Perspective taking in an intergroup context
and the use of uniquely human emotions:
Drawing an E on your forehead

Prise de perspective et expression d’émotions typiquement humaines :
dessiner un E sur le front

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Abstract

Intersecting theories of essentialism and ethnocentrism, Leyens and his colleagues (2000) recently documented people’s tendency to infra-humanize (some) outgroups. Specifically, they observed that people were more reluctant to attribute or associate uniquely human emotions to the outgroup than to the ingroup. The present paper aims at investigating the behavioral consequences of people’s tendency to infra-humanize the outgroup in the realm of perspective taking. Derived form the theory of Leyens et al. (2000, 2001) and previous research (Vaes et al., 2005), it was hypothesized that participants would take the perspective of an ingroup target more easily than that of an outgroup target, when they described their past week in terms of

Résumé

En intégrant les théories d’essentialisme et d’ethnocentrisme, Leyens et ses collègues (2000) ont montré que les gens ont tendance à infra-humaniser (certains) exogroupes. Spécifiquement, ils ont observé qu’on attribue moins d’émotions typiquement humaines à l’exogroupe qu’à l’endogroupe. Cet article se focalise sur les conséquences comportementales de la tendance des gens à infra-humaniser l’exogroupe. Ces conséquences ont été investiguées dans le domaine de la prise de perspective d’autrui. Se basant sur la théorie de Leyens et al. (2000, 2001) et des recherches précédentes (Vaes et al., 2005), on a prédit que des participants prendraient plus facilement la perspective d’une cible de leur groupe que de l’exogroupe, quand les cibles avaient décrit leur semaine

Key-words
intergroup interaction, secondary emotions, perspective taking, essentialism, intergroup familiarity.

Mots-clés
relation intergroupe, émotions secondaires, prise de perspective, essentialisme, familiari-rité intergroupe.

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A great deal of the research in social psychology tries to understand the nature and the sources of prejudice and discrimination. Many of these theories (for a recent review, see Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002), however, have reduced the fundamentals of prejudice and discrimination to its evaluative nature. Discrimination can then arise from either the attribution of more positive traits, resources, facilities, help, etc. to the ingroup (i.e., ingroup favoritism) or from the tendency to ascribe more negative properties to the outgroup (i.e., outgroup derogation). In both cases, it does not really matter what these properties are; only the fact that they create differential responses and that all reflect negative evaluations is theoretically relevant. An interesting extension (for other examples, see Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Smith, 1993, 1999) of the traditional conceptualization of discrimination and prejudice in evaluative terms stems from Leyens and his colleagues (2000, 2001; Gaunt, Leyens, & Demoulin, 2002; Paladino et al., 2002) who focused on the role of emotions. Leyens et al. (2000, 2001) differentiated between uniquely and non-uniquely human emotions, and found that people are generally reluctant to ascribe or even associate (Paladino et al., 2002) uniquely human emotions to the outgroup. Given that all uniquely human characteristics (e.g., intelligence, language, and uniquely human emotions) are necessary, but none of them are sufficient to be considered fully human, Leyens et al. interpreted this differential attribution of uniquely human emotions in terms of infra-humanization. While the research of Leyens et al. documented prejudice in terms of infra-humanization, Vaes and colleagues (Vaes, 2001; Vaes, Paladino, Castelli, Leyens, & Giovanazzi, 2003) focused on the behavioral consequences of infra-humanization. The general observation proved to be that the ingroup member was better treated than the outgroup member when uniquely human emotions were expressed. No differential reactions were observed when non-uniquely human emotions were used. The present article broadens the work of Vaes et al. (2003; Vaes, 2001) and aims at further testing the behavioral consequences of infra-humanization in the realm of perspective taking.

Subjective essentialism, ethnocentrism, and infra-humanization

From its first introduction (Sumner, 1906) until now (for a review, see Brewer & Brown, 1998; Hewstone et al., 2002), ethnocentrism has shown to be a strong and widespread phenomenon. Instances of ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation are reported abundantly in the literature and keep ethnocentrism at the center of social psychological theorizing. It makes a difference whether individuals belong to different groups or share their group membership and this difference needs to be explained. While a lot of research has focused on more surface-level explanations such as stereotypes (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron 1994), only recently, have researchers acknowledged the existence of a deeper level of explanation. People have the tendency to unite members of the same group on some shared underlying characteristic that at the same time differentiates them from members of other groups (Cornell & Leyens, 1994; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992; Yzerbyt, Cornell, & Estrada, 2001). This deep, underlying characteristic can be grounded in the realm of one's language, cultural history, biology, or religion and endows a social category with an essence. Even though social categories, like Dutch, Catholics, or soccer
fans objectively accept different gradations of membership, people subjectively tend to attribute them different essences as if they were natural kinds, like mammals or reptiles (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992).

Given the potency of ethnocentrism and people’s tendency to attribute different essences to their ingroup and outgroups, it follows that people should ascribe a better essence to their own group. As a consequence, on a dimension as fundamental as humanity, people believe that ‘the’ human essence belongs to their ingroup and that an infra-human essence characterizes (some) outgroups.

When asked, people seem to agree on what constitutes the human essence. In rank order, the three most cited characteristics were: intelligence (reasoning, thinking, etc.), uniquely human emotions, and language (communication) (Leyens et al., 2000). Since there is already ample research demonstrating that individuals discriminate against outgroups on the basis of intelligence (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998) and language (Giles & Coupland, 1991), Leyens and his colleagues concentrated on the emotional side of the human essence. In doing so, they had to get an insight into people’s lay conception of what they see as uniquely human emotions and emotions that they share with animals. Recent cross-cultural studies, using French-speaking, Spanish-speaking, Dutch-speaking and American English-speaking participants (Demoulin et al., 2004), revealed that all samples similarly differentiated between “uniquely human” and “non-uniquely human” emotions. Moreover, results showed that they made their judgments on largely the same basis used by emotion scientists to distinguish between “primary” and “secondary” emotions. As secondary emotions in the scientific literature (Ekman, 1992; Kemper, 1987, 1991), uniquely human emotions in the studies of Demoulin et al. (2004) were characterized by a longer duration, less intensity, revealing more morality, cognition and sensitivity, less visibility, a later appearance in life, internal causation, and more variability across cultures. Therefore, the terms primary versus secondary emotions were used to refer to respectively non-uniquely human versus uniquely human emotions.

If all uniquely human characteristics (i.e., intelligence, language, and secondary emotions) are necessary to be considered a human being, but none of them is sufficient, it suffices to differentiate others from ourselves to our own group’s advantage on the basis of one or all of the uniquely human characteristics to infra-humanize the outgroup. Since our focus lies on emotions, infra-humanization implies that people have the tendency to associate or attribute secondary emotions more easily to their ingroup than to an outgroup. This general hypothesis was successfully tested using different paradigms as an adapted Implicit Association Task (Paladino et al., 2002), a simple attribution task (Leyens et al., 2001), Jacoby’s (1991) dissociation task (Gaunt, Leyens, & Demoulin, 2002), or a task measuring the overattribution bias (Gaunt, Leyens, & Sindic, 2004).

Following the reasoning that the human essence tends to be reserved for the ingroup and even denied to the outgroup, it is conceivable that people will react differently to outgroup than to ingroup members who express themselves in terms of secondary emotions. This hypothesis was confirmed by the work of Vaes and colleagues (Vaes, 2001; Vaes et al., 2003). When the target expressed secondary emotions, participants were ‘nicer’ to an ingroup than to an outgroup sender (Study 1); conformity was more likely towards a target that belonged to the ingroup compared to the outgroup (Study 2 and 3) and people showed a general tendency to approach or avoid respectively ingroup and outgroup members (Study 4). On the other hand, as expected, primary emotions, not being a uniquely human characteristic did not result in a better treatment for ingroup, compared to outgroup members.

**Perspective taking and uniquely human emotions**

In one of their experiments, Vaes et al. (2003) used the lost e-mail technique (Castelli, Zogmaister, & Arcuri, 2001; Stern & Faber, 1997; Vaes, Paladino, & Leyens, 2002) to look at the different prosocial behaviors engendered by secondary emotions in a helping situation. The idea behind this paradigm consists in sending manipulated messages to different e-mail accounts. Even though the message is addressed personally to each participant,
it is clearly an erroneous e-mail that was destined for somebody else. Using this method, Vaes et al. (Study 1) manipulated the messages so that they started with either a primary or a secondary emotion and were allegedly sent by either an ingroup or an outgroup member. Content analysis on participants' returns revealed that secondary emotions induced 'nicer' replies towards an ingroup compared to an outgroup member. Primary emotions did not induce differential responses.

Time and time again, it has been shown that both perspective taking and empathy are necessary precursors to helping. The capacity to see the world from another's point of view, and the ability to actually experience feelings for others, both act as motives to offer aid. More important, the causal relationship has been described so that taking the perspective of a needy person induces empathic feelings (Batson, Turk, Shaw, & Klein, 1995) and leads to increased helping of this person (Coke, Batson, McDavis, 1978; Dovidio, Allen, Schroeder, 1990; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). Given the intrinsic relation between perspective taking and helping and the results of Vaes et al. (2003) in a helping situation, we have a good reason to expect a similar pattern of results when perspective taking is measured. As such, we can extend previous findings on helping behavior to the realm of perspective taking.

In line with Vaes et al.'s (2003) results, differential perspective taking responses were expected towards ingroup and outgroup members who expressed themselves with secondary emotions. While the expression of secondary emotions should motivate participants to take the perspective of an ingroup target more easily than that of an outgroup target, the expression of primary emotions was not expected to induce differential perspective taking reactions toward ingroup and outgroup members. To test this hypothesis, we made use of Hass' technique (Hass, 1984; Steins & Wicklund, 1996). This straightforward visual perspective taking task was originally formulated on the basis of the theoretical thinking of Mead (1934), Piaget (1966), and self-awareness theory (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). The underlying idea was that a high degree of self-focus produces a state in which not only one's attention is directed toward oneself, at the same time one becomes aware of oneself as an object. This means that one adopts the perspective of an outside observer looking back at oneself. As a consequence, being self-focused, that is, becoming an object of one's own attention should enhance perspective taking performances. Building on these theories, Hass (1984) developed the drawing-an-E-on-your-forehead procedure. Steins and Wicklund (1996) adapted the method so that participants, confronted face-to-face with a target person, are requested to write a letter of the alphabet on a card that they hold against their foreheads. The one thing that is hard to control when writing a letter on one's forehead is the orientation in which you write it. The participant has to account for the fact that the target is sitting at a 180-degree angle, in order to infer correctly how the letter will be registered in the other's perception. If the letter appears correctly oriented for an external observer, as an "E", then it is assumed that the participant has taken the perspective of the external observer. If, on the other hand, the letter appears as "F", then the other's perspective is assumed as having been discarded.

Apart from replicating the behavioral consequences of infra-humanization as documented by Vaes et al. (2003) in the realm of perspective taking, the present study wanted to test our hypothesis under minimal intergroup conditions. Until now, the phenomenon of infra-humanization has been shown in different intergroup situations. Whether it concerned national groups (Gaunt et al., 2002; Paladinino et al., 2002, Study 1-3; Vaes et al., 2003, Study 2-4), conflicting regional groups (Leyens et al., 2001; Paladinino et al., 2002, Study 1), professional categories (Vaes et al., 2003, Study 1), or football teams (Gaunt, Sindic, & Leyens, in press), people always showed to infra-humanize the outgroup. While natural groups are based on a history characterized by stereotypes, status differences, and possible conflicts, minimal groups have the advantage of creating an intergroup situation that is completely new for the people involved. Therefore, finding similar results in a minimal intergroup situation as with natural groups can shed light on the fundamental variables underlying the intergroup effect. For now, the tentative argument seems to be that a person who identifies at least moderately with the ingroup, will infra-humanize all outgroups that are perceived as having different essences (for further elaboration of this argument, see...
Demoulin et al., 2002; Paladino et al., in press). Following the latter argument, it should be sufficient to make people believe that they belong to different groups that are characterized by different essences in order to observe the infra-humanization of the other. A subjective essentialism manipulation, adapted from Yzerbyt and Estrada (1999; for an overview see Yzerbyt, Cornielle, & Estrada, 2001) to induce an intergroup context was therefore used in the present study. This manipulation consists in making participants believe that they share a deep underlying feature with some individuals and at the same time that they are essentially different from others. Yzerbyt et al. (2003) proposed several methods to induce a belief of being member of an essence-based group. We used a physiological test in which participants’ saliva is ostensibly analyzed, and in which the result is manipulated as the same as or different from another participant.

The latter manipulation allowed us to control an often raised, alternative explanation that relates secondary emotions to familiarity. Primary and secondary emotions can also be differentiated on other than the human dimension (Demoulin et al., 2004). Secondary emotions for instance are judged as being less visible than primary emotions. As such, it could be that people give more secondary emotions to their ingroup than to outgroups because they may detect these specific emotions more easily in their familiar ingroup than in an outgroup. In this manner, it is conceivable that people will only infra-humanize groups with which they are unfamiliar. Since each experimental session categorized two naive participants into two essence-based groups and participants’ familiarity with each other was measured, we could test this alternative hypothesis directly.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were female undergraduate students in Psychology at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve who had to sign up for the experiment in couples. Fifty-eight couples participated in exchange for course credits. The study had a 2 (group membership: same group vs. different group) X 2 (type of emotion: primary vs. secondary emotions) between-participants design.

**Stimuli**

Eight different emotional terms were selected to serve as stimuli in the present experiment. Half of them were pre-tested primary emotions: pleasure (plaisir), astonishment (éméveillement), anguish (angoisse), and fear (peur). The remaining terms were secondary emotions: remorse (remords), exasperation (amertume), admiration (admiration) and friendship (amitié). All the stimuli were chosen on the basis of previous studies (Demoulin et al., 2004) in which participants had to rate a list of emotional terms on a non-uniquely human (= 1) - uniquely human (= 7) dimension. As intended, the humanity ratings for the primary emotions (M = 3.11) were significantly lower on this dimension than the secondary emotions (M = 5.09), t(35) = 10.93, p < .0001. At the same time we controlled for valence, so that the primary (M = 4.56) and secondary emotions (M = 4.35) did not show any overall difference on their judged valence, t(21) = 1.17, ns.

**Procedure**

Participants entered the laboratory in pairs with the expectation that they would engage in a study on the natural course of face-to-face conversations. They were seated face to face at a table with a partition in the middle. The partition was high enough to hinder participants to copy their partner’s answers on a questionnaire, but allowed a slight on each other’s face. The experimenter informed them that the main objective of the study consisted in the observation of a conversation between the two participants. During the course of the experiment, the content of this conversation was going to be prepared and some measures were going to be taken before and directly after the conversation. This preface introduced the cover story.

The first questionnaire asked participants to indicate how well they knew each other. The first question was based on the “inclusion of other in the self” scale of Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992). Eight pictures were presented in which two separate circles gradually merged until they coincided. Each participant had to choose the picture that depicted the relationship between her and her partner the best. The second question simply asked how long the two conversation partners knew each other.
Group manipulation

The experimenter invited the participants to take part in a saliva test (see Yzerbyt & Estrada, 1999). Specifically, they were asked to put a sample of saliva on a small test paper (pH indicator paper). The experimenter took the two samples to a table in the corner of the laboratory on which some chemical products were displayed and informed the participants that a catalyst would put a chemical reaction in motion. In fact, the chemical products consisted of plain water and lemon juice. While the first did not change the color of the indicator paper, the latter colored it red. The results were directly visible and the experimenter put either water on both strips or water on one and lemon juice on the other. So, for half of the participants the result of the saliva-test was identical, while for the other half the results were clearly different. The experimenter then informed the participants that there were two possible results to the test and that each had its own code. All people whose indicator paper did not change were given code 'A', while all people with an altered result were given code 'B'. As such, participants were categorized as belonging to the same or to different groups.

The type of emotion manipulation

At this point, the experimenter introduced the preparation of the conversation topic. To get the conversation started, the experimenter suggested that one person would pose some opening questions about the other person's last week. This implied that one person had to prepare some questions (the interviewer), while the other one had to give some input about her last week (the interviewee). However, the labels 'interviewer' or 'interviewee' were never made explicit throughout the experiment, since this could make participants to cross-categorize their role with the allocated group membership. On the contrary, it was emphasized that the conversation was not meant to be an interview, but a spontaneous dialogue about things that happened with the participants during their past week. After the couple decided who would do what, the experimenter gave an envelope to the interviewee and a piece of paper to the interviewer. The envelope contained a piece of paper on which about 30 emotional terms were written. The interviewee was instructed to summarize her past week by selecting four emotional terms, to put the paper back into the envelope, and to hand it over to the experimenter. This procedure was justified to the participants as a way for the experimenter to stay ignorant to the specific content of the conversation and as such preserve his objectivity until the conversation started. The experimenter then searched for a new questionnaire for the interviewee and, meanwhile, rapidly changed the envelope for another pre-prepared one that looked identical. The experimenter gave the new envelope to the interviewer and the questionnaire to the interviewee. The pre-prepared envelope contained a similar paper as the one the interviewee had filled out, on which either four primary or four secondary emotions (see Stimuli) were marked. The interviewer had another minute to adjust or add some questions on the basis of this information that allegedly came from the interviewee. While changing the envelope of the interviewee for the pre-prepared one, the experimenter did not know which envelope (with primary or secondary emotions) he took. In this manner, the experimenter remained blind to the emotion condition.

Perspective taking measure

The experimenter instructed the interviewer in the drawing-an-E-on-your-forehead procedure (see Hass, 1984; Steins & Wicklund, 1996). The interviewer had to write a letter of the alphabet as fast as possible on a small card while holding the card against her forehead and watching in the direction of her conversation partner. The experimenter gave the signal to start and recorded whether the letter was drawn in the partner's perspective or not. Four letters (B, E, R and G) were used and the order was rotated across participants.

Debriefing

Participants were told that the experiment was over and that the conversation was not the real scope of the present study. Subsequently, the interviewer was asked if she was aware of the direction in which she drafted the letters on her forehead. As a matter of fact, the previous work of Vaes et al. (2003) showed that only measures that are taken outside of participants' awareness, confirm the infra-humanization hypothesis. As a consequence,
we decided to discard all participants that were aware of their responses and thus could possibly control them. Moreover, asking participants in a group to not draw the letters correctly oriented for an external observer could have been, driven by desirability concerns instead of our manipulations. Following these criteria, eight participants (dispersed over all conditions) were eliminated from the analysis. After the inquiry, participants were thoroughly debriefed and received their course credits.

**Results**

Only the responses of the interviewees were taken into consideration, since it was the only person who underwent all manipulations and completed the perspective taking measure.

**Perspective taking**

The letters that were drawn in the proper direction from the perspective of an external observer were counted for every perspective taking response. The number of right responses was counted for each participant, scoring one point for every perspective taking response. Since there were four letters, this perspective taking measure ranged from 0 to 4. A 2 (group membership: primary vs. secondary emotions) X 2 (type of emotion: primary vs. secondary emotions) between-participants ANOVA showed a significant main effect of primary vs. secondary emotions, $F(1,46) = 5.89, p < 0.05$. When the perspective of the interviewee was taken more easily (primary emotions), the interviewee expressed herself more easily (3.13) than when she used the perspective taking measure of herself. The interviewee scored 2.42, $p > 0.05$.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Same group</th>
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<td>Primary emotions</td>
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<td>Secondary emotions</td>
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Note: Comparisons with others using different letters are significantly different from each other ($p < 0.05$).

**Discussion**

Since both duos were good friends or just very close, each other participants in the study, we wanted to control these findings for differences in participants' familiarity. An ANOVA was conducted for differences in participants' familiarity score, the interviewee's score on the index of the relationship with the interviewee (mean = 3.0, $p < 0.05$) was controlled for. Any difference in this index was not significant ($p > 0.05$). An ANOVA was conducted for differences in the interviewee's score on the index of the relationship with the interviewee (mean = 3.0, $p < 0.05$). An ANOVA was conducted for differences in the interviewee's score on the index of the relationship with the interviewee (mean = 3.0, $p < 0.05$).

1. Given the small variance in one of the cells (see Table 1), the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated, but despite this, Glass, Keppel, and Sanders (1978) noted that this result would not change the results of the analysis. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was further confirmed using the Levene's test. The results of the Levene's test were not significant, $F(1,46) = 0.01, p > 0.05$.
Discussion

Results indicated that participants’ perspective taking performance varied in the theoretically expected direction when an ingroup or an outgroup target described her feelings of the past week in terms of secondary emotions. Participants took the perspective of an ingroup target more easily than that of an outgroup target when secondary emotions were used. In the case of primary emotions no such differences were observed. As such, these findings replicate the pattern of Vaes et al. (2003) in the realm of perspective taking. Not only do secondary emotions expressed by an ingroup member lead to more solidarity responses, more approach, and more imitation than when these secondary emotions are provided by an outgroup member, they also facilitate people’s perspective taking performance in an ingroup compared to an outgroup context. These convergent findings obtained in a wide variety of situations and paradigms, using different behavioral measures, provide good support for our hypotheses, that is that people discriminate outgroup members on the basis of the expression of secondary emotions.

Interestingly, also participants’ perspective taking responses increased significantly towards an ingroup member when secondary, compared to primary emotions were expressed. This result replicates Vaes et al.’s (2002) earlier finding using the lost e-mail technique. In their initial experiments, Vaes et al. found that prosocial reactions, as one’s willingness to help or send ‘nicer’ replies, increased when an ingroup member expressed a positive or negative secondary, compared to a positive or negative primary emotion. Still, both the poor perspective taking performance towards ingroup members that expressed themselves with primary emotions and the high perspective taking score in the ingroup-secondary emotions condition remain somewhat puzzling. As far as the former is concerned, participants’ performance in this condition was lower, although not significantly, than in any of the outgroup conditions. A possible explanation could lie in the well-known black sheep effect (Marques, Zerbyt, & Leyens, 1988) that predicts that people will judge ingroup members more negatively than outgroup members when they violate a group norm. In a similar vein, primary emotions are perceived as the lesser human emotions that could threaten the human character of an emerging shared membership and decrease the probability of a perspective taking response. On the other hand, the almost perfect perspective taking performance of participants in the ingroup-secondary emotions condition, could indicate a ceiling effect. Given that participants often knew each other in advance, getting confirmation of one’s shared similarity and the other’s human character, could have created the perfect conditions to take the other’s perspective.

The present research adds to previous findings in at least two ways. First, the hypothesis was tested under minimal intergroup conditions. Groups were created ad hoc on the basis of a deep underlying feature that participants either shared (ingroup condition) or on which they differed (outgroup condition). Results confirmed that, even with this subtle manipulation, secondary emotions induced differential reactions towards ingroup and outgroup members. Hence, a subjective, essential difference between groups is at least a sufficient variable to make people infra-humanize the outgroup. Still, the present research does not allow asserting that essentialism is a necessary precursor of the present phenomenon, because of the lack of control conditions. A recent research of Demolin et al. (2002), however, can be enlightening in this regard. In their experiment, the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971) was adapted, so that three types of groups were created on the basis of their increased meaning for the participants. One third of the participants were randomly divided into different groups, another third was categorized on the basis of their preference for two colors, and a final third was assigned to a group based on their type of future career. Subjective essentialism (Haslam, Rotschild, & Ernst, 2001), identification with the ingroup, ingroup favoritism (Tajfel’s matrices), and the attribution of positive secondary emotions to the ingroup and to the outgroup were measured. As expected, people identified more with the ingroup and perceived the minimal groups more as essence-based categories when the categorization became more meaningful. More importantly, while ingroup favoritism was present in all conditions, infra-humanization, that is, the attribution of secondary emotions to the ingroup but not to the outgroup,
occurred only in the two meaningful conditions. This latter result suggests that perceiving groups as essentially different is not only sufficient, but also crucial in infra-humanizing the outgroup. Groups that we perceive as being characterized by a different essence are also often unfamiliar to us. As such, it could be rather the lack of familiarity than people's essential perception that causes our effects. Furthermore, secondary emotions are generally less visible compared to primary emotions, so it could be harder to detect these emotions in an outgroup than in people's familiar ingroup. As a consequence, secondary emotions expressed by an outgroup could be readily misunderstood, or encoded differently (Leyens, Demoulin, Désert, Vaes, & Philippot, 2002) when a familiar ingroup member expressed them. In all cases, familiarity could be an important alternative explanation for our results. However, the present experiment directly measured participants’ familiarity with the target and showed that familiarity was neither a viable covariate in the tested model, nor did it have any influence on the effects of the group and emotion manipulation. Together with results of Leyens et al. (2002) that show infra-humanization between men and women, this finding makes familiarity as an alternative explanation very unlikely.

Some limitations and future research

With familiarity excluded as an alternative explanation, and essentialism outlined as an important precondition of infra-humanization, the discussion on the process that underlies our findings is not concluded. The present research does not allow strong claims about the underlying mechanisms that are responsible for the effect and more research is needed to define possible mediators. In one of their studies, Vaes et al. (2003, Study 3) found that participants’ perceived similarity with the ingroup versus the outgroup partially mediated their conformity reactions. They reasoned that since secondary emotions are a uniquely human characteristic, the expression of these emotions depicts, at least tacitly, a person as more human. As a consequence, those individuals share the human nature with us, and a common ground or essential similarity is established. While this common humanity will result in positive behavior when an ingroup member is concerned, it will have detrimental consequences for an outgroup member. In the latter case, the outgroup member can be seen as trying to uplift him- or herself to the ingroup’s level on a dimension that we tend to reserve for our own group. Such perception should activate processes of ingroup distinctiveness (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Brewer, 1991; Brown & Abrams, 1986) that can lead to the derogation of the outgroup. Vaes et al. (2003) found partial support for this reasoning, showing that similarity can explain at least some of the variance in people’s responses. Still, the true challenge for future research seems to consist in finding a direct, unobtrusive measure of ‘humanness’ related to ingroup and outgroup members expressing different types of emotions. Our whole argument is based on the assumption that secondary emotions, being a uniquely human characteristic, outline a person as more human. As such, the results on similarity are but a consequence of the assumption that people tend to perceive ingroups and outgroups differently on the human dimension. For now, it seems that we can only derive an explanation in terms of differences in perceived humanity indirectly from the fact that secondary emotions are a uniquely human characteristic. A direct measure of perceived humanity that shows to underlie our effects will therefore be central to future research.

References


