contact:** Increasing pleasant relationships between groups can help to minimize dehumanization. The Contact Hypothesis of Allport (1954) [1] states that interaction between groups can lessen prejudice and develop healthier relationships when circumstances are met. Effective communication between groups is facilitated by several elements, including equal status, shared objectives, intergroup working together, and authoritative support.

2. **Dialogue and Reconciliation Programs:** Structured dialogue programs can foster healing and understanding in communities that have experienced conflict and dehumanization. These programs provide safe settings for free discussion, allowing participants to share their experiences, admit past wrongs, and work toward reconciliation (Lederach 1997) [23].

Legal and Institutional Interventions

1. **Anti-Discrimination Laws:** Enforcing laws to protect persons from discrimination and hate crimes is critical. Legal frameworks that protect human rights and equality can discourage dehumanizing behaviour and foster a culture of respect (Thornberry, 1998) [41]. Strong legal safeguards and accountability systems are required to avoid and combat dehumanization.

2. **Restorative Justice Practices:** Restorative justice, as opposed to punishment, focuses on mending harm and restoring relationships. Victim-offender mediation and community conferencing can help to humanize all parties involved by promoting accountability, healing, and reintegration (Zehr, 2015) [45]. These measures can assist address the core causes of dehumanization while also promoting societal peace.

Policy and Organizational Interventions

1. **Inclusive Policy Making:** Policymaking that includes and acknowledges diverse groups' perspectives can help to prevent exclusion and dehumanization. Laws which encourage social justice, equity, and inclusion can foster an environment in which all people are valued and respected (Young, 2000) [44].

2. **Organizational Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives:** Organizations can help to reduce dehumanization by establishing diversity and inclusion efforts. These programs should prioritize developing inclusive work environments, offering diversity training, and encouraging equal opportunity for all employees (Roberson, 2006) [35].

Conclusion
In conclusion, combating dehumanization necessitates a multidimensional approach that includes psychological, educational, communal, legal, and institutional initiatives. Societies can work toward rehumanization by encouraging empathy, inclusivity, and understanding, which improves well-being and fosters social harmony. The study emphasizes the significance of coordinated efforts to prevent dehumanization and restore human dignity in a variety of circumstances.

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