From the Intergroup to the Interpersonal:
Dehumanization Within Close and Intimate Relationships.

by

Bengianni Pizzirani
BPsych (Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University
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Abstract

Despite the recent emergence of research into interpersonal dehumanization (i.e., the denial of humanness), there has been little by way of empirical investigation of the phenomenon within the context of close relationships. To address this, the current dissertation aimed to investigate the manifestation and associated outcomes of dehumanization that occurs in intimate relationships. The dissertation comprises of three papers. Paper 1 describes a theoretical model in which dehumanization is defined as the underlying cause of hurt feelings. This paper provides the first detailed account of how dehumanization may manifest in close and intimate relationships; highlighting how the phenomenon may be associated with a wide range of relationship experiences and processes. Paper 2 reports on the development and psychometric evaluation of a dehumanization measure across three studies. In addition, Paper 2 identifies a novel factor structure that challenges existing conceptualizations of dehumanization. Paper 2 also provides the first empirical evidence linking dehumanization to the negative relationship behaviors theorized in Paper 1, including intimate partner abuse. Building on the findings between dehumanization and abuse reported in Paper 2, the final paper reports on a longitudinal investigation regarding changes in dehumanization perpetration predicting changes in emotional and physical abuse over time. Importantly, Paper 3 provides the first empirical evidence that dehumanization may be an impelling factor in the maltreatment and abuse of others. Together, these papers make a significant and novel contribution to the study of dehumanization and close personal relationships.
To my Parents and Braj.
Acknowledgments

I want to thank my supervisor Gery Karantzas for his guidance, patience, unwavering support, insightful comments (and hard questions!), immense knowledge, and calm, reassuring manner. You have made this journey an incredibly smooth and enjoyable experience, always allowing me room to work in my own way—and have taught me more than I could ever give you credit for here. I look forward to continuing this line of research together.

Thank you to the other members of the Science of Adult Relationships Lab with whom I have had the pleasure to work with—in particular—Ellie Mullins, Sue Chesterman and James Aloni for their friendship and wonderful collaboration. I would also like to thank Renee O’Donnell for her comradery and sympathetic ear; you made the past few years all the more productive and fun!

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Publications


Submitted (received a revise and resubmit request from editor) to Personality and Social Psychology Review.

Paper 2. The Development and Validation of a Dehumanization Measure Within Romantic Relationships.

Submitted to Frontiers in Psychology.

Paper 3. Dehumanization and Intimate Partner Abuse.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

This dissertation explores dehumanization and its effects within the context of close and intimate relationships. Put simply, dehumanization refers to the perception or treatment of another person as lacking human qualities (Bain, Vaes & Leyens, 2014; Haslam, 2006, 2014, 2015; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). While dehumanization has generally been understood to be an extreme phenomenon, observed in conditions of moral atrocity and intense conflict (e.g., the Jewish Holocaust or the Boko Haram violence in Nigeria), recent developments in the field have recognized that dehumanization can take the form of more commonplace behaviors (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011; Haslam, 2006; Leyens et al., 2001).

Nevertheless, no research has investigated dehumanization within the context of intimate or close relationships (such as people’s romantic relationships). Thus, our understanding to date regarding dehumanization is largely confined to the intergroup literature and social psychology more generally.

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to investigate dehumanization within the context of close and intimate relationships. In particular, this body of work endeavored to advance the current understanding of dehumanization by applying this largely intergroup theory to the interpersonal context—specifically the realm of romantic relationships. This includes how dehumanization may manifest within interpersonal contexts, its association with other negative relationship processes (e.g., partner maltreatment and emotional and physical abuse) and outcomes (e.g., relationship quality) and how these associations may vary across both target and perpetrator perspectives of dehumanization. Specifically, this dissertation includes three papers that deal with the theoretical and conceptual advancement of dehumanization within intimate relationships (Papers 1 and 2), measurement development and validation of dehumanization within this context (Paper 2), and applied research investigating the longitudinal association between dehumanization and intimate partner abuse.
(Paper 3). These three papers—and the structure of this dissertation more generally—are briefly outlined in the subsequent paragraphs.

The first paper presented in this dissertation (Chapter 2) describes a theoretical model in which dehumanization is defined as the underlying cause of hurt feelings that stem from largely negative interpersonal interactions or experiences. Specifically, Paper 1 proposes that an interpersonal model of dehumanization provides a unifying framework that integrates all past explanations of hurt feelings (e.g., Feeney, 2004; Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell & Evans, 1998; Vangelisti, Young, Carpenter-Theune, & Alexander, 2005) and reconciles many of the differences across previous theories, models, and typologies of hurt. Not only does Paper 1 propose a completely novel perspective regarding the key underlying cause of hurt, but it is also the first theoretical attempt to integrate dehumanization—a largely studied intergroup phenomenon—explicitly within the study of close and intimate relationships.

Building on this application of dehumanization to the study of hurt feelings within interpersonal contexts, the second manuscript presented as part of this dissertation (Chapter 3) describes the development and validation of a dehumanization measure within romantic relationships across three studies. A major barrier in linking dehumanization to close or intimate relationships is that no psychometrically validated measure exists to assess dehumanization in such contexts. Therefore, Chapter 3 details the development of a new self-report measure that captures the full range and diversity of dehumanization that occurs within intimate relationships. In addition, Chapter 3 also provides a systematic conceptual and empirical examination of the dimensional structure of interpersonal dehumanization. In doing so, Paper 2 provides the field of close relationships with a psychometrically sound measure of dehumanization as well as a fine-grained conceptualization of the nature of interpersonal dehumanization. Furthermore, the Paper 2 provides some of the first empirical evidence linking dehumanization to intimate relationship processes and outcomes. Specifically, the
dimensions constituting the newly developed dehumanization measure were found to be positively associated with destructive communication patterns, negative partner behaviors such as hostility, insensitivity, interference (including care that was intrusive), as well as physical and emotional partner abuse.

Based on these findings from Paper 2—in which dehumanization was found to be associated with a wide range of aversive relationship behaviors, including intimate partner abuse—the final manuscript presented in this dissertation (Paper 3, Chapter 4) considers how changes in dehumanization perpetration predict changes in the perpetration of emotional and physical abuse. That is, the initial findings from Paper 2 demonstrated that dehumanization is indeed associated with relationship behaviors that constitute intimate partner maltreatment and support the long-held view that dehumanization may function as a predictor of violent, aggressive and abusive acts. Specifically, in Paper 3 Latent Growth Curve Modelling (LGCM) was used to model whether the trajectory of dehumanization across a six-week period predicted changes in the perpetration of abuse measured at baseline and two-months post. It was found that a cubic non-linear change in dehumanization perpetration (defined by a combination of decreases and acute upsurges) was positively associated with increases in both emotional and physical abuse. In addition, the findings from Paper 3 also speak to the labile nature of dehumanization affirming the theoretical assumption that the phenomenon may be best characterized as malleable over time.

Finally, Chapter 5 entails a general discussion of the papers constituting this dissertation. Specifically, the findings from the papers reported in the preceding chapters are summarized to draw broad and novel interpretations about the study of dehumanization within the context of close and intimate relationships. As part of Chapter 5, dissertation implications and future directions into the study of dehumanization in intimate relationships are also discussed.
CHAPTER 2: THE EXPERIENCE OF HURT;
A DEHUMANIZATION PERSPECTIVE

Dehumanization has been studied in relation to a diverse range of contexts and phenomena. These include: prejudice, racism and power (Kahn, Goff, McMahon, 2015), medical settings (Haque & Waytz, 2012), organizational settings (Andrighetto, Baldissarri & Volpato, 2016; Christoff, 2014), emotional domains (Buckels & Trapnell, 2013), as well as areas such as technology (Ferrari, Paladino & Jetten, 2016), economics (Harris, Lee, Capestany & Cohen, 2014), and language (Fasoli et al., 2016). Despite the extensive contexts and phenomena in which dehumanization has been studied, there is a dearth of research examining the concept within the context of close or intimate relationships. Nevertheless, numerous negative relationship behaviors and interactions studied within the context of close relationships parallel many of the prototypical features of dehumanization. Thus, dehumanization is likely to take place within the context of intimate relationships. Moreover, dehumanization perpetrated by those closest to us is likely to have a particularly negative impact. That is, we turn to our close relationships to meet our fundamental needs of love, comfort and security (see Gillath, Karantzas, & Fraley, 2016), to bolster our sense of competence and to support our personal goals (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Therefore, when those closest to us engage in dehumanizing behaviors, it stands to reason that we are likely to experience significant negative affect (Adams, 2014), and in particular, to experience hurt.

In this chapter, dehumanization is presented as the underlying cause of hurt feelings in close relationships. That is, dehumanization is argued to be the defining feature that causes people to feel hurt by others. This perspective helps to reconcile the different causes of hurt that have been proposed to date in the literature. In doing so, the dehumanization perspective on hurt feelings outlined in Paper 1 (reported in this chapter) provides researchers with an orienting framework from which to further advance the study of hurt feelings and
dehumanization within close relationships. Paper 1 also provides the first theoretical application of dehumanization to the study of close and intimate relationships. In doing so, paper 1 explicitly demonstrates the utility of integrating a dehumanization perspective to the study of close relationships.
The research article that follows is the author’s copy of a manuscript submitted to *Personality and Social Psychology Review*.


Figure 1 is included at the back the manuscript in accordance with journal submission requirements.
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bengianni Pizzirani</td>
<td>School of Psychology</td>
<td><a href="mailto:b.pizzirani@deakin.edu.au">b.pizzirani@deakin.edu.au</a></td>
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Bengianni (supervised by Gery Karantzazs) conceived of the original idea, developed the theoretical framework, and drafted the manuscript.

*I declare that the above is an accurate description of my contribution to this paper, and the contributions of other authors are as described below.*

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<td>Conceived of the original idea, developed the theoretical framework, and drafted the manuscript.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Signature Redacted by Library</td>
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<tr>
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Abstract

The study of hurt feelings has been approached from a variety of perspectives, all of which have proposed different causes for the experience of hurt. As a result, there remains considerable debate in the literature as to the cause of hurt. In this paper, we present a new perspective on hurt in which we propose that the underlying cause of hurt feelings is dehumanization (i.e., to be denied uniquely or fundamentally human qualities and therefore likened to animals or machines). As such, we demonstrate that the underlying cause of hurt feelings is not that a particular experience is perceived as negative, but because the experience is dehumanizing. Our dehumanization model of hurt presents researchers with a novel view of hurt feelings that re-conceptualizes and extends upon the contexts in which hurt is thought to occur—and in doing so—provides an integrative perspective for the study of hurt.

Keywords: Hurt, dehumanization, interpersonal relationships, maltreatment.
The Experience of Hurt:

A Dehumanization Perspective.

Over the last two decades, there has been an increasing focus on the study of hurt feelings, particularly within interpersonal contexts. Despite this, the explanations for why certain experiences cause one to feel hurt are many and varied. For instance, some scholars have argued that the key feature of all hurtful experiences is a perceived devaluation of the relationship between the individual that has been hurt and the person who hurt their feelings (Leary & Springer, 2001). In contrast, other researchers have suggested that the defining feature of a hurtful experience is that the act violates particular relationship norms or rules (i.e., the experience is hurtful because it is viewed as a relationship transgression, Vangelisti, 2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2001). More recently, researchers have proposed that for an experience to result in hurt feelings the experience must threaten or damage either an individual’s mental representations about close relationships (Feeney, 2005), future social connections (MacDonald, 2009), or sense of safety and security (Shaver, Mikulincer, Lavy, & Cassidy, 2009).

What is apparent across these different perspectives is that there is considerable debate as to the underlying cause of hurt feelings (i.e., what is the defining feature of hurtful experiences that cause people to feel hurt by others?). Currently, there is no broad conceptual framework that helps to reconcile the different causes of hurt that have been proposed. In this paper, we build on the perspectives briefly outlined above to suggest that there is indeed an underlying cause that cuts across these different perspectives and captures all forms of hurtful experiences within a single conceptual framework. Grounded in the literature on dehumanization (i.e., treating or perceiving someone as less than human, Haslam, 2006), we suggest that the cause of hurt feelings is that the target is dehumanized—specifically—the target is denied the fundamental or unique qualities that relate to being human. This includes
the denial of human qualities such as competency, intelligence, morality, warmth, openness to change, and the ability to express emotions (Haslam, 2006). In particular, this paper describes how dehumanization, a largely studied inter-group phenomenon, underlies hurtful experiences within interpersonal contexts.

We begin the paper by defining hurt feelings and the major perspectives that have attempted to capture the underlying cause of hurt. We then turn our focus to the concept of dehumanization, with particular attention given to Haslam’s (2006) Dual Model of Dehumanization. In doing so, we review the relevant empirical work that has applied dehumanization to the examination of interpersonal relationships and highlight important associations between dehumanization and hurt feelings. We then present our dehumanization model of hurt in which we describe how the hurtful experiences previously identified by researchers (e.g., Feeney, 2004; Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell & Evans, 1998; Vangelisti, Young, Carpenter-Theune, & Alexander, 2005) are in fact, dehumanizing. We also identify additional hurtful experiences¹ that we suggest elicit hurt feelings but are not readily accounted for by previous perspectives and conceptualizations as to the underlying cause of hurt. Ultimately, we aim to demonstrate that the application of our dehumanization model to the study of hurt feelings advances upon previous conceptualizations and perspectives in three ways. Firstly, our model can be applied to any interpersonal context in which hurt is experienced, irrespective of the degree of closeness shared between the person who is hurt and the perpetrator of the hurtful behavior. Secondly, our proposed model is able to account for experiences of hurt that vary in level of severity. Therefore, our model can be applied to the most minor through to the most severe of hurtful experiences. Thirdly, our model captures the full range of interpersonal experiences that may cause someone to feel hurt (e.g.,

¹The term ‘hurtful experience(s)’ is used to describe any interpersonal event or behavior enacted by another that is perceived by an individual to have hurt their feelings.
from being humiliated or treated with contempt and hostility, to being rejected or socially ostracized). We conclude the paper by discussing the implications of conceptualizing hurtful experiences within a dehumanization framework and future research within the domain of hurtful experiences.

**Hurt Feelings**

Hurt is broadly defined as the emotional injury, pain or distress caused by another (Leary & Springer, 2001; Vangelisti, 2009). Experiences of hurt feelings can range from slight discomfort in response to a perceived maltreatment from a colleague, to deep psychological pain and anguish in response to a loved one’s infidelity or betrayal (Fitness, 2001; Fitness & Warburton, 2009). Therefore, in some cases the consequences of hurt feelings can be minor (e.g., forgetting to attend a lunch engagement with a best friend), or regarded as so severe (e.g., a serious relationship transgression such as an extra-marital affair) that the hurt person may feel it is necessary to terminate their relationship with the person who has hurt them (Vangelisti et al., 2005). Importantly, the experience of hurt feelings does not occur in isolation, but is interpersonal in nature (Vangelisti, 2009). Indeed, experiences of hurt often involve close others, with research demonstrating that close friends, romantic or dating partners, and family members account for 81% of the perpetrators of hurtful incidents (Leary, et al., 1998).

While hurt may co-occur, or, is experienced or expressed alongside other emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, and shame, experiences of hurt feelings have distinct cognitive appraisals that yield different affective responses to the aforementioned emotions (Feeney, 2005; Fitness & Warburton, 2009; Leary & Springer, 2001; MacDonald, 2009). More specifically, being hurt by another has been found to have different cognitive appraisals than anger and sadness, such that hurt-eliciting events are appraised as more unexpected and difficult to understand (relative to anger- and sadness-eliciting events) and are strongly
associated with confusion and distress (Fitness & Wurburton, 2009). Furthermore, research by Leary and Springer (2001) has demonstrated that a wide variety of negative emotions do not fully account for the variance in hurt feelings. These findings suggest that hurt cannot be reduced to a combination of other emotions (Leary & Springer, 2001; MacDonald, 2009), but should be regarded as a unique emotional state.

Currently, there is debate (and considerable ambiguity) in the literature as to the underlying cause of hurt feelings. This is not to say that many of the present perspectives do not have theoretical and predictive utility in their own right. Each conceptualization makes important predictions about the conditions under which hurt feelings are experienced, or how a person may appraise an event that may then cause them to experience hurt feelings. Below, we provide a brief account of each of these perspectives—and in doing so—raise important questions around each conceptualization’s capacity to provide a sufficient explanation for the cause of hurt feelings. This section is followed by a shift in focus in which we suggest that the primary reason for why each perspective offers a different conceptualization for the underlying cause of hurt feelings, lies in the fact that no one perspective is able to capture the full spectrum of hurtful experiences. Rather, we argue that the underlying cause of hurt feelings is dehumanization, and subsequently propose a dehumanization model of hurt feelings that is able to capture the full spectrum of experiences that may be considered hurtful.

**Causes of hurt feelings.** According to the relationship evaluation hypothesis (Leary & Springer, 2001), hurt occurs when a person (i.e., the target) of another’s hurtful behavior perceives the perpetrator (i.e., the transgressor) does not value the relationship to the same degree as the target. According to this theory, the defining feature of hurt feelings is a

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2 We define the *target* as the individual who has experienced hurt feelings due to the behaviors of the perpetrator. We define the *perpetrator* as the individual who enacts the hurtful behavior in the first instance.
perceived *relational devaluation*. The target’s perception is that the perpetrator regards the relationship as less valuable, important or close than the target would like—and this is what causes hurt feelings (Leary & Springer, 2001). In contrast, other researchers (e.g., Vangelisti 2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2001) have proposed that the defining feature of all hurtful experiences is that the hurtful act violates particular relationship norms or rules and are thus deemed transgressions. According to this perspective, relational transgressions that evoke hurt feelings are also marked by a heightened sense of victimization and vulnerability in the target of the transgression (Feeney, 2005; Shaver, 2009; Vangelisti, 2009). Although it has been suggested that these perspectives are not inconsistent with one another (i.e., hurt feelings are often evoked by relational transgressions and those transgressions usually imply low relational evaluations, Vangelisti, 2009), we—along with Feeney (2005)—argue that there are also hurtful experiences that occur within interpersonal contexts that cannot be adequately accounted for by the relational devaluation or relational transgression perspectives.

For example, in regard to relational devaluations Feeney (2005) argues that there are a number of hurtful experiences within romantic relationships that cannot be explained by the relationship evaluation hypothesis (e.g., Leary & Springer, 2001). Specifically, Feeney argues that situations exist in which the hurtful behavior or event in fact signals that the perpetrator cares deeply about the target. Examples of such behaviors and events include a partner behaving in a jealous or distrusting manner (i.e., questioning a partner’s whereabouts) or acts of concealment that are intended to protect the partner (i.e., the target of hurt) or to maintain the relationship (e.g., withholding gossip). While such experiences may lead to hurt feelings (because the target feels that their partner does not trust them, or because the target is hurt by the fact that their partner would withhold information from them), the hurt did not result from a devaluation of the relationship. Rather, the experience of hurt may come about
because the perpetrator values the target and the relationship highly (Feeney, 2005). Feeney also challenged the role that relational transgressions (e.g., Vangelisti, 2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2001) play in the experience of hurt feelings. According to the transgression perspective, the perpetrator violates relationship norms or rules, which in turn, causes the target to feel hurt. According to Feeney, however, not all relationship transgressions cause hurt feelings, nor do all transgressions evoke a sense of personal and emotional injury resulting in hurt. For example, although respecting a partner’s privacy is one of the most important “rules” of marriage (Argyle & Henderson, 1985), Feeney argues that breaking such a rule is unlikely to be seen as hurtful because it would not elicit a sense of personal injury in the target.

Drawing on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002), Feeney (2005) extended on the relational devaluation and relational transgressions perspectives, suggesting that hurtful experiences (whether they be deemed as relational devaluations or relational transgressions) are only hurtful when they undermine or compromise the mental representations that a person holds about close relationships. According to attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), individuals harbor two complementary cognitive working models—a model of self (evaluations regarding one’s self-worth to receive love and comfort) and a model of others (evaluations regarding the reliability of significant others to meet needs of love, comfort and security, Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Gillath, Karantzas, & Fraley, 2016). According to Feeney, hurt is elicited only when relationship transgressions damage the positivity of these working models, such as a compromised belief that one is worthy of love, or that others are dependable sources of support. Based on Feeney’s perspective, therefore, hurt is associated with a sense of “personal injury” that involves damage to the target’s attachment internal working models.
In an alternative application of attachment theory to explain hurt feelings, Shaver et al. (2009) have proposed that rather than particular experiences compromising a person’s internal working models, hurtful experiences directly compromise (even destroy) a person’s fundamental and underlying sense of safety and security. That is, hurtful events compromise the primary goal of the attachment system—a feeling of felt security. However, this perspective does not account for experiences of hurt that do not threaten one’s attachment to others or sense of safety and security. That is, while we certainly do not disagree with the attachment-based perspectives of hurt feelings (Feeney, 2005; Shaver et al., 2009), there are often times when experiences of hurt are not the result of a threat or damage to a person’s attachment working models or sense of security.

For instance, consider a work situation in which an individual’s efforts on a task are met with not only harsh, but also disparaging criticism from a known work colleague but someone with whom the individual does not work with closely. Given that criticism suggests to another that on some level the target is defective or flawed (Gottman, 1999), it is not surprising that criticism is often the most commonly reported hurtful experience (Leary et al., 1998). Hence, due to a variety of reasons, being criticized is likely to cause the target of the criticism to feel hurt. These reasons may include: self-appraisal that their hard work was not good enough, that their efforts and time commitment went unnoticed, that they lack the capacity to complete the task effectively, or they were simply hurt by the disparaging and slanderous nature of the comments. This hurtful experience, however, is unlikely to damage the target’s attachment to others, their belief that they are worthy of love, or that others are dependable (because no attachment exists to the work colleague). Nor is this hurtful experience likely to threaten the target’s sense of safety and security. Hence, by limiting the explanation of hurt to an attachment-based conceptualization it becomes difficult to account for the hurt caused by a perpetrator that the target has no or minimal attachment to the target.
Indeed, although friends and romantic partners are often reported as the perpetrators of hurt, research by Leary et al. (1998) demonstrates that people also report being hurt by acquaintances and authority figures. We argue, therefore, that for a perspective to capture the full spectrum of hurtful experiences, it must be able to account for hurt feelings that are caused by perpetrators that the target does not have a strong connection to, or with. The attachment-based perspectives are geared towards explaining only the more severe or deep experiences of hurt, and thus by their very nature, are not equipped to account for the less severe and everyday experiences of hurt that—although do not “pierce one’s deep, visceral, generally unconscious sense of safety and security” (Shaver et al., 2009, pp. 99)—are nevertheless hurtful.

Finally, MacDonald (2009) offers yet another theoretical perspective of hurtful experiences, arguing that “social injury” is the primary cause of hurt. Much like Feeney’s (2005) description of positive working models of others, social injury is defined as threats or damage to beliefs about one’s potential for seeking social connection (whether this be concerns about rejection and ostracism, or the availability of future social support, MacDonald, 2009). According to MacDonald, hurt is a form of social pain that arises in response to threats to, or losses of, social connection. This perspective is framed largely within the context of social exclusion, rejection and ostracism research in which threats to social connection may stimulate painful feelings (i.e., social pain) via some of the same physiological mechanisms activated by physical injury (e.g., Chen, Williams, Fitness, & Newton, 2008; Eisenberger, Jarcho, Lieberman, & Naliboff, 2006).

According to MacDonald (2009), hurt only arises when events or behaviors carry messages relevant to one’s prospects of seeking or receiving social support or connection in the future. However, as argued above in regard to the attachment-based perspectives of hurt (i.e., Feeney, 2005; Shaver et al., 2009), this view does not account for hurtful experiences
that do not threaten or sever one’s connection to others, and in particular, the future availability of social support. That is, not all hurtful experiences involve threats to, or damage of, an individual’s future social connections. For example, although being treated instrumentally (e.g., being treated as a means to an end, used, or taken for granted, Leary et al., 1998) is often reported to be a hurtful experience, the behavior itself suggests that the target is needed or required in some manner because they may be utilized for a particular purpose, or have something to offer the individual who has hurt them. The reason such an experience causes hurt feelings is because it devalues the target and suggests they are only valuable for what they can offer.

In this section, we have described a number of perspectives that have attempted to identify the key underlying cause of hurt feelings (i.e., Feeney, 2005; Leary, 2001; MacDonald, 2009; Shaver et al., 2009; Vangelisti, 2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2001). However, as we have identified, no one perspective or conceptualization is without its limitations. For example, in terms of the social support and attachment-based perspectives (i.e., Feeney, 2005; MacDonald, 2009; Shaver et al., 2009) key limitations include the inability to apply these perspectives to any interpersonal context irrespective of the degree of closeness that the target shares with the perpetrator. That is, these perspectives are limited to experiences of hurt in which the perpetrator of the hurtful behavior can only be a person that the target would normally turn to for love, comfort, support and security (i.e., their primary attachment figures or people that the target perceives as opportunities for social connection). Therefore, the application of these more relational-specific theories is often limited to include only contexts in which individuals have strong relational ties to another (as opposed to being hurt by the slanderous comments of a colleague [with whom no strong social connection may exist]).
Furthermore, the attachment-based perspectives (i.e., Feeney, 2005; Shaver et al., 2009) by their very nature have difficulty accounting for varying levels in the severity of the experience of hurt feelings. This is because the attachment-based perspectives focus on the more severe and pronounced experiences and expressions of hurt feelings. Thus, attachment perspectives fail to take into account the day-to-day experiences of hurt that do not register as visceral or serious (relative to the actions of a close or significant other), but are nonetheless, hurtful. In fact, we argue that none of the current perspectives of the underlying cause of hurt feelings adequately capture the full range of interpersonal experiences that may cause someone to feel hurt. For example, the relationship evaluation hypothesis (Leary & Springer, 2001) is unable to account for the hurt caused by a perpetrator that highly values the target and their relationship. In a similar vein, the relational transgression perspective (Vangelisti, 2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2001) is also limited because not all relationship transgressions result in the target experiencing feelings of hurt, nor do all transgressions evoke a sense of emotional pain or personal injury that would result in hurt feelings (Feeney, 2005).

As a way to remedy these limitations, we propose a dehumanization model of hurt feelings that not only captures and extends upon the conceptualizations presented above, but also allows for the study of hurt to cut across any interpersonal context or level of severity (i.e., our model can be applied to the most minor through to the most severe of hurtful experiences). In detailing this novel perspective to the study of hurt, we present an integrative model of hurt feelings in which we conceptualize the key underlying cause of hurt as the denial of humanness (i.e., dehumanization, Haslam, 2006). In the sections that follow, we define dehumanization and specify its associations with interpersonal and close relationship outcomes relevant to the experience of hurt feelings. We then present and discuss our proposed dehumanization model of hurt feelings.

**Dehumanization**
Conceptualizations of dehumanization. Dehumanization is defined as perceiving or treating an individual or group as lacking human attributes that separate humans from non-human entities, such as animals or inanimate objects like machines and robots (Bain, Vaes & Leyens, 2014; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Traditionally, dehumanization has been conceptualized as an extreme phenomenon that has typically been examined in the context of mass violence (i.e., the Boko Haram violence in Nigeria), intense conflict (i.e., the Gaza-Israel conflict, Kelman, 1976; Staub, 1989) and moral atrocities (i.e., the Jewish Holocaust, and the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, Bandura, 1999; Opotow, 1990). Since this early work, the conceptualization of dehumanization has evolved to acknowledge that dehumanization can also occur in interpersonal contexts and is not limited to conditions bound by prejudice or inter-group conflict (for review see Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016). Instead, dehumanization can also be conceptualized as a relatively regular phenomenon that occurs in commonplace social interactions. Indeed, denying human attributes to other people and likening them to nonhumans is in fact a subtle, everyday event that may occur in the absence of conflict and negative evaluations of the target (e.g., Leyens et al., 2000, 2001, 2003; Loughnan & Haslam, 2007). Furthermore—and as with hurt (e.g., Leary et al., 1998)—research suggests that dehumanization experienced within interpersonal contexts is most likely perpetrated by people from the target’s social network, which involves close others such as family and friends as well as co-workers, and other acquaintances (Adams, 2014).

Haslam’s Dual Model of Dehumanization. According to Haslam’s Dual Model of Dehumanization (2006), there are two distinct aspects to humanness that can be denied to others. The denial of human uniqueness (also referred to as “animalistic” dehumanization) refers to the denial of characteristics that are thought to distinguish humans from animals, such as intelligence, self-control, civility, competency, social refinement, and maturity. When denied
uniquely human attributes, people are likened to animals and seen as unintelligent, socially unrefined, primitive, irrational, or childlike (Haslam, 2006; Haslam, Loughnan & Holland, 2013). This form of dehumanization commonly occurs in relation to racism and prejudice, such as anti-immigration lobbyists describing asylum seekers and refugees as “infectious diseases” or “invasive pests” (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014).

The denial of human nature (also referred to as “mechanistic” dehumanization) refers to the denial of characteristics understood as features that are central to, or typical of, humans but not of mechanistic objects (Haslam, 2006). Such attributes include the ability to experience and express emotions, cognitive flexibility, and interpersonal warmth. When denied the attributes of human nature people are likened to objects, machines, or automata and seen as cold and heartless, rigid (i.e., pre-programmed), or valued only for the functions or purposes they can fulfill for another (Haslam, 2006; Haslam et al., 2013). This form of dehumanization is often examined within the context of medical practices (Haque & Waytz, 2012) and organizational settings (Andrighetto, Baldissarri, & Volpato, 2016) in which individuals are objectified or treated as tools and perceived as commodities. Interestingly, within these contexts mechanistic dehumanization has often been considered to be functional or a necessary pre-condition in order to execute various work and medical-related tasks. For instance, the denial of human nature assists people in positions of power (i.e., medical professionals and managers) to make “difficult” decisions that may cause pain and suffering for others by allowing such decisions to be made in a more distant, cold, and (presumably) rational manner (Christoff, 2016). For example, a doctor thinking of their patients as mechanical systems made up of interacting parts, may be useful in certain diagnostic and problem-solving contexts such as complex surgeries and procedures (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). More recently, however, questions have been raised in regard to this proposed
functionality— in particular— whether engaging in mechanical dehumanization is ethically acceptable (for review see Christoff, 2016; Haque & Waytz, 2012).

Dehumanization can also range in the way it is enacted, such that dehumanization can be perpetrated in a blatant and explicit manner or in a way that is subtle and implicit (Haslam, 2006). An example of blatant and explicit dehumanization would include describing native inhabitants (i.e., Australian Aboriginals or Native Americans) as “primitive” or “savages”. At other times, however, dehumanization can be more subtle and implicit, in which people are denied humanness in more underhanded ways, such as being ascribed fewer human attributes or being implicitly, rather than explicitly, associated with nonhumans (Haslam et al., 2013). For example, “…this would be easier if you were flexible and not so stubborn in your thinking” is an instance of subtle and implicit dehumanization in which the target is denied human nature (i.e., mechanistic dehumanization— being treated as cognitively inflexible, rigid or pre-programmed with only a narrow set of actions and abilities).

Subtle or implicit dehumanization can also take the form of making a relative comparison in which one is viewed as encompassing less of a human characteristic(s) than another individual or group (Haslam, 2006). Examples of relative dehumanization are: “The social circles I am part of seem to discuss the more ‘big’ and ‘intellectual’ issues when compared to the things you and your friends talk about”, “Those people are classier than you”, and “You are so cold compared to my other friends” (Haslam et al., 2013). As can be seen in these examples, relative denials of humanness involve comparative claims that an individual or group is less human than another individual or group. With relative denials of humanness, the dehumanized target is not perceived as non-human per se but is seen as less human in comparison to oneself or another individual or group. This is in contrast to absolute denials of humanness that involve making non-human attributions about another individual or
group without a comparison (e.g., “You are just like a robot—cold and heartless” or “You live like some sort of dirty animal or Neanderthal”, Haslam, 2006; Haslam et al., 2013).

**Dehumanization: The Underlying Cause of Hurt Feelings**

Given that research examining interpersonal dehumanization is still in its infancy, it is not surprising that evidence for the association between the denial of humanness and the experience of hurt is relatively sparse. The preliminary work that has been undertaken, however, provides indirect evidence to suggest that denials of human uniqueness and human nature may indeed elicit hurt. For example, experimental work by Bastian and Haslam (2011) and qualitative work by Adams (2014) has found that the occurrence of dehumanization is associated with emotions such as shame, sadness and anger. While both studies did not directly measure hurt, the emotions reported to be associated with being the target of dehumanization are consistent with emotions found to be experienced alongside hurt (Feeney 2005; Leary & Springer, 2001).

Furthermore, Bastian and Haslam (2011) reported that some experiences of dehumanization caused the targets to experience what they termed “deconstructive cognitive states” (i.e., reduced clarity of thought, cognitive inflexibility, and an absence of meaningful thought). The deconstructive cognitive states reported by Bastian and Haslam (in which the target of dehumanization experiences a reduced ability to make sense of the situation) are similar to the cognitive appraisals that are found to accompany hurtful experiences (i.e., the hurtful event was unexpected, difficult to understand, and strongly associated with feelings of confusion; Fitness & Wurburton, 2009). Thus, despite the relative paucity of empirical evidence demonstrating the link between interpersonal dehumanization and the experience of hurt, the research to date suggests that experiences of dehumanization are associated with similar emotions and cognitive appraisals to that of investigations into the experience of hurt. However, we highlight that the research to date provides only indirect evidence and clearly
much work is required to confirm the empirical associations between dehumanization and the experience of hurt. Nevertheless, this preliminary evidence speaks to the proposed connection between dehumanization and hurt. In the following section, we provide a detailed discussion of our conceptual framework linking dehumanization to hurt feelings.

**Dehumanization Model of Hurt**

According to our dehumanization model of hurt, the extent to which various interpersonal experiences are considered hurtful is dependent upon their relative positioning along the two dimensions upon which humanness is denied—namely—the denial of human uniqueness and the denial of human nature. In order to clearly delineate the distinction between dehumanizing and non-dehumanizing behaviors, we also include examples of negative interpersonal experiences that are not hurtful to illustrate how these behaviors reflect an absence of the denial of humanness. That is, although experiences can be negative, if the target of the negative behavior is not denied their sense of humanness, we contend that the experience of hurt should not ensue.

The associations between different hurtful experiences and the particular dimension(s) of humanness that they deny are illustrated in Figure 1. As shown in this figure, each of the two dimensions is anchored to range from high to low levels of the denials of human nature and human uniqueness respectively, yielding four quadrants of dehumanization. These quadrants are: (1) high denial of human uniqueness and low denial of human nature, (2) high denial of human nature and low denial of human uniqueness (3) high denial of human nature and high denial of human uniqueness, and (4) low denial of human nature and low denial of human uniqueness.

It is important to note that the description of hurtful experiences shown in Figure 1 across the four quadrants represent a consolidation of the hurtful behaviors and events that have previously been identified as hurtful experiences (see Feeney, 2004; Leary et al., 1998;
Vangelisti et al., 2005). Furthermore, the hurtful behaviors and events included across some of the quadrants include additional hurtful experiences that we suggest cannot be readily accounted for by previous conceptualizations of hurt (e.g., Feeney 2005; Leary & Spinger, 2001; MacDonald, 2009; Shaver et al., 2009; Vangelisti, 2001), or have not been explicitly identified as hurtful in prior literature (e.g., Feeney, 2004; Leary et al., 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005). Below we describe each of the four quadrants of our dehumanization model of hurt commencing with hurtful experiences that are exclusively related to the denial of human uniqueness.

**Hurtful experiences that entail a high denial of human uniqueness and low denial of human nature.** Hurtful experiences that can be considered to encompass the denial of human uniqueness (i.e., explicitly or implicitly likening another to animals) are presented in the bottom left quadrant of Figure 1. In terms of the hurtful experiences previously identified in the literature (i.e., Vangelisti et al., 2005), these include: contempt and hostility. According to Vangelisti et al. (2005), these types of hurtful experiences involve being spoken to or treated aggressively and include reports from participants such as “It was communicated in a nasty way” and “It [i.e., the hurtful comment] was said in a mean way”. In addition, we also describe particular interpersonal behaviors that may not appear dehumanizing and hurtful at first glance but do indeed cause people to feel denigrated and inept (i.e., the denial of human uniqueness), and consequently, lead to the experience of hurt feelings. These additional hurtful experiences—that also epitomize the denial of human uniqueness—are defined as undermining and interfering social support (i.e., social support that is undercutting of a person’s abilities [Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Cutrona, 2012] or controlling or intrusive ways of caring for another that stifles autonomy [Kunce & Shaver, 1994]). Below, we discuss how each of these hurtful experiences involves the denial of human uniqueness.
According to Matsumoto, Hwang and Frank (2016), contempt towards another is to make a statement about one’s status and inherent superiority and includes appraisals of others as incompetent or lacking intelligence. Similarly, Gottman (1999) proposed that contempt involves elevating one’s self above another person and communicates an element of disgust that is intended to demonstrate disapproval of another. Being the target of contempt is a hurtful experience because the perpetrator has treated the target as inferior—and in doing so—has communicated to the target that they are flawed or debased. In a similar vein, hostility is defined as a “negative attitude toward others, consisting of enmity, denigration, and ill will” (Smith, 1994, p. 26). When an individual becomes hostile they often express irritation and anger, and behave in an aggressive, attacking, antagonistic and often spiteful manner—which also communicates to the target a level of resentment and impatience (Baron et al. 2007; Pope, Smith & Rhodewalt, 1990). Hence, what underpins and perpetuates contempt and hostility (and also defines them as the denial of human uniqueness) is the perception that the target is foolish, flawed, irrational, or debased. Therefore, we argue that to treat someone with contempt or hostility elicits hurt feelings because it denies them qualities and characteristics thought to distinguish humans from animals, such as sophistication, rationality, and intelligence.

As part of our dehumanization perspective of hurt feelings, we argue that there are also interpersonal experiences that may appear positive, but which in fact paradoxically lead to hurt feelings through dehumanization. In regard to our dehumanization model of hurt feelings, we define undermining and interfering social support as either social support that is undercutting or caregiving that is compulsive and intrusive. Not surprisingly, a large body of research has demonstrated that support from one’s partner, family and other members of one’s social network is associated with positive outcomes, such as improved mental health and higher levels of subjective wellbeing than when support is not rendered (e.g., Cohen, 2004;
Feeney & Thrush, 2010; Feeney & Collins, 2014; Kunce & Shaver, 1994). However, a seeming puzzling finding across some of the social support literature is that the provision of social support may also be associated with negative mental health outcomes and poorer emotional wellbeing in support recipients (Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Cutrona, 2012; Iida, Seidman, Shrout, Fujita, & Bolger, 2008). According to Bolger and Amarel (2007), this negative outcome emerges when the support provided implies a lack of efficacy or ability in the support recipient. That is, social support that questions or challenges the recipient’s competence leads to negative outcomes such as decreases in mood and self-esteem, and heightened distress (Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Cutrona, 2012; Iida et al. 2008).

Similarly, within the caregiving literature there are some forms of support behavior that may appear positive, but in fact paradoxically cause hurt feelings through dehumanization. These include two related, but distinct, forms of care rendered to a partner—compulsive caregiving and controlling caregiving (Karantzas, 2017; Kunce & Shaver, 1994). Compulsive caregiving is defined as the tendency to become overinvolved in a partner’s problems and is characterized by repeated and invasive comments on the partner’s actions (Karantzas, 2017; Kunce & Shaver, 1994). As a function of this over involvement, the partner engaging in compulsive caregiving becomes intrusive and undermining by interfering in an individual’s capacity to try and deal with a problem or challenge using their own skills and abilities, or by leveraging their abilities off those of their partner’s (Karantzas, 2017). Similarly, controlling caregiving is defined as domineering, commanding, and restrictive behavior, through which the support provided is more controlling than it is cooperative (Karantzas, 2017; Kunce & Shaver, 1994). Instead of respecting the partner’s ability to make a decision or execute a task, the controlling partner tells their partner what to do (i.e., insists that the partner adopts their approach), and in the process expresses a lack of confidence in their partner’s capacity to behave in an agentic and independent manner. Therefore, support
or care that denies the recipient autonomy, or communicates to a person that they lack competence and skill inherently denies the recipient core characteristics that are related to human uniqueness (i.e., characteristics that distinguish humans from animals). To this end, a partner can engage in “support-like” behavior that interferes with the partner’s capacity to manage on his or her own, in which the “support” is often rendered even when the partner has not requested help. Such behavior is considered dehumanizing (and hurtful) because it treats the target as if they lack uniquely human attributes such as competence, intelligence, and agency (i.e., foresight, thinking, and self-control) and consequently likens the target to an animal.

Importantly, the undermining and interfering social support we outline as hurtful—due to their denials of human uniqueness—cannot be accounted for by existing conceptualizations of hurt feelings (Feeney, 2005; Leary & Springer, 2001; MacDonald, 2009; Shaver et al., 2009; Vangelisti, 2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2001). This is because the conceptualizations proposed in the past all center around an actual social pain, a personal/relationship threat (a future social pain), or damage to the perception that others can be relied upon for social support, comfort, and/or safety. These pains, threats and damaged perceptions include: relational devaluations, relational transgressions, worries about lack of receiving support in the future, damage to one’s attachment working models of self and other, or a lost sense of felt security. Therefore, past conceptualizations limit thinking around what is hurtful to behaviors that are largely viewed as “negative”. This means that behaviors that appear positive but nonetheless undermine an individual are excluded as behaviors that cause hurt feelings or are unlikely to be considered as hurtful experiences. In fact, these seemingly positive behaviors demonstrate that people hurt each other even though they value and are invested in the relationships that they share. Therefore, as part of our dehumanization model of hurt feelings, support behavior that is characterized as limiting or depressing a person’s
capacity to demonstrate autonomy, competence and efficacy, need to be considered as hurtful by the very nature of the human qualities that they deny in the recipient—human uniqueness.

**Hurtful experiences that entail a high denial of human nature and low denial of human uniqueness.** Hurtful experiences that entail the denial of human nature (i.e., explicitly or implicitly likening another to machines or inanimate objects, see top right quadrant of Figure 1) are characterized by an emotional or physical detachment from another, by which the target may be treated as if they have no feelings, or are only of value for their use (Haslam, 2006). To deny human nature to another is to deny them the fundamental need to forge and maintain meaningful and rewarding relationships (Bastian & Haslam, 2010). Not surprisingly, some of the most common emotional responses to the denial of human nature include feelings of relational loss (due to the disruption of social connectedness), sadness, and anger (Bastian & Haslam, 2011). Importantly, the psychological needs that individuals look to satisfy within close relationships, such as love, comfort, a sense of belonging, and a sense of feeling valued (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Williams, 2007), are all undermined by the denial of human nature.

The hurtful experiences previously identified by researchers (i.e., Feeney, 2004; Leary et al., 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005) that are high on the denial of human nature include: *active disassociation* (i.e., explicit rejection, social ostracism, or overt signals of disinterest in another, Feeney, 2005; Leary et al., 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005), *passive disassociation* (i.e., implicit rejection, such as being ignored or excluded, Feeney, 2005; Leary et al., 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005), *conditional regard* (i.e., being used or objectified [treated as an object or instrument], treated as a means to an end, or taken for granted, Leary et al., 1998), and *betrayal* (i.e., the violation of relationship norms relative to loyalty and trust, such as infidelity and deception, Feeney, 2005; Leary et al., 1998). In addition to how we classify these hurtful experiences as the denial of human nature, we also describe how *defensive communication styles* (i.e., withdrawal
and stonewalling) can provoke hurt feelings because they are also underpinned by the denial of human nature. We now discuss each of these hurtful experiences that we argue constitute the denial of human nature.

_Dissociation_ (be it active or passive) has consistently been reported as a hurtful experience (see Feeney, 2004; Leary et al., 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005) and is characterized by either explicit or implicit abandonment, exclusion, ostracism, relationship denigration, and disinterest towards another. Not surprisingly, disassociation can be a painful experience that constitutes a threat to one’s sense of meaningful existence (Steele, Kidd & Castano, 2015). Social bonds are central to psychological and physical wellbeing (Fitness, 2001; Steele et al., 2015), and disruptions to them can have significant negative outcomes such as increasing feelings of hurt, but also, reducing a person’s self-confidence over time (Feeney, 2004; Williams, 2007). Interestingly, Bastian and Haslam (2010) found that the denial of human nature (as opposed to the denial of human uniqueness) was consistently associated with experiences that suggest a level of rejection (e.g., social exclusion/ostracism). In particular, being socially ostracized led participants to perceive themselves as harboring machine-like qualities such as being emotionally inert, cold, and rigid (Bastian & Haslam, 2010).

According to both Leary et al. (1998) and Feeney (2004) disassociation can be active or passive. Active disassociation from another includes explicit rejection, abandonment, ostracism and the denial or retraction of expressions of love and commitment (Feeney, 2004; Leary et al., 1998). On the other hand, passive disassociation includes ignoring another person (implicit rejection) and excluding them from plans and activities (Feeney, 2004). However, whether an individual engages in active or passive disassociation, both forms of disassociation may be perceived as disregarding the target’s existence (i.e., the denial of human nature; Fiske, 1991). Additionally, insensitivity (a form of passive dissociation in which the partner’s feeling or wishes are ignored; Ruehlman & Karoly, 1991) can also disrupt
the experience of one’s humanity. For instance, Karantzas, Haslam, Simpson, and Pizzirani (2018) found that insensitivity was positively associated with the perpetration of dehumanization within a romantic relationship. Insensitivity is characterized by having limited or no concern for the partner’s feelings and is evident through thoughtlessness and inconsideration of another. The insensitive and dehumanizing perpetrator is often emotionally uninvolved or lacks genuine relatedness to the target, and considers them in an indifferent way (Fiske, 1991; Ruehlman & Karoly, 1991). Therefore, rejecting hurtful experiences (i.e., disassociation) are considered to be the denial of human nature because the perpetrator of these actions perceives and treats the target of the hurt in an indifferent way; much the same way one would treat an inanimate object, (e.g., with both a lack of concern and sympathy because the inanimate object does not have the ability to experience or express emotions).

Another form of rejection previously identified in the literature to be a hurtful experience and one that we argue is hurtful because it denies people human nature is betrayal (i.e., the violation of relationship norms relative to loyalty and trust, such as infidelity and deception, see Feeney, 2004; Leary et al., 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005). According to Fitness (2001), betrayal is not merely about violating relationship norms; rather, betrayal implies the rejection or discounting of another. Essentially, Fitness argues, “betrayal means that one party in a relationship acts in a way that favors his or her own interests at the expense of the other party’s interests (pp. 73)”. Hence, betrayal—in its many forms—is likely to be perceived by the target of the hurt as a devaluation of the relationship with the perpetrator (e.g., “My partner does not care about my feelings” or “My mother thinks I am insignificant”), and consequently a denial of human nature. Therefore, to betray another (e.g., infidelity and other acts of deception) can be conceptualized as a form rejection that is hurtful because the experience implies a level of relational devaluation, or the realization that one’s partner does not hold oneself or the relationship in high regard (Fitness, 2001).
Conditional regard is the last hurtful experience that has been previously identified by researchers (see Leary et al., 1998) to be included in this section on behaviors that entail a high denial of human nature and low denial of human uniqueness. Conditional regard is therefore positioned within the top right quadrant of our dehumanization model of hurt feelings (see Figure 1). Defined by experiences in which the target is objectified, treated as a means to an end, used, or taken for granted (Leary et al., 1998), conditional regard has clear associations with the denial of human nature. For example, consider a situation described by Bastian and Haslam (2011) in which a person discovers that the real reason a newly developed friendship was initiated was because their new ‘friend’ was interested in getting closer to an influential and important relative of theirs. This devaluating experience demonstrates how the hurtful everyday actions of others can be representative of dehumanization. That is, and as can be seen in the example above, when denied attributes reflective of human nature people are likened to objects or machines (i.e., treated instrumentally) because they are valued only for the functions or purposes they can fulfil for another (Haslam, 2006; Haslam et al., 2013).

Defensive communication styles (most often witnessed in times of relational conflict) such as stonewalling and withdrawal (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Heavey, Laney, & Christensen, 1993; Gottman, 1999) also portray a sense of indifference to another through either active or passive avoidance of an interaction. Withdrawal is most often witnessed in conflict interactions characterized by a dyadic pattern termed “demand-withdrawal” (Eldridge & Baucom, 2012). During this type of communication, a person demands or pressures for the other person to change, which is met with withdrawing behaviors by the other person (i.e., half-hearted involvement, avoiding discussions, and walking away, Eldridge & Baucom, 2012). Likewise, stonewalling (a form of withdrawal) is defined as a total lack of listening and a “tuning out” in response to another’s request for change (Gottman, 1991). According to Noller (2012),
withdrawal as a conflict style is seen as involving low concern for another that creates a sense of distance and disconnection between the members of the dyad.

Not surprisingly then, defensive communication patterns rank among the most destructive and least effective interaction patterns in couples’ problem-solving endeavors and are consistently associated with poor relationship and individual outcomes, such as relationship dissatisfaction, heightened distress, and negative affect (e.g., K. J. Baucom, Baucom & Christensen, 2015; Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Schrodt, Witt & Shimkowski, 2014). In addition to these negative outcomes, we argue that when one person becomes silent or refuses to engage in conversation during a time of conflict, such behavior is likely to undermine the other person’s perception of himself or herself as a valued member of the relationship because their partner has acted in a way that demonstrates little consideration for their feelings (i.e., the partner has acted in an insensitive manner, likening their partner to an inanimate object not worthy of consideration). To this end, defensive communication can be considered a behavior that results in the experience of hurt.

**Hurtful experiences that entail both the denial of human uniqueness and human nature.** The hurtful experiences presented thus far reflect either the denial of human uniqueness or human nature, but not both. Criticism and humiliation (see bottom right quadrant of Figure 1) are two broad behaviors that may tap both dimensions of dehumanization either separately or simultaneously. Criticism is defined “as negative verbal comments about one’s behavior, appearance, or personal characteristics” (pp. 497, Feeney, 2004) and involves the expression of disapproval that is usually aimed at another’s personality or character and is based on the intention to insult or blame (Gottman, 1999). Criticism is dehumanizing in that a critical insult attacks a person’s sense of self by pointing out the fundamental or uniquely human qualities that they lack (e.g., lacking cognitive flexibility or
social refinement), or by highlighting similarities that they share with animals or machines (e.g., being seen as irrational or cold).

To elucidate, consider a situation in which one member of a couple is not willing to change their mind or behavior despite there being no good reason to maintain this perspective. In this challenging—yet not uncommon couple interaction—the partner requesting change may criticize their partner for being stubborn or rigid in their thinking and behavior. Such a critical remark, although rational (and possibly justifiable) is at the very least mechanistic dehumanization of one’s partner because it suggests they perceive their partner’s thought processes as inflexible (i.e., pre-programmed and machine-like). Hence, in this scenario the perpetrator has expressed disapproval (i.e., criticism) aimed towards the target’s personality or character (and in the process denied their partner fundamental human nature qualities).

The distinction between which dehumanization dimension the criticizing behavior corresponds to, however, depends largely on what it is that is being criticized. To this end, criticism can target characteristics that exclusively reflect the denial of human nature (as can been seen in the example above) or the denial of human uniqueness. There are also instances in which the criticism of another is leveled in a manner that encompasses the denial of both dimensions of humanness. For example, “You are just too stupid to feel anything” demonstrates an instance where the criticizing behavior can tap both dehumanization dimensions simultaneously. Whereas, “You are so stubborn and inflexible” or “Stop being irrational, you are embarrassing me” are both examples of criticism that separately tap the human nature and human uniqueness dimensions, respectively. That is, relational problems and/or conflict—in which criticism is likely to feature—often reflect competing ideas about a wide range of possible relationship issues, such as a lack of care and concern, problems with the expression of feelings, or issues of competency around the achievement of goals or resolving challenges. To this end, when a person criticizes another, what determines the extent to which the criticism taps the human nature
dimension, the human uniqueness dimension, or both, depends largely on the context from which the criticism has occurred. For example, is the conflict or relationship problem about qualities that are uniquely human, or qualities that are fundamental to human nature? Or does the issue or conflict bring both denials of humanness into play because of either the topic itself, or the actions of the perpetrator? Such questions highlight the person by situation interaction that is at play for hurtful experiences that may tap both dimensions of dehumanization either separately or simultaneously.

Similarly, humiliation (engaging in behaviors such as teasing, mockery, sarcasm and ill-conceived humor to abase one’s pride or reduce their social status) also represents a range of hurtful experiences that we argue can be classified as the denial of human uniqueness or human nature. Furthermore, humiliation—in which the perpetrator aims to incite shame in the target—has previously been identified in the literature as a hurtful experience (see Leary et al., 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005). Humiliation involves teasing or embarrassing the target about their particular shortcomings, with research demonstrating that such experiences lead people to feel they have been dehumanized (Bastian & Haslam, 2011). Importantly, humiliation may also tap both dimensions of dehumanization either separately or simultaneously (as is the case with criticism). For example, “You are so cold and insensitive, you should be ashamed of yourself” demonstrates how a perpetrator’s attempt to humiliate another can be relevant to both dimensions of humanness. Whereas, humiliation that involves treating the target as inferior and socially unrefined (and subsequently teasing or humiliating them about such shortcomings [e.g., “You are so uncouth”]) exclusively reflects the denial of human uniqueness.

**Negative experiences that entail a low denial of human nature and a low denial of human uniqueness.** The key focus of this paper has been to map a wide range of hurtful experiences onto Haslam’s (2006) Dual Model of Dehumanization. However, the dehumanization framework presented above also facilitates the mapping of negative interpersonal experiences that do not encompass, or are low, on the denial of human nature.
uniqueness and human nature (see top left quadrant of Figure 1). The purpose of the inclusion of negative experiences that do not entail the denial of humanness is to demonstrate that the underlying cause of hurt is not that the experience is perceived as negative, but because the experience is *dehumanizing*. Therefore, we argue that negative experiences that do not deny another’s humanness (i.e., liken them to animals or machines) are unlikely to cause hurt feelings.

According to Haslam (2014), an interaction can be appraised as negative (i.e., not desirable, optimistic, or lacking positivity), without being dehumanizing. That is, just because an interaction is perceived to be negative does not qualify the experience as the denial of humanness. Consider the following situations: a romantic couple disagreeing on how best to combat their current financial strain or housemates arguing over whose turn it is to clean. Across these distinct situations, if both parties afford and maintain a sense of respect and dignity for one another, in which they refrain from becoming aggressive, avoid humiliating each other, or do not engage in disassociation or defensive communication (e.g., by ignoring the other or withdrawing from the situation), then such incidents would not constitute the denial of humanness regardless of the fact they are likely to be perceived as “negative” by all parties involved. According to our dehumanization model of hurt, hurt occurs when interpersonal experiences are evinced within an interaction that reflects denials of either or both dimensions of dehumanization. To this end, if an experience is characterized by behaviors such as a lack of respect for one another in which one individual tries to undermine the value of the other’s perspective through mockery and condescension (denial of human uniqueness/and or human nature), treats the other with contempt and hostility (denial of human uniqueness), or is rejecting and acts indifferently (denial of human nature), then the experience of hurt will ensue. Therefore, although some interpersonal experiences are perceived as negative, if they encompass little to any dehumanization, then hurt feelings should
not be incited. Thus, the classification of negative experiences as dehumanizing and hurtful cannot be based solely on a target’s perception that the perpetrator’s behavior was negative, but whether that behavior denied them full or proper humanness (Haslam, 2014).

Additionally, within interpersonal contexts, it is also likely for people to directly liken others to animals or machines in admiring or even loving ways (Haslam, Loughnan, Reynolds & Wilson, 2007). Such examples can include: a co-worker’s admiration of another’s ability to work long hours, describing them as ‘machine-like’, or, a mother likening her child to a ‘monkey’ because of their cheeky and playful behavior. Although from a definitional standpoint these examples could be conceptualized as dehumanization, the behavior is unlikely to promote inhumane treatment of the other (Haslam, 2014) or cause hurt feelings. People are only truly dehumanized when the likening is derogatory (Haslam et al., 2007). Thus, when a dehumanizing comment is delivered with affect connoting admiration and positivity (e.g., “aw, you little cheeky monkey”) it is unlikely to elicit hurt feelings in the target. We therefore contend that for a dehumanizing experience to cause hurt feelings the incident must liken the target to an animal or a machine in a derogatory or deprecating manner. For example, verbal criticism such as “You are just like a robot—cold and heartless” (denial of human nature, see top right quadrant of Figure 1) or being perceived as inferior and treated with contempt and hostility (denial of human uniqueness, see bottom left quadrant of Figure 1) would constitute denials of humanness that are hurtful.

**Implications and Future Directions**

The dehumanization model of hurt proposed in this paper has a number of important implications for the future study of hurt feelings. First and most importantly, our model proposes a completely novel perspective regarding the key underlying cause of hurt. That is, the essence of a hurtful experience is the denial of humanness rather than relationship devaluation or transgressions, threats/damage to attachment security or internal working
models, or threats to future social connections. According to our dehumanization model of hurt, the denial of humanness cuts across all existing perspectives in that all previous explanations of hurt encompass dehumanization on some level. To this end, our model provides a parsimonious account of hurt by situating hurtful experiences previously identified by researchers within a two-dimensional space pertaining to the denial of human nature and/or the denial of human uniqueness. Hence, our model helps to reconcile the debates that have ensued regarding the underlying cause of hurt.

Second, by suggesting that the experience of hurt is underpinned by denying another humanness, our model assumes that hurt does not purely reside in some disruption to the function of close relationships—an implicit assumption of all other perspectives pertaining to hurt feelings. While we believe that the experience of hurt is an interpersonal phenomenon, the hurtful experience need not be relational in nature, rather, it need only compromise one’s personal sense of humanness. This aspect of our model broadens our understanding regarding the contexts in which hurt can ensue. We contend that the experience of hurt need not be limited to the context of close relationships but can include any interpersonal context in which a person is denied humanness. By extension, hurt feelings can occur in workplaces, or sporting and volunteering contexts, to name but a few. In fact, the experience of hurt can occur in any context in which a person is treated as a means to an end, assumed to lack intelligence or appear rigid and narrow minded, viewed as overly emotional and irrational, or perceived as cold and to lack emotion.

Third, our model extends our understanding of hurt feelings to include hurtful experiences that have not been previously considered within the study of hurt, but that we contend are indeed hurtful. The inclusion of behaviors such as undermining and interfering social support, highlight that the experience of hurt need not emerge from an overtly negative place in which social threats and punishments may ensue. Rather, the experience of hurt can
emerge from seemingly caring acts by another—acts that to date have not figured in our understanding of hurt feelings.

The dehumanization model of hurt proposed in this paper can provide an important way forward for investigating hurtful experiences within interpersonal relationships. However, given that this paper provides the first exposition of this model, future research will need to establish the empirical associations proposed to exist between the denial of humanness and hurtful experiences. Furthermore, future research would need to establish the associations between the denial of humanness and the experience of hurt across varying interpersonal contexts to confirm that the hurtful experiences are not limited to the domain of close personal relationships. These future research directions would help to provide important “proof-of-concept” evidence for the model proposed in this paper.

Conclusion

The study of hurt feelings has been approached from a variety of perspectives, all of which have proposed different underlying causes for the experience of hurt. As a result, our understanding as to the cause of hurt remains unclear. As a way to reconcile existing perspectives and significantly advance our understanding of hurtful experiences, we draw on the dehumanization literature to propose a model in which we argue that the key cause of hurt is the denial of humanness. In doing so, we integrate dehumanization, a largely studied intergroup phenomenon, to gain insight into hurtful experiences within interpersonal contexts. The proposed model reconciles previous perspectives of hurt (e.g., Feeney 2005; Leary & Spinger, 2001; MacDonald, 2009; Shaver et al., 2009; Vangelisti, 2001; Vangelisti & Young, 2001) by capturing all forms of hurtful experiences outlined as part of previous research (e.g., Feeney, 2004; Leary et al., 1998; Vangelisti et al., 2005) within a single conceptual framework. As a result, the proposed model does not limit the study of hurt to the context of
close personal relationships but extends research into hurt feelings to any interpersonal context in which humanness is denied.
Figure 1. *Dehumanization Model of Hurt*

*Note.* Criticism and Humiliation appear in the bottom left, top right and bottom right quadrants to denote that these experiences can tap the dehumanization dimensions separately or simultaneously.
References


Baxter,


**Chapter 2 Conclusion**

This chapter included Paper 1 of this dissertation. The paper put forward a conceptual model suggesting that the underlying cause of hurt in interpersonal relationships encompasses the denial of humanness. Specifically, the experience of hurt is underpinned—or defined by—dehumanization in which the target is likened to an animal or machine (or both) via the denial of uniquely or fundamental human qualities. Thus, not all negative interpersonal interactions or experiences are hurtful. It is only those experiences in which a person is the target of the negative behavior that denies their sense of humanness (i.e., dehumanization) in which hurt should ensue. Similarly, seemingly positive experiences (e.g., undermining and interfering social support) can also be hurtful because they too are dehumanizing.

In addition, Paper 1 provides the first detailed account of how dehumanization may manifest in close and intimate relationships; highlighting how the phenomenon may be associated with a wide range of relationship experiences and processes (some of which include the maltreatment of another [e.g., undermining and interfering social support, hostility [aggression], and conditional regard]. However, given that Paper 1 reflects a theoretical analysis of interpersonal dehumanization, empirical evidence is required to confirm the proposed associations between dehumanization and the hurtful relationship behaviors and maltreatments outlined in Paper 1. Yet, no measure exists to assess dehumanization within intimate or close personal contexts. Therefore, in the next chapter, Paper 2 is presented, which reports on the development and psychometric evaluation of a new measure of dehumanization in romantic relationships.
CHAPTER 3: THE DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF A DEHUMANIZATION MEASURE WITHIN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

There is an increasing interest into the study of interpersonal dehumanization. This interest is largely the result of the continued utility of dehumanization as a predictor (and theorized mechanism) of both intergroup and interpersonal processes and outcomes studied within social psychology more generally (Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016). Paper 1 further illustrated the utility of the concept of dehumanization within close relationships—both as an underlying cause of hurtful experiences as well as a way to understand various negative relationship behaviors and maltreatments.

Despite the interest into the study of dehumanization within intimate relationships, there are inherent barriers that have limited the study of the phenomenon within this context. Firstly, no measure exists to assess target and perpetrator perspectives of dehumanization. Without such a measure, it is difficult to investigate the proposed associations between dehumanization and various relationship processes and outcomes. Secondly, there exists some conceptual ambiguity regarding the dimensionality of dehumanization. For instance, some research has demonstrated that dehumanization is best represented as a unitary construct (Bastian, Haslam & Jetten, 2014), while others consider dehumanization to be more nuanced comprising multiple dimensions (Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011; Haslam, 2006). As a way to address these two limitations, Paper 2 (reported in this chapter) described the development and psychometric evaluation of a self-report measure of dehumanization within intimate relationships that assesses the phenomenon from both target and perpetrator perspectives.
The research article that follows is the author’s copy of a manuscript submitted to *Frontiers in Psychology*.


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<td>Bengianni Pizzirani</td>
<td>School of Psychology</td>
<td><a href="mailto:b.pizzirani@deakin.edu.au">b.pizzirani@deakin.edu.au</a></td>
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Bengianni (supervised by Gery Karantzaz) conceived of the original idea, designed the methodology, performed the analyses and drafted the manuscript.

*I declare that the above is an accurate description of my contribution to this paper, and the contributions of other authors are as described below.*

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Abstract

Despite the emergence of research into interpersonal dehumanization, there has been little by way of empirical investigation of the phenomenon within the context of romantic relationships. To address this, we introduce and validate the Dehumanization in Romantic Relationships Scale (DIRRS), a self-report measure of dehumanization perpetration and targeting within intimate relationships. In Study 1 ($N=1251$, $M$ age=$25.35$, $SD=6.03$), confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the dimensionality of interpersonal dehumanization may be more nuanced than first thought. Specifically, a four factor first-order structure (comprised of factors that relate to denials of human uniqueness [i.e., immaturity/competence and social refinement] and human nature [i.e., conditional regard and dissociation] was found to be the best fit to the data. These results were replicated on a different sample in Study 2 ($N=847$, $M$ age=$3.55$ years, $SD=4.27$)—in addition to the assessment of criterion-related validity. Study 3 ($N=328$, $M$ age=$2.40$ years, $SD=4.27$) cross-validated the criterion-related validity reported in Study 2, and in addition, highlights that dehumanization is also associated with emotional and physical abuse. This research extends theory on interpersonal dehumanization and provides an empirically validated measure to reliably assess the occurrence of dehumanization within romantic relationships.

Keywords: Dehumanization; interpersonal relationships; confirmatory factor analysis; measurement; abuse; maltreatment.
The Development and Validation of a Dehumanization Measure Within Romantic Relationships

Dehumanization—defined as the denial of uniquely or fundamentally human characteristics to another—is considered to occur across a range of contexts including moral atrocities related to ethnic cleansing, inter-racial conflicts, as well as medical and organizational settings (Bain, Vaes & Leyens, 2014; Haslman & Stratemeyer, 2016). However, theoretical advancements over the past decade, suggest that dehumanization is not limited to intergroup conflicts or blatant acts of atrocity. Rather, dehumanization can take the form of implicit and commonplace behaviors that manifest within interpersonal contexts, but nonetheless, damage relational bonds (e.g., social ostracism and contempt; Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Bastian, Haslam & Jetten, 2014).

Despite the emergence of research into interpersonal dehumanization, there has been little by way of empirical investigation of dehumanization within the context of romantic relationships. Nevertheless, many of the behaviors identified as negative and toxic within romantic relationships such as hostility, ridicule, and being controlling reflect dehumanization (Pizzirani & Karantzas, 2018). Specifically, such behaviors deny the target (i.e., the romantic partner) their sense of agency, as if they have no feelings, or lack intelligence (Bastian & Haslam, 2011). Moreover, interpersonal dehumanization within close relationships is often characteristic of common and subtle maltreatments, such as feigning disinterest, acting in ways that may disrespect another, or minor exploitative acts such as requesting favors that see another treated as a means to an end (Bastian et al., 2014). For example, being socially ostracized or treated instrumentally (i.e., as if one’s value is based solely on what they have to offer another) by a friend.

Through a series of studies, Bastian and Haslam (2011) found that targets of a range of common maltreatments experienced dehumanization. Such work demonstrates that the
actions of close others—such as romantic partners—play an important hand in people’s experiences of dehumanization. Furthermore, acts of dehumanization within intimate contexts are likely to disrupt the positive functions of romantic relationships, which include the provision of support to encourage competence and personal growth within a partner (Feeney & Collins, 2014), and to meet a partner’s fundamental needs for comfort and security (Feeney, 2009).

Given the increasing interest in interpersonal dehumanization, it is surprising that there is little by way of dehumanization research within the context of intimate relationships. We argue that this dearth in research is for two reasons. Firstly, there exists no target or perpetrator assessment of dehumanization within romantic relationships. This is despite findings that demonstrate interpersonal dehumanization is most often perpetrated by people within one’s close social network, which includes romantic partners (Adams, 2014). Secondly, conceptual ambiguity surrounds the dimensionality of interpersonal dehumanization (and dehumanization more generally). For example, some research suggests that interpersonal dehumanization is best conceptualized as a two-dimensional construct (i.e., the denial of human nature and the denial of human uniqueness; Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011), while other studies suggest that interpersonal dehumanization may be unidimensional (Bastian et al., 2012a; Bastian, Jetten, Radke, 2012b; Bastian et al., 2014). To address these limitations, we report on three studies in which we developed and validated a measure to assess dehumanization (from both target and perpetrator perspectives) within romantic relationships, as well as determine the dimensional structure of the construct.

Dehumanization is described as treating or perceiving an individual or group as lacking human attributes that separate humans from non-human entities, such as animals or inanimate objects (Bain et al., 2014). Traditionally, dehumanization was viewed as an extreme phenomenon that took place within the contexts of mass violence (i.e., mass shootings),
intense conflict (i.e., the Syrian War, Kelman, 1976;) and moral atrocities (i.e., the genocide against the Tutsi in Rawanda, Bandura, 1999;). However, since this early work, dehumanization has been acknowledged to be a commonly experienced phenomenon within interpersonal contexts (such as couple, family, and peer relationships) that can include subtle (e.g., Leyens et al., 2000) and seemingly innocuous maltreatments such as being treated with condescension, contempt, or anger (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2011).

Up until the last decade, dehumanization was described as a unidimensional construct such that it reflected denying individuals the human qualities that separate them from animals (e.g., Leyens et al., 2000). In an attempt to provide a more comprehensive conceptualization of dehumanization, Haslam (2006) proposed a model of dehumanization comprising of two-dimensions. According to Haslam, dehumanization can entail behaviors beyond likening an individual or group to an animal. Haslam proposed that people also tend to engage in dehumanization that likens an individual or group to inanimate objects, such as machines and robots. To this end, these two distinct denials of humanness yield two-dimensions of dehumanization.

According to this two-dimensional perspective (Haslam, 2006), dehumanization can involve the denial of uniquely human characteristics and characteristics reflective of human nature. When denied uniquely human qualities (also referred to as ‘animalistic’ dehumanization), people are likened to animals and seen as primitive, inferior, irrational, childlike or unintelligent. Specifically, people are denied attributes such as self-control, civility, competency, social refinement, agency (i.e., the ability to plan and think for oneself) and maturity (Haslam, Loughnan & Holland, 2013). When denied human nature qualities (also referred to as ‘mechanistic’ dehumanization), people are likened to objects and machines and seen as superficial, cold, or lacking emotion (Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Haslam et al., 2013). This form of dehumanization involves denying people attributes such as
emotionality, cognitive flexibility, curiosity, and interpersonal warmth (Haslam et al., 2013).

The two-dimensional conceptualization of dehumanization (Haslam, 2006) has received considerable support from a number of studies (for review see Haslam, 2015). However, recent research again suggests a unidimensional conceptualization of dehumanization may be more appropriate within interpersonal contexts. For example, across four studies Bastian et al. (2012a) identified a unidimensional factor solution for dehumanization\(^1\) (as opposed to a two-factor solution), suggesting that the denial of human nature and human uniqueness may be subsumed under a single dimension. Thus, although a number of studies support the distinction between human uniqueness and human nature (see Haslam, 2015), recent research has brought this conceptualization into question, especially within the interpersonal context (e.g., Bastian et al., 2012b).

The issues regarding the dimensionality of interpersonal dehumanization may, in part, be a function of the history of the measurement of dehumanization (which has stemmed largely from intergroup research of the phenomenon). Specifically, assessment has largely involved either single item measures or multi-item perceptions of humanness traits. Single item measures, for instance, assess a particular group’s evolutionary progress on a question depicting the ascent of man (Kteily, Bruneau, Waytz, & Cotterill, 2015). However, this measure only assesses animalistic dehumanization (e.g., perceiving others as ‘savage’ and ‘barbaric’) and not the denial of human nature.

Self-report perceptions of humanness involve rating a set of personality-like characteristics as reflecting either human uniqueness or human nature (e.g., Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee & Bastian, 2005; Loughnan & Haslam, 2006). Derivatives of these measures assess the extent to which these traits are perceived within the self, and/or ascribed to others

\(^1\)Bastian and colleagues focused on the self-dehumanizing consequences of social ostracism and in doing so directly measured participants’ perceptions of their self-humanity after a dehumanizing experience.
Other self-report measures assess perceptions of having experienced dehumanization (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011). However, while these measures have been used to explicitly assess denials of human uniqueness and human nature, recent findings suggest either two semi-independent factors or two highly correlated factors with researchers collapsing across these dimensions to yield a single dehumanization factor (see Bastian et al., 2012a, 2012b). In addition, these measures suffer from three further limitations when assessing dehumanization within the context of close relationships.

Firstly, the vast majority of existing self-report assessments focus on ascribing or evaluating human characteristics rather than explicitly measuring behaviors that reflect dehumanization—that is—the actual treatment of someone as less than human. Within close relationships, the interpersonal processes that govern relationship functioning often entail a behavioral component (e.g., conflict patterns [Eldridge & Christensen, 2002], the provision of social support [Feeney & Collins, 2014], and the demonstration of intimacy [Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998]). To this end, it would be remiss of dehumanization assessments to not capture behavioral manifestations of the construct in close relationships.

Secondly, measures to date (largely because of the field’s focus on the intergroup context) reflect dehumanization attitudes or perceptions towards people or groups in general. However, within the context of close relationships, the fidelity of assessment can be higher and the predictive validity of the measure greater, when the assessment focuses on a specific individual (e.g., romantic partner, peer, or parent; Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011).

Finally, studies into dehumanization tend to focus, and therefore assess, perceptions or attitudes regarding being either the perpetrator of dehumanization or the target of dehumanization, but not both (e.g., Haslam et al., 2005; Kteily et al., 2015). Nevertheless,
within an interpersonal context such as romantic relationships, dehumanization should be considered dyadic in nature. In this way a person’s experiences of dehumanization will entail either treating one’s partner as less than human (i.e., perpetration) and/or being the target of dehumanization enacted by one’s partner. Hence, a comprehensive measurement of the construct within the context of intimate relationships should involve the assessment of dehumanization from both perspectives.

In light of these limitations, it is necessary to develop a psychometrically sound measure of romantic relationship dehumanization. Moreover, the development of such a measure can help relationship scholars better understand the role of dehumanization in the manifestation of aversive relationship behaviors (e.g., cycles of violence [Bastian et al., 2014] or intimate partner aggression).

The primary aim of this paper is to develop and psychometrically assess (i.e., construct validity and criterion-related validity) a measure of romantic relationship dehumanization that captures both perpetrator and target perspectives. The secondary aim is to determine the dimensionality of dehumanization within romantic relationships by comparing the two most common conceptualizations of interpersonal dehumanization proposed within the literature—the unidimensional structure (as reported by Bastian et al., 2012a & Bastian et al., 2012b) and the two-dimensional structure (reflecting Haslam’s [2006] dual model of dehumanization).

The development and psychometric evaluation of this new measure, titled the ‘Dehumanization in Romantic Relationships Scale’ (DIRRS), is reported across three Studies. Study 1 reports on the initial development and construct validity of the DIRRS and includes a comparison of the proposed unidimensional and two-dimensional structures. Study 2 reports on a cross-validation of the DIRRS and extends the psychometric evaluation to criterion-related validity (i.e., concurrent validity). Specifically, a series of measures
pertaining to relationship functioning such as relationship quality, patterns of communication and negative interactions, providing care for one’s partner, and maintaining positive partner regard are used to determine concurrent validity. Study 3 attempts to replicate the criterion-related validity findings of Study 2 but extends on this to explore the associations between dehumanization and overt emotional and physical abuse within romantic relationships.

**Study 1**

Study 1 reports on the development of the DIRRS and the psychometric evaluation of the measure (i.e., construct validation), thus identifying the optimal factor structure and determining the internal consistency (i.e., reliability) of the scales that constitute the DIRRS. Given the construct of interpersonal dehumanization has been articulated to constitute either a single dimension or two-dimensions it was important to: (1) develop an item pool that captured the full breadth of the construct across these differing conceptualizations, and, (2) statistically model and compare the unidimensional and two-dimensional conceptualizations of interpersonal dehumanization.

**Overview of Item Pool Development**

The development of the DIRRS involved deriving items that captured the definitional properties of both the unidimensional and two-dimensional conceptualizations of interpersonal dehumanization, as well as the full range of hurtful relationship behaviors suggested in the literature to represent interpersonal denials of humanness (for review see Pizzirani & Karantzas, 2018). A literature search was also conducted to identify past measures within the general field of dehumanization research.

Using the definitional features of human uniqueness (i.e., intelligence, self-control, civility, competency, social refinement, and maturity) and human nature (i.e., the ability to experience and express emotions, cognitive flexibility, and interpersonal warmth), the relational denials of humanness identified by Pizzirani and Karantzas (2018), and drawing on
Bastian and Haslam’s (2011) measure of dehumanization\(^2\), an initial pool of 30 items were developed that could be equally framed to capture both perpetrator and target perspectives of romantic dehumanization.

**Modelling the Dimensional Structure of Romantic Relationship Dehumanization**

The construct validation approach for Study 1 involved the apriori modelling and comparison of two factor structures. The first of these factor structures (Figure 1, Model 1) depicted dehumanization as a unidimensional construct, such that all items were modelled to load onto a global dehumanization factor. This factor structure draws on recent empirical evidence (as well as early theorizing on the concept of dehumanization) to suggest that the construct is best represented as unitary in nature (e.g., Bastian et al., 2012a, 2012b, 2014).

The second factor structure (Figure 1, Model 2) depicted dehumanization as a two-dimensional construct constituting the denial of human uniqueness and the denial of human nature. This factor structure represents Haslam’s (2006) dual model of dehumanization. Given the suggestion that interpersonal dehumanization may reflect quite nuanced manifestations of dehumanization (e.g., Pizzirani & Karantzas, 2018) we predicted that modelling the two-dimensional conceptualization on the DIRRS would provide better fit to the data than the unidimensional conceptualization.

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample consisted of 1251 participants (39.2% men, 60.1% women, .6% gender not specified) recruited online from social networking sites and online forums (e.g., Facebook and Reddit). The sample consisted of participants from the United States (54.8%), Canada

\(^2\) After reading a vignette in which they were the target of a particular maltreatment, participants were required to rate the extent to which the perpetrator viewed them as fully human (e.g., “the other person doesn’t see me as an individual”).
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(10.6%), Australia (8.6%), and the United Kingdom (8.2%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 63 years (M=25.35, SD=6.03) and were all in a current romantic relationship (M relationship length=3.33 years, SD=3.83). Relationship status of the sample comprised of individuals who were steadily dating (49.9%), cohabiting (25.7%), engaged (8.1%), and married (17.4%).

Materials and procedure

The DIRRS is presented in Appendix A. An initial pool of 30 items was created and items were framed to capture both perpetrator and target perspectives of romantic relationship dehumanization. Two experts then independently reviewed and rated the face-validity of all 30 items. A face-validity approach was used to ensure that the generated items were judged to appropriately assess the intended construct (e.g., Hardesty & Bearden, 2004; Murphy & Davidshofer, 1988; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) and to limit the exclusive reliance on empirical data reduction approaches such as Exploratory Factor Analysis.

The face-validation of items was based on three criteria. These were the extent to which each item: 1) captured the unidimensional and two-dimensional conceptualizations of dehumanization, 2) reflected dehumanization within romantic relationships, and 3) applied to both perpetrator and target perspectives of dehumanization. The two experts were also instructed to limit the measure’s length to ensure that it could be completed in a timely manner. To guide the number of items to be selected, the independent reviewers were asked to select up to six items reflective of the denial of human uniqueness and human nature. The decision to limit the item selection in this way was on the basis of Classical Test Theory and latent variable modelling approaches to measurement development (e.g., Brown, 2015; Harvey, Billings, & Nilan, 1985; Hinkin, 1995, 1998; Marsh, Hau, Balla, & Grayson, 1998).

The two independent reviewers demonstrated high agreement (Cohen’s Kappa = 91.2%) across the selection of 12 items from the original item pool. These 12 items were
categorized by both independent raters to reflect either the denial of human uniqueness (6 items) or the denial of human nature (6 items). Of the final 12 items selected by the expert judges, three were items were retained from the Bastian and Haslam (2011) dehumanization measure, while nine reflected original items (See Appendix A). As shown in Appendix A, each item is worded in two forms to reflect assessment of both perpetrator and target perspectives. Thus, participants are required to rate the same 12 items twice – once to assess their tendency to perpetrate dehumanization, and once to assess their tendency to be the target of dehumanization. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflect greater dehumanization perpetration or targeting.

Participants were administered the DIRRS by way of an anonymous online survey that also included a demographics questionnaire that entailed sex, age, ethnicity, relationship length and relationship status. The online survey took approximately 10 minutes.

Data Analysis

The construct validity of the DIRRS was assessed using Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) with Maximum Likelihood Estimation (Muthén & Kaplan, 1985). Assessment of model fit was based on the guidelines proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999). Therefore, in addition to evaluating the chi-square value ($\chi^2_{ML}$), a model with a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) ≥.95, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) ≤.05, and Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR)=.06 was indicative of good fit. Given that the secondary aim of this research was to determine the dimensional composition of interpersonal dehumanization, CFA was used to model two alternative factor structures – Model 1 evaluated the unidimensional conceptualization of dehumanization, while Model 2 evaluated the two-dimensional conceptualization. Because the newly developed measure included items that assessed dehumanization from both the
perpetrator and target perspectives, separate CFAs were conducted for each set of items. In
order to determine the best fitting structure between the two alternative models (i.e.,
unidimensional and two-dimensional structures) chi-square difference ($\Delta \chi^2$) tests of model fit
were conducted. To safeguard against Type II error when identifying significant differences
between models, a practical difference test (i.e., a TLI difference of .01) was employed.

**Results and Discussion**

The unidimensional structure of dehumanization (see Figure 1, Model 1)
demonstrated poor fit for both perpetration and target versions of the DIRRS (see Table 1).
The two-dimensional structure (see Figure 1, Model 2) also demonstrated poor fit for the
items constituting the perpetration of dehumanization and being the target of dehumanization
(see Table 1). Factor loadings for all items (perpetration and target) across the two alternative
models (i.e., Model 1 and 2) varied in magnitude from $\lambda=.45$ to $\lambda=.78$ (see Figure 1) and
were all significant at $p<.001$. As presented in Table 1, comparison of the fit of perpetration
and target items across Models 1 and 2 by way of chi-square differences tests revealed that
the two-dimensional model was of significantly better fit to data for both sets of items
compared to the unidimensional model.

However, despite the significantly better fit of the two-dimensional model, the overall
poor fit of this factor structure indicates model misspecification (e.g., Brown, 2015). In
particular, a poor fitting factor structure can often signal that item variance needs to be
accounted for through the modelling of additional factors (e.g., Brown, 2015; Kline, 2015).
To this end, we endeavored to derive a post-hoc multifactorial structure that would: (1) better
account for item variance, and (2) advance on prior theory regarding the dimensionality of
dehumanization.

Post-hoc re-examination of the items for human uniqueness and human nature
suggested that each subscale of the DIRRS may in fact contain subthemes suggestive of a
four factor solution for the perpetrator and target items respectively. While a four factor conceptualization of dehumanization is indeed novel, a closer inspection of the literature indicates an implicit set of facets pertaining to human uniqueness and human nature that are related, but somewhat distinct. Specifically, these facets can be found within the vast majority of contemporary definitions of human nature and human uniqueness (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Haslam, 2006, 2015; Haslam et al., 2013). For example, the denial of human uniqueness is described as perceiving the target as coarse and backward (i.e., lacking social refinement), or irrational, childlike and immature (i.e., lacking maturity and competence). The denial of human nature is often described as seeing the target as an object or machine (i.e., a means to an end) or as cold, inert, and lacking emotion (i.e., heartless).

Therefore, the denial of human uniqueness may reflect two subfactors with items (3 per factor) constituting immaturity/competence and social refinement. The immaturity/competence factor represents the treatment of an individual as if they are a child and can’t manage on one’s own, whereas the social refinement factor suggests that an individual is an embarrassment to one’s partner, and that one’s partner is ashamed of an individual’s lack of social status. Likewise, the denial of human nature also reflects two subfactors (3 items per factor), namely, conditional regard and dissociation. The conditional regard factor represents being treated as a means to an end in which one’s worth is based on what they can offer another (i.e., machine or robot-like), whereas the dissociation factor suggests that one is heartless and unresponsive (i.e., lacking emotion).

To determine the fit of this multifactorial structure, a four factor first-order structure with oblique rotation was evaluated (see Figure 2, Model 3). However, given that Model 3 reflected a multifactorial structure that was derived on the basis of items thought to capture the unidimensional and two-dimensional conceptualizations of dehumanization, two additional higher-order models were tested. Specifically, Model 4 (see Figure 2) represents a
two factor higher-order model with four first-order factors. The two higher-order factors represent the dual model of dehumanization. Model 5 (see Figure 2) represents a single factor higher-order model with four first-order factors. The higher-order factor represents the unidimensional conceptualization of interpersonal dehumanization. That is, both higher-order models assume that the existing conceptualizations of dehumanization reported in the literature may reflect higher-order or global structures that are underpinned by more nuanced and specific lower-order facets. As in the case of Models 1 and 2, Models 3 to 5 were evaluated for model fit and comparison across models was conducted using chi-square difference tests.

The four factor first-order structure of dehumanization (Figure 2, Model 3) resulted in very good fit for both perpetration and target items (see Table 1). The two-dimensional higher order structure (Figure 2, Model 4) demonstrated good to very good fit for both perpetration and target items (see Table 1). The unidimensional higher-order structure (Figure 2, Model 5) also resulted in good to very good fit for both perpetration and target items (see Table 1). Across Models 3 to 5, the scale items demonstrated moderate to high loadings onto their respective factors ($\lambda=.58–.89$, see Figure 2) and all loadings were significant ($p<.001$).

Chi-square difference tests comparing the fit between Models 3 through 5 with Model 2 (the best fitting model out of Models 1 and 2) were conducted across perpetration and target items. In relation to items assessing perpetration, Model 3 (i.e., the four factor first-order solution) demonstrated significantly better fit when compared to all other models (see Table 1). In relation to items assessing being the target of dehumanization, Models 3 through 5 were of significantly better fit compared with Model 2, however, the differences between Models 3, 4, and 5 ($\Delta \chi^2$ and $\Delta$TLI) were not significant. That is, Models 3 to 5 were equivalent in terms of fit (see Table 1).
In summary, model comparisons revealed that the four factor first-order solution (Model 3) was the best fit to the data in relation to the perpetration items. Model 3 comprised factors that relate to denials of human uniqueness (i.e., immaturity/competence and social refinement) and human nature (i.e., conditional regard and dissociation). The four factor first-order model possesses good internal consistency across both perpetration (immaturity/competence $\alpha=.76$; social refinement $\alpha=.75$; conditional regard $\alpha=.71$; dissociation $\alpha=.83$) and target (immaturity/competence $\alpha=.76$; social refinement $\alpha=.78$; conditional regard $\alpha=.76$; dissociation $\alpha=.85$) items.

While the superior fit of Model 3 was apparent across all comparisons based on the perpetration items of the DIRRS, the findings were not as consistent for the target items. Specifically, Model 3 demonstrated significantly better fit than Models 1 and 2, however, was of equivalent fit when compared to Models 4 and 5 (i.e., the two factor and single factor higher-order models). While further confirmation of this new factor structure is required, what is apparent is that the dimensionality of the DIRRS (and interpersonal dehumanization more generally) may be more nuanced than first thought. That is, the two most common conceptualizations of dehumanization proposed within the literature—the unidimensional structure (as reported by Bastian et al., 2012a and Bastian et al., 2012b) and the two-dimensional structure (reflecting Haslam’s [2006] dual model of dehumanization)—may not best reflect the nature of interpersonal dehumanization, especially within romantic relationships.

**Study 2**

The findings for the construct validation of the DIRRS in Study 1 resulted in a four factor first-order structure (i.e., Figure 2, Model 3) that had not been theorized apriori. Therefore, the central aim of Study 2 was to cross-validate this structure on an independent sample. In doing so, we again compared the fit of the four factor first-order structure to all
other dehumanization models tested as part of Study 1 (i.e., Models 1, 2 [Figure 1], 4, and 5 [Figure 2]). We also extend our psychometric evaluation of the DIRRS to a criterion validity analysis for both versions (target and perpetration) of the measure.

Given that dehumanization reflects people’s behavioral tendencies to treat another as less than human, it is highly probable that being the perpetrator and/or target of dehumanization is likely to be associated with a constellation of negative relationship behaviors and outcomes. For instance, dehumanization perpetration is characterized by treating someone as incompetent, stupid or as a means to end (Haslam, 2006), and is thus likely to be associated with engaging in other toxic and aversive relationship behaviors. These can include limiting a person’s agency and autonomy through controlling and intrusive behavior often manifested as caregiving or social support (e.g., Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Kunce & Shaver, 1994; Pizzirani & Karantzaz, 2018). Similarly, targets of romantic relationship dehumanization are likely to report being treated insensitively, suffering ridicule, and hostility. Therefore, targets may also engage in reactive or defensive behaviors in response to their partner’s dehumanization, such as engaging in destructive communication patterns (e.g., stonewalling or withdrawing).

Conversely, being either the perpetrator or target of dehumanization should attenuate people’s engagement in positive and constructive relationship behaviors while also lessening their positive appraisals of their partner and the relationship overall. For example, based on the perpetrator’s treatment of their romantic partner as less than human, we would expect the perpetrator to possess less positive regard for their partner as well as reductions in the perceived quality of their relationship. This is because the target is unlikely to be evaluated by the perpetrator as living up to what is expected of a partner (Fletcher, Simpson & Giles, 1999). On the other hand, the target of dehumanization is also likely to view their partner and the relationship in a less positive light given that the behaviors that constitute dehumanization
are likely to undermine the positive functions of romantic relationships in which the perpetrator may also be viewed as falling well short of the target’s ideas of how they should be treated within their romantic relationship (Fletcher et al., 1999; Simpson, Fletcher & Campbell, 2001). Therefore, the second aim of Study 2 was to determine the concurrent validity of the DIRRS using a series of measures pertaining to relationship functioning as well as partner and relationship appraisals.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 847 participants (37.9 % men, 61.4 % women, .7% gender not specified) recruited online via the same social networking platforms used in Study 1. Participants were from the United States (60%), Canada (12%), Australia (19%), and the United Kingdom (9%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 59 years (M=25.55, SD=6.43) and were all in a current romantic relationship (M=3.55 years, SD=4.27). Relationship status consisted of participants who were steadily dating (51%), cohabiting (25%), engaged (8%), and married (16%).

Materials and procedure

Participants completed an anonymous online survey which took approximately 20 minutes. The survey consisted of a series of demographic questions and self-report measures. These questions and measures are outlined below.

Demographics. Included general questions concerning the participant’s age, gender, country of residence, and relationship status and length.

Dehumanization. Participants completed both the perpetration and target versions of DIIRS developed in Study 1 (see Study 1 for details).

Relationship quality. Participants’ appraisal of their current romantic relationship was assessed using the Perceived Relationship Quality Components short form (PRQC-SF;
Fletcher, Simpson & Thomas, 2000). The PRQC-SF consists of 6 items that are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely; α=.83).

*Negative social exchanges.* Negative relationship behaviors experienced within romantic relationships were assessed using the Test of Negative Social Exchanges (TENSE; Ruehlman & Karoly, 1991). The TENSE consists of 24 items that are rated on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 9 (frequently) where participants are asked to rate the frequency with which their relationship partner demonstrated negative behaviors. The TENSE is comprised of four subscales (6 items per dimension): Hostility, Insensitivity, Interference, and Ridicule (αs>.79).

*Positive regard.* Positive appraisal of a romantic partner was assessed using a modified version of the Revised Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory (RBLR; Cramer, 1986). The RBLR consists of 16-items that are rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (very untrue) to 6 (very true; α=.90).

*Communication Patterns.* Constructive and destructive communication patterns were assessed using the Communication Patterns Questionnaire short form (CPQ-SF; Furtis, Campbell, Nielsen & Burwell, 2010). The measure consists of 11 items comprising two subscales: demand/withdrawal (destructive communication), and positive communication (constructive communication). Items are rated on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 9 (very likely; αs>.72).

*Caregiving.* To assess the tendencies by which individuals render care to their romantic partner, participants completed the Caregiving Questionnaire (Kunce & Shaver, 1994). The Caregiving Questionnaire is a 32-item measure designed to assess 4 caregiving dimensions (8 items per dimension): proximity vs distance, sensitivity vs insensitivity, cooperation vs control, and compulsive caregiving. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree; αs>.79).
Results and Discussion

Results are reported in two sections. In the first section, we report on the cross-validation of the construct validity of the two versions of the DIIRS using CFA. Specifically, we compared the structure of the best-fitting model identified in Study 1 (the four factor first-order model of dehumanization, Model 3 [Figure 2]) to all other factor structures illustrated across Models 1 to 5 (see Figures 1 and 2). After estimating model fit, we conducted a series of model difference tests in which Model 3 was tested against all other models. In the second section, we report on the analyses pertaining to the criterion-related validity of the measure by way of correlational analyses in which the dimensions of both versions of the DIIRS were examined for their associations with the criterion-related variables.

Construct validity

The evaluation of the four factor first-order structure of dehumanization (Model 3) demonstrated excellent fit to the data for both the perpetration version of the DIRRS and target version of the DIRRS (see Table 2). Consistent with the findings from Study 1, chi-square difference tests and ΔTLI revealed that the four factor first-order structure was significantly better in fit when compared to all other models (Δχ² and ΔTLI pertain to Model 3 compared against Models 1, 2, 4, and 5 respectively [see Figures 1 and 2]). This was the case across both the perpetration and target versions of the DIRRS (see Table 2).

The findings regarding construct validity for Study 2, replicate the findings of Study 1, such that the four factor first-order solution was the best fit to the data. Importantly, in Study 2, these findings were consistent for models testing items from both perpetrator and target perspectives. These findings again suggest that when it comes to interpersonal dehumanization—such as within romantic relationships—dehumanization may be more nuanced than first thought. This is not to say that the dual model (Haslam, 2006) or unitary conceptualizations of dehumanization are not relevant to the study of dehumanization within
romantic relationships. Rather, the one and two factor higher-order models reflect broad
dimensions that are best distilled into more fine-grained facets within the context of romantic
relationships. Importantly, these related but distinct facets capture a number of primary
themes that are often implicitly discussed in reference to human uniqueness and human
nature, but not readily identified as part of the one or two factor approaches.

With reference to the four factor first-order structure of the DIRRS, while the
subfactors of immaturity/competence and social refinement both reflect denials of human
uniqueness, they are also conceptually distinct. For example, an individual may perceive their
partner to be highly competent, but nonetheless lack a degree of social refinement. Likewise,
although conditional regard and dissociation reflect denials of human nature, treating
someone with conditional regard is not synonymous with treating someone as if they are
heartless or unable to experience or express interpersonal warmth (i.e., dissociation). With
conditional regard, an individual can possess interpersonal warmth while at the same time be
treated as if they are only valuable for what they can offer. In contrast, dissociation reflects a
constant state of emotional inertia (i.e., heartless and cold).

**Criterion validity**

Based on the results of the construct validity analyses, we evaluated the criterion-
related validity of the four factor first-order structure of the perpetrator and target versions of
the DIRRS. Specifically, the associations between the four factors of immaturity/competence,
social refinement, conditional regard, and dissociation, and variables representing positive
and negative relationship interactions as well as relationship and partner evaluations were
tested.

The descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between the four factors of the
DIRRS (for both perpetration and target versions) and the criterion-related validity variables
are listed in Tables 3 and 4. In line with predictions, for both versions of the DIRRS, the four
subscales were found to positively correlate with the use of demand-withdrawal communication (i.e., destructive conflict management) and negatively with positive communication (i.e., constructive conflict management). Similarly, across both versions of the measure, all four subscales were negatively associated with reports of relationship quality and regard for one’s partner (see Tables 3 and 4). Additionally, moderate associations were found between all subscales of the target version of the DIRRS and scores on negative relationship experiences as indexed by the TENSE subscales of hostility, insensitivity, interference, and ridicule (see Table 3). Finally, and in line with our predictions, all subscales of the perpetration version of the DIRRS were positively associated with providing care that is compulsive and intrusive, and negatively associated with care that is sensitive, proximal, and cooperative (see Table 4).

In summary, being the target or perpetrator of dehumanization has implications for the way romantic partners treat one another and their appraisals of their partner and relationship. A consistent pattern of negative associations with positive relationship behaviors, and positive associations with negative relationship behaviors was found between all dehumanization subscales (for both target and perpetration versions of the DIRRS). In short, both versions of the DIRRS and their respective factors were associated with criterion-related variables in ways that were in line with our predictions.

**Study 3**

Study 3 had two aims. First, to cross-validate the associations between dehumanization and the criterion-validity variables reported in Study 2. Second, to investigate the associations between dehumanization and the very extreme end of the negative relationship behavior spectrum—overt emotional and physical abuse.

The application of dehumanization to the study of more severe romantic relationship behavior stems from the long-held view that perpetrators of dehumanization are less likely to
experience empathic distress or guilt for an abhorrent or violent act and are less likely to condemn oneself for such an act (e.g., Bandura, 1999; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Kelman, 1976; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). Because the perpetrator perceives the target of dehumanization to be someone who is less than human (and thus not worthy of moral concern or respectful treatment; Haslam, 2015) it stands to reason that within romantic relationships, a partner that dehumanizes their significant other may also engage in emotional abuse, domestic violence, and other abusive maltreatments.

Furthermore, based on previous findings in which dehumanization has been shown to have a negative impact on self-perception (e.g., feelings of shame and guilt; Bastian & Haslam, 2011), we also examined the association between dehumanization and positive appraisals of the self (i.e., feeling proud, confident, and strong).

Consistent with our predictions in Study 2, we expected that being the target and perpetrator of dehumanization would be negatively associated with positive relationship behaviors, positively associated with negative relationship behaviors (including emotional and physical abuse), and negatively associated with relationship quality. It was also predicted that being the target of dehumanization would be negatively associated with positive self-appraisals.

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample consisted of 328 participants (27% men, 72% women, 1% gender not specified) recruited online (using the same social networking sites as Studies 1 and 2) from the United States (51%), Canada (5%), Australia (42%), and New Zealand (2%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 60 years ($M=23.40$, $SD=6.43$) and were all currently in a romantic relationship ($M=2.40$ years, $SD=4.27$). Relationship status consisted of participants who were steadily dating (51%), cohabiting (25%), engaged (8%), and married (16%).
Materials and procedure

As with Studies 1 and 2, participants completed an anonymous online survey. Participation took approximately 20 minutes. The survey contained many of the same assessments used in Study 2 (i.e., the same demographic questions, the DIRRS to assess being the target and perpetrator of dehumanization, the TENSE [Ruehlman & Karoly, 1991] to assess negative interactions, the CPQ-SF [Furtis et al, 2010] to assess communication patterns, and the PRQC-SF [Fletcher et al., 2000] to measure relationship quality. In addition to these measures, the survey included measures of emotional and physical abuse and self-appraisals. These are described below.

**Emotional abuse.** Participants completed the restrictive engulfment (7-items) and dominance/intimidation (7-items) subscales of the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (Murphy & Hoover, 1999) in order to provide an assessment of both their experience and perpetration of emotional abuse. Participants are required to rate emotional abuse items in terms of the number of times they and their partner enacted the abuse in the past 6-months (i.e., 0 [never in the past 6 months] to 6 [>20 times]). Items were summed to create a total emotional abuse experience score ($\alpha=.80$) and a total emotional abuse perpetration score ($\alpha=.75$) for each participant.

**Physical abuse.** Participants also completed the overt physical violence (7-items) and restrictive violence (3-items) subscales of the Abuse Within Intimate Relationships Scale (AIRS; Borjesson, Aarons, & Dunn, 2003). Participants were asked to indicate how often physical abuse behaviors occur in their current romantic relationship on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). Items were asked twice, once to assess the experience of physical abuse ($\alpha=.80$), and again to assess the perpetration of physical abuse ($\alpha=.90$).

**Self-appraisal.** Participants were required to rate the extent to which they generally feel strong, proud, and confident. Each of these items is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from
1 (very slightly, or not at all) to 5 (extremely). Scores from these items were then averaged to create a composite score of positive self-appraisal (α=.73).

**Results and Discussion**

The descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between the four factors of the DIRRS (for both perpetration and target versions) and the criterion-related validity variables are presented in Tables 5 and 6. As predicted (and consistent with Study 2 results), across both versions of the DIRRS, the four subscales were found to positively correlate with the use of demand-withdrawal communication and negatively with positive communication. Similarly, across both versions of the measure, all four subscales were negatively associated with reports of relationship quality (see Tables 5 and 6). Additionally, for the target version of the DIRRS, moderate associations were again found (see Study 2) between the dehumanization subscales and reports of partner hostility, insensitivity, interference, and ridicule (as indexed by the TENSE subscales; see Table 5).

In line with further predictions, all dehumanization subscales of the DIRRS were moderately positively correlated with the experience of emotional abuse (see Tables 5 and 6). In addition, scores on all but one DIRRS subscale (i.e., social refinement [target version]) were significantly positively correlated with the experience of physical abuse. Similarly, scores on all but the social refinement subscale of the target version of the DIRRS were found to correlate negatively with positive self-appraisals. While the social refinement subscale for the target version of the DIRRS failed to reach significance for both the physical abuse and self-appraisal associations, the direction of these correlations was consistent with the other dehumanization factors.

In summary, the results of Study 3 provide support for the criterion validity findings from Study 2 for both the target and perpetration versions of the DIRRS. The reported associations between the target dehumanization subscales and self-appraisals are also
consistent with previous research in which dehumanization has been shown to have a negative association with self-perception (e.g., Bastian and Haslam, 2011). In particular, being denied humanness by one’s romantic partner appears to have implications for how individuals perceive themselves in terms of variables related to ego and self-efficacy (i.e., feeling proud, confident, and strong). Furthermore, the findings of the current study suggest that dehumanization is associated with extreme and serious negative relationship behaviors, namely emotional and physical abuse. Findings from Study 3, therefore, further support the link between dehumanization and the unacceptable treatment of others. This suggests that within romantic relationships denying humanness may give people a license to aggress or abuse their partner.

**General Discussion**

Despite increasing interest in the study of interpersonal dehumanization, there remains little research into this phenomenon within the context of romantic relationships. A major barrier in linking dehumanization to the study of romantic relationships is that no measure exists to assess dehumanization within this interpersonal context. Furthermore, ambiguity exists regarding the factor structure of interpersonal dehumanization. With these limitations in mind, the current paper reports on the development and psychometric evaluation of the Dehumanization in Romantic Relationships Scale (DIRRS). The DIRRS significantly extends on past measures of dehumanization by providing a multifaceted assessment of dehumanization within romantic relationships that accounts for both perpetrator and target perspectives.

The current paper advances on current conceptualizations of dehumanization by proposing that dehumanization within romantic relationships (and possibly, interpersonal relationships more generally) consists of four related but distinct facets (each possessing good internal reliability). This novel factor structure decomposes the denial of human
uniqueness and human nature into two factors respectively—immaturity/competence and social refinement (denials of human uniqueness), and conditional regard and dissociation (denials of human nature). Not only do these facets represent key features of the denial of humanness described in the literature (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Haslam, 2006, 2015; Haslam et al., 2013), but the implication is that not all denials of human uniqueness should be considered as conceptually equivalent; likewise, for denials of human nature. That is, to treat a partner as immature or incompetent is not the same as treating them as lacking social refinement. Similarly, treating someone with conditional regard is not analogous to engaging in dissociation. The factor structure constituting these facets was replicated across Studies 1 and 2, with the four factor first-order model consistently found to be of better fit compared to all other factor structures. Moreover, the same four factor model equally applied to the perpetrator and target versions of the DIRRS.

Across Studies 2 and 3, the dehumanization facets in both versions of the DIRRS were also associated with criterion-related variables in ways that were in line with predictions. All four facets were positively associated with destructive communication patterns, negative partner behaviors such as hostility, insensitivity, interference (including care that was intrusive), and ridicule. In contrast the facets were negatively associated with constructive communication patterns, the provision of sensitive-proximal care, relationship quality, regard for one’s partner and positive self-appraisals (only measured in Study 3). These findings provide the first evidence that romantic relationship dehumanization attenuates positive relationship appraisals and functioning but amplifies negative appraisals of oneself and partner, exacerbating negative relationship processes. Furthermore, the associations found between the DIRRS and emotional and physical abuse (Study 3) highlight that dehumanization is indeed associated with relationship behaviors that extend into the realm of intimate partner violence and aggression. In this way, the findings of Study 3
suggest that just as dehumanization may be an explanatory mechanism for intergroup prejudice, discrimination and aggression (e.g., Bandura, 1999; Haslam, 2015; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017; Kteily et al., 2015), so too, may dehumanization act as an impelling factor in the manifestation of interpersonal abuse. Therefore, future research should investigate dehumanization as a possible explanatory mechanism for the manifestation of abuse within romantic relationships.

Although the four factor first-order model of dehumanization (see Figure 2, Model 3) was the best fitting model (see Tables 1 and 2), we note that both the one and two factor higher-order models (see Figure 2, Models 4 and 5) also produced good to very good fit. This suggests that the four first-order factors may indeed represent specific substrates of human uniqueness, human nature, or dehumanization overall. Thus, researchers may also be interested in using the DIRRS to compute higher-order factors\(^3\) if they wish to aggregate up to more global assessments of interpersonal dehumanization. It is important to note, however, that omitting the four factors from the modeling of dehumanization by way of the DIRRS reduces fit significantly—which speaks to the substantive and empirical need to model these dehumanization facets within the context of romantic relationships.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Although we find highly consistent results across the three studies in terms of the construct and criterion-related validity of the DIRRS, each sample was by-and-large a community, non-clinical sample that on average reported low levels of dehumanization. Researchers, therefore, should attempt to confirm our findings using a more diverse sample including distressed or high-conflict couples. An understanding of how couples characterized

\(^3\) In a series of preliminary analyses, we calculated human nature, human uniqueness and dehumanization overall subscales to represent the one and two factor higher-order models, respectively. Associations between these broader subscales and previously mentioned criterion-related variables were found to be similar to what is noted in Tables 1–6.
by high stress and negativity engage in dehumanization may provide important insights into understanding key contextual factors affecting couples and families. These factors may include financial stress, a history of troublesome family relationships, and other contextual variables indicative of harsh or unpredictable environments. Furthermore, future research should implement the DIRRS within dyadic contexts, in order to account for the influence that both members of a couple have on their own and their partner’s experience of being the perpetrator and target of dehumanization.

In addition, although we developed and validated the DIRRS using data from individuals currently in romantic relationships, we believe the measure can be readily adapted to assess other types of relationships, including parent-child relationships and relationships between peers and colleagues. Finally, future research should investigate whether dehumanization plays a causal role in the enactment of emotional and physical abuse, or merely a variable that is associated with, but not a causal factor of, negative relationship experiences.

Conclusion

Despite increasing scholarly interest in the concept of dehumanization, and recent application of the phenomenon to the study of interpersonal processes, we still know very little about the manifestation of dehumanization within romantic relationships. We also do not clearly understand the consequences of being denied humanness by one’s romantic partner. This paper has made some novel and important contributions to the study of dehumanization, enhancing the field’s understanding of how dehumanization is conceptualized, assessed, and evaluated within romantic relationships. It is hoped that the DIRRS spurs on dehumanization research within the context of romantic (and other close) relationships, continuing the growth of dehumanization research within the field of social psychology, and in particular the study of interpersonal processes.
Figure 1. Alternative conceptualizations of dehumanization
Note. Standardized factor loadings and covariances for perpetration items are presented in parentheses.
Figure 2. New conceptualizations of interpersonal dehumanization. Note. Standardized factor loadings and covariances for perpetration items are presented in parentheses.
Table 1. Study 1 Chi-square difference tests for perpetration and target versions of the DIRRS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>(\chi^2)</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>(\chi^2) (\Delta)</th>
<th>df (\Delta)</th>
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<tr>
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*Note. \(\chi^2\) = Chi-square; df = degrees of freedom; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Residual.

***\(p < .001\)
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<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
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<th>df</th>
<th>( \Delta )</th>
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*Note. Note:* \( \chi^2 \) = Chi-square; df = degrees of freedom; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Residual.

\( *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001 \)
Table 3.
Study 2 descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between the target version of the DIRRS and other study variables

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<td>-.45**</td>
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<td>-.42**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
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</table>

Mean                          | 2.12             | 1.52             | 1.67             | 1.82             | 2.34             | 2.61             | 2.13             | 2.21             | 5.80             | 18.64            | 19.65            | 5.40             |
Standard Deviation            | 1.03             | .77              | .88              | 2.34             | 1.46             | 1.65             | 1.21             | 1.30             | .98              | 8.74             | 5.43             | .63              |
N                             | 847              |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |

Note. **p < .01
## Table 4

*Study 2 descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between the perpetration version of the DIRRS and other study variables*

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**Standard Deviation**

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**N** 847

*Note.  *p < .05,  **p < .01*
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**Study 3 descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between the perpetration version of the DIRRS and other study variables**

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*Note.* *p* < .05, **p** < .01
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Study 3 descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between the target version of the DIRRS and other study variables

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*Note. *p < .05, **p < .01*
Appendix A

The Dehumanization in Romantic Relationships Scale (DIRRS) consists of 24 items (12 items that assess dehumanization perpetration and 12 items that assess dehumanization receipt). Each statement is answered on a 7-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). For the perpetration items, instructions are to rate each item based on how the individual generally behaves in their romantic relationship. For the target items, instructions are to rate each item based on how their romantic partner generally behaves. Factor categories are shown below as subheadings and should be omitted when the scale is administered.

Generally, I treat my partner…

- Immaturity/competence
  - … as if they were a child
  - … as if they are immature
  - … as if they can’t manage on their own

- Social refinement
  - … as if they embarrass me
  - … as if they lack social status
  - … as if I am ashamed of them

- Conditional regard
  - … as a means to an end
  - … as if they are only valuable for what they can offer
  - … as if their opinion doesn’t count

- Dissociation
  - … as if they are heartless
  - … as if they are unresponsive
  - … as if they are cold

Generally, my partner treats me…

- Immaturity/competence
  - … as if I am a child*
  - … as if I am immature*
  - … as if I can’t manage on my own

- Social refinement
  - … as if I embarrass them
  - … as if I lack social status
  - … as if they are ashamed of me

- Conditional regard
  - … as a means to an end*
  - … as if I am only valuable for what I can offer
  - … as if my opinion doesn’t count

- Dissociation
  - … as if I am heartless
  - … as if I am unresponsive
  - … as if I am cold

*Denotes items retained from Bastian and Haslam’s (2011) measure of dehumanization
References


Simpson, J. A., Fletcher, G. J. O., & Campbell, L. (2001). The structure and function of
ideal standards in close relationships. In G. J. O. Fletcher and M. S. Clark (Eds.),
Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Interpersonal processes, (pp.86—106).
Malden, MA : Blackwell Publishers
Chapter 3 Conclusion

This chapter entailed Paper 2, which described the development and validation of the Dehumanization in Romantic Relationships Scale (DIRRS). The DIRRS captures both perpetrator and target perspectives, offering researchers the means by which to assess dehumanization within close and intimate relationships. In addition, Paper 2 identified and cross-validated the dimensional structure of interpersonal dehumanization. In particular, dehumanization within intimate relationships (and possibly, interpersonal relationships more generally) consists of four related but distinct facets. Consequently, interpersonal dehumanization may be more nuanced than initially considered such that it extends beyond the broader unidimensional and bidimensional conceptualizations. Having said this, the DIRRS can also be used to calculate broad (i.e., general) subscales of dehumanization (e.g., denial of human nature and denial of human uniqueness, or a unitary score on dehumanization) as it appears that these facets may be hierarchically nested within more global subscales.

Paper 2 also provides the first empirical evidence for the association between dehumanization and a wide range of negative relationship behaviors—some of which extend into the realm of intimate partner maltreatment (i.e., emotional and physical abuse). While these initial findings provide support for the link between dehumanization and maltreatment within close and intimate relationships, this work is cross-sectional in nature and merely reflects one set of findings. Therefore, Chapter 4 (which includes Paper 3) reports on an investigation into whether people’s perpetration of intimate partner abuse over time is predicted by the extent to which they engage in dehumanization.
CHAPTER 4: THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN DEHUMANIZATION AND INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE

In Chapter 2, dehumanization was described as the underlying feature of hurtful experiences within interpersonal contexts. In particular, a constellation of commonly studied hurtful and aversive behaviors (many of which constitute partner maltreatment [e.g., contempt, hostility, controlling behaviors and conditional regard]) were explained in terms of the various denials of humanness they encompass. In Chapter 3, dehumanization (both perpetration and targeting) was positively associated with various facets of maltreatment—of which the most explicit was emotional and physical abuse. These initial findings reported in Paper 2 (Chapter 3) linking dehumanization to emotional and physical abuse provide evidence that dehumanization is indeed associated with relationship behaviors that constitute intimate partner maltreatment. Furthermore, the findings and conclusions drawn from the previous chapters also provide indirect support to the long-held view (i.e., from the intergroup literature) that perpetrators of dehumanization are less likely to experience empathic distress or guilt for an abhorrent or violent act and are less likely to condemn oneself for such an act (e.g., Bandura, 1999; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Kelman, 1976; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017)—highlighting how the phenomenon may function as a predictor of violent, aggressive and abusive acts (Haslam, 2015; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014).

Nevertheless, the findings from Paper 2 (reported in Chapter 3) are cross-sectional in nature and represent only one set of results. Additionally, no research has tested this (proposed) causal assumption by way of research using experimental and longitudinal designs. Therefore, the Paper 3 (reported in this chapter) addresses this important gap in research by testing the causal assumption between dehumanization and maltreatment, and doing so, within the context of close intimate relationships. It is important to note that as part of Paper 3, dehumanization is calculated at the global (i.e., total/overall) level only. This was
done in order to ensure adequate sample size to estimate the variance-covariance models
developed and to reduce the likelihood of convergence problems as well as biased estimates
or standard errors (see Bentler & Chou, 1987; Jackson, 2003; Newsom, 2015).
The research article that follows is the author’s copy of a manuscript submitted to the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.


Figure 1 is included at the back the manuscript in accordance with journal submission requirements.
# AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

## 1. Details of publication and executive author

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<th>Publication details</th>
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<td>Published (in press) in <em>Journal of Social and Personal Relationships</em></td>
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<th>School/Institute/Division if based at Deakin; Organisation and address if non-Deakin</th>
<th>Email or phone</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bengianni Pizzirani</td>
<td>School of Psychology</td>
<td><a href="mailto:b.pizzirani@deakin.edu.au">b.pizzirani@deakin.edu.au</a></td>
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## 2. Inclusion of publication in a thesis

| Is it intended to include this publication in a higher degree by research (HDR) thesis? | Yes | If Yes, please complete Section 3 If No, go straight to Section 4. |

## 3. HDR thesis author’s declaration

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<td>School of Psychology, Deakin University</td>
<td>From the Intergroup to the Interpersonal: Dehumanization Within Close and Intimate Relationships</td>
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</table>

Bengianni (supervised by Gery Karantzaz) conceived of the original idea, developed the theory, performed the analyses and drafted the manuscript.

*I declare that the above is an accurate description of my contribution to this paper, and the contributions of other authors are as described below.*

### Signature and date

[Signature Redacted by Library]

## 4. Description of all author contributions

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<th>Name and affiliation of author</th>
<th>Contribution(s) (for example, conception of the project, design of methodology or experimental protocol, data collection, analysis, drafting the manuscript, revising it critically for important intellectual content, etc.)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bengianni Pizzirani, School of Psychology, Deakin University</td>
<td>Conceived of the original idea, developed the theory, performed the analyses and drafted the manuscript.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gery Karantzaz, School of Psychology, Deakin University</td>
<td>Supervised the executive author, verified the analytical methods and provided critical feedback and important intellectual content that helped shaped the research.</td>
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5. Author Declarations
I agree to be named as one of the authors of this work, and confirm:
xi. that I have met the authorship criteria set out in the Deakin University Research Conduct Policy,
xt. that there are no other authors according to these criteria,
xxiii. that the description in Section 4 of my contribution(s) to this publication is accurate,
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Abstract

The extent to which individuals perceive one another as fully human has consequences for how others are inevitably treated. Despite the role that dehumanization is thought to play in facilitating maltreatment towards others, there is a dearth of research regarding the extent to which the perpetration of dehumanization is associated with intimate partner abuse. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to delineate the longitudinal association between the perpetration of dehumanization and the perpetration of emotional and physical abuse within romantic relationships. Latent Growth Curve Modelling (LGCM) was used to model whether the trajectory (i.e., intercept and slope) of dehumanization across a six-week period predicted changes in the perpetration of abuse measured at baseline and two-months post. It was found that a cubic non-linear change in dehumanization perpetration (defined by a combination of decreases and acute upsurges) was positively associated with increases in both outcome variables (i.e., emotional and physical abuse). This work directly affirms theory and past empirical evidence that dehumanization is a factor that facilitates the maltreatment of others and extends on past research by suggesting that the maltreatment of others by way of dehumanization is not confined to intergroup contexts, but rather can be perpetrated against those whom we regard as our most intimate and closest of ties.

Keywords: Dehumanization; interpersonal relationships; abuse; maltreatment.
The Association Between Dehumanization and Intimate Partner Abuse

“The only bond worth anything between human beings is their humanness”.

Jesse Owens, 1936

As underscored in the quote above, there exists an understanding (both in lay- and academic perspectives) that the extent to which individuals perceive one another as fully human has consequences for how others are inevitably treated. The focus on dehumanization in this paper reflects the increasing emphasis on studying this phenomenon in interpersonal contexts, but also represents an important theorized mechanism that may assist in explaining partner maltreatment (specifically, emotional and physical abuse). Indeed, past research has highlighted that dehumanization reduces pro-social behavior (Vaes, Paladino, & Leyens, 2002), while recent theorizing contends that dehumanization increases the likelihood of aggression against another (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017).

Put simply, dehumanization refers to the perception or treatment of another person as lacking human qualities (Bain, Vaes & Leyens, 2014; Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016). Relevant to the present study, dehumanization is theorized to be an important factor that allows for an individual or group to be maltreated (Bandura 1999; Haslam, 2015)—of which a form of maltreatment is intimate partner abuse (Higgins & McCabe, 2000). Despite the role that dehumanization is thought to play in facilitating maltreatment (such as abuse) or aggression towards others, there is a dearth of research regarding the extent to which the perpetration of dehumanization is associated with intimate partner abuse. Furthermore, research is yet to investigate whether people’s perpetration of intimate partner abuse over time is predicted by the extent to which they engage in dehumanization. This paper, therefore, reports on a longitudinal investigation of whether the change in one’s perpetration of dehumanization over time is associated with changes in one’s perpetration of emotional and physical abuse.
Dehumanization

Dehumanization is defined as perceiving an individual or group as lacking qualities that are uniquely or essentially human—qualities that separate humans from non-human entities, such as animals or inanimate objects (e.g., robots and machines; Bain, Vaes & Leyens, 2014; Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016; Haslam et al., 2013). According to Haslam (2006), humans are distinguished from animals on attributes involving intelligence, civility, and social refinement, and differ from inanimate objects—such as machines and robots—on the basis of emotionality and interpersonal warmth (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). When human uniqueness attributes are denied, people are dehumanized in the way that they are likened to animals and seen as primitive, childlike, irrational, or unintelligent (Haslam, 2006; Bain et al., 2009). When human nature attributes are denied, people are dehumanized in the way that they are likened to inanimate objects or pre-programmed machines, and seen as cold, rigid or lacking emotion (Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Haslam, 2006). Thus, dehumanization comprises the denial of characteristics reflective of human uniqueness and human nature.

Historically, the study of dehumanization has largely occurred within the contexts of intergroup conflicts (Haslam, 2015) and blatant acts of atrocity (e.g., the Jewish Holocaust or the Boko Haram violence in Nigeria; Bandura, Barabaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996; Haslman & Stratmeyer, 2016; Kelman, 1976; Staub, 1989). More recent research, however, has also suggested that dehumanization can occur within daily social interactions (Bastian, Jetten, & Haslam, 2014)—in which people routinely act in ways that benefit themselves while causing harm to others (Bandura, 1999). Nevertheless, this research has not investigated dehumanization within the context of intimate close relations (such as people’s romantic relationships). Thus, our understanding to date regarding the associations between dehumanization and serious maltreatments such as abuse, are largely confined to the
intergroup literature and social psychology more generally (e.g., Haslam, 2015; Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017).

According to these past and current lines of intergroup and social psychology research, the tendency to dehumanize is associated with enacting violence and aggression because perceiving someone as less than human short-circuits an individual’s ability to inhibit aggressive or abusive tendencies (Kelman, 1976; Staub, 1989). Therefore—largely because the target of the dehumanization is perceived to be expendable—harming the dehumanized target by ways of aggression and abuse is regarded as acceptable by the perpetrator (Opotow, 1990). Furthermore, because the target of dehumanization is perceived as lacking human qualities (in particular the capacity to experience emotions) perpetrators are less likely to experience empathic distress or guilt (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014) and less likely to condemn oneself for immoral, aggressive, or abusive acts (Haslam, 2015). In summary, dehumanization enables the perpetrator to act abusively and violently because they perceive the target of dehumanization to be someone who is less than human and inferior, and thus not worthy of moral consideration or respectful treatment.

**Interpersonal Dehumanization and Intimate Partner Abuse**

To view and treat another individual as less than human may sound extreme, however, it is a common and widespread phenomenon (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Indeed, theory and research suggest that dehumanization can manifest in relatively implicit forms within everyday social interactions, rather than limited to the occurrence of moral atrocities, such as mass violence or genocide (see Haslam, 2006; Leyens et al., 2000). More recently, a number of studies have shown that within interpersonal contexts, dehumanization is in fact a commonplace phenomenon that is perpetrated by close others (such as romantic partners, family, and friends) and associated with interpersonal maltreatments (e.g., being degraded, demoralized, or invalidated; Adams, 2014; Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011; Bastian et al.,
2014; Bastian, Jetten, & Radke, 2012; Pizzirani & Karantzas, 2018, Pizzirani, Karantzas, & Mullins, 2018). For example, Bastian and Haslam (2011) found that a number of common interpersonal maltreatments (e.g., being treated with contempt, condescension, and everyday thoughtlessness) were experienced as dehumanizing, and that the dehumanization encompassed both the denials of human nature and human uniqueness.

However, the vast majority of research into dehumanization within interpersonal contexts has not specifically focused on romantic relationships. Furthermore, while some researchers allude to an association between dehumanization and intimate partner abuse (e.g., Bastian et al., 2014), only one publication has provided empirical evidence for this association (Pizzirani et al., 2018). Specifically, in a recent series of studies, Pizzirani et al. (2018) found that the perpetration of dehumanization was positively associated with the perpetration of emotional and physical abuse. These initial findings provide proof-of-concept that dehumanization is indeed associated with relationship behaviors that extend into the realm of intimate partner maltreatment and abuse. This work, however, merely reflects one set of findings, and the associations evidenced between the perpetration of dehumanization and emotional and physical abuse were cross-sectional in nature. Therefore, attempts at replicating these associations are necessary to not only determine the consistency of these findings, but to provide some sense of the directionality (i.e., causation) of these associations. To this end, research should not limit the study of dehumanization and intimate partner abuse to cross-sectional designs; rather, the longitudinal associations between these variables should be estimated by way of prospective methodologies. Investigating the association between these variables over time is also necessary for two additional reasons central to the study of dehumanization and to the study of romantic relationships.

Firstly, the theoretical work into dehumanization largely implies that dehumanization is an impelling factor that causes an individual to engage in the maltreatment of others in the
form of aggression, violence, or abuse (Bandura 1999; Bandura et al., 1996; Haslam, 2015; Kelman, 1976; Opotow, 1990; Staub, 1989). No research, however, has tested this (proposed) causal assumption by way of research using experimental and longitudinal designs. The current study therefore addresses an important gap in the literature in testing the underlying causal assumption between dehumanization and maltreatment.

Secondly, it is now widely acknowledged that many relational phenomena are dynamic in nature (e.g., Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson, & Swanson, 2002; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). For instance, numerous studies have found that positive relationship behaviors (e.g., responsiveness and social support; Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2010) as well as negative relationship behaviors (e.g., destructive conflict patterns; Holley, 2011; Noller, Feeney, Bonnell & Callan, 1994) demonstrate change over time. Moreover, research has demonstrated that changes within one relationship phenomenon is associated with fluctuations within another relationship phenomenon – whether it be relationship behavior, cognition or affect (e.g., Gottman et al., 2002). For example, Rubin and Campbell (2012) found that changes in intimacy were associated with fluctuations in relationship passion and sexual intercourse on a given day.

Such change dynamics are also likely to apply to phenomena such as dehumanization and intimate partner abuse. Although longitudinal research into both these phenomena is largely non-existent, implicit and explicit theorizing in relation to both constructs suggests that dehumanization and intimate partner abuse are likely to demonstrate instability (e.g., Buckels & Trapnell, 2013; Fasoli, et al., 2015; Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990; Gwinn, Judd, & Park, 2013; Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016). That is, these phenomena are likely to include some degree of variability due to various contextual factors (e.g., an atmosphere of high couple conflict) and individual difference variables (i.e., dark triad/tetrad traits, see Bastian, this issue; Kteily, Bruneau, Waytz, & Cotterill, 2015; Malamuth, 2003)
that may increase or attenuate tendencies to dehumanize another (for review see Kteily & Bruneau, 2017) or perpetrate intimate partner abuse. In this way, studying changes in these variables over time as well as the change dynamics between these variables (i.e., how change in one variable is associated with change in another variable) is critical in understanding whether there is a particular trajectory of dehumanization that impels an individual to escalate the perpetration of emotional and physical abuse of one’s partner over time.

**Current study**

For decades, scholars have noted how the denial of humanness can lead to the immoral or deprecating treatment of others (e.g., Allport, 1954, 1979; Bandura, 1999; Haslam, 2006, 2015; Kelman, 1976; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017; Opotow, 1999; Staub, 1989). This enduring understanding of dehumanization highlights how the phenomenon may function as a predictor of violent, aggressive and abusive acts (Haslam, 2015; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Nevertheless, there exists little by way of longitudinal research to determine the extent to which dehumanization is indeed a predictor of maltreatment. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research investigating whether the perpetration of dehumanization is associated with intimate partner abuse—a form of maltreatment specific to the context of romantic relationships. To address these limitations, the aim of the current study was to delineate the longitudinal association between the perpetration of dehumanization and the perpetration of emotional and physical abuse within romantic relationships. In particular, the current investigation focuses on how change within dehumanization perpetration over time is associated with changes in the perpetration of emotional and physical intimate partner abuse.

**Method**

**Participants**
The sample consisted of 174 participants (27% men, 72% women, 1% gender not specified) recruited online (using social networking sites such as Facebook, Gumtree and Reddit) from Australia (50%), the United States (43%), Canada (6%) and New Zealand (1%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 60 years ($M=28.13, SD=8.69$) and were all currently in a romantic relationship ($M=4.87$ years, $SD=6.60$). Relationship status consisted of participants who were steadily dating (45%), cohabiting (21%), engaged (8%), and married (26%).

**Materials and procedure**

Across a period of two months, participants completed eight surveys (one survey per week; Time 1 [T1] to Time 8 [T8]) as part of an online longitudinal study. The surveys, which took approximately five minutes to complete on each occasion, consisted of a series of demographic questions and self-report measures. The weekly online questionnaires were administered to participants by way of an email that included a URL link to the respective weekly survey to be completed. The measures included across the weekly surveys are described below.

**Demographics (collected at T1 only).** Included general questions concerning the participant’s age, gender, country of residence, relationship status and relationship length.

**Dehumanization (collected at T2 to T7).** To assess the extent to which participants dehumanized their romantic partner, the perpetration version of the Dehumanization in Romantic Relationships Scale (DIRRS; Pizzirani et al., 2018) was administered. The measure consists of 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and includes items such as “At some point today I treated my partner as cold” and “At some point today I treated my partner as if they can’t manage on their own”. The DIRRS can be used to calculate broad subscales of dehumanization (e.g., denial of human nature and denial of human uniqueness) as well as facets nested within these broad
subscales (see Pizzirani et al., 2018). However, these subscales can also be aggregated to form a total (i.e., global) score for dehumanization perpetration (Pizzirani et al., 2018). Higher scores at the subscale and global scale level reflect greater dehumanization perpetration. Within the present study, global scores for dehumanization were calculated for surveys T2 to T7 (αs=.85—.86).

*Emotional abuse (collected at T1 and T8).* Participants completed the perpetration version of the restrictive engulfment (7-items) and dominance/intimidation (7-items) subscales of the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (Murphy & Hoover, 1999) in order to provide an assessment of emotional abuse. Participants were required to rate the emotional abuse items in terms of the number of times they had abused their partner in the past 6-months (i.e., 0 [*never in the past 6 months*] to 6 [*>20 times*]). Items include statements such as, “Drove recklessly to frighten them” and “ Tried to stop them from seeing certain friends or family members”. Items across subscales are summed to create a total emotional abuse score, with higher scores indicating greater perpetration of emotional abuse (α=.75).

*Physical abuse (collected at T1 and T8).* Participants also completed the perpetration version of the overt physical violence (7-items) and restrictive violence (3-items) subscales of the Abuse Within Intimate Relationships Scale (AIRS; Borjesson, Aarons, & Dunn, 2003). Participants were asked to indicate how often they engaged in physically abusive behaviors in their current romantic relationship on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). Items include statements such as “I have physically attacked my partner” and “I have used an object to hit my partner”. The two subscales are aggregated to form a total physical abuse score, with higher scores indicative of greater perpetration of physical abuse (α=.90).

**Data Analysis**
Latent Growth Curve Modelling (LGCM) was used to model whether the trajectory (initial level [i.e., intercept] and rate of change [i.e., slope]) of dehumanization across T2 to T7 predicted changes in the perpetration of emotional and physical abuse measured at T1 (i.e., baseline) and T8 (i.e., final survey assessment). Two separate LGCMs were conducted, one in which change in emotional abuse was the outcome variable, and another in which change in physical abuse was the outcome variable. Figure 1 illustrates an example of the LGCMs tested. As shown, the T2 to T7 assessments of dehumanization are modelled to load onto an intercept and a slope latent factor respectively. Given that the intercept reflects the initial levels of dehumanization perpetration, all loadings are scaled to unity (i.e., 1), while the slope values reflect parameters that indicate a particular rate of change. The values depicted in Figure 1, for example, reflect a linear change (i.e., 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7), and thus assumes that dehumanization would increase over time. In order to determine the most appropriate rate of change for dehumanization perpetration, we conducted preliminary analyses in which we tested and compared three possible trajectories of change – linear, quadratic and cubic. Across all models, the covariance between the slope and intercept was freely estimated.

Once the rate of change that best fit the data was identified (see Results below), emotional and physical abuse were regressed onto the latent growth curve for dehumanization. As illustrated in Figure 1, given that physical and emotional abuse were collected at two time points, we modelled change over time by way of a Latent Change Score (Coman et al., 2013). The LCS is analogous to a paired samples t-test, in which the regression paths from T1 abuse and the LCS variable are scaled to unity (1), while the intercept for abuse at T8 is set to zero, as are the mean and variance of the residual error for abuse at T8. This parametrization of the LCS implies that scores for emotional or physical abuse at T8 are explained as a function of the LCS.
Results

A series of preliminary LGCMs were conducted (without the LCS for emotional and physical abuse) in order to determine the trajectory that best fit dehumanization perpetration across T2 to T7. Assessment of model fit was based on the guidelines proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999)\(^6\). The application of a linear pattern for the slope of dehumanization resulted in a model of modest fit $\chi^2(3) = 10.669$, $p > .05$; CFI = .928; RMSEA = .112; SRMR = .052. Similarly, the application of a quadratic trajectory also resulted in a model of modest fit $\chi^2(3) = 11.222$, $p > .05$; CFI = .923; RMSEA = .126; SRMR = .054. Finally, the application of a cubic pattern resulted in a model that demonstrated excellent fit to the data $\chi^2(3) = 4.881$, $p > .05$; CFI = .981; RMSEA = .060; SRMR = .018. Comparison across the three models of imposed trajectories on the basis of the CFI (see recommendations, Chen 2007; Cheung & Revensvold, 2002) revealed that the cubic trajectory was of better fit to the data than both the linear trajectory model ($\Delta$CFI = .053 [cubic model – linear model]) and the quadratic trajectory model ($\Delta$CFI = .058 [cubic model – quadratic model]).

The primary LGCM analyses were then conducted in which the LCS for physical abuse and emotional abuse were regressed onto the intercept and slope latent variables (modelling a cubic rate of change) for dehumanization. A separate LGCM was estimated for each outcome variable (i.e., physical and emotional abuse). The LGCM with emotional abuse as the outcome variable demonstrated acceptable fit to the data $\chi^2(17) = 43.601$, $p < .05$; CFI=.911; RMSEA=.09; SRMR=.11. The intercept ($\beta = .40$, $p < .05$) and slope ($\beta = .49$, $p < .05$) for dehumanization were significantly positively associated with changes in emotional abuse. That is, higher initial levels of dehumanization, as well as a cubic non-linear change in

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\(^6\) Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) $\geq .95$, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) $\leq .05$, and Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR)=.06 are indicative of good fit.
dehumanization (points of upward acceleration in experiences of being the perpetrator of
dehumanization) were associated with increases in emotional abuse over time.

The LGCM with physical abuse as the outcome variable resulted in excellent fit to the
data $\chi^2(17) = 22.068, p > .05; CFI = .972; RMSEA = .042; SRMR = .057$. The intercept for
dehumanization was not significantly associated with changes in physical abuse ($\beta = -.02, p > .05$), however, the slope for dehumanization was significantly positively associated with
change in physical abuse ($\beta = .17, p < .05$). Specifically, a cubic change in dehumanization
was associated with increases in physical abuse.

**Discussion**

Dehumanization has been proposed as an impelling factor in the prediction of
aggression, violence and abuse (Bandura 1999; Bandura et al., 1996; Haslam, 2015; Kelman,
1976; Opotow, 1990; Staub, 1989). Recently, it has been suggested that this association
extends beyond the contexts of moral atrocities and intergroup relations, and that
dehumanization may well yield maltreatment within romantic relationships (Bastian et al.,
2014; Pizzirani et al., 2018). Despite this, there exists no research (intergroup or
interpersonal) that tests for the implied causal association between dehumanization and
abuse. To address this limitation, the current study sought to determine the longitudinal
association between the perpetration of dehumanization and the perpetration of emotional and
physical abuse within romantic relationships.

As part of our preliminary analyses, we determined that the trajectory that best fit the
sample data was a cubic trajectory in which individuals demonstrate both minor decreases
and points of upward acceleration in dehumanization over time. This trajectory is important
to highlight as it speaks to the labile nature of dehumanization and affirms the theoretical
assumption that the phenomenon may be best characterized as malleable over time and likely
to be moderately stable at best (for studies that demonstrate changes in dehumanization, see Buckels & Trapnell, 2013; Fasoli, et al., 2015; Gwinn et al., 2013).

The implementation of this non-linear trajectory within our main analyses yielded findings to suggest that the perpetration of dehumanization is indeed associated with the perpetration of both emotional and physical abuse. These findings are also consistent with recent cross-sectional research into which interpersonal dehumanization was reported to be associated with not only a wide range of romantic partner maltreatments (e.g., hostility, insensitivity, interference and ridicule), but also emotional and physical abuse within romantic relationships (Pizzirani et al., 2018). In the present study, however, non-linear changes in dehumanization over a six-week period were associated with an increase in abuse spanning two months.

In unpacking our findings further, we found that initial levels of dehumanization (i.e., the intercept) was positively associated with abuse, however, this relationship was only found for emotional abuse. It was also found that a cubic non-linear change in dehumanization perpetration (defined by a pattern of minor decreases and points of upward acceleration) was positively associated with increases in both outcome variables (i.e., emotional and physical abuse). More specifically, the trajectory of weekly reports of dehumanization across a six-week period—best represented by a combination of decreases and acute upsurges—significantly predicted the difference (i.e., LCS) between reports of emotional and physical abuse at T1 and two months later, at T8. In particular, it is the upward acceleration (i.e., increases) in dehumanization across time points that is associated with increases in emotional and physical abuse over time. Put simply, the increase (rather than the attenuation) of dehumanization over time is predictive of increases (i.e., changes) in intimate partner abuse.

Our longitudinal findings are significant for two reasons. Firstly, our findings provide the first evidence to suggest that dehumanization appears to be a causal factor in the
manifestation of intimate partner abuse. The majority of research into the perpetration of abuse is cross-sectional in nature with little by way of empirical data based on prospective designs that speaks to changes in the perpetration of abuse over time. Nevertheless, theory into intimate partner abuse assumes that various individual differences are indeed impelling factors that increase the likelihood of maltreatment manifesting (Finkel & Hall, 2018; Finkel et al., 2012). Our findings therefore provide important evidence to support the theoretical claims regarding the causal implications of impelling factors.

Secondly, our findings directly affirm theory and past empirical evidence that dehumanization is a factor that facilitates the maltreatment of others (e.g., Allport, 1954, 1979; Haslam, 2015; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Kelman, 1976). Importantly, our work extends on past research by suggesting that the maltreatment of others by way of dehumanization is not confined to intergroup contexts, acts of atrocity, or even interpersonal acquaintances that may have very little emotional connection to the perpetrator (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011; Bastian et al., 2012). Rather, dehumanization can be perpetrated against those whom we regard as our most intimate and closest of ties, and that treating another as less than human appears to give one license to engage in abuse. As noted by Haslam and colleagues (Haslam et al., 2013; Haslam, 2015), dehumanization is thought to enable the perpetrator to act abusively or immorally against any individual (including a romantic partner) because they perceive the target of dehumanization to be someone who is less than human, and thus not worthy of moral and respectful treatment. Specifically, dehumanization enables a perpetrator to disconnect—or divorce themselves—from their moral reasoning that would usually maintain the humane treatment of others (Bandura, 1999; Bandura et al., 1996). Thus, the conceptualization of dehumanization as a mechanism that facilitates aggressive or abuse actions in the intergroup literature may well be an appropriate way to frame the occurrence of interpersonal dehumanization within romantic relationships.
Limitations and Future Directions

The current study has some limitations. Firstly, due the complexity of the analyses conducted, our sample size was only large enough to assess dehumanization globally (i.e., overall). We are therefore unable to shed any light on how the various facets of interpersonal dehumanization (see Haslam, 2006; Pizzirani et al., 2018) may differentially predict or be related to, emotional and physical abuse within romantic relationships. A more thorough and complete examination of interpersonal dehumanization would unpack the dimensional elements (e.g., human uniqueness and human nature) of the construct in an attempt to better understand how they are associated with intimate partner abuse. Secondly—and as is often the case with the study of relationship processes and interactions—the examination between dehumanization and abuse within romantic relationships would benefit from a dyadic perspective (in order to account for the influence that both members of a couple have on their own and their partner’s experience of both dehumanization and abuse).

And finally, while self-report data is most commonly used when measuring dehumanization perpetration (for a review on the measurement advantages of using self-reports to assess overt dehumanization, see Kteily & Bruneau, 2017), researchers should look to confirm our findings by supplementing self-report measurements of dehumanization with behavioral (i.e., observational) assessments. By observationally coding for dehumanization—by way of identifying markers of denying another person unique or essential human qualities during relationship tasks that are commonly used in relationship research (e.g., a couple conflict discussion)—researchers will be able to triangulate self-report assessments with behavior directly observed within couple interactions.

Conclusion

The current study builds and expands upon previous studies of dehumanization by not only providing the first longitudinal assessment of the phenomenon, but by leveraging this
unique longitudinal data to examine dehumanization’s association with emotional and physical abuse occurring in romantic relationships. This research involved a novel and innovative approach to understanding the factors that lead to abuse at the hands of one’s romantic partner and how this may in fact be a result of their tendency to treat their partner as less than human. We hope that the findings from this study will help to generate further interest in the application of dehumanization to the study of interpersonal relationships and in doing so strengthen the evidence-base from which preventative strategies for domestic violence and abuse are developed.
Figure 1. *Latent growth curve model showing the trajectory of dehumanization predicting changes in the perpetration of abuse.*
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perspective. Under review (Chapter 2 of this dissertation).


Chapter 4 Conclusion

Paper 3, which is reported in this chapter, has a number of significant implications for the study of dehumanization within close and intimate relationships. Firstly, the findings build directly on the previous papers presented in Chapters 2 and 3 in which dehumanization was proposed to be associated with the maltreatment of others (Paper 1, Chapter 2) and empirical evidence (cross-sectional) was provided for this proposed association (Paper 2, Chapter 3).

Specifically, Paper 3 goes beyond the theoretical reasoning and cross-sectional findings reported in Papers 1 and 2 (and past research) by providing longitudinal evidence for the association between dehumanization and intimate partner abuse. In doing so, these findings confirm the long-held view in the intergroup literature that dehumanization is an impelling factor that causes an individual to engage in the maltreatment of others in the form of aggression, violence, or abuse (Bandura 1999; Bandura et al., 1996; Haslam, 2015; Kelman, 1976; Opotow, 1990; Staub, 1989). The findings of Paper 3 highlight the importance of framing dehumanization as a possible factor in the manifestation of family and domestic violence. In particular, the findings suggest that understanding the role that dehumanization can play in intimate partner abuse may be important in helping to end cycles of violence within close relationships (Bastian, et al., 2014).

Secondly, this chapter highlights that interpersonal dehumanization may be best characterized as a moderately stable facet of individual differences. As noted in Papers 1 and 2 (Chapters 2 & 3), many relational phenomena and individual differences tied to relationship processes demonstrate dynamic properties (e.g., Gillath et al., 2016; Overall et al., 2010; Rubin & Campbell, 2012). The findings of Paper 3 suggest that dehumanization is a dynamic phenomenon that can be conceptualized over time as having a non-linear trajectory. This trajectory is characterized by reductions as well as acute increases in the tendency to
perpetrate dehumanization over time. This non-linear pattern may point to role that particular contextual factors play in increasing or attenuating people’s tendencies to engage in dehumanization. Thus, future research should investigate the types of moderating variables that may help to explain the non-linear pattern of dehumanization identified in Paper 3. Importantly, researching the contextual moderators (e.g., circumstances, discussions, or interactions considered to be highly serious, frustrating, or distressing) that are likely associated with dehumanization may be important in identifying factors that increase as well as buffer the risk of dehumanization in intimate relationships. This, in turn, may have important and novel flow-on effects in terms integrating a dehumanization framework into couple and family violence interventions.
CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Traditionally, dehumanization was conceptualized as an extreme phenomenon typically examined in the context of mass violence (i.e., the Boko Haram violence in Nigeria), intense conflict (i.e., the Gaza-Israel conflict, Kelman, 1976; Staub, 1989) and moral atrocities (i.e., the Jewish Holocaust, and the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, Bandura, 1999; Opotow, 1990). Since this early work, the conceptualization of dehumanization has evolved to acknowledge that the phenomenon is not limited to conditions bound by prejudice or inter-group conflict (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011; Haslam, 2006; Leyens et al., 2001). Instead, dehumanization can also be conceptualized as a relatively common phenomenon that occurs in everyday social interactions. Despite the emergence of research into interpersonal dehumanization, however, no research has investigated dehumanization within the context of intimate close relationships (such as people’s romantic relationships). Thus, our understanding to date regarding dehumanization is largely confined to the intergroup literature and social psychology more generally.

The major aim of this dissertation was to investigate dehumanization within the context of close and intimate relationships. In addressing this primary aim, this dissertation makes a significant contribution to both the fields of dehumanization and close relationships in that it is the first attempt to theoretically and empirically couch the study of close and intimate relationships within a dehumanization framework. This final chapter begins with a brief overview of the research conducted in this dissertation, followed by a discussion of the broader implications of the findings for the understanding and study of both dehumanization and close relationships.

Summary of results

In Chapter 2, Paper 1 was presented in which a theoretical model was proposed suggesting that dehumanization may be the underlying cause of hurt feelings that occur in
interpersonal interactions. Importantly, the proposed model reflects an integrative framework that unifies previously espoused explanations of hurt (e.g., Feeney, 2004; Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell & Evans, 1998; Vangelisti, Young, Carpenter-Theune, & Alexander, 2005). In doing so, this model reconciles points of difference across previous theories and typologies. Furthermore, the model reflects the first theoretical attempt to integrate dehumanization within the study of close and intimate relationships. In doing so, the model also outlines the types of negative relationship behaviors that are characteristic of dehumanization, and thus, reflective of partner maltreatment. The implications and future directions outlined as part of Paper 1 provided the grounding for the papers reported across Chapters 3 and 4. These implications and future directions included the need to provide empirical evidence for the theorized associations between dehumanization and relationship behaviors indicative of abuse and maltreatment such as undermining and interfering social support, hostility [aggression], and conditional regard, to name but a few.

Although Paper 1 served as the conceptual foundation for this dissertation, Paper 2 provided the first empirical investigation of dehumanization within intimate relationships. Specifically, Paper 2 (see Chapter 3) described the development and validation of the Dehumanization in Romantic Relationships Scale (DIRRS)—and in doing so revealed a novel factor structure that decomposes the denial of human uniqueness and human nature into two factors respectively—immaturity/competence and social refinement (denials of human uniqueness), and conditional regard and dissociation (denials of human nature). Thus, Paper 2 advances the conceptualization of interpersonal dehumanization, by extending on past unidimensional and two-dimensional conceptualizations. To date, there exists some debate as to whether dehumanization is best represented as a unitary or multifaceted construct. The findings from Paper 2 speak to the multi-dimensional nature of the construct, but also highlight that the multiple facets that constitute the DIRRS (and thus interpersonal
dehumanization), may reflect lowered-order facets that may be aggregated up to form unidimensional or two-dimensional (i.e., denial of human uniqueness and denial of human nature) higher-order assessments of dehumanization. Importantly, across lower and higher-order levels of assessment, the conceptual structure of interpersonal dehumanization seems consistent irrespective of whether the target or perpetrator perspectives are measured.

Paper 2 also provided the first empirical evidence that dehumanization not only occurs in intimate relationships, but that it is associated with a wide range of relationship processes and outcomes (many of which were outlined in Paper 1 [Chapter 2]). For example, all four facets of the DIRRS were positively associated with destructive communication patterns, negative partner behaviors such as hostility, insensitivity, interference (including care that was intrusive), and ridicule. In contrast the facets were negatively associated with constructive communication patterns, the provision of sensitive-proximal care, relationship quality, regard for one’s partner and positive self-appraisals. Thus, dehumanization within romantic relationships attenuates positive relationship appraisals and functioning but amplifies negative appraisals of oneself and partner as well as exacerbating negative relationship processes. Furthermore, while not reported as part of this dissertation, work in preparation has also provided proof-of-concept regarding the central proposition of the model of dehumanization outlined in Paper 1. Specifically, dehumanization is also positively associated with experiences of hurt ($r = .21$ to $.61$) across studies with both individuals and dyads (Pizzirani & Karantzas, 2018).

Finally, Paper 2 reported that the facets constituting interpersonal dehumanization were associated with emotional and physical partner abuse. These findings pertaining to abuse highlight that dehumanization is indeed associated with relationship behaviors that extend into the realm of intimate partner maltreatment. While these finding were preliminary in nature, they were important to this dissertation for two reasons. Firstly, no other study has
reported empirical evidence for the association between dehumanization and intimate partner abuse (while Paper 1 described how particular interpersonal experiences [some of which are considered to be maltreatment] constitute the denial of humanness, this work was theoretical in nature). Secondly, the findings from Paper 2 were the catalyst for a more specific investigation of the association between perpetration of dehumanization and abuse reported as part of Paper 3.

Paper 3 (Chapter 4) addressed an important gap in the literature on dehumanization by testing the underlying causal assumption between dehumanization and the maltreatment or abuse of other. While Paper 3 tests this assumption within the context of romantic relationships, the findings have significant implications for the dehumanization field more broadly. That is, the findings affirm not only the association between dehumanization and intimate partner abuse but also the long-held view (within the intergroup perspective) that dehumanization functions as an impelling factor in the manifestation of violent, aggressive and abusive acts. This assumption regarding dehumanization, first proposed over five decades ago (e.g., Allport, 1954/1979; Kelman, 1976) has echoed throughout the study of dehumanization but—until now—had not been investigated longitudinally. Thus, Paper 3 offers the first empirical evidence that presents dehumanization as a causal factor in the maltreatment of others.

In addition, Paper 3 also revealed another significant and novel finding relevant to the phenomenon of dehumanization. In particular, Paper 3 demonstrated how the longitudinal trajectory of dehumanization reflects an aspect of individual difference that is moderately stable and exhibits non-linear change over time. While previous work has demonstrated experimentally that dehumanization can change as a function of the manipulation of an independent variable (including disgust, power and exposure to homophobic epithets; e.g., Buckels & Trapnell, 2013; Fasoli, et al., 2015; Gwinn, Judd, & Park, 2013), no study had
examined naturally occurring fluctuations in dehumanization over time. These findings, therefore, broaden the scope of dehumanization by considering it as a construct that may well be malleable as a function of time and situation. To this end, identifying the factors that moderate the trajectory of dehumanization is likely to yield important insights into the nature of the phenomenon.

**Implications for Future Research**

The three papers constituting this dissertation significantly contribute to the fields of dehumanization and close relationships by highlighting the ways in which denials of humanness are associated with a wide range of relationships outcomes and processes. Importantly, the theory and empirical evidence reflected across the three papers suggest that dehumanization may be an important factor in not only the experience of hurt feelings, but the manifestation of intimate partner abuse.

As underscored in the title of this dissertation (‘From the Intergroup to the Interpersonal: Dehumanization Within Close and Intimate Relationships’), a major strength of this body of work is that it represents the benefits and utility of theoretical integration. Too often scholars work within silos in their respective fields, often overlooking theory and ideas conceptualized outside of the literature from which they publish and consume most often. This can lead to different areas of research often ‘reinventing the wheel’ or using a variety of terms and labels when discussing the same or overlapping constructs. This dissertation, however, applied a largely intergroup phenomenon (historically investigated in contexts of extreme violence and atrocity) to the study of close relationship processes and outcomes.

In addition, this dissertation encompasses a number of original and innovating findings. For example, in Chapter 2, the Paper 1 outlined a dehumanization model of hurt. Specifically, dehumanization was described as the underlying cause of hurt feelings.
Importantly, this model provides a (much needed) parsimonious account of hurt and identifies a number of relationship behaviors as the denial of humanness.

In Chapter 3, Paper 2 was presented, which reports on the development and validation of the DIRRS. The DIRRS provides a measurement of interpersonal dehumanization capable of not only capturing both perpetrator and target perspectives, but that can also be used to assess dehumanization at the facet level as well as at a higher-order level. The level of specificity regarding assessment (i.e., facet or higher order), is largely dependent on the level at which the researcher wishes to measure the construct. It is important to note, however, that our facet-level findings reflect a novel conceptualization of dehumanization that may be especially important to maintain when investigating associations with diverse relationship processes and outcomes.

Chapter 4 presents Paper 3, which details the first empirical evidence demonstrating dehumanization to be a casual factor in the manifestation of abuse. Furthermore, the findings highlight that the perpetration of dehumanization appears to be malleable over time. The results of Paper 3 provide empirical validation for the various theoretical propositions regarding dehumanization as an impelling factor in the maltreatment of others. This, coupled with the moderate stability of dehumanization over time can inform applied research and interventions into ways to attenuate the dehumanization tendencies of individuals—especially those who are in couples experiencing high levels of abuse and conflict. The findings highlight that it may be important to assess dehumanization with contexts of domestic violence and maltreatment and that such assessments are likely to inform researchers and practitioners as to individuals who are most at risk of committing intimate partner violence. Moreover, the moderate stability of dehumanization may also inform points of intervention at which strategies to short-circuit one’s tendency to dehumanize may be most effective.
These findings, however, should be viewed in light of research study limitations outlined in each paper presented across Chapters 2 to 4, as well as the future directions noted. In particular, there is a clear need for both dyadic and observational data when investigating dehumanization within the context of close and intimate relationships. For example, within an interpersonal context (such as romantic relationships), dehumanization should be considered dyadic in nature. In this way a person’s experiences of dehumanization will entail either treating one’s partner as less than human (i.e., perpetration) and/or being the target of dehumanization enacted by one’s partner. Importantly, future research that employs dyadic designs will allow researchers to account for the influence that both members of a couple have on their own and their partner’s experience of being the perpetrator and target of dehumanization. Furthermore, future research should attempt to build on the self-report approach to data collection reported in the papers across Chapters 3 and 4. By observationally coding for dehumanization (by way of identifying markers of denying humanness to another) researchers will be able to determine the concordance between self-report and behavioral assessments as well as develop a more comprehensive conceptualization of dehumanization and its manifestation within close or intimate relationships.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation makes a significant and novel contribution in understanding how dehumanization may manifest within the context of close and intimate relationships. The findings have significant implications for two very disparate—but clearly complimentary literatures (i.e., dehumanization [intergroup and social psychology literature more generally] and close relationships [interpersonal literature]). That this, through the theoretical integration of dehumanization into the study of close and intimate relationships this dissertation has provided both areas of research with new and useful ways of theorizing, conceptualizing, and assessing interpersonal dehumanization. Ultimately, it is hoped that the
papers included as part of this dissertation will be useful in developing fresh insights into the study of dehumanization and close and intimate relationships, as well as continued integration across these two distinct but compatible fields of research into human behavior.
Appendix 1 – Ethics Approval

Memo

| To:    | Dr Gery Karantzas  
|        | School of Psychology |
| From:  | Secretary – HEAG-H  
|        | Faculty of Health  |
| CC:    | Bengianni Pizzirani |
| Date:  | 21 September 2015 |
| Re:    | HEAG-H 129_2015: Dehumanisation within romantic relationships |

Approval has been given for Dr Gery Karantzas and Bengianni Pizzirani, School of Psychology, to undertake this project for a period of 2 years from 21 September, 2015. The current end date for this project is 21 September, 2017.

The approval given by the Deakin University HEAG-H is given only for the project and for the period as stated in the approval. It is your responsibility to contact the Secretary immediately should any of the following occur:

- Serious or unexpected adverse effects on the participants
- Any proposed changes in the protocol, including extensions of time
- Any events which might affect the continuing ethical acceptability of the project
- The project is discontinued before the expected date of completion
- Modifications that have been requested by other Human Research Ethics Committees

In addition, you will be required to report on the progress of your project at least once every year and at the conclusion of the project. Failure to report as required will result in suspension of your approval to proceed with the project.


This should be completed and returned to the Administrative Officer to the HEAG-H, Pro-Vice Chancellor’s office, Faculty of Health, Burwood campus by **Tuesday 17th November, 2015** and when the project is completed. HEAG-H may need to audit this project as part of the requirements for monitoring set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)
Signature Redacted by Library

Steven Sawyer
Secretary
HEAG-H
References


