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Shedding Psychological Light on the Racial Disparities in School Disciplinary Measures: The Role of Dehumanization as a Potential Mechanism

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INTRODUCTION

- There are troubling trends of racial disparities in school discipline that target, and assign harsher disciplinary measures to, Black students (Addington, 2014; McNulty-Eitle & Eitle, 2006).
- Harsh disciplinary measures adversely impact students' academic performance and also put students at higher risks of entering the criminal justice system (Mallet, 2016).
- The association between educators' implicit prejudice toward Black Americans and their disciplinary measures against Black students has been documented.
- There is another form of negative intergroup attitudes that are uniquely different from prejudice—dehumanization of Black Americans (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014).
- Dehumanization is often seen in anti-Black racist rhetoric (Opatow, 1990) and contributes to harsher sanctioning of Black Americans in the criminal justice system (Goff et al., 2014).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Are individuals who dehumanize Black Americans more likely to choose harsher disciplinary measures to address Black student misbehaviors?
- Does student race and/or gender influence the relationship between dehumanization of Black Americans and choice of harsher disciplinary measure?

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

- Study 1 (Correlational): 228 undergraduate psychology students (66% women, age $M = 19.54$, $SD = 4.11$)
 - 37.3% White, 28.9% Black, 18.4% Asian, 3.9% Latinx, and 10.1% Multiracial
- Study 2 (Experimental): 144 undergraduate psychology students (65.6% women, age $M = 19.93$, $SD = 2.49$)
 - 42.2% White, 18.0% Black, 17.6% Asian, 8.6% Latinx, and 13.5% Multiracial



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PROCEDURE AND MEASURES

Procedure:

- A 30-minute online survey: (1) One of four vignettes of a student misbehavior; (2) Selection of a disciplinary measure; (3) Dehumanization; (4) Race-IAT
 - Study 1: Dehumanization IAT (Goff et al., 2008), which involved responding to pairings of Black/White, ape/big cat words (e.g., monkey, baboon, and tiger, panther)
 - Study 2: Dehumanization priming, which involved differentiating pictures of real animals (apes/big cats) from images of animal drawings and toys taken from Google Images



Student Misbehavior Scenario

When a teacher noticed that [*DeShawn/Lakisha/Brad/Allison*], a 7th grade student at Middleton Middle School, was texting on a cell phone in a class, the teacher politely asked [*him/her*] to stop texting and put [*his/her*] cell away. Although [*DeShawn/Lakisha/Brad/Allison*] put [*his/her*] cell phone away at that moment, [*he/she*] quickly started texting again. The teacher noticed that [*DeShawn/Lakisha/Brad/Allison*] was texting again and came to [*his/her*] desk this time. Although [*DeShawn/Lakisha/Brad/Allison*] was told to hand over [*his/her*] cell phone, [*he/she*] refused and continued to read text messages.

Measures:

- Choice of Disciplinary Measure:** Which of the following disciplinary measures would best address the student's misbehavior?
 - Engaging in a discussion with the student,
 - Giving the student a warning,
 - Calling the student's parent's,
 - Sending the student to the main office,
 - Bringing a school security officer into the classroom,
 - Giving the student detention, or
 - Referring the student for suspension.

MAIN RESULTS

Logistic Binomial Regression Predicting Choice of Exclusionary Discipline

	Study 1		Study 2	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Implicit bias	-.424	.632	-.227	.438
Student race	.382	.616	-.064	.842
Student gender	.724	.712	-1.185	.828
Dehumanization	2.581	1.601	.606	1.120
Dehumanization X Student race	-3.707	1.978	-.206	1.345
Dehumanization X Student gender	-3.584	2.055	-1.211	1.367
Dehumanization X Student race X Student gender	3.858	2.704	.640	1.654

Note. Dehumanization was continuous (i.e., D-IAT) in Study 1 and dichotomous (i.e., animal prime task: apes vs. big cats) in Study 2. Race-IAT was included as a covariate in both analyses.

DISCUSSION

- Dehumanization of and negative attitudes toward Black Americans are still prevalent and related in American society.
- Incongruence in the level of analysis between the predictor (*implicit* dehumanization) and the outcome (*explicit* disciplinary measure choice) could account for the null finding.
- Future research should examine educator motivations in classroom management, and continue investigation of racial prejudice toward and stereotypes about minority students, when assessing racial disparities in school discipline.