

**Social Dominance Orientation and Industry-Specific Dehumanization: A
Cross-Sectional Analysis of Workplace Hierarchies and Intergroup Attitudes**

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Abstract

Dehumanization—the psychological process whereby people perceive others as less than human—represents one of the most troubling aspects of human social behavior. This study examines how feelings of inadequacy, superiority, and the desire for social dominance create a self-reinforcing cycle of dehumanization across different industry contexts. Using a cross-sectional design, we investigate whether individuals with high Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) exhibit greater dehumanization of out-group members compared to in-group members across industries, and whether the magnitude of this effect varies depending on industry-specific hierarchical structures and intergroup contact norms. We developed a comprehensive questionnaire measuring SDO, dehumanization attitudes, industry characteristics, and intergroup contact experiences. Expected results suggest that the relationship between SDO and out-group dehumanization will be stronger in industries with rigid hierarchies compared to those with egalitarian norms, with implications for workplace interventions and organizational policy.

Keywords: dehumanization, social dominance orientation, workplace hierarchy, intergroup relations, organizational psychology

Social Dominance Orientation and Industry-Specific Dehumanization: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Workplace Hierarchies and Intergroup Attitudes

At the heart of many dehumanizing behaviors lies a paradoxical relationship between feelings of inadequacy and assertions of superiority. Dehumanization—the psychological process whereby people perceive others as less than human—represents one of the most troubling aspects of human social behavior. This report examines how feelings of inadequacy, superiority, and the desire for social dominance create a self-reinforcing cycle of dehumanization, drawing on established psychological research and theory (Adler, 1907; Covin, 2011; Haslam, 2006).

Understanding the psychological mechanisms driving dehumanization is critical for addressing societal polarization, mental health crises, and systemic discrimination (Bandura, 1990; Haslam, 2006). While previous research has extensively documented the general prevalence and consequences of dehumanization, less attention has been paid to how organizational and industry contexts may moderate these relationships. The present study addresses this gap by examining how Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) relates to dehumanizing attitudes across different industry contexts, with particular attention to the role of hierarchical structures and intergroup contact opportunities (Kteily et al., 2015; Pratto et al., 1994).

Literature Review

The Inadequacy-Dehumanization Connection

Alfred Adler, founder of the school of individual psychology, introduced the concept of compensation as a psychological strategy to cope with perceived inferiority. In his 1907 book *Study of Organ Inferiority and Its Psychological Compensation*, Adler argued that perceived inferiority or weakness led to physical or psychological attempts to compensate for it (Adler, 1907). This compensation can take two primary forms: overcompensation, characterized by a superiority goal, which leads to striving for power, dominance, self-esteem, and self-devaluation; and undercompensation, which includes a demand for

help, leads to a lack of courage and a fear for life (Covin, 2011). When individuals experience feelings of inadequacy but cannot consciously acknowledge these feelings, they may engage in overcompensation through dehumanizing others. By perceiving certain groups as less than human, they artificially elevate their own status and worth (Covin, 2011).

The superiority complex—closely related to overcompensation—describes a psychological defense mechanism wherein individuals mask their feelings of inferiority by exhibiting exaggerated dominance (Covin, 2011). This complex manifests in dehumanizing behaviors when individuals attempt to reinforce their perceived superiority by casting others as subhuman or animal-like, thereby creating artificial distance between themselves and the dehumanized group (Haslam, 2006).

Social Dominance Orientation

One of the most robust predictors of dehumanization is Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), defined as the degree to which people support out-group inequality (Pratto et al., 1994). Research has consistently shown that those who dehumanize do not simply perceive others as threatening but enjoy asserting their power over certain out-groups and support efforts to separate the out-group from the in-group (Kteily et al., 2015). SDO predicts dehumanization in many perceived out-groups and is cross-cultural as well, especially for those who dehumanize immigrants (Kteily et al., 2015). People with high SDO tend to feel less connected and attuned to the mind of others, making it easier to deny the full humanity of outgroups (Kteily et al., 2015). This orientation toward social hierarchy and dominance creates a psychological environment conducive to dehumanization, as it provides justification for treating certain groups as inferior or less deserving of moral consideration (Haslam, 2006).

The Role of Contempt in Dehumanization

Recent research has identified trait contempt as a particularly strong predictor of dehumanizing tendencies (Steiger & Reyna, 2017). Contempt—characterized by cold

feelings toward others and viewing them as incompetent—appears to play a particularly strong and unique role in tendencies to dehumanize others (Steiger & Reyna, 2017). Studies show that contemptuous people tend to view the social world through a cold and incompetent lens, which may cause them to drag down all groups into the cold and incompetent category, thus leading to tendencies to broadly dehumanize others (Steiger & Reyna, 2017). Both the affective/behavioral coldness and superiority components of contempt drive dehumanizing tendencies. The relationship between trait contempt and dehumanization remains robust even when controlling for other negative emotions like disgust and anger (Steiger & Reyna, 2017). Contempt has been linked with delegitimizing beliefs about groups, characterized by denying a group humanity, justifying discrimination and aggression, and likening a group to 'demons, monsters, or Satans' (Steiger & Reyna, 2017).

Echo Chambers and the Amplification of Dehumanization

A critical factor in the persistence and spread of dehumanizing attitudes is the role of echo chambers—closed information environments where similar views are reinforced and amplified (Nguyen, 2020). Recent research on hate speech diffusion has demonstrated that hatemongers play a more crucial role in governing the spread of information compared to singled-out hateful content. In online networks, hateful users acquire a more well-connected position in the social network and often flock together to build up information cascades. Most critically, hateful behavior over online social networks does intensify through echo chamber formation (Nguyen, 2020). These findings establish that echo chambers serve as amplification mechanisms for dehumanizing attitudes, creating environments where such views become normalized and even celebrated.

The Vicious Cycle of Dehumanization

One of the most troubling aspects of dehumanization is its self-reinforcing nature, creating what psychologists describe as a vicious cycle. According to Albert Bandura's moral disengagement theory, dehumanization serves as a psychological mechanism that

allows people to selectively disengage from their own moral code and do immoral things without feeling distress (Bandura, 1990). Deindividuation—seeing people as categories rather than individuals—makes it easier to rationalize contentious moves or severe actions taken against one’s opponents. Once certain groups are stigmatized as evil, morally inferior, and not fully human, the persecution of those groups becomes more psychologically acceptable (Haslam, 2006). Once a violence break over has occurred, it may seem even more acceptable for people to do things that they would have regarded as morally unthinkable before (Bandura, 1990).

When people are dehumanized, they often respond by dehumanizing their dehumanizers in return (Covin, 2011). Research on bullying behaviors notes that dehumanization works both ways; when an individual dehumanizes someone they are in turn dehumanizing themselves, creating an inability to become fully human (Covin, 2011). This creates a cycle where initial dehumanization based on perceived inadequacy occurs, the dehumanized group responds with reciprocal dehumanization, this response is then used to justify the original dehumanizing attitudes, and the cycle intensifies with each iteration.

Industry Context and Organizational Hierarchies

While previous research has extensively documented individual-level predictors of dehumanization, less attention has been paid to how organizational and industry contexts may moderate these relationships. Different industries vary substantially in their hierarchical structures, competitive pressures, and opportunities for intergroup contact (Kteily et al., 2015; Pratto et al., 1994). These contextual factors may amplify or attenuate the relationship between individual differences in SDO and dehumanizing attitudes.

Industries with rigid hierarchies, such as manufacturing or military organizations, may create environments that legitimize dominance behaviors and amplify SDO’s effects on dehumanization. Conversely, industries with more egalitarian norms, such as education or non-governmental organizations, may provide contexts that discourage such attitudes.

Method

Research Design and Hypotheses

This study employs a cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between Social Dominance Orientation and dehumanization across different industry contexts. We developed five main hypotheses:

1. **H₁**: Individuals with high Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) will exhibit greater dehumanization of out-group members compared to in-group members across industries, but the magnitude of this effect will vary depending on industry-specific hierarchical structures and intergroup contact norms (Kteily et al., 2015; Pratto et al., 1994).
2. **H₂**: The relationship between SDO and out-group dehumanization will be stronger in industries with rigid hierarchies (e.g., manufacturing, military) than in industries with egalitarian norms (e.g., education, NGOs) (Pratto et al., 1994).
3. **H₃**: High-SDO individuals in industries with frequent intergroup competition (e.g., finance, politics) will report higher out-group dehumanization than those in cooperative industries (e.g., healthcare, academia), mediated by perceived threat to in-group status (Kteily et al., 2015).
4. **H₄**: Industries with strong "us vs. them" narratives (e.g., law enforcement, partisan media) will show higher moral disengagement among high-SDO individuals, leading to justification of dehumanizing policies (Bandura, 1990).
5. **H₅**: High-SDO individuals in industries with structured intergroup collaboration (e.g., cross-functional teams in tech) will exhibit lower out-group dehumanization than those in siloed industries, moderated by quality/frequency of contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Participants

Participants will be recruited through online platforms targeting working professionals across various industries. Inclusion criteria include being at least 18 years old and currently employed in a identifiable industry sector. We aim to recruit approximately 500 participants across 10 major industry categories to ensure adequate power for between-industry comparisons.

Materials and Procedure

Questionnaire Development

We developed a comprehensive questionnaire designed to take participants 15-30 minutes to complete. The questionnaire uses language accessible to a general audience while maintaining scientific rigor. All measures use established, validated scales where possible (Haslam, 2006; Kteily et al., 2015; Pratto et al., 1994).

Informed Consent

Participants receive detailed information about the study purpose ("to learn how people view others at work"), potential risks ("some questions might feel personal"), safety measures ("your answers are secret"), and available support resources. Participants can skip any question or withdraw at any time (Haslam, 2006).

Demographic and Industry Classification

Participants indicate their country of employment, industry sector (healthcare, education, technology, finance, manufacturing, military/police, other), age range (18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46+), and gender identity. Industry classification follows established organizational taxonomy to enable systematic comparison.

Social Dominance Orientation

SDO is measured using the validated SDO7 Scale (Pratto et al., 1994). Sample items include "At work, some groups deserve more power than others" rated on 5-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Dehumanization Measures

Dehumanization attitudes are assessed using adapted versions of established measures. Items include "People in other departments are less skilled than my team" to capture subtle forms of workplace dehumanization while avoiding overtly offensive language (Haslam, 2006; Kteily et al., 2015).

Industry-Specific Measures

We assess perceived threat ("I worry other groups might take my team's resources"), moral disengagement ("It's okay to bend rules if it helps my team win"), and intergroup contact frequency ("I work closely with people from different teams daily") (Bandura, 1990; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Qualitative Components

Open-ended questions explore participant experiences: "Describe a time you disagreed with someone from another team. How did it feel?" and "What makes someone 'deserve' respect at work?" These responses will be subjected to thematic analysis and sentiment analysis (Haslam, 2006).

Validation Checks

Consistency is assessed through repeated concepts asked differently (e.g., "My workplace treats everyone equally" and "I trust people from other departments").

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol includes multiple ethical safeguards. Participants receive disclaimers that dehumanization is a common psychological process and study participation does not imply negative character judgments (Haslam, 2006). Mental health resources and anti-discrimination organization contacts are provided. Data collection is completely anonymous, with identifiable information collected only for an optional prize draw stored separately from survey responses.

Planned Analyses

Quantitative Analysis

Primary analyses will use regression models to test the main effects of SDO on dehumanization (H_1) and examine moderating effects of industry type (H_2 , H_3). Mediation analysis will test whether perceived threat mediates the relationship between SDO and dehumanization in competitive industries (H_3). ANOVA will compare dehumanization levels across industry categories.

Qualitative Analysis

Open-ended responses will be subjected to thematic coding to identify industry-specific narratives and moral disengagement strategies (H_4). Artificial intelligence sentiment analysis will detect subtle dehumanizing language patterns.

Mixed Methods Integration

We will triangulate quantitative trends with qualitative themes, comparing high-SDO quantitative scores with narrative content (e.g., mentions of competition vs. collaboration).

Expected Results

Based on the theoretical framework and existing literature, we anticipate several key findings:

Main Effects

We expect to find a significant positive correlation between SDO scores and dehumanization measures across all industries (H_1), with effect sizes consistent with previous research (Cohen's $d \approx 0.4$ – 0.6) (Kteily et al., 2015; Pratto et al., 1994). Industries should show meaningful variation in baseline dehumanization levels, with hierarchical industries showing higher means.

Industry Moderation Effects

The relationship between SDO and dehumanization should be significantly stronger in hierarchical industries compared to egalitarian ones (H₂) (Pratto et al., 1994). We anticipate interaction effects such that high-SDO individuals in manufacturing or military contexts show markedly higher dehumanization scores than high-SDO individuals in education or healthcare.

Competitive Context Effects

Industries characterized by frequent intergroup competition should show elevated dehumanization among high-SDO individuals (H₃) (Kteily et al., 2015). Mediation analysis should reveal that perceived threat to in-group status partially explains this relationship, with finance and political sectors showing the strongest effects.

Moral Disengagement Patterns

Qualitative analysis should reveal industry-specific moral disengagement narratives (H₄) (Bandura, 1990). We expect law enforcement and partisan media sectors to show themes of justified dominance and "us vs. them" thinking among high-SDO respondents.

Contact Effects

Industries with structured intergroup collaboration should show attenuated SDO-dehumanization relationships (H₅) (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Technology and healthcare sectors may demonstrate that frequent, positive intergroup contact can mitigate the dehumanizing tendencies of high-SDO individuals.

Qualitative Themes

Thematic analysis should reveal distinct industry cultures around hierarchy and intergroup relations. Expected themes include "competition justifies dominance" in finance, "hierarchy ensures safety" in military contexts, and "collaboration improves outcomes" in healthcare and education.

Discussion

The expected results of this study have several important implications for understanding dehumanization in organizational contexts and developing targeted interventions.

Theoretical Implications

This research extends Social Dominance Theory by demonstrating how organizational contexts moderate individual differences in hierarchy preferences (Kteily et al., 2015; Pratto et al., 1994). The finding that industry characteristics amplify or attenuate SDO's effects on dehumanization suggests that environmental factors play a crucial role in translating personality predispositions into actual attitudes and behaviors.

The industry-specific patterns also support Adler's compensation theory by showing how organizational environments may either exacerbate or ameliorate the tendency for individuals with feelings of inadequacy to engage in overcompensation through dehumanizing others (Adler, 1907; Covin, 2011). Industries that provide legitimate pathways for achieving status and recognition may reduce the need for compensatory dehumanization.

Practical Implications

These findings suggest several leverage points for organizational interventions. In industries prone to dehumanization, organizations could implement structured intergroup contact programs, modify reward systems to emphasize cooperation over competition, and provide alternative pathways for status achievement that do not depend on dominating others (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

The identification of industry-specific risk factors also enables targeted prevention efforts. Organizations in high-risk sectors could implement early screening and intervention programs, while those in lower-risk industries could focus on maintaining protective factors such as collaborative cultures and egalitarian norms.

Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences about the relationship between industry contexts and dehumanizing attitudes. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track how individuals' attitudes change as they move between different organizational contexts.

Additionally, the focus on self-reported attitudes may not fully capture behavioral manifestations of dehumanization. Future studies could incorporate behavioral measures and observational data to provide a more complete picture of how SDO and industry context interact to influence actual treatment of others.

Conclusion

[Placeholder: Detailed conclusions will be added upon completion of data collection and analysis. The conclusion will synthesize key findings, discuss theoretical and practical implications, and propose directions for future research on industry-specific factors in dehumanization processes.]

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