



Infrachumanizing Praise

Athletic Admiration Decreases Perceptions of Agency and Support for College Athletes' Rights

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Abstract: Five studies demonstrate that athletic praise can ironically lead to infrachumanization. College athletes were seen as less agentic than college debaters (Studies 1 and 2). College athletes praised for their bodies were also seen as less agentic than college athletes praised for their minds (Study 3), and this effect was driven by bodily admiration (Study 4). These effects occurred equally for White and Black athletes (Study 1) and did not depend on dualistic beliefs about the mind and body (Study 2), failing to provide support for assumptions in the literature. Participants perceived mind and body descriptions of both athletes and debaters as equally high in praise (Study 5), demonstrating that infrachumanization may be induced even if descriptions of targets are positively valenced. Additionally, decreased perceptions of agency led to decreased support for college athletes' rights (Study 3).

Keywords: infrachumanization, dehumanization, sports, policy, college athletics

A scene in the documentary *Schooled: The Price of College Sports* (Branch, Byrnes, Martin, & Finkel, 2013) shows historian Taylor Branch speaking in favor of college athlete's rights (e.g., paying athletes for playing) at a conference panel. Former Naval Academy athletic director Jack Lengyel approaches Branch afterward and argues that, "The student does not have consent. You can't have the animals running the zoo in a college education." Lengyel employs a metaphor that likens college athletes to animals in an effort to justify athletes' lack of compensation for their services.

This quote illustrates the psychological process investigated in the present studies: We argue that social representations of athletes that mainly focus on their body lead to infrachumanization, which means people see these athletes as less agentic than the average person. We argue that this infrachumanization, in turn, leads people to *not* support athletes' rights (e.g., unionization among college athletes) – it leads people to see athletes as "animals" that shouldn't be "running the zoo."

Dehumanization and Infrachumanization

Dehumanization refers to one person perceiving another as lacking some attribute that defines what it is to be human (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014), and researchers operationalize "what it is to be human" differently.

Harris and Fiske (2006, p. 848) refer to dehumanization as an "extreme" or "severe" prejudice. Following from the

stereotype content model (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007), they argue that people perceive groups and individuals along two dimensions: warmth and competence. The former is loosely synonymous with liking – seeing someone as trustworthy, friendly, helpful, and moral; the latter refers to respecting – ability, intelligence, skill, and efficacy (Fiske et al., 2007). Harris and Fiske (2006) demonstrate that groups low in warmth and competence evoke disgust and contempt in people, leading to the dehumanization of these groups. Humanness is thus operationalized as having some degree of warmth or competence.

Infrachumanization

Researchers have recently focused on *infrachumanization*, which refers to dehumanization that is subtler than explicit dehumanization and is often measured relative to another group or person (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Infrachumanization is usually operationalized in one of two ways: (1) by asking participants which traits define or are typical of a group, or (2) by asking participants how capable a group member is on some attribute or ability. The relative endorsement of these traits is how infrachumanization is assessed: Traits that represent some form of humanness are seen as less definitive or typical of a group that is infrachumanized relative to another group.

For example, Leyens et al. (2000, 2001) operationalize humanness by focusing on how people perceive human beings different from animals; they define human uniqueness as possessing "secondary emotions," such as

optimism, nostalgia, humiliation, and hope (Demoulin et al., 2004). Since people perceive human beings to be uniquely capable of these emotions, infrahumanization occurs when people ascribe fewer secondary emotions to a group or person.

Haslam (2006) proposed that individuals perceive humanness on two orthogonal continua: first, what separates human beings from animals; and second, what separates human beings from objects or machines. Haslam refers to the traits that separate us from animals as “human uniqueness,” which includes traits like morality, high cognitive ability, self-control, and civility (roughly analogous to what we will call “agency”); traits that separate us from objects and machines are labeled as “human nature,” which includes traits such as interpersonal warmth, emotionality, sociability, and curiosity. These unrelated dimensions each predict two distinct forms of dehumanization: animalistic dehumanization, in which people perceive others as having diminished human uniqueness; and mechanistic dehumanization, in which people perceive others as having diminished human nature.

Gray, Gray, and Wegner (2007) propose a dual model of mind perception: Individuals perceive the minds of others along the two dimensions of agency (the capacity for self-control and thinking; the capacity to “do,” Waytz, Gray, Epley, & Wegner, 2010) and experience (the capacity to feel emotions). God and robots are seen as having agency, but little experience; children and animals are seen as having experience, but little agency; and adult human beings are seen as having high levels of both agency and experience. Gray, Knobe, Sheskin, Bloom, and Barrett (2011) demonstrate that a focus on one's body (specifically, sexualized bodies) does not lead to “wholesale de-mentalization,” but instead a “redistribution of mind” (p. 1217): People who are presented in terms of their sexualized bodies are seen as *less* agentic, but *more* experiential. They argue that a focus on the body leads people to be seen like animals (in Haslam's, 2006 terms, bodily descriptions cause their subjects to be animalistically dehumanized).

Who Is Dehumanized?

Work in dehumanization has primarily focused on the dehumanization of sexualized women (e.g., Heflick & Goldenberg, 2014) and outgroup members (especially racial or ethnic outgroups, e.g., Leyens et al., 2000; but this has also been shown in minimal groups, Capozza, Andrighetto, Di Bernardo, & Falvo, 2012).

Other social categories – such as occupations – can be dehumanized relative to one another (i.e., infrahumanized). Loughnan and Haslam (2007) provided evidence that suggests infrahumanization may occur even when derogation, disgust for, or sexualization of the group is absent.

Artists, elderly, and children were rated higher on human nature traits (e.g., curious, friendly, impatient) than businesspeople, police, and criminals – suggesting that the former three groups are seen as more distinct from objects and machines than the latter three. However, businesspeople, police, and criminals were rated higher on uniquely human traits (e.g., conservative, polite, cold) – suggesting that artists, elderly, and children are seen as more similar to animals than the latter three.

Gray et al. (2011) demonstrated that bodily representations of targets induce infrahumanization of the targets. Participants viewed photographs of individuals and were asked to rate how much more or less capable these people were of agentic (e.g., self-control) and experiential (e.g., feeling pain) traits than the average person. Participants saw the same individuals either clothed or naked. The nude targets were infrahumanized relative to the clothed targets – that is, the clothed people were perceived as more agentic and less experiential than the naked people (Gray et al., 2011, Experiment 3).

Infrahumanizing Praise

Considering both Loughnan and Haslam (2007) and Gray et al. (2011), we propose the novel hypothesis that *praise* and *admiration* can lead to infrahumanization when they focus on one's *body*. Loughnan and Haslam (2007) only presented the target group names, and the bodily representations in Gray et al. (2011) were sexualized. We test the prediction that athletes as a social group may be infrahumanized because popular descriptions of them focus on their bodies. We aim to demonstrate that infrahumanization can occur outside of derogation, disgust, and sexualization – that ironically, positively valenced descriptions of competent individuals can lead to infrahumanization. We hypothesize that athletic praise (i.e., a positively-valenced bodily description) will lead to infrahumanization relative to intellectual praise (i.e., a positively-valenced mind description). In line with both Gray et al. (2011) and Haslam (2006), we predict that athletes admired for their bodies will be seen as less agentic than other targets.

Physical Descriptions of Athletes

The body is primary in the social representation of athletes (Morse, 1983; Oates, 2007; Oates & Durham, 2004; Trujillo, 1995). There is a cultural fascination with elite athletes' bodies, and much of the discourse about their bodies is admiration. These descriptions are thus a unique cultural location to examine how warm, competent, non-sexualized descriptions (i.e., positive evaluations of one's bodily skills) can be ironically infrahumanizing.

Trujillo (1995) argues that the cultural fascination with athletes' bodies is a “fetish,” in the sense that the athletic

body is the object of spectacle and pleasure. Although representations of athletes can be sexualized (Oates & Durham, 2004; and especially female athletes, Daniels & Wartena, 2011; Messner, 1988), most descriptions of male sports bodies depict an “athletic instrument to be admired” (Trujillo, 1995).

The fetishism of athletes is evident in cultural products like *ESPN The Magazine's* Body Issue, which depicts elite athletes in the nude (Moss, 2015); graphs of average heights and weights for athletes published in popular websites (Manfred, 2014); Internet articles like, “Top 10 Most Jacked NBA Players,” (Eide, 2013); the ogling at basketball players’ wingspans (Levin, 2014); and broadcast quotes like, “Can you believe the size of the people who play this game?” or referring to an athlete as, “a big hunk of man who is stable in his legs” (Trujillo, 1995, p. 415).

It has been speculated (including by social psychologists to the media; Greenberg, 2012) that these primarily physical descriptions of athletes may be dehumanizing, but it has yet to be empirically tested. The dehumanizing nature of these descriptions can be illustrated by the sports cliché of referring to especially athletically built players as “physical specimens,” a practice that has been bemoaned by journalists (Hall, 2014), scholars (Bigler & Jeffries, 2008), and athletes alike (Lawrence, 2005). Practices before professional drafts can be especially physically focused, as Oates (2007, p. 77) describes:

“... a showcase for the best college senior players [is] held each year in Mobile, Alabama. . . The players are told to strip to their shorts and line up. . . Upon hearing his name called, the player takes the stage and poses for the audience for a few moments before his height and weight are measured and announced.”

A professional team’s executive said that this practice is a “livestock show, and it’s dehumanizing,” and the players themselves reported feeling like animals, like a “prize bull” (Lieber, 1989).

We propose that these common physical descriptions can lead to infrahumanization, and we test the novel prediction that these bodily descriptions can be infrahumanizing *even if* they explicitly praise and admire the athlete.

College Athletes’ Rights

We focus on college athletes (specifically, basketball players) in the present studies. There has been a groundswell of voices, especially in the last decade, arguing for reform in the economic structure of college sports – including journalists (e.g., Branch, 2011; Deford, 2014; Huma, 2011; Nocera, 2014; Rosenberg, 2010, 2011; Trahan, 2014; Zirin, 2015) and scholars across multiple disciplines

(e.g., Hawkins, 2010; Kahn, 2007; McCormick & McCormick, 2006, 2010; Van Rheenen, 2012). The movement for reform is based primarily on one fundamental contradiction: Major college sports (i.e., Men’s Division I college basketball and football) are a billion-dollar industry, yet the athletes themselves earn only a miniscule fraction of this sum (i.e., a scholarship). Critics argue “amateurism” is an exploitative façade to keep the athletes from sharing in the profits of their labor (see Van Rheenen, 2012), stating that amateurism “has *never* been about an ideal; it has *always* been about control” (Phillips, 2014).

Despite this movement for reform, only 30.6% of Americans support college athletes being paid – above and beyond scholarship – for playing (Mondello, Piquero, Piquero, Gertz, & Bratton, 2013). Echoing this sentiment, a relatively recent decision by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) unanimously rejected the right of football players from Northwestern University to unionize (Kelderman, 2015). We argue that infrahumanization of athletes – a product of their bodily-focused cultural representations – might partially explain the opposition to support for athletes’ rights (e.g., pay for play, unionization, injury coverage).

Van Rheenen (2012) mentions the role of the supposed mutually exclusive mind/body dichotomy in the economic exploitation of athletes by arguing that the division of mind (nonathletic students) and body (student-athletes) is a hierarchy, with the mind being valued more than the body in the modern economic climate. Van Rheenen (2012) theorizes about this problem from a sociological perspective – in the present studies, we empirically test a psychological view of this problem: Bodily descriptions lead to the infrahumanization of student-athletes, which in turn leads to opposition for reform supporting athletes’ rights.

The Current Studies

We have five primary goals in the present research. First, we aim to conceptually replicate the findings in Gray et al. (2011) that focusing on one’s body – as compared to their mind – leads to infrahumanization (Studies 1–4). Second, work in dehumanization and infrahumanization generally focuses on sexualized depictions; we examine if outright praise can lead to infrahumanization when this praise focuses on one’s *non*-sexualized body (Studies 1–4). Third, we examine if this infrahumanization occurs differently for Black and White athletes, such that Black athletes are especially infrahumanized when described in bodily ways (Study 1). Fourth, theorizing on the redistribution of mind argues – but has left untested – that mind/body dualistic beliefs are the root of infrahumanization. We thus tested if mind/body dualistic beliefs moderate this effect, such that infrahumanization occurs especially for those who are primed to have dualistic beliefs about the mind

and body (Study 2). Fifth, we investigated the potential policy implications of this infrahumanization (Study 3): Does seeing people as less agentic diminish endorsement of policies that support their agency?

Study 1

We first examined if male student-athletes are infrahumanized relative to a comparable student group: student debaters. Both of these groups participate in a team competition, with each group representing one half of the body/mind dichotomy: Athletes represent competitors who use their bodies, whereas debaters represent competitors who use their minds. We predicted a conceptual replication of Gray et al. (2011): the athlete (i.e., Gray et al.'s *body* condition) would be seen as *less* agentic.

Gray et al. (2011) also measure perceptions of experience, hypothesizing that infrahumanization also entails an *increase* in perceptions of experience. We included measures of experience in each study; however, the scale demonstrated poor psychometric properties, which replicate the low reliabilities for this scale in Gray et al. (2011). The experience subscale performed as hypothesized in each of the present studies, but we do not report the results here, as the scale does not appear to measure one coherent theoretical construct. The Electronic Supplementary Material includes a detailed analysis of this subscale.

Student career (i.e., athlete or debater) was manipulated by providing participants with a vignette, which described a student named "Michael." We wrote these descriptions to highlight Michael's skills at either basketball or debate – they are positively valenced passages that praise the abilities of Michael. If athletes are seen as less agentic, our novel hypothesis that admiration can be infrahumanizing – as long as it is bodily-focused – will be supported.

We also tested a secondary hypothesis: Infrahumanization would occur differently for White and Black athletes. Grano (2010) theorized that, for White athletes, their skill is evidence of their character; for Black athletes, however, skill is interpreted as a primal, natural athletic gift from nature that has been shaped by social structures (e.g., coaches). Following from this logic, we tested the hypothesis that infrahumanization will occur more so for a Black athlete (relative to a White athlete).

Method

Participants and Procedure

Two hundred fifty-eight participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk website and were compensated

\$0.40 for their participation in the brief survey. Participants' ages ($M = 30.98$, $SD = 9.47$) ranged from 18 to 63 years, the sample was 33.3% female, and 76.4% identified as White/Caucasian.

Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate "how individuals perceive the capabilities of others." After agreeing to participate, participants read a brief description of a university student named Michael that was accompanied by a photograph of him. Participants then answered dependent variables and a brief demographic questionnaire.

Independent Variables

Description

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of two types of descriptions: *athlete* or *debater*, the former representing a bodily description and the latter representing a description of the mind. Both were positive descriptions of Michael's capabilities in his role as either an athlete or a debater. The athlete description read:

Michael is a student on the basketball team at the university he attends. He is a shooting guard who stands 6'3" tall, weighs 185 pounds, has a 6'5" wingspan, scores 16.9 points and records 1.8 assists per game. He excels mainly at the basket: with the ball, he can power past his defender, while he makes hard and quick cuts to the basket without the ball. His tremendous lower-body strength translates into an impressive vertical leap, allowing him to rebound effectively.

The debater description read:

Michael is a student on the debate team at the university he attends. He competes mainly in the Lincoln-Douglas competitions at debate tournaments. In his last four competitions, he has placed 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 1st, respectively. His intellectual acuity shines as he refrains from employing logical fallacies and does not pick apart his opponent's weakest argument; instead, he acknowledges their strongest point and takes it apart with wit and much critical thought.

Race of Target

A picture of Michael accompanied the descriptions, and participants were randomly assigned to see a picture of either a *Black* student or a *White* student.¹

¹ The pretesting analyses of the photographs can be found in the Electronic Supplementary Material, ESM1.

Agency

Participants read the prompt, “Compared to the average person, how much is Michael capable of . . .” and were then asked to rate Michael on perceptions of agency: exercising self-control, acting morally, remembering things, understanding how others are feeling, and planning ($\alpha = .81$). They provided their answers on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (= *much less capable*) to 5 (= *much more capable*), with the midpoint at 3 being anchored with *equally as capable*.

Results

We submitted participants' responses to a 2 (Description: Athlete vs. Debater) \times 2 (Race: Black vs. White) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA). The full model yielded one significant effect: The athlete ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.40$) was perceived as less agentic than the debater ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.50$), $F(1, 254) = 168.35$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.62$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [1.34, 1.90], (Figure 1). Neither the main effect of race nor the description by race interaction was significant, $F_s \leq 0.10$, $p_s \geq .75$.

Discussion

We conceptually replicated the effects of Gray et al. (2011). Athletes were infrachumanized relative to debaters: An athlete (i.e., bodily-focused description) was perceived as *less* agentic than a debater (i.e., mind-focused description). We advanced the theory by demonstrating that infrachumanization can occur when disgust or sexualization is absent, and when positively valenced praise of abilities is present. We argue that athletic admiration, then, can ironically be an “infrachumanizing praise.”

There was no main effect of race, indicating that a Black student was not infrachumanized more than a White student; moreover, no description by race interaction was found, indicating that this infrachumanization occurred equivalently for both White and Black athletes. These results are also comparable to those of Gray et al. (2011, Study 1), which did not find either a main effect or interaction with sex of target. This lack of race effects will be discussed further in the General Discussion.

Study 2

Researchers argue that focusing on one's body leads to redistribution of mind because of mind/body dualism, which refers to how people tend to see the mind and body as two separate and opposite entities (Gray et al., 2011). This theoretical assumption is formally tested in the present study. We primed participants with either dualist (i.e., mind and body are distinct, separate entities) or physicalist

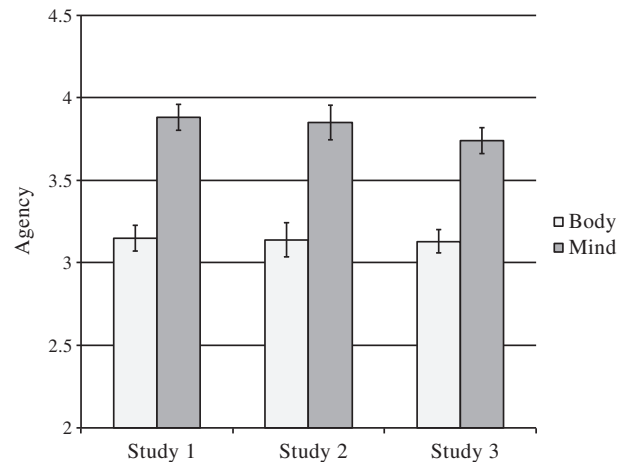


Figure 1. Students described bodily are perceived as less agentic than those described in terms of their mind. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

(i.e., mind and body are fundamentally the same) beliefs, then gave participants a description of an athlete or debater, and asked participants to evaluate his relative agency. If infrachumanization occurs only for those participants who are primed with dualistic beliefs, then the dualism-as-cause hypothesis will be supported.

Method

Participants and Procedure

One hundred fifty introductory psychology students at a large, public Midwestern university participated online in the study for partial course credit. Participant ages ($M = 19.13$, $SD = 2.02$) ranged from 18 to 32 years, the sample was 64.7% female, and 80% identified as White/Caucasian.

After agreeing to participate in the study, participants read a passage that manipulated beliefs about the relationship between the mind and the body, read one of the same descriptions of Michael as in Study 1, and then filled out the dependent measures and a brief demographic questionnaire.

Independent Variables

Mind and Body Beliefs

Participants were randomly assigned to read either a *dualism* or *physicalism* passage that manipulated beliefs about the mind and the body (taken from Forstmann, Burgmer, & Mussweiler, 2012). The last sentence of each of the passages was emphasized: The dualism condition read that, “. . . a person's mind and body are two distinct entities,” while the physicalism condition read that they are “both rooted in the same physical substances.”

We employed the same manipulation check as Forstmann et al. (2012). Participants were presented with a series of

seven Venn-like diagrams, each of which depicted two circles on a horizontal line. One circle was labeled “body” and one was labeled “mind.” We asked participants to select which arrangement “best represents your idea of how one’s body relates to their mind” and were reminded that the “closer the circles are to one another, the more similar the mind and body are.” Diagrams were scored from 1 (= *almost complete overlap of the circles*) to 7 (= *largest distance between the two circles*); thus, higher values of the manipulation check represent higher dualistic beliefs.

The manipulation was successful in priming dualistic beliefs about the mind and body, as participants in the dualism condition rated higher on dualistic beliefs than those in the physicalism condition, $t(148) = 4.13$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.68$, 95% CI [0.35, 1.00].

Target Career Description

The athlete and debater conditions were identical to those used in Study 1, except no photograph was present.

Agency

The same agency scale from Study 1 was used in the current study ($\alpha = .79$).

Results

We submitted participants’ responses to a 2 (Prime: Dualism vs. Physicalism) \times 2 (Description: Athlete vs. Debater) between-subjects ANOVA. The full model yielded one significant effect: The athlete ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .32$) was perceived as less agentic than the debater ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.57$), $F(1, 146) = 88.10$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.54$, 95% CI [1.17, 1.90]. Neither the main effect of the prime nor the description by prime interaction was significant, $F_s \leq 0.73$, $p_s \geq .40$. We also tested the description by manipulation check interaction as an ancillary test of the dualism hypothesis. This interaction was not significant, $\Delta R^2 = .005$, $\beta = .20$, $t(146) = 1.06$, $p = .293$.

Discussion

We directly replicated the results of Study 1: Highlighting the skills of an athlete (relative to a debater) led to an infrahumanizing diminished perception of agency within a college student sample. We tested an assumption in the literature, as well – that mind/body dualistic beliefs are the cause of this effect. We failed to find support for this hypothesis: Infrahumanization occurred equally for those who were primed with dualistic and physicalist beliefs. Thus, we found no empirical support for the assumption

(see Gray et al., 2011) that dualism is at the root of infrahumanization.

Study 3

The previous two studies demonstrate that athletes are infrahumanized relative to debaters; we argue that this is due to the *bodily* focus of athletic praise relative to the *mental* focus of praising debaters. However, this could also simply be due to stereotypes about the two groups (i.e., the “dumb jock” stereotype; Harrison et al., 2009; Sailes, 1993). In Study 3, we controlled for this alternative explanation by manipulating the *body* and *mind* descriptions within the athletic domain, this time focusing on describing the athlete as talented because of his athleticism (body) or because of his intelligence (mind). We predicted that the results would again show that the athletic profile is infrahumanized (i.e., seen as less agentic) than the intelligent profile.

We also tested our prediction that infrahumanization leads to decreased support for athletes’ rights. After reading the vignette about the athlete and rating his agentic capabilities, participants were told the athlete partakes in an organization that pushes for athletes’ rights and asked how much they agreed with a number of policy-oriented items about athletes’ rights (e.g., pay for play, unionization, injury coverage). We predicted an indirect effect of condition on policy attitudes, such that an athletic (relative to an intelligent) description leads to infrahumanization, which in turn predicts less support for athletes’ rights.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Two hundred fifty-five participants were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk website and were compensated \$0.65 for their participation in the brief survey. Participants’ ages ($M = 34.39$, $SD = 11.6$) ranged from 18 to 68 years, 42.4% of the sample identified as female, and 81.6% identified as White/Caucasian.

After agreeing to participate in the study, participants read a brief description of Michael the athlete and answered the same measure of agency as in Studies 1 and 2. Participants then read about Michael’s attitudes toward university athletic policies, followed by their opinion on those policies, and demographics.

Description

The infrahumanization in Studies 1 and 2 could be due to the athletic identity instead of the bodily description per se.

To control for this, we employed *mind* and *body* descriptions of an athlete in Study 3. Both were descriptions of athletes, while one condition focused on praising his body and the other focused on praising his mind. The former condition read:

Michael is a student on the basketball team at the university he attends. He is a shooting guard who stands 6'3 tall, weighs 185 pounds, has a 6'5 wingspan, scores 16.9 points and records 1.8 assists per game. Defensively, he uses his imposing agility to stay in front of opposing players. Offensively, he can power past his defender, and he makes explosive cuts to the basket without the ball. His tremendous lower-body strength translates into an impressive vertical leap, allowing him to rebound effectively.

His coaches say the best part of his game is his incredible physique and athletic prowess.

While the latter read:

Michael is a student on the basketball team at the university he attends. He is a shooting guard who scores 16.9 points and records 1.8 assists per game. Defensively, he studies his opponent diligently, understanding their habits and tendencies. Offensively, he is an intelligent scorer, knowing the most efficient places on the floor to shoot from. He understands the geometry behind positioning players on the floor, allowing him to make precise passes on time, as if he can see a play in his head before it happens.

His coaches say the best part of his game is his incredible basketball intelligence.

Participants were randomly assigned to either the *mind* or *body* condition.

We used a manipulation check to examine if participants read these descriptions as representing the body (athleticism) or the mind (intelligence). We asked participants how athletic and intelligent Michael is on a scale from 1 (= *not at all*) to 7 (= *very much so*). The description manipulation was successful: Participants rated the body condition ($M = 6.57$, $SD = 0.61$) as more athletic than the mind condition ($M = 6.08$, $SD = 0.85$), $t(253) = 5.33$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.67$, 95% CI [0.42, 0.92] and rated the mind condition ($M = 6.21$, $SD = 0.89$) as more intelligent than the body condition ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(253) = 11.34$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.42$, 95% CI [1.15, 1.70].

Agency

The same agency scale from Studies 1 and 2 was used in the current study ($\alpha = .77$).

Policy Attitudes

Participants were then told that Michael "is also very involved with an organization at his university" that aims to "promote institutional policies that support student athletes' rights." Participants were told that three of these policies involve: being paid to play basketball; athletes should be allowed to unionize; and athletic departments should cover injury problems due to playing, even after the student has already graduated. Three items asked how much participants agreed with Michael on these policies, scored from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 7 (= *strongly agree*). Participants were then asked how much they agree with two more policy-related items on the same 7-point scale (reverse-scored): "Student athletes cannot handle making a lot of money, so it is in Michael's best interest that he does not get paid for playing" and "Student athletes like Michael are already paid what they deserve - a college scholarship." These five items were averaged together to form a measure of support for athletes' rights policies ($\alpha = .86$).

Results

Effect of Description on Agency

Athletes praised for their bodies ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.41$) were perceived as less agentic than athletes praised for their minds ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.46$), $t(253) = 11.19$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.40$, 95% CI [1.13, 1.68].

Total and Indirect Effect Analyses on Policy

The total effect of condition on policy attitudes was not significant, $t(253) = 1.14$, $p = .25$, $d = 0.14$, 95% CI [-0.10, 0.39]. We also performed analyses to examine if the type of description (i.e., mind vs. body) has an indirect effect on policy attitudes by way of perceptions of agency. We performed these analyses with the PROCESS SPSS macro using model 4 and 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2013).

First, we tested the effect of condition (body = 0, mind = 1) on policy attitudes via perceptions of agency (Figure 2). As shown in the previous analyses, the mind condition predicted greater perceptions of agency, $\beta = .58$, $t(253) = 11.19$, $p < .001$. Agency and condition were then entered simultaneously into a linear regression model predicting policy attitudes, and the overall model was significant, $F(2, 252) = 4.37$, $p = .014$. Agency predicted greater support for athletes' rights after controlling for condition, $\beta = .21$, $t(252) = 2.72$, $p = .007$; however, condition did not

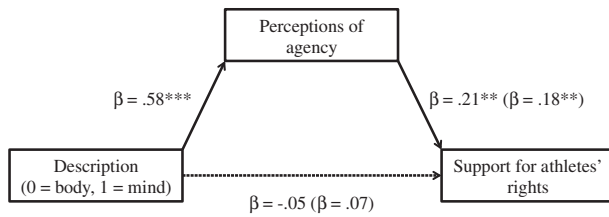


Figure 2. Mediation model in Study 2 depicting the indirect effect of description on support for athletes' rights via perceptions of agency. Standardized regression weights in parentheses represent zero-order correlations between the two variables.

significantly predict policy attitudes after controlling for agency, $\beta = -.05$, $t(252) = -0.62$, $p = .54$. The indirect effect of description on policy attitudes via agency was .12, and the 99% confidence interval did *not* include zero [.01, .24], indicating that the indirect effect was significant, $p < .01$. A body description (vs. mind description) of an athlete led to less perceptions of agency, and in turn decreased support for athletes' rights.

Discussion

We demonstrated that athletes described in terms of physical skill are infrahumanized relative to athletes described in terms of intellectual skill. An athlete whose best skill is his incredible "physique and athletic prowess" was seen as less agentic than an athlete whose impressive "basketball intelligence" is his greatest asset despite similar performances (e.g., average points scored). Loughnan and Haslam (2007) argued that certain social categories may be disproportionately associated with different types of humanness, and the social category of "athlete" could explain our findings in Studies 1a and 1b; however, a virtually identical conceptual replication *within* the athletic category provides evidence that this infrahumanization is due to a focus on the body and not a product of the category per se. We also demonstrated that infrahumanization predicts less support for athletes' rights.

Study 4

The first three studies demonstrate that athletes are perceived as less agentic than debaters (Studies 1 and 2), and an athlete praised for his body is perceived as less agentic than an athlete praised for his mind (Study 3). Does this mean athletic admiration leads to infrahumanization? These three studies did not include a control condition, so an equally plausible explanation is that the debater and mind descriptions may be "superhumanized," or seen as especially agentic. We address this limitation in Study 4 by also including a control condition: a neutral description

of a college athlete that focuses on neither his mind nor his body.?

Method

Participants and Procedure

One hundred forty-nine participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk website and were compensated \$0.50 for their participation. Participants' ages ($M = 34.07$, $SD = 10.57$) ranged from 19 to 70 years, the sample was 43.6% female, and 75.2% identified as White/Caucasian.

After agreeing to participate, participants read one of three vignettes about a student-athlete named Michael, which praised him for his body, his mind, or merely described him personally (i.e., a control condition). Participants then rated Michael's agentic capabilities.

Descriptions

The body athlete and mind athlete descriptions were identical to those in Study 3. The control condition read:

Michael is a student on the basketball team at the university he attends. He has short hair, brown eyes, weighs 155 pounds, and is 5'8" tall. He lives in an apartment with two cats. He enjoys working out, and he has a stationary bike in this apartment. His favorite kind of food is Thai food, and he likes almost every type of music, except for country music. He gets pretty good grades. His friend group is small, but he is very close with all of them. His friends say he is easy to get along with, but he really likes his routine and doesn't try new things often.

Agency

The same five items from Studies 1 to 3 were used in this study, and we added two more items from Gray et al. (2007): conveying thoughts or feelings to others and thinking critically ($\alpha = .86$). We also used a 6-point Likert scale in lieu of a 5-point Likert scale in this study.

Results

We submitted perceptions of agency to a one-way ANOVA. The omnibus effect was significant, $F(3, 196) = 14.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. We performed pairwise comparisons between each of the levels of the independent variable, using Tukey's HSD test to correct for multiple comparisons (Figure 3). Two homogenous subsets emerged: first, the control and mind conditions; second, the body condition. The mind ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.65$) and control ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.60$) conditions did not differ from one another, $d = 0.25$, 95% CI [-0.15, 0.64], $p = .654$. The body

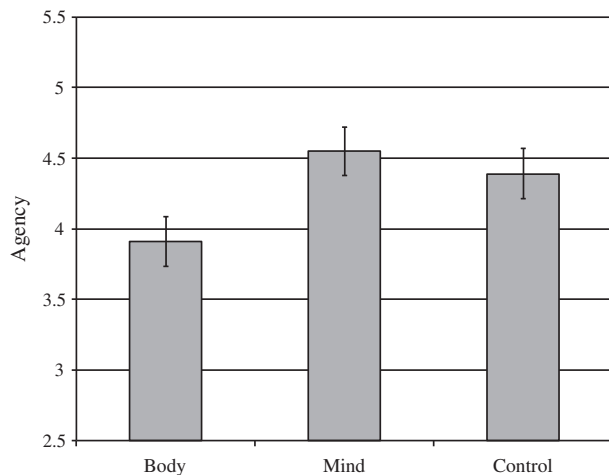


Figure 3. A college athlete described in terms of his body is perceived as less agentic when compared to a mind and control description. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

condition ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.64$) was perceived as less agentic than both the mind, $d = 1.00$, 95% CI [0.58, 1.41], and control conditions, $d = 0.78$, 95% CI [0.37, 1.19], $ps < .001$.

Discussion

We replicated the findings from Studies 1 to 3, showing that bodily praise leads to infrahumanizing perception of decreased agency. We also ruled out the alternative explanation that the mind condition was driving the effect: The mind and control conditions were perceived as equally agentic, while the body condition was significantly lower in agency than both of these comparison conditions. The effect is thus explained by the bodily praise being infrahumanizing.

Study 5

We have referred to the bodily description as “praise” or “admiration” throughout this paper. In our final study, we empirically tested this contention. Participants read each of the descriptions and told us how much they believed the author was praising Michael in the vignette. We predicted that the mind athlete, body athlete, and debater conditions would be viewed as equally positive, with the control condition viewed significantly less as “praise.”

Method

Participants and Procedure

Fifty participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk website and were compensated \$0.50

for their participation. After agreeing to participate, participants read four vignettes, presented in a random order: the mind athlete, body athlete, debater, and control descriptions. Each of these descriptions was the same as those used in Studies 1–4.

Perceptions of Praise

We asked participants, “How much is the author of this description...” and completed the stem with six items: speaking favorably of Michael, speaking positively of Michael, praising Michael, admiring Michael, complimenting Michael, and speaking highly of Michael ($\alpha s = .94-.96$). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale anchored from 1 (= *not at all*) to 5 (= *extremely*).

Results

We submitted perceptions of praise to a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA. The omnibus effect was significant, $F(3, 147) = 93.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .79$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that the mind athlete ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.75$), body athlete ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.78$), and debater ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.61$) conditions did not differ from one another, $ps \geq .91$. The control condition ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.95$) was significantly lower in perceptions of praise than each of the other three conditions, $ps < .001$.

Discussion

Participants saw each of the mind athlete, body athlete, and debater conditions as equally positive in their praise and admiration of Michael. This supports our contention that the infrahumanizing effects in Studies 1–4 occur even when the social representation praises the group member. Ironically, infrahumanization may be caused by praise, if it focuses on one's body.

General Discussion

We demonstrated that an individual is infrahumanized when he is described as an athlete (relative to being described as a debater) in Studies 1 and 2. This effect was not moderated by target race (Study 1) or beliefs about mind/body dualism (Study 2). We showed that infrahumanization emerges for an athlete praised for his body (relative to one praised for his mind) and that decreased perceptions of agency for the bodily-described athlete lead to less support for college athletes' rights (Study 3). These effects were driven by the body conditions (Study 4) and occurred even though the descriptions contained outright praise (Study 5).

Five Theoretical Goals

The present research focused on five theoretical goals that replicate and extend previous research on infrahumanization. We review each goal and summarize what evidence the present studies brought to bear on each.

Focus on Body Leads to Infrahumanization

We conceptually replicated the findings of Gray et al. (2011), showing that focusing on one's body leads to infrahumanization – perceivers see these bodily-described individuals as less agentic than mind-described individuals, and this effect is driven by the bodily descriptions. We demonstrated this comparing athletes (those seen as particularly embodied) to debaters (those who use their mental acuity to compete) in Studies 1 and 2 as well as athletically-gifted athletes to intellectually-gifted athletes in Studies 3 and 4.

Praise Can Be Dehumanizing

We found support for our novel hypothesis that praise can be dehumanizing, so long that it praises one's bodily skills. Research demonstrates that outgroup members (Capozza et al., 2012; Leyens et al., 2000; Vaes & Paladino, 2009; Viki et al., 2006), specific races and ethnicities (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008; Saminaden, Loughnan, & Haslam, 2010), women (Bernard, Gervais, Allen, Campomizzi, & Klein, 2012; Gervais, Vescio, Forster, Maass, & Suitner, 2012; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2014), overweight people (Holland & Haslam, 2013), and asexuals (MacInnis & Hodson, 2012) are a number of the targets of dehumanization and infrahumanization, and that this is driven by disgust (Buckels & Trapnell, 2013; Harris & Fiske, 2006; Hodson & Costello, 2007), sexualization (Gray et al., 2011; Vaes, Paladino, & Puvia, 2011), or subjective uncertainty (Landau, Sullivan, Keefer, Rothschild, & Osman, 2012). The present demonstration of infrahumanization cannot fall into any of these categories: The infrahumanized targets were males described as athletic bodies – however, they were not sexualized, and the descriptions were positively-valenced (Study 5). These warm and competent (cf. Harris & Fiske, 2006) targets were infrahumanized. We argue that a focus on the body – even in the absence of disgust or sexualization *and* in the presence of admiration – is enough to trigger infrahumanization.

Black and White Targets are Similarly Infrahumanized

We did not find evidence that infrahumanization of athletes occurs differently for Black and White targets. This is a demonstration similar to that of Gray et al. (2011), who found that body-focused (as compared to face-focused) photographic depictions of targets led them to be infrahumanized, and that this effect did *not* depend on target gender – sexualized men and women were similarly

infrahumanized. Gray and colleagues argue that gender is still implicated, however, as women are more likely to be described in terms of their body.

We make a similar claim to Gray and colleagues within the present studies. In particular, the media depicts Black athletes (when compared to White athletes) more in terms of their body (e.g., naturally athletic, physically strong) than their mind (Eastman & Billings, 2001; Ferrucci, Tandoc, Painter, & Leshner, 2013; Hardin, Dodd, Chance, & Walsdorf, 2004; Mercurio & Filak, 2010; Niven, 2005; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Schmidt & Coe, 2014; Stone, Perry, & Darley, 1997). Perceivers internalize these depictions, as well: People implicitly associate Black (relative to White) athletes with “natural” athlete words (e.g., tall, strong, agile, big), and this association is particularly strong with heavy sports media users (Kobach & Potter, 2013). These results are consistent with the findings that people perceive Black athletes (and nonathletes alike) as gifted athletically but unintelligent (e.g., Biernat & Manis, 1994; Copping, Kurtz-Costes, Rowley, & Wood, 2013; Harrison, 2001; Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Bennett, 2008; Miller, 1998; Sailes, 1993; St. Louis, 2003; Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999; Walzer & Czopp, 2011; Wiggins, 1989). Lastly, Black males are vastly over-represented on the football and basketball teams at major revenue-generating universities (see Hawkins, 2010, pp. 111–112). Thus, while Black and White athletes may both be infrahumanized as a function of being described in terms of their bodies, these descriptions are far more likely to affect Black athletes in practice.

Dualism Is (Not) an Explanatory Mechanism

We found no support for the proposed explanation (Gray et al., 2011, p. 1217) of dualism: Participants primed to think of the mind and body as separate, distinct entities demonstrated the same infrahumanization effect – less perceived agency – as did participants primed to think of the mind and body as rooted in the same fundamental systems. We provided a direct empirical test of the dualism-as-a-cause assumption and found no support. Further research should investigate what may be the root cause for redistribution of mind in response to a focus on one's body.

Van Rheenen (2012) offers an interesting possibility for explaining the redistribution of mind effect in that the current economic system in major college sports reproduces institutional hierarchies, one of which being the mind is painted as more valuable than the body. Perhaps bodily-described individuals are infrahumanized relative to mind-described people due to the cultural value placed on the mind in contemporary society. In an economy that no longer primarily produces material goods and that values the technologically savvy, the mind may be seen as especially profitable and the body as something that must

merely be maintained. The infrahumanization of those who are especially embodied may be a product of the cultural values placed on the mind and body: Those described as bodies are seen as lesser human beings because their bodily skills are seen as less valuable in the information age.

Policy Implications of Infrahumanization

We demonstrated that redistribution of mind – specifically, perceived agency – predicts decreased support for student-athletes' rights (e.g., pay for play, unionization). Despite no total effect of description (athletic vs. intelligent) on policy attitudes, we found an indirect effect via perceptions of agency. As a product of decreased perceptions of agency, these descriptions praising the physique and athleticism of an individual have ironic downstream consequences of decreasing support for this individual's rights. Van Rheenen (2012) argues that exploitation “can be defined as an unfair exchange between two parties” (p. 563), and that the current state of affairs in major college sports fits this definition: athletes are exploited.

We demonstrate the predictive validity of Gray and colleagues' (2007) agency scale, as exploitation is one of the many consequents of dehumanization and infrahumanization (see Haslam & Loughnan, 2014) – participants who infrahumanized the target also supported his exploitation.

This finding adds to literature that suggests subjectively positive feelings, praise, and admiration can contribute to the exploitation of the targets of those feelings (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jackman, 1994).

Limitations and Future Research

We also used Gray et al.'s (2007) experience subscale throughout the present studies, but it did not demonstrate adequate psychometric properties (see Electronic Supplementary Material). This replicates the low reliabilities reported in Gray et al. (2011). Our results focusing on agency are in line with the theoretical accounts dual model of mind perception (Gray et al., 2007, 2011) and animalistic infrahumanization (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). The experience subscale is what distinguishes the dual model of mind perception, so future research should examine when it is appropriate to use the experience subscale, as Gray et al. (2007) demonstrated that it could be psychometrically valid.

The control condition we employed in Study 4 was a mixture of characteristics about the body (weight, works out) and mind (grades, does not try new things). A limitation of this condition is that the mind characteristics are counterstereotypical, and thus these characteristics may have been especially salient to participants. This salience of the mind could be driving the effect. However, the descriptions of mind abilities are far different in tone in

the control and mind conditions – yet, they are perceived to be equally as agentic. We believe that it is much more plausible that the body condition is driving these effects. Future research could tease apart these ambiguities and examine bodily careers outside of athletics. For example, are manual laborers thought of as bodies, and does this facilitate infrahumanization?

Conclusion

Former Naval Academy athletic director Jack Lengyel responded to historian Taylor Branch's plea for major college sports reform by remarking that, “You can't have the animals running the zoo in a college education.” We presented five studies that illustrate the psychology behind this type of statement. We demonstrated that the admiration of athletes' bodies leads to their infrahumanization (decreased perceptions of agency), and that less perceived agency predicts decreased support for college sports reform that ensures athletes' rights.

Electronic Supplementary Material

The electronic supplementary material is available with the online version of the article at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000272>

ESM 1. Table (PDF).

Mean reaction times.

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