

The Psychological Mechanisms and the Regulatory Function of the Dehumanization of Suicide Attempt Survivors

Name: Spencer Chen

SFU Faculty/Major: Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Psychology

Presentation Description:

This research investigates when and why crisis responders and laypeople dehumanize suicide attempt survivors. Attempt survivors may be dehumanized when they are perceived to lack agency and/or when they receive harmful treatment, and dehumanization may help the dehumanizer regulate their emotions.

Abstract:

Clinicians and laypeople are prone to dehumanize suicide attempt survivors. However, little is known about the psychological mechanisms that lead people to see suicide attempt survivors as less than fully human and the possible functions this dehumanization may serve. This research investigates whether perceptions of suicide attempt survivors' low agency and service providers' use of harmful treatment contribute to dehumanization. More specifically, perceiving suicide attempt survivors to lack agency will increase negative emotions directed at the attempt survivor and these negative emotions should lead to more unconscious and subtle forms of dehumanization. Hearing about suicide attempt survivors who receive harmful clinical treatments is likely to produce self-directed emotions like guilt and shame which in turn should create a need to reduce these feelings by engaging in more conscious and deliberate forms of dehumanization. Thus, dehumanization can serve an emotion regulatory function for the dehumanizer. These hypotheses were tested using introductory psychology students ($N = 151$) who are interested in pursuing a mental health career. If time allows, they will also be tested using a sample of crisis responders who regularly support suicidal individuals. The results of this research could provide insights into why and when suicide attempters are dehumanized by crisis service providers in the frontline and laypeople who aspire to serve the public in meaningful ways.

References/Acknowledgments:

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