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Less human, more to blame: Animalizing poor people increases blame and decreases support for wealth redistribution

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### **Abstract**

Increasing economic inequality adversely affects groups with low socioeconomic status (low-SES). However, many people are opposed to redistribution policies. In this context, we examined how the dehumanization of low-SES groups influenced this rejection. In the first study ( $N = 303$ ), opposition to redistribution was related to denying humans' uniqueness (intelligence and rationality) and negative attitudes about low-SES groups, more than denying human nature (emotionality and capacity to suffer) in low-SES groups. Mediation analyses indicated that this effect occurred via blaming low-SES groups (more internal than external attributions) for their plight, after controlling for negative attitudes and participants' SES. In the second study ( $N = 220$ ), manipulating the human uniqueness of a fictitious low-SES group affected support for redistribution measures through blame. These results indicated that animalizing low-SES groups reduces support for redistribution, through blaming low-SES groups for their situations.

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Keywords: Dehumanization, Poverty, Income Inequality, Income Redistribution, Low-SES.

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Increasing rates of economic inequality affect the wellbeing of many people around the world (Buttrick & Oishi, 2017; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017). However, there is widespread popular opposition to policies designed to redistribute wealth and thus reduce the negative impact of income inequality (Ashok, Kuziemko, & Washington, 2015). The main aim of the present work is to analyze some ways in which people resist redistribution policies. Specifically, we focus on how dehumanizing low-SES groups (Loughnan, Haslam, Sutton, & Spencer, 2014; Sainz, Martínez, Moya, & Rodríguez-Bailón, 2018) may influence the rejection of redistribution policies through internal attributions for poverty of the victims of it (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003).

### **Opposition to Redistribution Policies**

Previous studies analyzed how different factors contribute to the legitimation and maintenance of the unequal *status quo* (Moya & Fiske, 2017; Willis, Rodríguez-Bailón, López-Rodríguez & García-Sánchez, 2015). In this context, redistribution preferences seem to be shaped by a multitude of variables, such as the status of the perceiver (e.g., Brown-Iannuzzi, Lundberg, Kay, & Payne, 2015); their personal ideological preferences (e.g., Jaime-Castillo, & Sáez-Lozano, 2014; Rodríguez-Bailón, Bratanova, Willis, López-Rodríguez, Sturrock, & Loughnan, 2017); structural variables, such as inequality within a society (e.g., Heiserman & Simpson, 2017; Sands, 2017); and various combinations of these factors (e.g., Dawtry, Sutton & Sibley, 2015).

An important factor that contributes to the rejection of the redistribution of income is people's causal understanding of poverty. Poverty is a complex and multi-determined process that is sometimes

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misrepresented as a simple consequence of an inadequate decision-making process of low-SES groups (e.g., not saving money, being lazy). This causal misrepresentation is accompanied by a denial of the role of contextual or cultural factors (e.g., low wages, poor education, the loss of social values among the poor) that are, in fact, influencing the economic situations of these groups (Tagler & Cozzarelli, 2013). This serves to justify income inequality by placing the responsibility for low-SES groups' situations on them rather than on social and economic systems. Moreover, blaming low-SES groups for their disadvantaged situation promotes economic inequality by motivating citizen to oppose to wealth redistribution (Bullock et al., 2003). We proposed in this study that the dehumanization of low-SES groups fuels this process.

### **Dehumanization of Low-SES Groups**

Dehumanizing groups has been deemed a pervasive process that serves to legitimate different types of inequality (for reviews, see Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Haslam, & Stratemeyer, 2016; Vaes, Leyens, Paladino, & Miranda, 2012). One of the main contributions to the study of dehumanization is Haslam's (2006) dual model of humanity. According to this author, two related dimensions of humanity exist: The first dimension is human nature (HN), which involves a sense of emotionality or interpersonal warmth that is denied to objects or machines. The denial of this dimension leads to the perception of others as machine like (mechanistic dehumanization), without the ability to experience any suffering or other emotional states. The second dimension of Haslam's (2006) model is human uniqueness (HU), which refers to intelligence, agency, or self-control and serves to differentiate humans from other animals. Groups lacking this dimension are dehumanized in an animalistic way and are therefore considered to be "inferior" or "less evolved" animals. The denial of this dimension has been deemed a process that contributes to creating and sustaining hierarchical differences among groups (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014).

Even though these dimensions of humanity (HU and HN) are related to each other, previous studies have found that the denial of each dimension has distinct outcomes. For example, denying HN to patients helps doctors to cope with burnout (Vaes & Muratore, 2013) and to administer painful yet beneficial procedures to patients (Haque & Waytz, 2012). In contrast, the denial of HU, although relatively subtle in

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and of itself, involves lowered perceptions of traits such as rationality and civility. It is also associated with blatant forms of dehumanization, including seeing racial/ethnic minorities as being closer to apes than *Homo Sapiens* on an evolutionary continuum (Kteily, Bruneau, Waytz, & Cotterill, 2015). The denial of HU has been associated with a tendency to reduce helping behaviors (Andrighetto, Baldissarri, Lattanzio, Loughnan, & Volpato, 2014) or with the perception that individuals are less capable of improving themselves (e.g., Viki, Fullerton, Raggett, Tait, & Wiltshire, 2012). It has also been associated with a higher tendency to exclude groups in certain contexts (Martínez, Rodríguez-Bailón, Moya, & Vaes, 2015), among other possible negative consequences for those who are animalized (for a revision, see Haslam & Loughnan, 2014).

Early research focused on analyzing the role of dehumanization in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, or gender inequalities. More recent research has begun to examine the relation between dehumanization and social class. This research revealed that a widespread tendency exists for people low in SES to be considered animal like (Sainz et al., 2018) and thus denied HU traits. For example, Loughnan et al. (2014) showed that low-SES groups, such as “Chavs” in the UK and “White trash” in the US, were regarded as less uniquely human and more animal like.

These findings indicated that the denial of humanity may be an important feature that triggers the perception of low-SES groups and, more generally, reactions to economic inequality. Based on previous evidence showing how variables such as hierarchy-maintenance orientation shape perceptions of the income gap (Kteily, Sheehy-Skeffington & Ho, 2017), we propose that the (de)humanization of low-SES groups could also bias the interpretation of factors that cause poverty, leading people to reject redistribution policies. We also propose that the two dimensions of humanity may have distinct effects. Each dimension of humanity may allow people to come to terms with the existence of inequality and poverty in their society. On the one hand, the denial of HN implies that a group has a limited capacity to suffer, so observers feel less distressed and guilty about their situations (Zebel, Zimmermann, Viki, & Doosje, 2008). This could lower the tendency to help and, as a consequence, it may maintain income

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inequality. On the other hand, one of the functionalities of the denial of HU is to create vertical or hierarchical differentiation between groups, in which the others are placed below one's own or group position (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Moreover, previous studies have also found that people are less likely to help groups they consider to be animal like (e.g., Andrighetto et al., 2014). Thus, it is plausible, though not yet established, that the denial of HU to low-SES groups might also contribute to the depiction of low-SES groups. This might result in decreased support for redistribution (i.e., promotion of income inequality). Furthermore, the psychological mechanisms that might be responsible for the link between the attribution of humanity and redistribution policies have also not been identified.

### **Overview of the Present Research**

Research indicates that low-SES groups are dehumanized and that this might contribute to the justification and maintenance of economic inequalities, just as dehumanization serves to maintain racial and other intergroup hierarchies (for a review, see Vaes et al., 2012). In this context, there are grounds to believe that the mechanistic dehumanization (denial of HN) of low-SES groups might contribute to economic inequality by triggering the minimization of the suffering of these groups. However, research showed that these groups instead tend to be the subject to animalistic dehumanization (denial of HU). Thus, we considered that this dimension may have a key role above and beyond HN.

Little research attention has been paid to how this denial of HU may shape attitudes and responses to poverty and economic inequality. In this article, we propose that the dehumanization of low-SES groups (Loughnan, et al., 2014) may play a key role in organizing attributions for poverty and redistribution policies: The animalistic dehumanization of low-SES groups implies that these groups are perceived as irrational and impulsive, without control over their behavior. This animalization may lead to a process where people blame low-SES groups for their situation, ascribing it to internal causes (e.g., making wrong decisions) more than external factors (e.g., economic recession). Further, attributions for poverty have an important proximal influence on attitudes toward wealth redistribution (Tagler & Cozzarelli, 2013). We therefore proposed that they mediate between the denial of HU and reduced support for redistribution. In

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short, we proposed that (de)humanizing (denying or attributing HU traits) low-SES groups biases attributions about the causes of poverty, and in turn, leads to opposition to income redistribution.

We conducted two studies to address the unexplored relation between the attribution of humanity to low-SES groups and support for redistribution policies designed to improve their economic situations. The first study was correlational and examined the relationship among both dimensions of humanity (HU and HN), attributions for poverty, and attitudes to redistribution. The second study was experimental and was aimed at examining the causal influence of the denial of HU on attitudes toward redistribution. Both studies examined whether the link between the attribution of humanity and redistribution preferences might be mediated by placing the blame on low-SES groups for their situations. Data and materials for these studies can be found online ([osf.io/eakq6](https://osf.io/eakq6)).

### **Study 1**

The main goal of this study was to explore the relation between the attribution of humanity to low-SES groups and inequality engagement variables, such as attributions about the causes of poverty, and support for redistribution policies. We expected that the denial of humanity would be associated with greater blame placed on low-SES groups (more internal than external attributions) for their disadvantaged situations (Hypothesis 1), and lower support for redistribution policies (Hypothesis 2). Specifically, when doing these analysis, we analyzed whether one dimension of humanity (i.e., HU) was associated with the other variables to a higher extent than the other dimension of humanity (i.e., HN). Finally, we also explored a possible mediational analysis using a blaming index of attributions (internal less external) for poverty, as the mediator in the relation between the attribution of HU and redistribution policies (Hypothesis 3). To analyze the unique role of humanity (i.e., HU) above and beyond negative attitudes about poverty, we adjusted for negative attitudes about low-SES groups in the analysis.

### **Method**

#### **Participants and Procedure**

Participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk). They were compensated

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for their participation in a study about income distribution and economic attitudes. Sample size was calculated using G-Power analysis for a small correlation ( $r = .200$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ , 80% Power, minimum  $n = 193$  participants; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). The final sample was composed of 303 US participants (140 women, 161 men, 2 other,  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.78$ ,  $SD = 13.05$ ). Once participants agreed to participate in the study (which received the approval of the ethics committee of the University of Kent), they were presented with the following measures:

**Dehumanization measures.** We included two different measures of dehumanization. Participants completed an eight-item scale from Bastian, Jetten, and Radke (2012), which included four items associated with HU (e.g. “People from lower classes lack self-restraint, like animals” (reverse),  $\alpha = .764$ ) and four items associated with HN (e.g. “People from lower classes are superficial, they have no depth” (reverse),  $\alpha = .741$ ). Responses were given from 1 (“Not at all”) to 7 (“Very much so”). In addition, we used the “Ascent of Man” measure that Kteily et al. (2015) developed. Participants were presented with three sliders, one for each target class, in a random order, to test how “evolved” they considered the average member of low-, middle-, and upper-SES groups to be. Responses ranged from 0 (“Least evolved”) to 100 (“Most evolved”). A low-SES humanity score was calculated by subtracting an upper/middle-SES rating from a low-SES rating (higher scores mean that low-SES groups are more evolved), following the procedure of Kteily et al. (2015).

**Attributions about poverty.** To assess the attribution of the causes of poverty for the low-SES groups, we included the scale that Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler (2001) developed. Participants rated 18 possible causes of poverty. Answers were given from 1 (“Not at all important as a cause of their poverty”) to 5 (“Extremely important as a cause of their poverty”). The original structure of the measure distinguished among internal (e.g., “lack of effort and laziness by the poor”;  $\alpha = .88$ ), external (e.g., “prejudice and discrimination in hiring”;  $\alpha = .86$ ), and cultural (e.g., “being born into poverty”;  $\alpha = .55$ ) causes of poverty. However, as the author of the scale pointed out, the cultural dimension is empirically less consistent in factor analyses, and sometimes reflects a mix of internal and external attributions. [Since](#)



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we were interested in comparing internal and external attributions, we computed a factor analysis to test a two factorial structure of the scale including the cultural items. The results confirmed one factor including mainly external attributions ( $\alpha = .89$ ), and the second factor including mainly internal attributions ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Items related to cultural attributions were distributed between both factors<sup>1</sup>. Finally, to have a measure that reflected the process of “blaming” the members of low-SES groups for their situations, we created a blaming index (Blaming the poor = internal – external attributions). Higher scores in this index reflect more blaming of low-SES groups for their plight.

**Redistribution attitudes.** We included four items (e.g., “The government should redistribute wealth by heavily taxing the rich,”  $\alpha = .86$ ) adapted from Dawtry et al. (2015), and five items (e.g., “There is a need to flatten the hierarchy in this society,”  $\alpha = .89$ ). adapted from Kteily et al. (2017), to measure redistribution attitudes. Responses for both measures were given from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly agree”). An exploratory factor analysis (varimax rotation, principal components extraction) showed only one factor explaining 66.42% of the variance. Therefore, we decided to merge both scales into a single scale ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Negative attitudes about low-SES groups.** We measured attitudes about low-SES groups using a six-item ( $\alpha = .89$ ) scale with positive (e.g., “I generally like low-SES groups”) and negative items (e.g., “I don't like low-SES groups very much”) adapted from Cozzarelli et al. (2001). Responses for both measures were given in a scale from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly agree”).

**Participants' SESs and demographics:** Participants reported their subjective SES (the 10-step MacArthur ladder, adapted from Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). They also provided objective indicators of SES, such as their annual pretax income ranges (seven-point scale from 1, “Below \$15,000,” to 7, “Above \$65,000”) and education level (seven-point scale from 1, “Less than a high school degree,” to 7, “Doctoral degree”). As in previous research (Kraus & Keltner, 2009), we standardized these objective indicators to create a measure of objective SES ( $r = .161, p = .005$ ). Finally, participants reported their demographic details (e.g., gender, age) and were thanked for their participation in the study.

## Results

**Attributions of humanity to low-SES groups.** Results from the Bastian et al. (2012) measure showed that low-SES groups were ascribed with more HN ( $M = 5.26$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) than HU traits ( $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ),  $t_{(302)} = -14.83$ ,  $p < .001$ , Hedges  $g_{av} = .60$ ). Regarding the Ascent of Man measure, the results revealed differences between low-SES groups ( $M = 80.54$ ,  $SD = 22.60$ ) and both middle-SES ( $M = 85.04$ ,  $SD = 17.58$ ,  $t_{(302)} = -5.44$ ,  $p < .001$ , Hedges  $g_{av} = .22$ ) and upper-SES groups ( $M = 86.00$ ,  $SD = 18.70$ ,  $t_{(302)} = -4.26$ ,  $p < .001$ , Hedges  $g_{av} = .26$ ). No differences were found between middle- and upper-SES groups,  $t_{(302)} = -1.07$ ,  $p = .284$ . Therefore, we decided to create the index of Ascent of Man by subtracting the low-SES rating from the mean of the humanity scores from upper/middle-SES groups.

**Regression analysis.** We calculated simultaneous multiple regressions using the measures of humanity, along with the attitudes about low-SES groups, as predictors of the income engagement variables (Table 1). To simplify the analysis, we created a composite index of the measure of HU and the Ascent of Man scale ( $r = .40$ ;  $p < .001$ ) by following a similar procedure to the one used before by Kteily and Bruneau (2017). This procedure consists of merging, after standardizing, the measures that related to the human-animal dimension (i.e., HU and the Ascent of Man). Results indicated that the ascribed level of HU/Ascent of Man score (index) negatively predicted the blaming index and, at the same time, positively predicted support for redistribution policies. Thus, the more participants considered low-SES groups as animals, the more they blamed them for their disadvantaged situations and the more they rejected the redistribution of resources. These results support our hypotheses 1 and 2. Moreover, analyses comparing variables' ability to predict outcomes were computed following the procedure highlighted by Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, and Piquero (1988). As expected, results showed that compared to HN, HU/Ascent of Man better predicted most of the variables included in the study (Table 2).

**Mediation analysis.** After calculating the regression analysis, we implemented a mediation analysis (PROCESS model 4, bootstrapping 10,000 samples, 95% CI; Hayes, 2013). This was done to explore the possible mediation of blaming low-SES groups in the relation between the index of HU/Ascent of Man

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and redistribution policies (Figure 1). Based on the regression results, we included the [HU/Ascent of Man index](#) as the predictor of attitudes about redistribution policies. The results revealed a significant indirect effect of blaming low-SES groups (*Indirect Effect* = .41, *SE* = .04, [.33, .51]) in the relation between the [HU/Ascent of Man index](#) and attitudes toward redistribution policies. Additionally, we calculated the same mediational analysis including HN, negative attitudes, and participants' SESs (objective and subjective) as covariates in the analysis (Table 3). The results, after controlling for these variables, revealed that the indirect effect remains significant (*Indirect Effect* = .23, *SE* = .05, [.13, .33]): The effect of the [HU/Ascent of Man index](#) prevails above and beyond the effect of HN (*Hn Effect* = .04, *SE* = .07, [-.11, .18]), negative attitudes toward low-SES groups (*Attitudes Effect* = -.19, *SE* = .08, [-.34, -.06]), and the subjective (*SSS Effect* = -.14, *SE* = .06, [-.26, -.01]) and objective participants' statuses (*OSC Effect* = -.04, *SE* = .06, [-.16, .09]). In summary, these results supported our hypotheses 3, indicating that a negative relation exists between the attribution of the human-animal dimension ([captured by the HU/Ascent of Man index](#)) and the rejection of redistribution policies, mediated by blaming low-SES groups.

## Discussion

This study analyzed the relation between the attribution of humanity to low-SES groups and economic engagement variables, such as attributions for poverty (placing blame on low-SES groups for their current situations) and attitudes toward redistribution policies. The results indicated that the less that people attribute humanity to low-SES groups, the more they blame these low-SES groups for their poverty, and the less they are in favor of supporting income redistribution policies. However, the dimensions of humanity (HU, HN) seem to have a different influence on the predicted variables. The results pointed out that differences between humans and animals, captured mainly by [the HU/Ascent of Man index](#), was a better predictor of the variables included in the study than HN was. Therefore, it seems that viewing individuals from low-SES groups as scoring lower in the human-animal dimension ([HU/Ascent of Man index](#)) is associated with the rejection of redistributive policies, via blaming the low-SES groups for their poverty situations, more than the consideration that low-SES groups are incapable of

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suffering when living in poverty (i.e., denial of HN). Moreover, the influence of the [HU/Ascent of Man index](#) on redistribution policies via the attribution of placing blame on low-SES groups seems to prevail. This happened even when we controlled for individual variables, which remained significant in the mediation model, such as SES or attitudes about low-SES groups. Therefore, it seems that the effect of the attribution of human or animal traits to low-SES groups is the factor that triggers the rejection of redistribution policies, via blaming the groups for their plights. Based on this preliminary result, we carried out a second study to focus on how the attribution or the denial of HU to low-SES groups influenced support for income redistribution through blaming low-SES groups.

## Study 2

In this study, we manipulated the HU ascribed to low-SES groups to determine whether it exerts a causal influence on support for redistribution policies via attributing the placing of blame on low-SES groups for their plights. We decided to manipulate the attribution of humanity in terms of HU rather than HN given that in Study 1, participants were more inclined to deny these traits (see also Loughnan et al., 2014) and that the denial of these traits was more strongly related to blame and redistribution. We expected differences between the humanized (high HU) and the animalized (low HU) low-SES groups. Specifically, we hypothesized that there would be higher attributions of internal causes of poverty for the low-HU group in comparison with the high-HU group (Hypothesis 1). Additionally, we predicted higher attributions of external causes of poverty when presented with a high-HU group in comparison with the low-HU group (Hypothesis 2). In short, we considered that the participants would blame the poor for their plights more when they were animalized. We also expected that the participants presented with the low-HU group would show less positive attitudes toward redistribution compared with participants who were asked to imagine a group described with high-HU traits (Hypothesis 3). Finally, we anticipated a mediation of the blaming index in the relation between the humanity manipulation and the support for redistribution policies, after controlling for participants' SESs and the ascribed HN to the group (Hypothesis 4). All hypotheses were preregistered and can be found online ([osf.io/7gwmp](https://osf.io/7gwmp)).

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

The sample size was calculated by using G-power analysis (Faul et al., 2009) for an independent t-test (two independent groups) based on the partial correlation between HU and redistribution, controlling for HN from Study 1 (effect size  $d = .38$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ , 80% Power). The results revealed that a minimum of 220 participants were required. We recruited slightly more participants to be sure that we would reach the minimum. The final sample was composed of 257 US participants (140 men, 115 women, 2 others,  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.62$ ,  $SD = 11.67$ ). They were recruited through Prolific Academic services and were compensated for their participation in the study. Participants were asked to take part in a study about groups' relations and economic attitudes (which received approval from the ethics committee of the University of Granada). Once they provided their consent to participate, participants were presented with the following measures:

**Humanity manipulation.** Participants were required to read a fictitious scientific article published in a well-known scientific journal about “the personality of groups”. A short abstract of the article described the socioeconomic details and the personality traits of a group that is supposed to live in our society. In both conditions, participants were told that the described group was considered as having a low SES in society (few resources, lower levels of education, and jobs that are not highly respected). Once participants read this information, they were presented with the manipulation of HU (low vs. high ascription of HU traits) following the same procedure and materials as Martínez et al. (2015). In one condition, the group was described as being irrational, lacking culture, or behaving in a childlike manner (low-HU condition). In the other condition, the group was described as being rational, having culture, and behaving in a mature way (high-HU condition)<sup>2</sup>. Participants answered manipulation checks about the SES of the group (“What is the socioeconomic status of the group?” from 1 “Low SES” to 3 “Upper SES”). Its ascribed HU traits (“To what extent do you think the group lacks culture, it is irrational, childlike, coarseness, immoral/civic, rational, mature, refined, and moral?” [reversed] from 1 “Not at all” to 7 “Completely,”  $\alpha = .93$ ) and its ascribed HN traits (“To what extent do you think the group is

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emotional, warm, open minded, and active and has depth?” from 1 “Not at all” to 7 “Completely”).

**Attributions about poverty and redistribution attitudes.** We included the same measure of attributions about poverty as in Study 1<sup>1</sup>. As preregistered, we calculated the index of blaming: internal attributions (eight items,  $\alpha = .88$ ) less external attributions (10 items,  $\alpha = .88$ ). Regarding the redistribution preferences, we shortened and adapted the scale used in Study 1. In this study, we presented four items measuring preferences for redistribution (e.g., “Support should be given for the low socioeconomic status group described above to receive more money,” from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 7 “Strongly agree,”  $\alpha = .90$ ). Finally, participants reported their SESs, their demographic details (e.g., gender, age), and were thanked for their participation in the study.

## Results

**Manipulation checks.** The results confirmed the effectiveness of the manipulation. Participants reported a lower attribution of HU traits to the group described in the low-HU condition ( $M = 2.15$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) than in the high-HU condition ( $M = 5.87$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ),  $t_{(255)} = -22.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , Hedges’s  $g_s = 2.74$ . Additionally, no differences were found regarding the SES of the low-HU ( $M = 1.14$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) vs. the high-HU group ( $M = 1.02$ ,  $SD = .15$ ),  $t_{(255)} = 1.42$ ,  $p = .716$ , as both were described as having low SESs.

**Attributions and redistribution for low- and high-HU groups.** Results regarding the attributions for poverty showed a higher attribution of internal causes to the group lacking HU ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) in comparison with the high-HU group ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = .94$ ),  $t_{(255)} = 5.26$ ,  $p < .001$ , Hedges’s  $g_s = .66$ . The opposite pattern of results was found regarding the external attributions, with less external attribution being associated with the low-HU group ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) compared with the high-HU group ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = .81$ ),  $t_{(255)} = -2.53$ ,  $p = .012$ , Hedges’s  $g_s = .31$ . Additionally, the blaming index showed the expected differences between the low- and high-HU groups, with the low-HU group ( $M = -.29$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) being deemed more responsible for their poverty compared with the high-HU group ( $M = -1.14$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ),  $t_{(255)} = 4.64$ ,  $p < .001$ , Hedges’s  $g_s = .58$ . In general, these results support our hypotheses 1-2 regarding how the dehumanization of low-SES groups has an effect on the attribution of more

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responsibility to the group for their situation. In relation to attitudes toward income redistribution policies, the results also confirmed hypothesis 3. This implies that participants supported less redistribution policies when presented with the low-HU group ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ) than with the high-HU group ( $M = 5.30$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ),  $t_{(255)} = -2.97$ ,  $p = .003$ , Hedges's  $g_s = .37$ .

**Mediational analysis.** We computed a mediational analysis (PROCESS model 4, bootstrapping 10,000 samples, 95% CI; Hayes, 2013) of the blaming index in the relation between (de)humanization (low and high HU) and redistribution attitudes to verify our hypothesis 4 (Figure 1). The results showed a significant indirect effect of attributing blame in the relation between (de)humanization and attitudes toward redistribution (*Indirect Effect* = .40,  $SE = .09$ , [.23, .59]). Additionally, we computed a mediational analysis controlling for participants' SESs and the adjusted residual of HN. Due to the correlation between HU and HN, we calculated the residuals of HN (after regressing the observed HN on the manipulation check of HU) to use it as a covariate in the mediational analysis (Table 3). This allowed us to calculate the effect of HN, that it is independent from HU, and then, we uniquely controlled for this specific effect (Paternoster et al., 1998). The results after controlling for these variables revealed that the indirect effect remained significant (*Indirect Effect of the Blaming Index* = .33,  $SE = .12$ , [.11, .56]), after controlling for subjective and objective status (*SSS Effect* = -.10,  $SE = .08$ , [-.25, .05],  $p = .207$ ; *OSC Effect* = -.05,  $SE = .08$ , [-.19, .11],  $p = .551$ ), and the residuals of HN (*HN Effect* = -.01,  $SE = .08$ , [-.16, .15],  $p = .930$ ).

## Discussion

In this second study, we analyzed how (de)humanizing low-SES groups, through the ascription or the denial of HU traits, affects the justification of income inequality. The results confirmed that humanizing low-SES groups reduced the ascription of internal and increased the ascription of external causes of poverty, compared with the animalistic dehumanization of low-SES groups. This implies that low-SES groups are blamed for their economic struggles when they are (de)humanized. Additionally, the results showed that the dehumanization (vs. humanization) of these groups also led to lower support for the redistribution of income measures. This, in the end, favored a decrease in inequality within our

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societies. Finally, these results indicated that blaming low-SES groups is the mechanism that mediates in the relation between (de)humanization and support for income redistribution, even when controlling for participants' SESs or HN. In general, we can conclude that (de)humanizing low-SES groups has consequences for how people perceive and legitimate the current levels of income inequality within our societies.

### **General Discussion**

The present research extends previous findings regarding the association between SES and dehumanization (Loughnan et al., 2014; Sainz et al., 2018) by exploring the consequences of (de)humanizing low-SES groups in the justification of income inequality. The results from these two studies indicated that animalizing low-SES groups led participants to attribute the economic struggles of low-SES groups to their own wrongdoings or failures. This, in turn, led participants to consider social policies, such as welfare or income redistribution, as useless efforts without any impact on the eradication of poverty. In short, dehumanization contributes to justifying poverty rates and decreases the tendency for people to help those who have less in our society, which helps to perpetuate the *status quo*.

Although the consequences of dehumanization have been clearly established in the literature, the study of the relation between SES and dehumanization has been underexplored. In this context, the denial of humanity contributes to justifying and legitimizing differences in the socioeconomic hierarchy. This seems to be due to the fact that dehumanization acts as a barrier that blinds people to evidence about how the socioeconomic system perpetuates unequal access to resources, goods, and services. These results highlight how (de)humanization is an important factor in the study of attitudes about inequality and income redistribution, by biasing or denying the surrounding day-to-day conditions that low-SES groups cannot control. From this perspective, the dehumanized perception of these groups will trigger the rejection of any social policies, such as welfare or income redistribution. This is because the problem is perceived to be internally caused by those who suffer from it. Additionally, based on previous evidence (e.g., Bastian, Laham, Wilson, Haslam, & Koval, 2011), we know that animalized individuals are



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considered to be unable to change their behaviors by themselves (and blamed for that) due to their primitive nature. Therefore, dehumanizing low-SES groups contributes to the perception that poverty is a stable and permanent state that cannot be solved by improving the budgets of poor families. Having in mind these results, future studies could analyze if a dehumanized look at poverty might be a process that feeds itself, in line with previous findings in the dehumanization field (i.e., reinforcement of dehumanization and violence, Kteily, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016) or in the ideological sphere (i.e., vicious circle of economic inequality, García-Sánchez, der Toorn, Rodríguez-Bailón, & Willis, 2018). It might be possible that the more that people dehumanize low-SES groups, the less they will help poor people (i.e., maintaining the *status quo*), which could lead people to blame or dehumanize, even more, these groups for not overcoming their situations (i.e., confirmatory bias).

So far, we know that a higher ascription of internal rather than external attributions for poverty has led to a process of attributing blame to low-SES groups for their poverty situations. However, some limitations existed in these studies when it came to measuring attributions for poverty. First, the results indicated that the reliability of one factor was low (Cozzarelli et al., 2011). The low reliability of the cultural factor did not affect our main goal of comparing internal and external attribution. However, future studies, however, should implement preliminary studies to confirm the factorial structures of the scales before conducting the main studies. Second, in the studies we did not take into consideration other possible categorizations of the causes of poverty. Future studies should address this limitation by analyzing how different types of internal attributions may change the pattern of results found in the current studies. Previous studies established different categories of attributions about poverty based on the capability of control (e.g., Weiner, Osborne, & Rudolph, 2011), differentiating between internal and controllable (e.g., wasting their money) versus internal and uncontrollable (e.g., having a low IQ) causes of poverty. This controllability seems to be a key issue in the ascription of humanity to a target (Testé, 2017). Therefore, we could hypothesize that the ascription of more internal and controllable causes of poverty would lead to even lower support for redistribution policies in comparison with an internal yet

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incontrollable cause of poverty. These predictions are in line with a previous study by Bastian et al. (2010). This previous article showed that after committing an immoral action (i.e., internal), animalized individuals are not punished given that they are considered to be unable to control themselves (i.e., uncontrollable); instead, participants seemed to exhibit a paternalistic attitude toward such individuals.

Along with these findings, previous studies also highlighted the negative consequences of being dehumanized (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2011). This could also be contributing to worsening the negative consequences of those who live in poverty. In addition to the lay theories about different causes of internal attributions that people may have, previous studies have found that living in economic scarcity has a negative impact on people's cognitive resources (Shah, Mullainathan, & Shafir, 2012), which influences how people deal with their economic decisions. All of these findings indicated that poverty is a misunderstood situation: The factors that are considered to be internal caused might be, in fact, an outcome of living in a deprived situation (i.e., not controllable), highlighting the lack of responsibility of low-SES groups for their disadvantaged situations.

Additionally, the present results seem to point out that people tend to actively dehumanize and negatively depict the poor so as to justify income inequality justification. We know that in some contexts, dehumanization could be a completely separate process from a depicted vision of the person or group. However, in other contexts, dehumanization might be used as an active, valence-driven process to justify our behaviour towards others' (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Future studies could investigate how dehumanization can vary in its level of negativity (i.e., the relation with negative attitudes) as a consequence of the social functionality that the process might have in the various specific contexts. For instance, it is possible that dehumanization motivated by an active desire to denigrate others might include a sense of negativity (i.e., dehumanization by commission) compared with a passive form of dehumanization (i.e., dehumanization by omission, Waytz & Schroeder, 2014). This functionality might be incorporated into the well-known distinctions of dehumanization based on type (animal vs. objects), explicitness (explicit vs. sublet), or grade (blatant vs. subtle) that have been previously established in the

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literature (see Haslam, 2014). Moreover, future studies could also implement manipulations of humanity that are not based on the ascription of traits but rather based on pictorial forms of dehumanization, such as the Ascent of Man (Kteily et al., 2015). This might help to provide a more independent manipulation of humanity from the other measures included in the study. Additionally, the inclusion of real groups instead of fictitious groups would also strengthen the conclusion of these studies.

Future studies could also analyze how income inequality in each society moderates the dehumanization of low-SES groups. Previous studies identified how levels of inequality influence attitudes about redistribution (Heiserman & Simpson, 2017). We would expect that societies with higher levels of income inequality would more likely dehumanize the groups at the very bottom of their societies. Meanwhile, societies with lower levels of inequality would be less likely to dehumanize these groups given that the differences among groups with different SESs would be less salient (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). [Additionally, our results seem to indicate that participant's SES does not play a clear role in the present results. However, other related variables, such as identification with other socioeconomic status groups could moderate our results. Future studies could address this issue.](#)

Finally, we consider that researchers should put future effort into understanding how poverty is perceived, with the ulterior goal of reversing the dehumanized perception of low-SES groups. However, efforts should also be made to understand how wealthy and high-SES groups are perceived. The concentration of income in the hands of a few people is a major issue to the same extent that poverty is. Therefore, more research is needed to understand how the mechanistic dehumanization of the high-SES groups, that Sainz et al. (2018) previously identified, influences the types of wealth attributions and people's opinion about the redistribution of income in these groups.

In conclusion, dehumanizing low-SES groups seems to be a pervasive process that not only contributes to legitimating the unequal distribution of wealth, but also constitutes a barrier to interclass relations that perpetuates the suffering of those who have less in our societies. These results highlight how humanizing the poor contributes to supporting a more equal society that favors all groups and individuals

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equally.

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**Notes.**

<sup>1</sup> Details of the factorial analysis for the attributions of poverty scale can be found online.

<sup>2</sup> The full manipulation of humanity (Low-HU vs. High-HU) that we implement in the Study 2 can be found online.

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**Table 1.** Simultaneous multiple regression analysis of dehumanization (HU/Ascent of Man, HN and attitudes) on the inequality engagement variables (attributions about poverty and preferences for redistribution attitudes) included on Study1.

	Internal Attributions $F_{(3, 302)} = 50.26^{***}$ , $R^2 = .329$		External Attributions $F_{(3, 302)} = 14.36^{***}$ , $R^2 = .117$		Blaming Low-SES $F_{(3, 302)} = 53.87^{***}$ , $R^2 = .344$		Redistribution Attitudes $F_{(3, 302)} = 18.65^{***}$ , $R^2 = .149$	
	$\beta$	95% CI	$\beta$	95% CI	$\beta$	95% CI	$\beta$	95% CI
HU/Ascent	-.379**	[-.516, -.241]	.133°	[-.025, .291]	-.331**	[-.467, -.196]	.199*	[.044, .354]
HN	-.109	[-.243, .025]	.137°	[-.017, .291]	-.156*	[-.288, -.025]	.040	[-.111, .191]
Attitudes	.160*	[.034, .286]	-.137°	[-.281, .008]	.190*	[.066, .314]	-.208*	[-.350, -.066]

Note. The predicted variable HU/Ascent of Man is the result of merging, after standardizing, both measures that refers to the same dimension following a similar procedure from Kteily & Bruneau (2017). \*\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$ ; °  $\leq .09$

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**Table 2.** Comparison of the capability of prediction (beta scores) among the variables included in the Study 1.

	Internal Attributions	External Attributions	Blaming Low-SES	Redistribution Attitudes
HU/Ascent vs. HN	$z = 2.93; p < .001$	$z = -.04; p = .965$	$z = -3.76; p < .001$	$z = 2.18; p = .028$
HU/Ascent vs. Attitudes	$z = 5.86; p < .001$	$z = 2.93; p < .001$	$z = -5.66; p < .001$	$z = -4.42; p < .001$

**Table 3.** Mediation analysis of the blame placed on low-SES in relation between dehumanization of low-SES (measured in Study 1, manipulated in Study 2) and attitudes towards redistribution policies, controlling by attitudes about low-SES groups (Study 1), HN (Study 1 and 2), and participants` SES (Study 1 and 2).

	Study 1			Study 2		
	IE ( <i>SE</i> )	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>	IE ( <i>SE</i> )	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>
Total effect	.19 (.08)	[.03, .34]	.017	.32 (.16)	[.01, .63]	.041
Direct effect of (de)humanization	-.04 (.06)	[-.16, .08]	.516	-.01 (.11)	[-.23, .21]	.957
Indirect effect of blaming low-SES	.23 (.05)	[.13, .33]	-	.33 (.12)	[.11, .56]	-
Control variables (after including the mediator)						
Attitudes	-.19 (.08)	[-.34, -.06]	.005	-	-	-
HN	.04 (.07)	[-.11, .18]	.628	-.01 (.08)	[-.16, .15]	.930
OSC	-.04 (.06)	[-.16, .09]	.571	-.05 (.08)	[-.19, .11]	.551
SSS	-.14 (.06)	[-.26, -.01]	.031	-.10 (.08)	[-.25, .05]	.207

**Note.** Objective social class (OSC) and subjective social class (SSS).



**Figure 1.** Mediational analysis of the blame placed on low-SES in relation between dehumanization of low-SES (measured in Study 1, manipulated in Study 2) and attitudes towards redistribution policies, controlling by attitudes about low-SES groups (Study 1), HN (Study 1 and 2), and participants` SES (Study 1 and 2). Direct effects after including the mediators are in brackets.  $^{**} p \leq .001$ ;  $^* p \leq .05$ .