

How does Variability Affect Humanization? Variable (vs. Constant) Behavior Increases Perceptions of Experience, but Decreases Perceptions of Agency

Kristina Wald & Jane Risen (University of Chicago Booth School of Business)

SUMMARY

When targets behave variably (vs. consistently) across time points, observers perceive them as having a greater capacity to feel (i.e., experience dimension of humanization), but also a lesser capacity to think and reason (i.e., the agency dimension of humanization).

INTRO

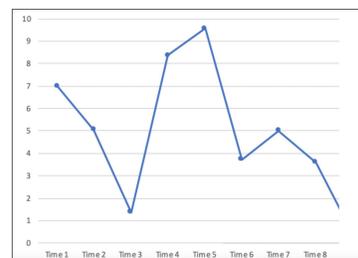
- (De)humanization is the degree to which a target person is perceived as having a human mind (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Waytz, Gray, et al., 2010). 
- There are two dimensions of humanization: experience (the ability to feel) and agency (cognitive capacities) (Gray et al., 2007). 
- Past research suggests uncertainty, unpredictability, and lack of control trigger mind perception (Waytz, Gray, et al., 2010; Waytz, Morewedge, et al., 2010; A. Kay et al., 2010). 
- Thus, we predict that a target's behavioral variability (which should create unpredictability/uncertainty) will affect how much observers humanize the target:
 - **H1:** When a target behaves more variably, people will perceive the target as higher on the experience dimension. 
 - **H2:** When a target behaves more variably, people will perceive the target as lower on the agency dimension. 

METHODS

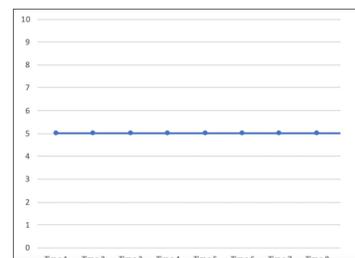
- **Basic design:**
 - Participants see graph of target's behavior on a given trait (high vs. low variability)
 - Participants rate humanization of target using established scale (e.g., how capable of feeling pain the target is, how capable of self-control the target is)
- **Studies 1-2:** Basic design (traits stimulus sampled, e.g., shy, outgoing, friendly, unfriendly)
- **Study 3:** Basic design with behavioral intentions measures
- **Study 4:** To disentangle variability from uncertainty, we added a manipulation of (un)certainty (false feedback on predicting target's behavior)
- **Study 5:** Same as Study 4 with dehumanized target (homeless person)

Stimuli

(graph of target's behavior)



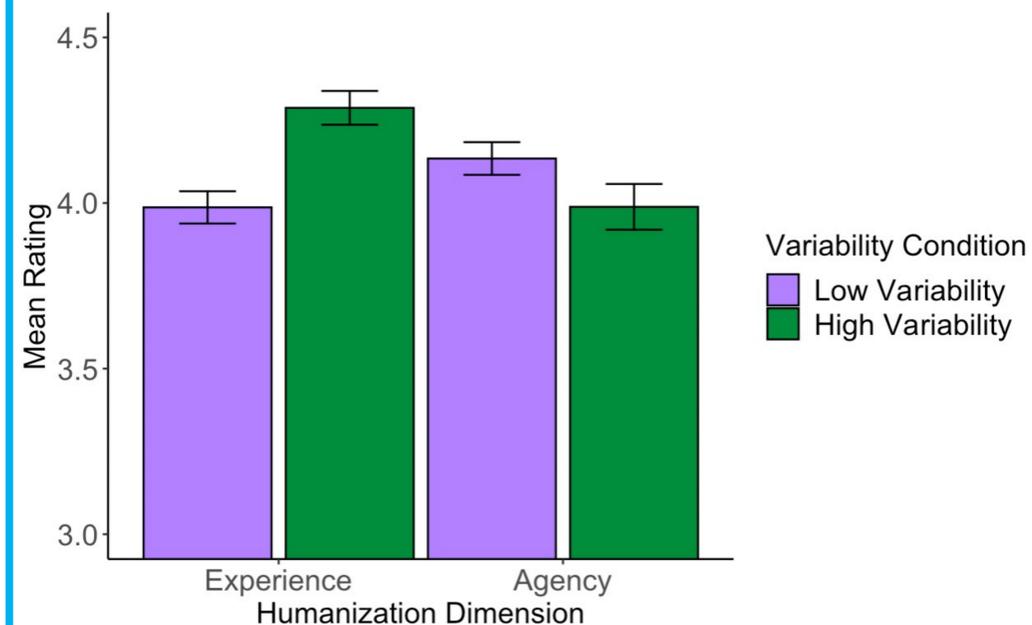
High variability condition



Low variability condition

KEY RESULTS

(Study 2)



DISCUSSION

- Behavioral variability is an important predictor of humanization perceptions.
- In Studies 4-5, effects were driven more by variability than uncertainty for experience, but results were mixed for agency.
- Providing information about a target's variability may be an effective intervention to increase humanization.

REFERENCES

- Gray, H. M., Gray, K., & Wegner, D. M. (2007). Dimensions of Mind Perception. *Science*, 315(5812), 619-619.
- Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An Integrative Review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(3), 252-264.
- Haslam, N., & Loughnan, S. (2014). Dehumanization and Infrahumanization. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65(1), 399-423.
- Kay, A., Moscovitch, D., & Laurin, K. (2010). Randomness, Attributions of Arousal, and Belief in God. *Psychological Science*, 21(2), 216-218.
- Waytz, A., Gray, K., Epley, N., & Wegner, D. M. (2010). Causes and consequences of mind perception. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 14(8), 383-388.
- Waytz, A., Morewedge, C. K., Epley, N., Monteleone, G., Gao, J.-H., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2010). Making sense by making sentient: Effort motivation increases anthropomorphism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99(3), 410-435.