



Thoughts from a Police Therapist

Mass Violence and Dehumanization
in a First Responder Context

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Learning Objectives

1

Identify three types of dehumanization in a first responder context.

2

Explain how incidents of mass violence may impact first responder wellness.

3

Understand how incidents of mass violence may impact therapists of first responders.

What is “dehumanization”

Denying
someone’s
“humanness”
(Haslam, 2008)

Subhuman (animal)

- Lawyers are sharks
- Cops are pigs
- “She’s as gentle as a lamb”
- “Like a bull in a china shop”

**PLEASE STOP CALLING
COPS “PIGS”...**

**PIGS ARE HIGHLY INTELLIGENT
& EMPATHETIC ANIMALS WHO
WOULD NEVER RACIALLY
PROFILE YOU.**



@earthlingillo

Inhuman (machine)

- [Montana Highway Patrol](#)
- Media attention
- Uniformed, badge number
- Why didn't they...?



Superhuman

- Media attention
- Billboards
- Heroes
- Acknowledgement at events



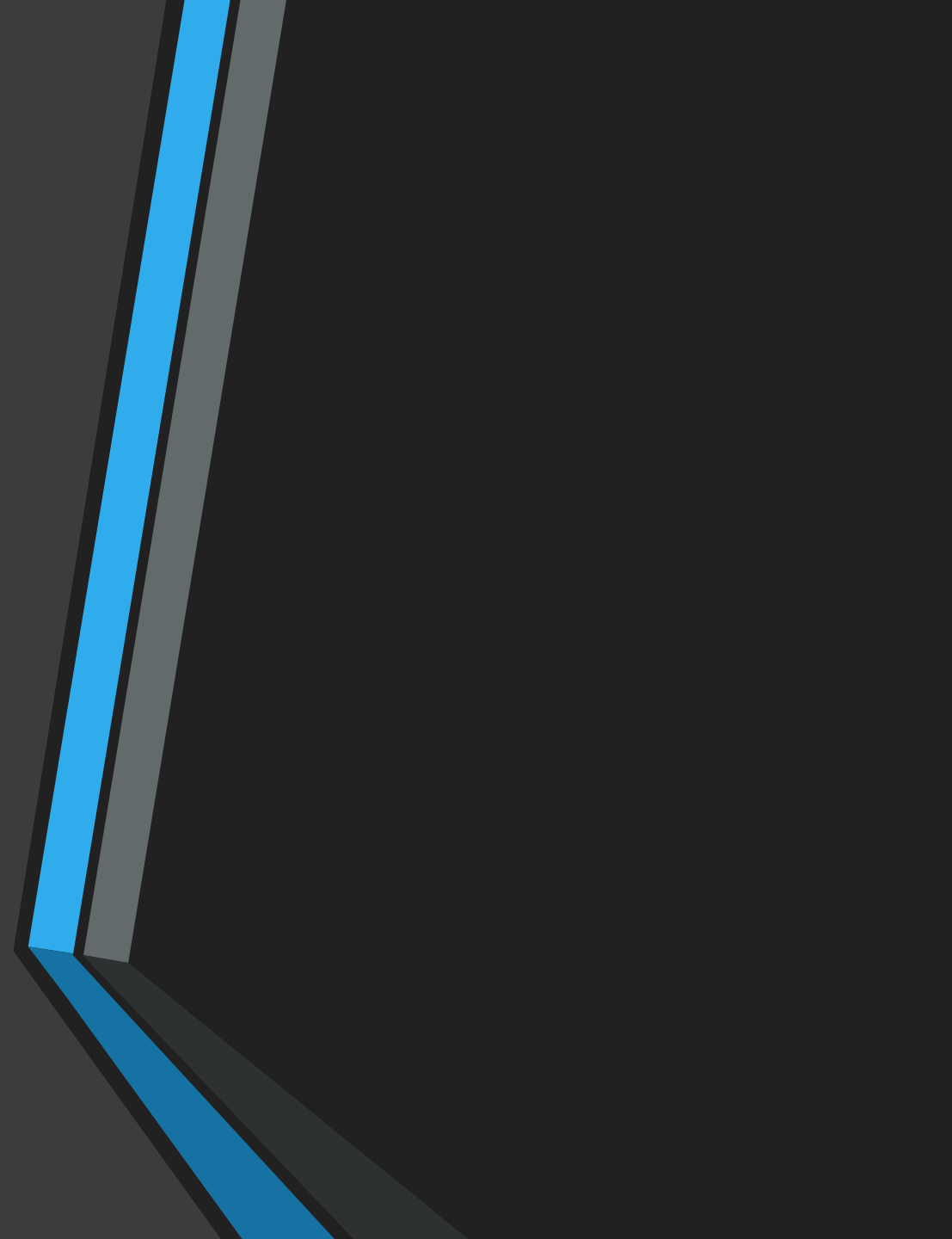
**Putin Immediately Surrenders
After U.S. Airdrops Nashville
Police Officers Into Battlefield**

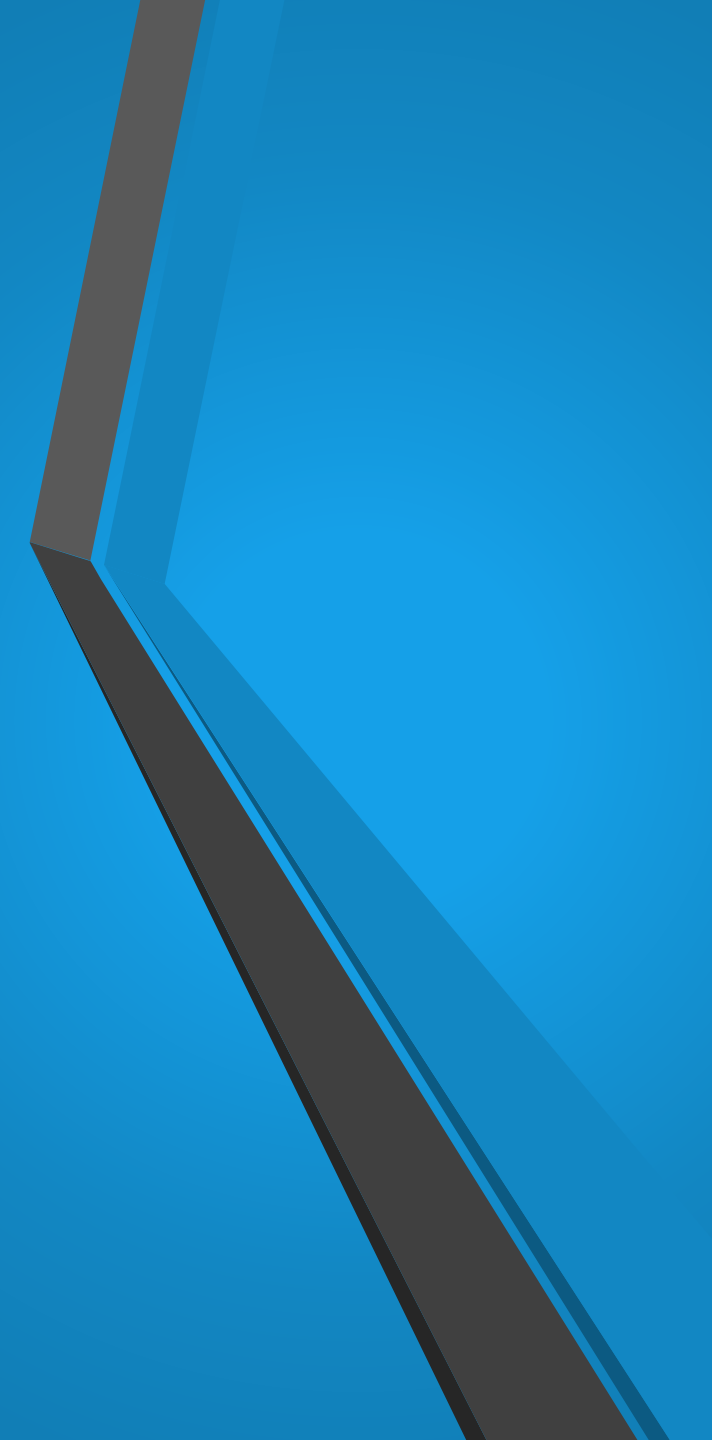


Read the article at

“The people we render superhuman do not get to be human like the rest of us. They do not get to feel anything but significant and confident. They must have everything they already need so it would be silly to think they would ever ask about their own needs and wants. It breeds loneliness and disconnection, rather than fellowship and kinship. In short, in moving someone beyond the category of human, we move them beyond thinking they have any needs like our own.”

Lange, 2019





How does mass violence impact first responders?

Spoiler alert: They're human beings, too!



Physical



Emotional



Mental



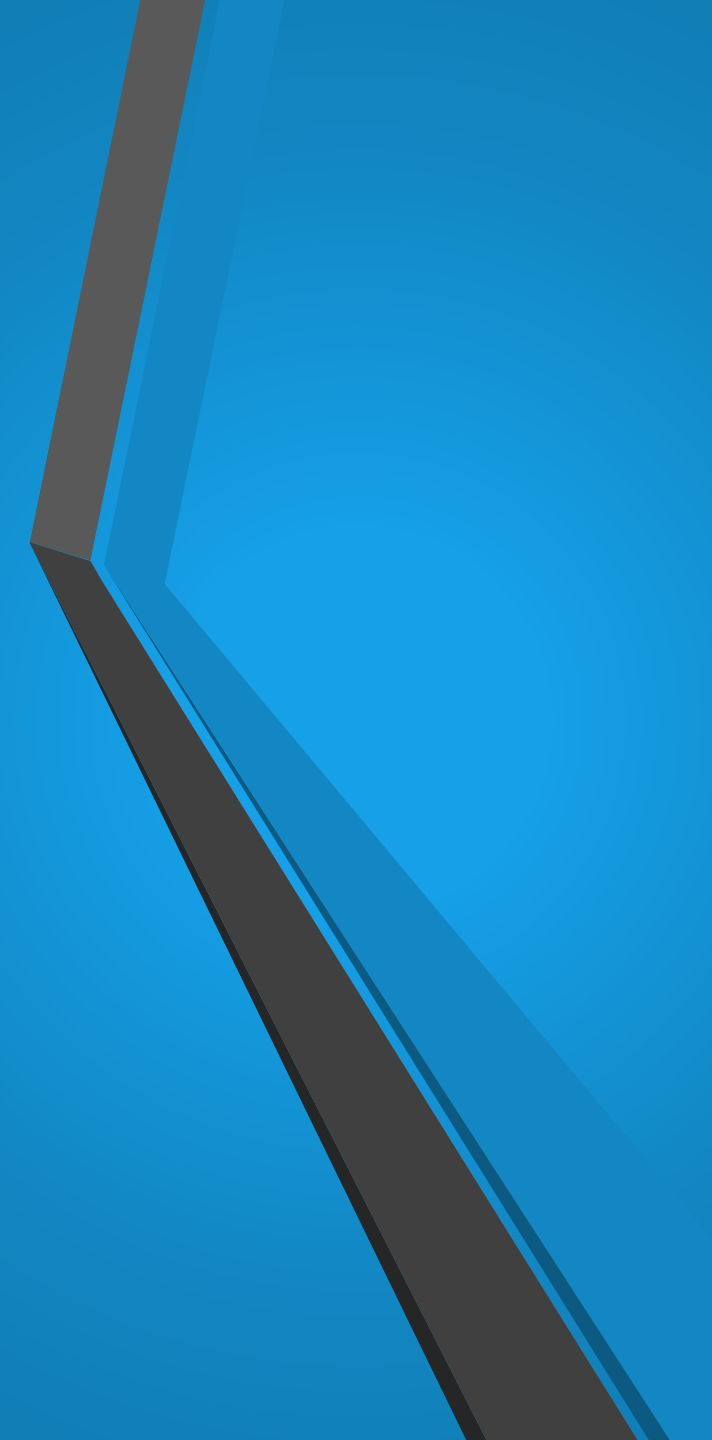
Spiritual



Professional



Impact



How does mass violence impact *therapists* of first responders?

Spoiler alert: They're human beings, too!



Physical



Emotional



Mental



Spiritual



Professional



Impact

Ways to care
for yourself,
colleagues, &
employees
after an
incident of
mass violence

Self-Care

- Find a therapist of your own
- Reality check all the empathy
- Eat
- Drink water
- Move, exercise
- Say “no”
- Reschedule clients

Ways to care
for yourself,
colleagues, &
employees
after an
incident of
mass violence

Resources

- Offer a mental health day that doesn't count against their PTO
- Provide food
- Opportunities for group debriefing
- Share the load
- Find therapeutic opportunities/resources
- Allow for flexibility

References

- Haslam, N., Kashima, Y., Loughnan, S., Shi, J., & Suitner, C. (2008). Subhuman, inhuman, and superhuman: Contrasting humans with nonhumans in three cultures. *Social Cognition*, 26(2), 248-258. <https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2008.26.2.248>
- Mika-Lude, K. M., Degges-White, S., & Isawi, D. (2023). Under fire: Meta-dehumanization and burnout among first responders. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 60, 144–158. <https://doi.org/10.1002/joec.12208>
- Lange, A.C. (2019). A less discussed form of dehumanization: Superhumanization <https://dailymontanan.com/2024/04/17/montana-highway-patrol-terminated-trooper-who-requested-mental-health-support/>