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Construing a Transgression as a Moral or a Value Violation Impacts Other Versus Self-Dehumanisation

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Abstract

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Keywords

dehumanization, objectification, morals, values, ethical behaviour, self-focus, other-focus

Disciplines

Other Social and Behavioral Sciences | Psychology

Comments

Construing a transgression as a moral or a value violation impacts other versus self-dehumanisation

Percevoir une transgression comme morale ou relative à des valeurs influence la déshumanisation de soi vs. d'autrui

Simone Tang*
Lasana Harris**

Abstract

What determines whether people dehumanise another person or themselves? We propose that the construal of a violation as moral or value-based influences who is dehumanised. Previous research has demonstrated that people perceive morals to be objective indicators of right and wrong (Goodwin & Darley, 2008), while values are viewed as subjective (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003). Here, participants recalled past moral or value violations, then reflected on the thoughts and feelings of either the other person victimised by their violation, or their own thoughts and feelings. Participants then rated dehumanisation of either the other or themselves using the Human Nature and

Résumé

Quels facteurs conduisent-ils les individus à déshumaniser autrui ou eux-mêmes ? Nous proposons qu'envisager une transgression comme de nature morale ou fondée sur des valeurs influence l'objet de la déshumanisation (soi vs. autrui). Des travaux antérieurs ont montré que les individus perçoivent la morale (*morals*) comme un indicateur objectif du bien et du mal (Goodwin & Darley, 2008), alors que les valeurs sont perçues comme subjectives (Schwartz, 2003). Dans la présente contribution, les participants étaient amenés à rappeler des transgressions morales ou de valeurs, et étaient ensuite amenés à se pencher soit sur les pensées et les sentiments de la victime, soit sur

Uniqueness Scale. We found that participants dehumanised the other more when recalling a value violation. This result suggests that differences in construal between morals and values can have an impact on dehumanisation.

leurs propres pensées et sentiments. Les participants évaluaient ensuite la déshumanisation soit d'autrui soit d'eux-mêmes sur la base de l'échelle de nature et d'unicité humaines. Nous avons constaté que les participants déshumanisaient autrui davantage lorsqu'ils se rappelaient d'une violation de *valeur.* Ce résultat suggère que les différences d'appréhension de la morale et des valeurs peuvent exercer un impact différent sur la déshumanisation.

"We march up, moody or good-tempered soldiers – we reach the zone where the front begins and become on the instant human animals."

"I did not want to kill you… But you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and called forth its appropriate response… I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle."

REMARQUE (1929/2004, pp. 30, 117)

In *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich M. Remarque, Paul Baumer enlists in the German army during World War I, and is quickly consumed by the horrors of war. On the battlefield, as a way to make sense of the events, he learns to dehumanise himself and others as objects and animals. Dehumanisation has been investigated and described in different ways (Klein & Gervais, 2015), and the distinction between animal dehumanisation and objectification (Loughnan & Haslam, 2007) is but one approach employed in extant social psychological literature. Explicit ways include denying morality and justice to others (Opotow, 1990) and delegitimising others by casting them into extremely negative social categories (Bar-Tal, 1990). More subtle ways include inferring a lack of secondary emotions, such as nostalgia (Leyens, Demoulin, Vaes, Gaunt, & Paladino, 2007; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006). Despite the range of definitions,

VIOLATION CONSTRUAL AND DEHUMANISATION

moral considerations and reduced mental state inferences to the targets of dehumanisation feature prominently in each of these conceptualisations (Harris & Fiske, 2009; Bastian & Haslam, 2010). And as we can see through Baumer's experience, a person is capable of dehumanising and objectifying others as well as the self. Though this anecdote is set to the backdrop of war and conflict, dehumanisation is common in our everyday lives, and influences how we perceive others and ourselves.

To note, extant literature has viewed the relationship between dehumanisation and objectification differently (Gervais, Bernard, Klein, & Allen, 2013, Chapter 1). For example, some see them as completely overlapping, while others see one as subsuming the other. Dehumanisation has largely been used in intergroup contexts (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2005; Harris & Fiske, 2006; Haslam, 2006; dehumanising the homeless or minorities), while objectification has largely been used in the context of gender (e.g., Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008; females objectifying their bodies). In our work, we view them as largely overlapping and interchangeable.[1]

Other- versus self-dehumanisation

Other-dehumanisation. Dehumanising others has been linked to a wide range of social issues, including sexism (females as animals or objects, Cikara, Eberhardt, & Fiske, 2011; Rudman & Mescher, 2012), stigma (see Harris & Fiske, 2009, for a review) and racism (outgroup members as less agentic than ingroup members, Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2005). Because of its far-reaching consequences, it has also been used to understand destructive global events, such as genocide (Kelman, 1973) and torturing of prisoners of war (Fiske, Harris, & Cuddy, 2004).

Dehumanising others has important implications for how we subsequently behave. Seeing others as less than human, whether as animals or automata, leads to alarming consequences. For example,

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1. Dehumanisation has been separated into animalistic and mechanistic in previous literature. However, given their high correlations in our work and in others (e.g., Bastian et al., 2012), we will not separate the two.

individuals provide less support for rehabilitation when sex offenders are seen as less human (Viki, Fullerton, Raggett, Tait, & Wiltshire, 2012) and males report being more likely to sexually victimise women when they associate females with animals (Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Dehumanising others can also lead to outright physical aggression (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006). For instance, the Black-ape association can alter participants' judgments about violence against a Black target, and individuals are more likely to believe that the beating a Black suspect receives is justified when primed with apes (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008). Disconcertingly, an archival study also showed that Blacks who are perceived to be ape-like are more likely to be convicted of capital crimes and executed (Goff et al., 2008).

Dehumanising can lead to brutality, but brutality can also lead to dehumanisation. In a virtual reality study, experienced gamers played a violent first-person shooter game inside an fMRI machine. During the game, parts of the brain implicated in social cognition showed less activation (Mathiak & Weber, 2006). The reduced activity is consistent with other-dehumanising brain responses in intergroup contexts (Cikara, Farnsworth, Harris, & Fiske, 2010; Harris & Fiske, 2006), and suggests that engaging in aggression, even in a virtual setting, leads to other-dehumanisation.

Self-dehumanisation. In contrast to other-dehumanisation, there has been much less work done in the area of self-dehumanisation in relation to ethical behaviours. However, despite the dearth of work, we know that individuals are capable of reducing infer-ences of their own mental life. In situations of rape, victims self-dehumanise and self-objectify, which lead to freezing responses, self-blame and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Moor, Ben-Meir, Golan-Shapira, & Farchi, 2013). Self-dehumanisation can also occur when the self perpetrates a harmful act. When students played Mortal Kombat or Call of Duty 2 – both violent video games in which their avatars perpetrate and are the recipi-ents of violence – they rated themselves as being more animalistic and machinistic (Bastian, Jetten & Radke, 2012). These effects were not accounted for by global self-esteem or changes in mood, suggesting that violence directly affects how we perceive

our internal, mental life. In addition to outright brutality, isolation can also lead to self-dehumanisation. When participants recalled a time when they were socially excluded or played a socially excluding game, they rated themselves as more lacking in human attributes (Bastian & Haslam, 2010).

These results suggest that although we should be motivated to believe that we are human beings with thriving mental and cognitive life, there are circumstances under which we may reduce that perception. It is important to note, however, that any motivation to reduce mental inferences may not be conscious. For example, motivated reasoning is not conscious, but equally serves some kind of goal attainment (Kunda, 1990).

Differences between other- and self-dehumanisation

So far, we have categorised dehumanisation into self and other. However, we should note that the two phenomena are not mutually exclusive and can co-occur (e.g., Bastian et al., 2012; Loughnan et al., 2015). When someone commits a harmful act, he can accept that he is a bad person for behaving badly, or he can rationalise his behaviour in order to maintain the belief that he is a good person. If he rationalises his behaviour, he subsequently has two choices. In the first choice, he can reduce the inference of the victim's humanity. If he did a harmful act to a mindless machine or animal, the act is considered less contemptible and therefore less bad. In the second choice, he can reduce the inference of his own humanity. If he is animal-like or machine-like to begin with, he cannot be considered as culpable for the behaviour and is therefore less bad. Like the protagonist in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, an actor can choose to engage in both, or perhaps choose between other-dehumanisation and self-dehumanisation. What might determine her choice?

Other-dehumanisation is different from self-dehumanisation. The desire to dehumanise or objectify others can stem from a host of factors, such as negative emotions like disgust and contempt that the other evokes (Harris & Fiske, 2006; 2009), an expectation that the other will demand financial or emotional resources (Cameron & Payne, 2011; Cameron, Harris, & Payne, 2014), to justify a harm

that was committed against the other or members of that other's group (Bar-Tal, 2005; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Opotow, 1990), or simply because they are unlike us (Haslam, 2006; Leyens et al., 2001, 2003). On the other hand, since individuals are motivated to maintain a positive sense of self (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Williams & Gilovich, 2008), self-dehumanisation may occur when it is difficult to rationalize away or justify one's harmful behaviour (Bandura, 1999). Thinking of the self like a machine or animal in relation to a specific bad behaviour reduces culpability, thus preserving a general positive view of the self. Though one may argue that a positive sense of self drives some of the causes of other-dehumanisation like post-hoc harm justification, it certainly does not motivate them all. This motivational difference between other- and self-dehumanisation could thus be reflected in separate factors that might give rise to these two phenomena.

Comparing other- to self-dehumanisation is important for theoretical and practical reasons. Firstly, to date there has been no research demonstrating what drives self- versus other-dehumanisation, and the circumstances influencing each. Secondly, this will build upon the existing research on self-dehumanisation. In the studies on self-dehumanisation reviewed above, all the participants suffered harmful acts; here we investigate self-dehumanisation when people commit harmful acts. Importantly, the link between the two impacts how we understand and provide support to targets of dehumanisation – someone who strips herself of mental life may perceive and react to the world differently than someone who is stripped of mental life.

Violation construal

When someone perpetrates a dehumanising act, both the self and the victim can be candidates for dehumanisation. In the studies reviewed previously, elements of mistreatment, harm and moral emotions are present. Since morality is a common thread in accounts of both self- and other-dehumanisation, the construal of the violation could determine whether someone dehumanises the other versus the self. We term this differentiation "violation

construal"[2]. Specifically, the violation or transgression can be framed as a violation of morals or a violation of values, which we explain in more detail below.

Morals vs. values. Extant research across different fields, such as Psychology, Neuroscience, Sociology, Business and Management, Communications and Education, fuses morals and values to investigate "moral values" (e.g., Bovasso, Jacobs & Rettig, 1991; Jiang, Lin, & Lin, 2011; Lewis, Kanai, Bates, & Rees, 2012; Marvell, 1974; Pagliaro, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2011; Pantic & Wubbels, 2012; Prasad et al., 2009; Schnall & Roper, 2012). The concept of values does overlap with the concept of morals. Both are about codes of conduct to which individuals may refer to guide and motivate their daily behaviours. Morals also arguably subsume values, since someone's morals should also be their values. Importantly, however, morals and values are not merely conventions that people generally hold. For example, not everyone generally believes that seeking excitement (a stimulation value; Bardi & Schwartz, 2003) is important, and not everyone generally believes that one must be loyal to one's country (Graham et al., 2011).

Despite similarities, morals and values are distinct in important ways. Firstly, one could value something without necessarily moralising it. For instance, a person may value exercise, but someone who takes the elevator instead of the steps is not morally bad. Secondly, people can also adopt (embrace) or adapt (bend) values because of socialization or life circumstances (Schwartz, 2009). In contrast, adults and children view morals as objective facts about the world (Goodwin & Darley, 2008; Wainryb, Shaw, Langley, Cottam, & Lewis, 2004). Lastly, even though people place high importance on both their morals and values, they prioritize the values they hold (especially when they conflict, such as openness to change versus tradition, Schwartz, 2003, 2009). Due to potential conflicts and prioritization, values are thus up for trade-offs (Schwartz, 2009; Rokeach & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). Morals, on the other hand, may be prohibited from trade-offs (Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000)

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2. Although we call this "violation construal", we differentiate it from construal theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010), which is related to psychological distance.

and used as a yardstick to determine whether a justice process was fair or not (rather than judging the process in and of itself, Mullen & Skitka, 2006). Thus, given these differences, one way to frame the distinction between the two concepts is in terms of flexibility – morals are less flexible than values. Separating morals from values can inform us of what leads people to dehumanise the self versus the other – the flexibility inherent in value violations may not be suitable for self-dehumanisation due to the self-enhancing motive driving this perception. However, violating rigid morals may require self-dehumanisation.

In our work, we operationalise a moral violation as an act that is considered objectively wrong. When people refer to a moral violation, they will generally agree that the act is wrong. This definition is compatible with previous work showing that laypeople conceptualise morality as inflexible and objective (Goodwin & Darley, 2008), especially when the act is negatively valenced (Goodwin & Darley, 2012). To be immoral means doing something objectively wrong, and by viewing morals as more objective, there is less latitude and flexibility for what is right or wrong. Whereas folk perceptions of morals are inflexible and objective, folk perceptions of values are flexible and subjective, and any act that violates a person's value system will be seen as less severe and less objectively wrong. Hence, we operationalise a value violation as an act that is considered subjectively wrong – it defies a specific person's beliefs, regardless of whether the belief is widely held or not.

Self- versus other-focus

One can imagine that by focusing on the self, the perpetrator will have to reconcile his humanity with his act. This possibility is supported by work on cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962). Since individuals desire to see themselves as good, moral beings (e.g., Sedikides, Meek, Alicke, & Taylor, 2013), immoral behaviour creates a conflict with this perception that must be resolved. To do so, they may dehumanise themselves. However, if an action contradicts their values, they may modify those values so that they are consistent with the action. When focusing on the other, however, the victim's mind is brought to the foreground, and the salience of this mind may lead to dehumanisation of the victim.

Alternatively, one can imagine that by focusing on the self, the perpetrator neglects the perspective of the victim and thus believes what he did was justified. Research by moral psychologists supports this alternative possibility. In Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983), what is good in self-focused stages is whatever satisfies personal needs. In the externally focused stages, what others want and desire are taken into account in order to determine whether an act is good or bad. Relatedly, the moral disengagement model (Bandura, 1999) also posits that unethical behaviours are associated with a lack of empathy. Supporting these models, research has shown that in organisations, individuals who become self-focused through increased power are more likely to ignore unethical social influences (Pitesa & Thau, 2013), while empathy reduces unethical decision making (Detert, Trevino, & Sweitzer, 2008).

The literature, however, does not directly compare self- versus other-focus despite these contradicting predictions and despite its importance on how people respond in moral situations. Furthermore, highlighting the victim or not can affect the influence of violation construal on self- versus other-dehumanisation. For example, employing the moral disengagement model, a focus on the other can lead to increased empathy (the empathy hypothesis), which can weaken the influence of construal on target dehumanisation. It will therefore be informative to see whether spotlighting the agent (self) or victim (other) matters for dehumanisation, and importantly, to investigate how focus may change the relationship between violation construal and self- versus other-dehumanisation.

Hypotheses

Two-way interaction. We predict a significant a two-way interaction (*violation construal x target of rating*). Within the value violation condition, we expect more dehumanisation when rating the other (compared to the self). Since values are flexible, they may more readily allow reinterpretation of harmful actions as less bad because the victim deserved it. Harming non-humans does not make the actor a bad person, and this belief subsequently encourages dehumanisation of the other.

In contrast, within the moral violation condition, we expect more dehumanisation when rating the self (compared to the other). Since morals are perceived to be inflexible, limited avenues are available to re-interpret bad behaviour. One way to do so is to make the bad behaviour consistent with a negative sense of self, so that an individual dehumanises the self more after committing a moral violation.

Three-way interaction. Given the divergent predictions of focus discussed above, we leave open how focus will moderate the relationship between violation construal and target on dehumanisation.

Although we predict two-way and three-way interactions, we still include main effects in the results section.

Overview of studies

In the first set of pilot studies, we assessed lay construals of morals and values. In the main study, we manipulated construal of an action as a moral or value violation, and whether the focus is on the self or the victim, and we measured dehumanisation of the self or the other.

Pilot 1a

Why might people dehumanise the self when thinking about morals, but dehumanise the other more after thinking about values? We hypothesised that morals could be thought of as more rigid than values. Nonetheless, there could be several other lay conceptual differences between morals and values that require examination. Firstly, people may feel freer to choose values than morals, in that when presented with multiple options, they have the opportunity to pick which they choose to follow. Secondly, values could be more easily adoptable than morals, in which people can more readily accept values than morals. Thirdly, morals could be more integral to a person's identity. Lastly, people may perceive morals as imposed upon people, whereas values are not.

Method

In a within-subjects design, 43 participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (30% female; age $M = 34.02$, $SD = 12.49$) completed the study. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with the following ten statements (five about morals, five about values) on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale: "To what extent are people free to choose their morals (values)?", "To what extent are morals (values) imposed upon people?", "To what extent are morals (values) flexible?", "To what extent can morals (values) be adopted?", "To what extent are morals (values) integral to a person's identity?" We counterbalanced the order in which participants saw the morals or values questions first.

Results

Consistent with our predictions, we found that participants viewed morals ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.54$) as less *flexible* than values, $M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.34$, $t(42) = 4.38$, $p < .01$, Cohen's $d = 1.35$. There were no significant differences for the other pairs, all $ts(42) < 1.20$, all $ps > .20$.

Pilot 1b

In the second pilot study, we replicate and confirm that participants indeed view values as more flexible than morals.

Method

Employing a within-subjects design again and counterbalancing whether participants saw questions about morals or values first, 42 participants (45% female; age $M = 32.57$, $SD = 10.16$) from Amazon Mechanical Turk were asked to rate the following two statements: "To what extent are morals (values) easily changeable?" and "To what extent are morals (values) flexible?" They were paid $0.50 to complete the study.

Results

We averaged the two items to form a composite since the two items correlated highly with each other (r = .78 and .77 for values and morals respectively).

Using a paired samples t-test, we found that morals (M = 3.29, SD = 1.46) were considered less flexible than values, M = 3.82, SD = 1.41, $t(41)$ = 4.22, p < .01, Cohen's d = 1.30. These results replicated those of Pilot 1a and provide further support for our conjecture that morals are considered more rigid than values.

Principal study

After having confirmed that participants did indeed see values as more flexible than morals in the second pilot study, we asked participants to recall either a moral or value violation at work and measured the extent to which they dehumanised themselves versus the victim.

Method

Participants. We recruited 252 United States participants (52% female; age M = 31.09, SD = 10.78) from Amazon Mechanical Turk. Sample size was determined as follows: As Cohen (1988) noted, a small effect size d is about .25 to .30, while a medium effect size is around .50. To be conservative, we used a small effect size to calculate the sample size needed to sufficiently power our study. Using the program G-Power, with 8 groups and a numerator degree of freedom 1, we needed at least 147 participants to detect an effect size of .30 and at least 210 participants to detect an effect size of .25. Participants were compensated $0.50 for completing the study.

Materials

Violation recall prompts. These prompts were used to prime thoughts of either a moral violation or a value violation:

Please think back to a time at work when you did something [*that you might consider to conflict with your beliefs or*

values/that you thought was wrong or immoral] to someone else at work. For example, you might have had to downsize and layoff workers, taken credit for somebody else's work when you shouldn't have, required employees to work longer hours, [*or made other trade-offs and sacrifices that negatively affected other people/or made other trade-offs that you thought were wrong*]. Please describe what happened.

Focus prompts. These prompts were used to manipulate participants' focus on themselves or about the person they harmed:

If you interacted with someone, what was the interaction like and how did [you/the other person] feel? [What were the thoughts going through your/What do you think were the thoughts going through the other person's] mind at the time?

Human nature and uniqueness scale. This scale measures the extent to which a person dehumanises a target (from Bastian et al., 2012). Since we were interested in dehumanisation after harmful acts, we adapted the scale from past to present tense. Sample items include, "I feel like I am open-minded, like I can think clearly about things" (reverse coded) and "I felt like I lacked self-restraint, like an animal". The scale was anchored from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much).

Procedure

We employed a 2 (construal; moral/value) x 2 (target of focus; self/other) between-subjects study design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. They first wrote about the violation type construed as either a moral or value violation. Next, to manipulate target of focus, they were asked to describe how they felt or the victim felt. Finally, participants rated either their own human nature and uniqueness or the victim's human nature and uniqueness. In the latter case, we modified the items so that the pronouns referred to the victim rather than the participant.

Results

Seven participants said that they did not have such an interaction, three participants did not respond adequately to the prompts (e.g., writing only the target of the violation) and 24 did not follow instructions (e.g., writing about someone else's violation), resulting in 218 participants for analysis.

Dehumanisation

Given that the two subscales were highly correlated ($r = .53$, $p < .001$), we followed the procedures of Bastian et al. (2012) and analysed the data with all the items combined into one dehumanisation scale.

Main effects. There was a main effect of violation construal, where value violations ($M = 2.21$, $SD = .06$) induced more dehumanisation than did moral violations ($M = 2.02$, $SD = .06$), $F(1, 210) = 5.11$, $p = .03$, Cohen's $d = .31$. There was also a main effect of target, where people dehumanised the other ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .07$) more than they dehumanised the self ($M = 1.88$, $SD = .05$), $F(1, 210) = 33.53$ $p < .01$, Cohen's $d = .81$. The effect of focus was marginal, where focusing on the self ($M = 2.19$, $SD = .06$) resulted in more dehumanisation than focusing on the other ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .06$), $F(1,210) = 3.22$, $p = .07$, Cohen's $d = .24$.

Two-way interactions. Central to our hypotheses, the main effect of violation construal was qualified by a two-way interaction. Violation construal interacted with the target of rating, $F(1, 210) = 4.63$, $p = .03$, Cohen's $d = .29$ (Figure 1). Follow-up tests revealed that when rating the other, value construals ($M = 2.54$, $SD = .09$) increased other-dehumanisation compared to moral construals ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .10$), $F(1,214) = 7.80$, $p < .01$, but no such differences emerged in self-dehumanisation (Value $M = 1.88$, $SD = .07$; Moral $M = 1.87$, SD = .07), $F(1,214) < .01$, $p > .90$. There were no other significant two-way interactions – violation construal did not interact with focus, $F(1, 210) = 1.82$, $p = .18$, and focus did not interact with the target of rating, $F(1, 210) = 1.32$, $p = .25$.
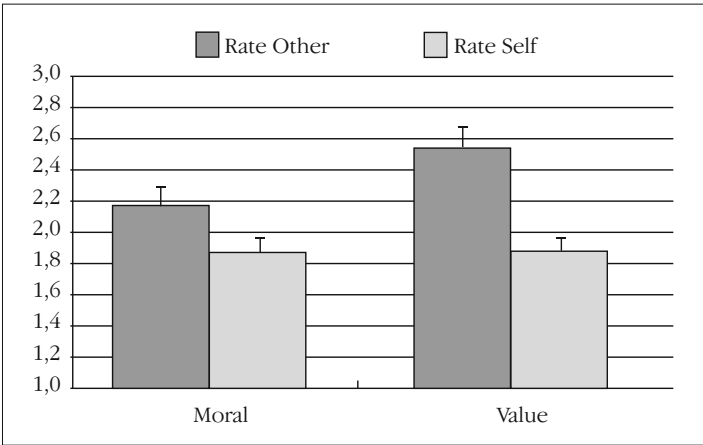
FIGURE 1:
The effect of violation construal on dehumanisation moderated by whether the participant rated the self or the other.

Three-way interaction. Contrary to our hypothesis, there was no three-way interaction, $F(1, 210) = 1.73$, $p = .19$ (Figure 2). The trending three-way interaction prompted us to examine the pattern of results. Simple effects tests revealed that when participants focused on the other, the interaction disappeared, $F(1,109) = .39$, $p > .50$, but the interaction remained significant when they focused on the self, $F(1,109) = 5.60$, $p = .02$. The difference between value construals and moral construals in other-dehumanisation became insignificant when focusing on the other, $F(1,109) = .68$, $p > .40$, but remained significant when focusing on the self, $F(1,101) = 26.64$, $p < .01$ (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2:
Construal x target interaction x focus on dehumanisation.

Content analysis

Given that people engaged in free recall, we had rich data and the opportunity to code for the content of the responses. This allowed us to see whether differences, other than the flexibility of the different types of violations (morals or values) emerged. It is possible that because values are more flexible and bendable, participants believed that there must have been more external pressure (coercion) in order to get the participant to violate a value. Additionally, because values are perceived to be more flexible, people may attribute their behaviour to more situational forces in value violations due to the variable nature of situations. Finally, since people were asked to recall violations in the workplace, we also wanted to know whether participants in the value condition might be more likely to recall firing someone. Recent news reports on the troubled and staggering economy indicate that laying someone off can be heavily due to forced circumstances (e.g., due to bad economy, downsizing, streamlining firm). If value violations induce thoughts of coercion, and firing someone is usually out of a person's control, then more people could recall firing somebody in the value violations prompt.

Two coders, blind to our hypotheses, coded our participants' recollections of moral and value violations for three pieces of information: whether the violation was described as coerced or not, whether the source of the violation was described as situational or dispositional, and whether the violation involved firing somebody. Out of the 218 participants whose results were analysed, two participants did not provide sufficient information for whether there was coercion or whether there was situational attribution involved. In the coercion category, the presence of coercion was coded as 1, while the absence of it was coded as 0. In the source category, a situational source of transgression was coded as 1, while a dispositional source was coded as 0. In the transgression type category, firing somebody was coded as 1, while other transgressions such as lying, cheating or stealing were coded as 0. Coders first independently coded the responses before meeting to resolve disagreements. Independently, they had an agreement rate of at least 90% for all three categories.

	Moral construal	Value construal	Number of observations
Coercion**	0.24	0.53	216
Situational attribution	0.94	0.96	216
Firing*	0.09	0.18	218

TABLE 1:
Proportion indicating coercion, firing someone, and situational attribution in responses, ** $p < .01$ and *$p < .05$.

We found three significant differences between the moral and value construals. Firstly, participants were more likely to use words that indicated coercion (e.g., "I had to lie", rather than "I lied") in value violations (53%) compared to moral violations (24%), $\chi^2(1,N=216) = 19.38, p < .01$, Cohen's $d = .55$ (Table 1). Secondly, participants writing about value violations (18%) were also more likely to write about firing someone compared to moral violations (9%), $\chi^2(1,N=218) = 3.45, p < .05$, Cohen's $d = .27$ (Table 1). There were no differences between the moral (94%) and value (96%) construal in whether the violation was attributed as situational or dispositional, $\chi^2(1,N=216) = .75$, $p > .25$ (Table 1).

Conclusion and discussion

Our studies showed that morals were perceived to be more inflexible than values, and construing an act as a value violation led to increased other-dehumanisation. Construal did not affect self-dehumanisation, however, and focusing on the self or other did not affect dehumanisation.

We found that construing a violation as value-based, compared to moral-based, led to increased other-dehumanisation. This finding supported our prediction. However, moral construal did not affect self-dehumanisation. The lack of movement in self-dehumanisation may be due to a floor effect. Successful self-dehumanisation manipulations were more involved, such as having participants play violent video games (Bastian et al., 2012). Since our manipulation was a recall prime, it may not have been strong enough to induce self-dehumanisation.

We also did not find a three-way interaction. From the results, the interaction between construal and target weakened when focusing on the other (vs. focusing on the self). Tests of simple effects showed that the previously significant difference between value and moral construal in other-dehumanisation became insignificant when focusing on the other, while the difference remained significant when focusing on the self. This direction of results would support the empathy hypothesis rather than the cognitive dissonance hypothesis. The lack of significant three-way interaction could be due to our subtle wording of the focus prime and to a mild recall prime, and so future research should see whether the pattern becomes significant if a stronger manipulation were used.

Additionally, there could be more meaningful differences between moral and value construals other than flexibility, as suggested by the results of our content analysis. For instance, compared to moral violations participants more frequently described their value violations using words related to coercion, even though there were no differences in situational attribution. This suggests it is not whether moral and value violations stem from different sources, but rather how they are interpreted – in that there is more perceived coercion involved in value violations. We did find that value violations prompted more responses related to firing someone. As we suggested before, if value violations induce thoughts of coercion, and firing someone is usually out of a person's control (e.g., due to bad economy, downsizing, superior's orders), it is reasonable to have observed that more people wrote about firing in the value violations prompt. In sum, there appears to be substantial differences between construing an act as a moral or value violation that merits further investigation in future studies.

Our findings should be interpreted in light of their limitations. Although we tried to control for the types of behaviours that people would recall by providing specific and identical examples for all conditions and merely changing how the violation is construed, the responses were free recall. This was advantageous in the sense that content analyses showed differences between morals and values could be more complex than flexibility, but

limited us by having less control over what people had in mind while giving their responses. That said, the recall prime is often used in the social psychological and organizational behaviour literatures, and show that recall primes and manipulations are robust (e.g., the power prime; Galinsky, Gruenfeld & Magee, 2003; Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008; Inesi, Botti, Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2011; Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012; Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012; Smith, Jostman, Galinsky, & van Dijk, 2008; Whitson et al., 2013) and are accepted manipulations in the fields. Future investigations could include manipulating construal of a behaviour, such as lying, as a moral or value transgression so that the behaviour itself is constant.

A possible alternative explanation of our effects is that the tense differences in the two construal conditions could have impacted dehumanisation. The value violations involved assessing the behaviour at the time of recall ("Please think back to a time at work when you did something that you might consider to conflict with your beliefs or values"), whereas moral violations involved assessing the behaviour at the time of violation ("Please think back to a time when you did something that you thought was wrong or immoral to someone else at work"). It is possible that using current standards to assess their violation increases other-dehumanization as a way to preserve current moral standing. Despite this difference, however, the alternative explanation cannot explain the interaction between the target and violation construal (where violation construal does not impact self-rating dehumanization, only for other-rating dehumanization).

Lastly, the dependent variables were self-reported. It would be informative to have a field study with behavioural outcomes, such as whether someone intervenes when a target of dehumanisation is in pain, or to have a physiological measure of dehumanisation.

In spite of the limitations, our results suggest theoretically another stage at which dehumanisation can occur. Previous work has shown that attributes about someone (e.g., gender, attire, social group, status, emotions evoked, as reviewed above) can induce dehumanisation and lead to harmful behaviour; however, we show that dehumanisation can occur long after a harmful act

has been committed. This is congruous with work by Bastian et al. (2012) showing that playing a violent video game may facilitate other-dehumanisation. We go two steps further though and show that while someone may imbue the victim with mental capacities before harming her, he may dehumanise her (1) even after a significant period of time (2) with a simple reminder of their harmful act. This is consistent with the notion of everyday dehumanisation (Lee & Harris, 2014).

In terms of social context, we showed that dehumanisation could occur in everyday contexts, which is consistent with previous work (Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, & Barrett, 2011; Harris & Fiske, 2009; Leyens et al., 2007; Puvia & Vaes, 2015; Waytz & Epley, 2012). These subtle harms can still have insidious effects, including undermining a person's status and identity (Bastian & Haslam, 2011) and endorsing other, more explicit harmful actions. In connection with related but separate work on mind perception, people may assuage their guilt after harming another person by perceiving them as relatively mindless (Waytz, Gray, Epley, & Wegner, 2010). In an age that increasingly embraces moral relativism, the moral/value construal can influence other-dehumanisation. When people are reminded of moral relativism – that people can hold different morals – they are more likely to subsequently engage in cheating or theft (Rai & Holyoak, 2013). In a similar fashion, if harmful acts are construed as values, which are considered more flexible and thus akin to moral relativism, then perhaps individuals will continue to perpetuate harm against others. Within the business realm, the context which we based our study, one can imagine that construing a harmful act, for example pilfering from a client, as value-based can lead to increasingly damaging behaviours, such as stealing or embezzling from other clients. In intergroup relations, construing usage of a racial epithet as value-based could lead to aggression against a group. In contrast, our findings suggest that construing the racial epithet as moral-based would lead to less dehumanisation, which could inhibit further acts of harm.

Both other- and self-dehumanisation lead to negative consequences, but could diverge in terms of the nature of such consequences. Other-dehumanisation could lead to aggression, since the external target of reduced mental inference is now less

than human. On the other hand, self-dehumanisation could lead to withdrawal, since the detrimental feelings could be directed inward. Veterans after combat, for example, often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and aggression towards others. It is possible that they way they construe their act could have an effect on such behaviours.

To conclude, small differences in construal between morals and values can have an impact on dehumanisation or objectification. Given that dehumanisation occurs cross-culturally (Bain, Park, Kwok, & Haslam, 2009; Loughnan et al., 2015) and can lead to alarming ramifications, more research should be conducted to further understand the circumstances under which an individual may be more or less likely to other-dehumanise and self-dehumanise.

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