



How the valence of vicarious contact influences dehumanization of individuals who are homeless

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Introduction

- Individuals who are homeless are regularly dehumanized – denied complex cognitive and emotional characteristics.⁴
- Both direct and indirect contact have been shown to minimize prejudice and dehumanization of marginalized groups.^{1, 2, 3}
- Indirect contact may be particularly useful in affiliations where group members do not have equal social status.¹
- It remains unclear how the content (positive or negative) that characterizes indirect contact impacts perceptions of individuals who are homeless.⁴

Can simply hearing about another person's experience with an individual who is homeless influence one's own tendency to dehumanize these individuals?

Methods

Participants: $N = 141$ (65 female, $M = 35.78$, $SD = 10.10$) recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk in exchange for nominal pay

Methods: Single factor (Valence: positive vs. negative) between participants design

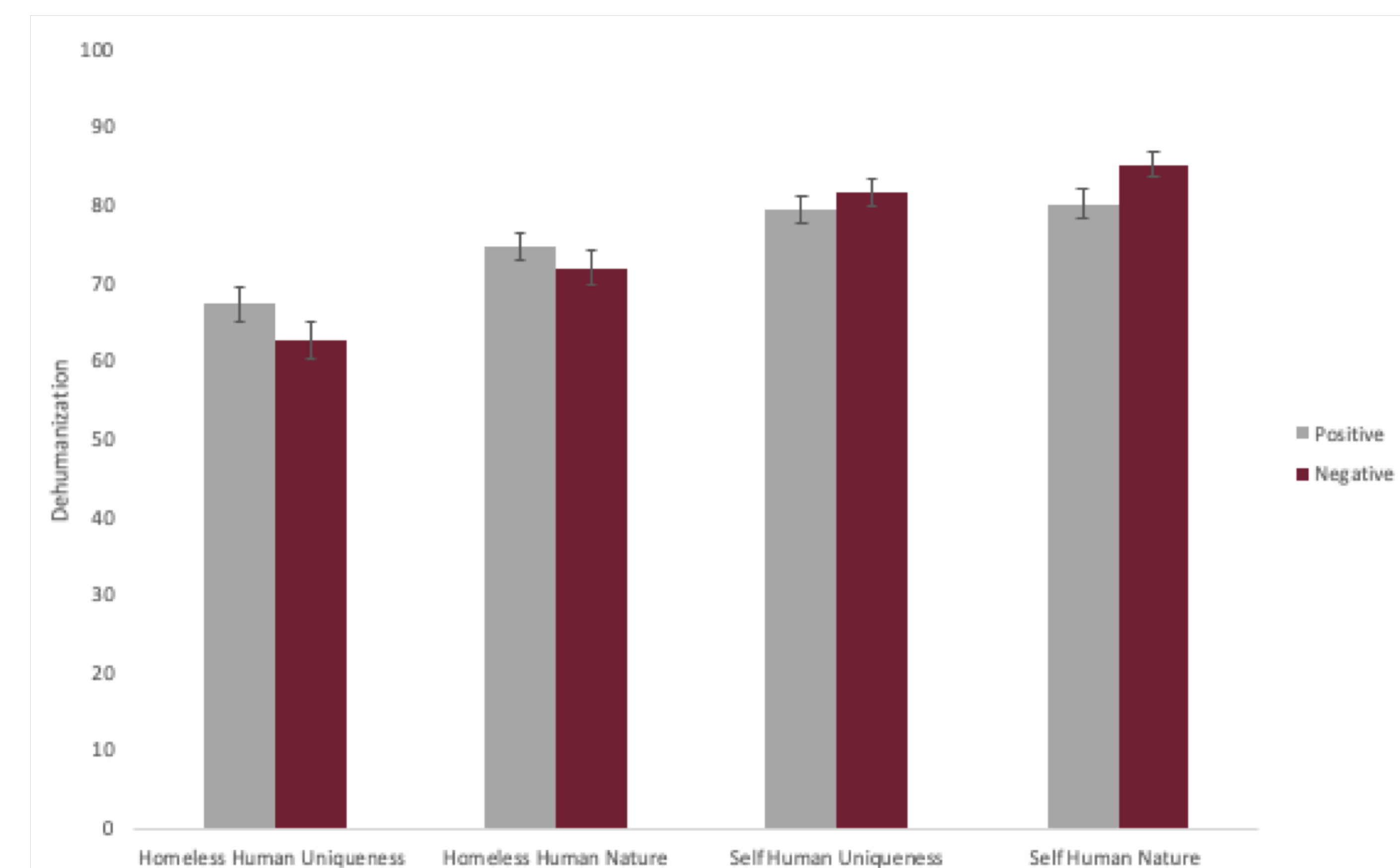
- Participants were randomly assigned to read about a positive or negative encounter that another student had with an individual who is homeless
- A questionnaire assessed participants' perceptions of human nature (HN) and human uniqueness (HU) traits for themselves and individuals who are homeless⁴
- Dependent Variables: Human Nature, Human Uniqueness traits, and similarity to student (100 point analogue scale with appropriate anchors)

Results

- Participants rated the positive encounter to be significantly more positive ($M = 71.11$, $SD = 23.26$) than the negative encounter ($M = 20.50$, $SD = 20.70$), $t(139) = 13.56$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.31$.
- Valence significantly impacted ratings of one's own human nature, $t(136.18) = -2.12$, $p < .04$, $d = .36$. The impact of valence on other dehumanization measures failed to reach significance.

Results Continued

- Ratings of similarity to the author of the story were significantly higher in the positive ($M = 55.96$, $SD = 28.03$) than the negative ($M = 41.33$, $SD = 32.05$), $t(139) = 2.89$, $p < .004$, $d = .49$.
- Valence significantly impacted judgements about the human uniqueness, $F(1,137) = 8.71$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2 = .06$, and had a marginally significant impact on the human nature of individuals who are homeless, $F(1,137) = 2.97$, $p = .087$, $\eta^2 = .02$, after controlling for perceived similarity.



Conclusion

- The positive story elicited greater feelings of similarity between the participant and author than the negative story.
- The valence of indirect contact has the potential to impact perceptions of individuals who are homeless if the reader feels similar to the author of the story.
- Unexpectedly, participants rated themselves to be higher in human nature after reading the negative story.
- Future research could explore how indirect contact elicits social comparisons (e.g., I'm more empathic than the author of this story) and the consequences for one's own self-concept.

Similarity appears to be a key factor driving the impact of indirect contact (whether positive or negative) on perceptions of individuals who are homeless.

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