

## SELF-DEHUMANIZING AS AN EFFECT OF ENDURING DISPOSITIONS POOR IN HUMANNESS

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to explore to what extent enduring individual variables, namely Machiavellianism and economic opportunism, are involved in self-dehumanization. Confirming our hypotheses, a first study ( $N = 109$ ) showed that Machiavellians (Machs) attribute more mechanistic, less human characteristics to the self. A second study ( $N = 150$ ) found that both high-Machs and high opportunists have a greater tendency to explicitly assume an overlap between their own selves and a machine, that is, to explicitly dehumanize the self and have a higher score in a self-dehumanization scale other than the one used in Study 1. Issues about the components of the personality structure of these organizations that imply self-dehumanization are discussed.

**Key words:** Human nature, Human uniqueness, Machiavellianism, Opportunism, Self-dehumanization

## INTRODUCTION

The denial of humanness to others is associated chiefly with intergroup processes (Haslam, 2006; Leyens et al., 2001; Leyens, Demoulin, Vaes, Gaunt, & Paladino, 2007). It is a discriminatory process aiming to justify moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999, 2002), moral exclusion (Opatow, 1990), and delegitimizing beliefs (Bar-Tal, 2000) towards outgroups. Psychological dispositions that can induce dehumanization of the self have received less attention in recent research. The present study focuses on the effects of Machiavellianism and economic opportunism on dehumanizing the self. This is a challenging issue that can highlight to what extent individual traits are involved in self-dehumanization processes, that is, to what extent these variables contaminate self-perception as regards humanness attributed to the self.

Do psychological dispositions exist that increase the tendency to perceive human beings in a dehumanizing way? Opatow (1990) argues that non-connectedness to others is one such factor able to trigger destructive attitudes including dehumanization. Haslam and Bain (2007) showed that abstract construals, as opposed to concrete ones, can constitute a cognitive base that encourages the occurrence of mechanistic dehumanization of others *via* the psychological distance and the cold-cognition judgment that they imply. Haslam (2006) also suggests that lack of empathy and empathy disorders described most frequently in terms of mechanistic dehumanization, such as lack of warmth and of emotional responsiveness should favor the tendency to attribute less human nature to others. In contrast, empathy is considered to be a prerequisite for preventing dehumanization (Halpern & Weinstein, 2004).

Although Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, and Bastian (2005) showed that privileged treatment is reserved for the self, because individuals attribute more human nature characteristics to themselves than to others, Bastian and Haslam (2010) showed that social ostracism has a self-dehumanizing effect on its victims; victims of ostracism feel less human and believe that the perpetrators of ostracism are both less human and less willing to attribute humanness to them. Therefore, in some circumstances, dehumanization can also be turned against one's own self. In a recent study, Bastian et al. (2013) showed that the perpetrators of ostracism also perceive themselves as less human and that self-dehumanization is mediated by the perceived immorality of their behaviour (see also Bastian & Crimston, 2014).

This paper aims to explore whether enduring, as opposed to contingent, dispositions of manipulative personalities lead to self-dehumanization; that is, if individuals who have manipulating dispositions attribute less human nature characteristics to the self. Machiavellians and opportunists are two kinds of defectors who prefer manipulating, non-cooperative strategies, and aim to achieve their goals

or maximize their gain at the expense of others. In fact, Machiavellians are cynical, “cold-blooded” individuals (McIllwain, 2003) who attribute negative intentions to others (Repacholi, Slaughter, Pritchard, & Gibbs, 2003), do not trust partners, and tend to maximize their economic gain at the expense of others by means of cheating (Sakalaki, Richardson, & Thépaut, 2007). Moreover, Machiavellianism is negatively correlated with empathy (Barnett & Thompson, 1985; Gurtman, 1992; Watson et al., 1994) and with helping others in emergencies (Wolfson, 1981). High-Machs are emotionally cold and mainly motivated by the outcomes of their actions (Cooper & Peterson, 1980). A grandiose sense of self-worth (Watson et al., 1994) and narcissism (McHoskey, 1995) are positively associated with Machiavellianism. Gurtman (1992) showed that the main interpersonal problems of Machiavellians are an excessive tendency to take revenge and excessive striving for competition with others even when the situation does not call for it, which suggests that Machiavellians are hostile towards others. Christie (1970) refers to data relevant to this point: the Mach IV scale (Christie & Geis, 1970) has a positive correlation with hostility and with negative view and ratings of others.

Economic opportunists are individuals who attempt to promote their personal economic interests by means of deceit and treachery (Williamson, 1985). They are distinct from Machiavellians in that their strategies apply chiefly to economic behaviour, but present certain affinities with them. Opportunism has been shown to be positively correlated with Machiavellianism (Sakalaki, Richardson, et al., 2007), with individualism (Sakalaki, Kazi, & Karamanoli, 2007), and with defecting behaviour in game situations, as well as with pro-self social value orientation and narcissism (Sakalaki & Sotiriou, 2012). Opportunists have lower perceived self-efficacy, fewer positive emotions and less optimism (Karamanoli, Fousiani, & Sakalaki, 2014). Opportunism has been found to be negatively correlated with autonomy, agreeableness and well-being (Sakalaki & Fousiani, 2012a). Like Machiavellians (Dugatkin & Wilson 1991; Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996), opportunists have a preference for loose and unstable relations with others (Sakalaki & Fousiani, 2008; Sakalaki & Fousiani, 2012b) and an external locus of control (Sakalaki, Kanellaki, & Richardson, 2009). Finally, a study on social representations of significant moral concepts such as sincerity and revenge, showed that cooperators had a greater propensity to either associate negative evaluation with their own responses concerning the stimulus word “revenge” or to omit evaluations, whereas they more often associated a positive value to the stimulus word “sincerity”. In contrast, high Machs associated more often a positive value with “revenge” and a neutral value with “sincerity”, while high opportunists more often omitted evaluations for both “revenge” and “sincerity” (Sakalaki, Kyriakopoulos, & Kanellaki, 2010).

Our interest in focusing on these defectors lies in the fact that they share some dispositional specificities that are incompatible with characteristics generally attributed to human nature, namely, lack of warmth and empathy as well as cynicism, pro-self orientation, hostility towards others, immoral behavior, and loose, unstable relationships with others. We wished to explore whether the above traits are conveyed by individuals to less human nature attributed to the self.

### ***The concepts of mechanistic and animalistic dehumanization***

Recent literature distinguishes between two senses of humanness that refer to distinct kinds of characteristics (Haslam, 2006). *Human nature (HN) characteristics* separate humans from lifeless objects, machines and automata, whereas *uniquely human (UH) characteristics* distinguish humans from animals. Two corresponding forms of dehumanization arise, according to what kind of characteristics are being denied to others: a) *animalistic dehumanization* operates through the denial to others of UH characteristics; and b) *mechanistic dehumanization* through denying HN characteristics to others. Recently, Wilson and Haslam (2012) demonstrated that people distinguish between species-unique and species-typical behaviors. They proposed an index of human-non-human behavior judgments, thus providing research on humanness with new instruments.

Haslam and colleagues' (2004, 2005) studies on HN characteristics led to a conceptualization of mechanistic dehumanization as a sum of characteristics that tend to represent others as objects or machines. Thus, according to Haslam's (2006) model, the components of mechanistic dehumanization are: a) inertness as opposed to emotional responsiveness; b) coldness versus interpersonal warmth; c) rigidity versus cognitive openness; d) passivity, fungibility versus agency, individuality; and e) superficiality versus depth.

With respect to animalistic dehumanization, most studies underline its modalities and functions in intergroup contexts. Infra-humanization theory (Leyens et al., 2000, 2007), focusing mainly on animalistic dehumanization and on intergroup processes, distinguishes two types of emotions, namely, non-uniquely human (non-UH) emotions (e.g., fear, joy, anger) and uniquely human (UH) ones (e.g., despair, optimism, remorse, regret; Demoulin et al., 2004). Individuals tend to attribute more UH emotions to their ingroup than to outgroups, but no such bias is observed for non-UH emotions (e.g., Leyens et al., 2001). It is noteworthy that the ingroup's characteristics are viewed as more human than those of outgroups (Paladino & Vaes, 2009). However, a recent study showed that women are more infra-humanized both by men and women (Svoli & Sakalaki, 2015). Furthermore, those outgroups perceived as hostile or threatening, as

well as outgroups that represent targets of the ingroup's aggression, are infra-humanized in order for the ingroup to be able to deny responsibility for harming the victim and to embark on moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999, 2002). According to Haslam's (2006) model, the UH characteristics which distinguish humans from animals include: civility as opposed to lack of culture; refinement as opposed to coarseness; moral sensibility versus amorality and lack of self-restraint; rationality and logic versus irrationality and instinct; maturity versus childlikeness.

### ***Aims of the study***

This investigation aimed to explore if personality organizations that present enduring characteristics poor in humanness, like Machiavellians and opportunists, attribute less human nature characteristics to the self.

The first study explored the hypothesis of a positive correlation between Machiavellianism measured by the Machiavellian Personality Scale (MPS; Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009) and a self-dehumanizing low-human nature, scale (Hypothesis 1). The second study aimed to establish whether the association between Machiavellianism and self-dehumanization is confirmed using measures different from those of Study 1 namely, the traditional Mach IV scale (Christie & Geis, 1970), the Adjusted Mechanistic Dehumanization of the Self Scale (AMDOSS; Moller & Deci, 2010) and Bastian et al.'s (2013) scale and whether this tendency extends to opportunists. It was expected that high-Machs and high-opportunists should both assume an overlap of their own self with a machine and have a greater propensity to perceive the self as less human, on both the human species and human uniqueness dimensions (Hypothesis 2).

We expected that the effect of perpetrators of ostracism's perceived immorality of their selves on self-dehumanizing, observed by Bastian et al. (2013), will generalize to individuals who have enduring dispositions of non-cooperativeness and hostility towards others.

## **METHOD**

### ***Study 1***

#### ***Pilot Study***

A *Low Human Nature Traits Scale* (LHNS), adapted to the representations of human nature within Greek society, was developed. A pilot study, including 31 Greek/Cypriot undergraduate students aged 18-22 years old was conducted. Participants were

presented with 15 traits inspired by the species-typical dehumanization (HN) literature (see Haslam, 2006) and were asked to rate them as high human nature traits versus low human nature or machine-like traits (HN; 1 = low human nature, 9 = high human nature). The five traits with the lowest scores for HN –namely, superficial, cold, unfeeling, hard-hearted and indifferent –constitute the LHNS. A pilot study with a sample of 134 participants showed a negative correlation ( $r = -.38, p = .01$ ) between the five-trait LHNS and a scale measuring high human nature traits which included items like warmth, agency, and openness (see Bastian & Haslam, 2010; Haslam, 2006).

## **Main Study**

### *Method*

*Participants.* One hundred and nine individuals, including 64 females and 42 males (3 participants did not report their gender) aged 18-60 years old took part in this study. Participants answered individually and anonymously the following questionnaires.

*Measures.* Participants first answered the LHNS. They were asked to what degree they consider that they themselves possess each of the traits composing this scale (1 = not at all 9 = very much).

Next, they answered the 16-item Machiavellian Personality Scale (MPS) introduced by Dahling, Whitaker, and Levy (2009), who provided evidence for its convergent, divergent and criterion-related validity. It covers four domains: distrust of others (e.g., “I dislike committing to groups because I don’t trust others”), engagement in amoral manipulation (e.g., “I believe that lying is necessary to maintain a competitive advantage over others”), desire for control over others (e.g., “I enjoy having control over other people”), and desire for status for oneself (e.g., “Status is a good sign of success in life”). Respondents rated each item on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The total score of the items provides a score of Machiavellian personality with higher scores indicating higher Machiavellian personality.

*Results.* The internal consistency of the scales was satisfactory. Cronbach’s alphas were .80 for the MPS and .74 for the LHNS, respectively. Confirming our first hypothesis, results showed that Machiavellians had a greater propensity to attribute more mechanistic, less human traits (coldness, indifference, lack of depth, etc.) to the self,  $r = .27, p < .01$ .

## **Study 2**

### *Method*

*Participants.* The sample comprised 150 participants (52 males and 98 females). Of the total sample, 51.3% were 18 to 25 years old; 21.3% were 26 to 34 years; 13.3% were 35 to 44 years; 10.7% were 45 to 60 years; and 3.3% were 60 years or older. In addition, 63.5% had a high school level education; 30.4% had a technical or university education; 4.4% had a post-graduate level education; and the remaining 1.4% had an education at the gymnasium (junior high school) level.

*Materials.* The study included the following four scales:

*Machiavellianism.* In order to confirm the association between Machiavellianism and self-dehumanizing, we used a different measure of Machiavellianism from Study 1. Participants completed the traditional Mach IV scale (Christie & Geis, 1970) which consists of 20 items (e.g., “Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble”, “Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so”, “It is wise to flatter important people”). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Half of the items were worded in the positive direction and their scoring was reversed. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale in the present study was .76.

*Economic opportunism.* Respondents completed a shortened 10-item version of the Economic Opportunism Scale (EOS; for the 20-item version, see Sakalaki & Fousiani, 2012a). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha for the scale in this study was .69.

*Dehumanization of the self scales.* Participants evaluated themselves as being characterized by human nature or uniquely human traits, or as being deprived of such traits, by completing the adjusted dehumanization scale by Bastian et al. (2013), in which traits are rated on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely so*). Bastian and Haslam’s (2010) original dehumanization scale included eight statements assessing the denial of human nature and denial of human uniqueness of a person presented in a vignette. In this study the scale was adjusted in order to assess denial of human nature (four items: “I feel I am open-minded, I can think clearly about

things” [reversed], “I feel I am emotional, I am responsive and warm” [reversed], “I feel I am superficial, I have no depth”, “I feel I am mechanical and cold, like a robot”) and denial of human uniqueness of the participants (four items: “I feel I am refined and cultured” [reversed], “I feel I am rational and logical, I am intelligent” [reversed], “I feel I lack self-restraint, like an animal”, “I feel I am unsophisticated”). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for the scale in this study was .65.

Mechanistic dehumanization of the self was also assessed by the *Adjusted Mechanistic Dehumanization of the Self Scale* (AMDOSS) developed by Moller and Deci (2010). This scale was inspired by the Inclusion of Other in Self scale (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997). This single-item 6-point scale consists of six pairs of circles representing different degrees of overlap. The first circle represents “me” and the second circle represents “machines”. Individuals are asked to what degree they estimate that they are or function as machines, by choosing between one of the 6 couples of circles: Higher scores, corresponding to a greater overlap between the two circles representing “me” and “machines” and therefore a greater identification with a machine, indicate greater mechanistic dehumanization of the self.

### Results

In confirmation of Hypothesis 2, both Machiavellianism and opportunism scores correlated positively with the AMDOSS score,  $r = .220$ ,  $p = .007$  and  $r = .266$ ,  $p = .001$ , respectively, showing that both kinds of defectors have a greater propensity to perceive themselves as machines. Machiavellianism and opportunism also correlated positively with Bastian et al.’s self-dehumanizing scale,  $r = .186$ ,  $p = .023$  and  $r = .201$ ,  $p = .01$ , respectively.

## CONCLUSION – DISCUSSION

In confirmation of Hypothesis 1, Study 1 showed that Machiavellians attributed less human, more mechanistic traits to the self. In confirmation of Hypothesis 2, Study 2 showed that Machiavellians and opportunists both have a greater tendency to perceive themselves as machines and to dehumanize the self, both on Bastian et al.’s (2013) scale and AMDOSS (Moller & Deci, 2010). Therefore, the self-dehumanizing effect of Machiavellianism extends to opportunism.

These findings raise questions about components of the personality structure of these organizations of the self that should receive more attention in future research.



For instance, it can be argued that perceiving the self as less human interacts with the distant and indifferent attitudes towards others that enable or mediate a cynical, manipulative and exploitative behaviour, exempt from culpability or remorse. In other words, it can be hypothesised that the mechanistic dehumanization of the self may partly mediate the hostile and cynical behaviour that these defectors reserve for others. This hypothesis is consistent with Moller and Deci's (2010) work which showed that mechanistic dehumanization of the self acts as a mediating variable that explains the positive correlation between control orientation and hostility towards others. Like cynicism –which is a component of Machiavellian personality (Gunnthorsdottir, McCabe, & Smith, 2002)– dehumanizing the self can affect social behaviour, by establishing a more distant and cold relationship to others which allows for morally disengaged social behaviour. In return, manipulators should be conscious of the immorality of their behaviour and, as shown by Bastian et al. (2013), the perception of their own immoral behaviour should itself have a self-dehumanizing effect. Future research should explore experimentally whether dehumanization of the self determines manipulators' morally disengaged social behaviour, and also whether one's own perceived immorality determines Machiavellians' and opportunists' self-dehumanization.

The findings of this investigation suggest that manipulative personalities perceive themselves as less human, more machine-like. Therefore, when people act in cold-hearted, exploitative, manipulative ways, they attribute less humanity to the self and tend to perceive themselves as machine- or object-like. Attributing less humanness to the self underlines that personalities of this kind are aware of their dispositions poor in humanness. However, self-awareness of one's own self being less human does not necessarily inhibit the manipulative tendencies of those defectors. On the contrary, it can favor distance and moral disengagement that enhance their exploitative dispositions. Future studies should explore the effects of dispositional specificities poor in humanness on the mental health and psychological well-being of both manipulators and their victims.

The processes of self-dehumanization demand further exploration within the situational, political and socio-economic context of the current economic crisis in Greece and Europe which has occasioned a fragmentation of humans, institutions and social bonds, and has led to a resurgence in public discourse of “cold cognition” and economic rationality inspired mainly by the dominant economic models known to contribute to dehumanization processes (Haslam, 2006). The further examination of the attribution of humanness to the self may highlight a dimension of self-perception with significant effects at inter-individual, inter-group and intra-individual levels.

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