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‘You Treated Me Like an Object, I Don’t Forgive You!’: The Effect of Dehumanization on Interpersonal Forgiveness from the Victim’s Perspective

‘¡Me trataste como un objeto, no te perdono!’: El efecto de la deshumanización en el perdón interpersonal desde la perspectiva de la víctima

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Abstract.

Introduction. There is a gap in the literature on the impact of the perceptions of a victim of an offense upon their forgiveness towards the offender, particularly when those perceptions include dehumanization. **Objectives.** The present cross-sectional exploratory study aimed at examining whether the perceptions of being treated in a dehumanized fashion influences interpersonal forgiveness, avoidance, and revenge intentions of dehumanized victims towards the offender. **Method.** We recruited 149 individuals from the general population, who took part in an online task, consisting of remembering an offense they had been victim of and of a set of self-reported measures of dehumanization (*uniqueness* and *nature*), interpersonal forgiveness, avoidance, and revenge intentions. We used multiple linear regression to test the study’s hypotheses. **Results.** The perceived denial of the victims’ human uniqueness was not associated with the dependent variables, whereas the perceived denial of the victims’ human nature was significantly and negatively associated with interpersonal forgiveness and positively with avoidance and revenge intentions, after controlling for the effects of a set of known covariates. **Conclusions.** The results revealed a role for dehumanization (*nature*) in predicting the victims’ interpersonal forgiveness, avoidance, and revenge intentions. Implications for further research are discussed.

Resumen.

Introducción. En la literatura hay una laguna en la comprensión del impacto de las percepciones de la víctima de una ofensa sobre su perdón hacia el ofensor, particularmente cuando estas percepciones incluyen la deshumanización. **Objetivos.** Este estudio explorativo transversal tuvo como objetivo examinar si las percepciones de ser tratado de manera deshumanizada influyen en las intenciones de perdón interpersonal, evitación y venganza de las víctimas deshumanizadas hacia el agresor. **Métodos.** Reclutamos a 149 personas de la población general, quienes participaron en una tarea online que consistía en recordar una ofensa de la que habían sido víctima y de un conjunto de cuestionarios sobre la deshumanización (*uniqueness* y *nature*), el perdón interpersonal, la evitación, y las intenciones de venganza. Usamos la regresión lineal múltiple para probar las hipótesis del estudio. **Resultados.** La negación percibida de la singularidad humana de las víctimas no se asoció con las variables dependientes, mientras que la negación percibida de la naturaleza humana de las víctimas se asoció significativa y negativamente con el perdón interpersonal y positivamente con las intenciones de evitación y venganza, después de controlar los efectos de un conjunto de covariables conocidas. **Conclusiones.** Los resultados revelaron que la deshumanización (*nature*) tiene un rol en la predicción de las intenciones de perdón interpersonal, evitación y venganza de las víctimas. Se discuten en el artículo las implicaciones para las futuras investigaciones.

Keywords.

Interpersonal Forgiveness; Avoidance; Revenge; Dehumanization.

Palabras Clave.

Perdón interpersonal; evitación; venganza; deshumanización.

1. Introduction

Interpersonal relationships are essential to human beings' functioning and well-being, although sometimes they can represent a source of conflict and discomfort. In fact, conflicts among partners, relatives, and friends are not rare, and if not solved, they can damage pre-existing relationships and impact upon individuals' health and well-being (McCullough et al., 2000). At the interpersonal level, forgiveness is one of the most powerful means to restore damaged relationships and regain value for both parts involved in the conflict (Bono et al., 2008; Karremans & Van Lange, 2008; Karremans et al., 2003; McCullough et al., 2000). However, forgiveness depends on several factors, including—but not limiting to—the characteristics of the offense and the offender's behaviors (McCullough et al., 1998; Riek & Mania, 2012). Although such factors are key in the process of Interpersonal Forgiveness (IF), previous research neglected those factors, and particularly those linked to the victims' perceptions of the offense and their subsequent impact upon forgiveness.

We propose that the way an offense is perceived can influence the forgiveness process. In fact, being victim of a transgression perceived as denying one's humanity was found to influence the victims' cognitive and emotional responses (Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011) and the subsequent course of interpersonal relationships (Bastian et al., 2014). Surprisingly, research addressing the relationship between a victim's perceptions of being dehumanized through an offense and interpersonal forgiveness is lacking. In the present research, we aimed to address this question by investigating whether the perceived dehumanization linked to an offense influences a victim's inclination to grant forgiveness and their intentions to avoid and/or revenge against the perpetrators.

In the following paragraphs, we first introduce our theoretical background and then present our hypotheses.

1.1 Interpersonal Forgiveness

Forgiveness has been defined as a “set of motivational changes whereby one becomes decreasingly motivated to retaliate against an offending relationship partner, decreasingly motivated to maintain estrangement from the offender, and increasingly motivated by conciliation and goodwill for the offender” (McCullough et al., 1997, p. 321). Consistently, McCullough and colleagues (1998, as cited in McCullough et al., 2006) showed that transgressions experienced at the interpersonal level frequently give rise to “a desire to avoid the transgressor, a desire to seek revenge against the transgressor, and a decline in goodwill for the transgressor” (p. 887). Previous research has identified several antecedents of IF and classified them into four main categories, varying in proximity to the act of forgiveness, respectively: (i) the characteristics of the victim (individual differences, cognitive, emotional, and motivational factors; e.g., Brose et al., 2005;

Eaton et al., 2006; Pica et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2021); (ii) the characteristics of the victim-offender relationship (i.e., commitment, closeness, and importance of the relationship; e.g., McCullough et al., 1998); (iii) the behavior of the offender (i.e., whether the offender provided the victim with an apology; e.g., McCullough et al., 1997, 1998); (iv) the characteristics of the offense (i.e., the extent to which the offense was perceived to be severe and harmful, and time from the offense; e.g., McCullough et al., 1998; Riek & Mania, 2012; Worthington, 1998).

Regarding the offender's behaviors and the characteristics of the offense, research has demonstrated that offenses perceived as more severe are less likely to be forgiven (Worthington, 1998). Furthermore, attribution of responsibility is also essential in IF, whereas a transgressor perceived as being characterized by bad intentions is more likely to trigger anger and negative feelings in the victim, ultimately impacting upon the victim's likelihood to forgive (McCullough et al., 1998; Riek & Mania, 2012). Instead, the presence of an apology was found to act as an admission of responsibility that prompts regret in the offender, preventing the latter from repeating the offense in the future (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998). Another significant factor affecting IF is time from the offense, as this seems to facilitate a selective forgiveness and promote a process of “letting go” of past offenses, committed by either oneself or others (Hall & Finchman, 2005; Pierro et al., 2018; Pierro et al., 2021; Worthington, 2006).

Philosophical conceptual frameworks of forgiveness highlighted the interpretation and classification of an event as a first key step for forgiveness to occur. Specifically, Scobie and Scobie (1998) suggested that “It is important to remember that it is the perception of damage by a victim which determines the nature of the event” (pp. 390–391). Nevertheless, psychological literature on the relationship between a victim's perceptions of the offense and their likelihood to forgive is lacking. In our view, such question needs to be addressed, particularly in relation to the victims' perceptions of dehumanization (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). In fact, we hypothesized that perceiving oneself as being victim of a dehumanizing offense can damage both the victim's self-perceptions and their confidence in interpersonal relationships (Bastian & Haslam, 2011), potentially acting upon their ability to grant IF. By testing this hypothesis, we aimed at expanding the extant knowledge on how victims' perceptions influence the forgiveness process, specifically by linking the literatures on forgiveness and dehumanization.

1.2 Dehumanization

The term “dehumanization” indicates the denial of others' qualities and characteristics that distinguish oneself as a human being (Haslam, 2006). Two types of dehumanization have been identified in the literature, un-

derlying different implications of being human, namely animalistic dehumanization and mechanistic dehumanization (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan 2014). On the one hand, animalistic dehumanization represents the denial of one's human uniqueness, specifically those attributes that distinguish human beings from animals, such as refinement, morality, higher-order cognitive processes. On the other hand, mechanistic dehumanization represents the denial of one's human nature, specifically those attributes that are typical of and shared across human beings, such as distinctive emotions, agency, warmth, and mental openness. According to Bastian and Haslam (2011), when

Human Uniqueness attributes are denied to people they are explicitly or implicitly likened to animals, and seen as child-like, immature, coarse, irrational, or backward. When Human Nature attributes are denied to them, they are explicitly or implicitly likened to objects or machines and seen as cold, rigid, inert, and lacking emotion and agency. (p. 107)

Research has shown that perceptions of dehumanization can have several consequences for interpersonal and intergroup relations (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). For example, Kteily et al. (2016) showed that individuals' perceptions of being dehumanized by someone belonging to an assumed outgroup led those individuals to reciprocate the dehumanizing treatment and even to support violent and aggressive collective actions. Other research provided empirical evidence that treating ingroup members (e.g., colleagues) with equality-based respect heightened individuals' perceptions of being treated humanely (Renger et al., 2016).

Along the same lines, Bastian and Haslam (2010) argued that interpersonal maltreatments can determine a victim's perception of being dehumanized, showing that social exclusion negatively impacts upon self- and other perceptions of being human, particularly in terms of diminished human nature characteristics. Furthermore, Bastian and Haslam (2011) showed that when uniquely human attributes are denied (i.e., when a target's equal status is not recognized), aversive self-awareness and feelings of shame and guilt towards the self occur, whereas when human nature attributes are denied (i.e., when the target's actual personhood and existence are not recognized), cognitive deconstructive states (i.e., an absence of meaningful thoughts and aversive self-awareness), as well as feelings of sadness and anger towards the offender occur. Importantly, these deconstructive states, sadness, and anger, have all been linked to a lack of forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998; Riek & Mania, 2012). Overall, such findings provide indirect evidence of the fact that a victim's perceptions of being treated in a dehumanized fashion may lead them to a diminished willingness to forgive the offender.

Moreover, Bastian and Haslam (2011) found that transgressions aimed at diminishing human nature (i.e., mechanistic dehumanization) were perceived as more severe forms of interpersonal maltreatments than transgressions aimed at diminishing human uniqueness (i.e., animalistic dehumanization), with the two types of dehumanization entailing different emotional and interpersonal consequences. The denial of human uniqueness (i.e., when victims are treated as children, unsophisticated and/or primitive beings) resulted in rumination about possible self-involvements in the causality of the maltreatment, whereas the denial of human nature (i.e., when victims are treated as objects, without feelings and empathic concerns, being used to satisfy a perpetrator's secondary aims) resulted in the victim's cognitive withdrawal and increased anger against the perpetrator (Bastian & Haslam, 2011). Assuming interpersonal transgressions to act as threats to social relationships and to influence one's sense of social connectedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), we expected forgiveness to be hindered by a victim's perceived denial of human nature characteristics.

1.3 Current Research

In the current study, we aimed to explore the relations between dehumanization and IF from the perspective of the victims of an offense. We hypothesized that a greater perception of being dehumanized (in particular, the denial of victims' human nature) would be associated to a lower willingness to grant forgiveness and to a greater desire to seek avoidance and revenge towards the offender. Furthermore, we aimed to test the effect after controlling for known antecedents of IF, such as perceived offense severity, degree of responsibility attributed to the offender, time from the offense, presence of an apology, and also the victim's age and gender (Riek & Mania, 2012).

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Participants and Procedure

Using snowball sampling, we recruited 149 adult participants (89 women, aged 19–73 years; $M_{\text{age}} = 41.55$ years; $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.74$) from Rome, Italy. Recruitment was promoted through academic and social networks (e.g., Facebook, Instagram). Participation was entirely voluntary and informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were all invited to take an online survey, consisting of a short task and a set of self-reported measures, requiring about ten minutes to be completed. Regarding the inclusion criteria, participants needed to be aged at least 18 years or older and be fluent in Italian to take part in the study. An institutional ethics committee reviewed the study's procedure and expressed favourable opinion.

Participants were first asked to think back to an episode where they had been offended or hurt by a significant other and to briefly describe it. The instructions

were as follows: “Every now and then, most or all people have hurt somebody else. Think about an episode where you were offended or hurt by someone close and significant to you”. After receiving these instructions, participants were asked to write a paragraph about the offense. The writing part served to induce participants to recall the episode and their feelings about it. The written descriptions of the offenses reflected a wide variety of ordinary interpersonal situations of low to moderate severity (e.g., being hurt by a partner, a family member, a friend). After describing the offense, participants were administered a set of self-reported measures, as described in the next paragraphs. At the end of this task, all participants were thanked, debriefed, and dismissed.

2.2 Measures

We measured IF through four items from the Feeling sub-scale of the State Self-Forgiveness Scale (SFS; Wohl et al., 2008), adapted to specifically assess others’ forgiveness. Participants were asked to focus on how they felt about the other person at the moment of reading, in relation to the wrongful event. Ratings were on a 4-point scale (from 1 = “Not at all” to 4 = “Completely”). We finally averaged across the four items to determine a composite score ($\alpha = .72$). Higher scores reflected greater IF.

We measured avoidance and revenge intentions using the two relevant subscales of the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Scale (TRIM-12; McCullough et al., 1998). Ratings were on a 7-point scale (from 1 = “Totally disagree” to 7 = “Totally agree”). Higher scores indicated higher intentions of avoidance and revenge towards the offender/transgressor, respectively.

We assessed perceptions of dehumanization by using the scale proposed by Bastian and Haslam (2011). This includes two subscales, each comprised of five items, measuring animalistic dehumanization (uniqueness; $\alpha = .87$) and mechanistic dehumanization (nature; $\alpha = .94$), respectively.

We assessed the perceived severity of the offense by asking participants to rate the extent to which they perceived the described offense as (i) serious and (ii) harmful or damaging to the self. Ratings were on a 10-point scale (from 1 = “Not at all” to 10 = “Completely”; Fincham & May, 2021; Fisher & Exline, 2006; Hall & Fincham, 2005). The two items were highly correlated ($r = .67$, $p < .001$) and their scores were averaged to obtain a global score of transgression/offense severity.

We adapted five items from Fisher and Exline (2006), rated on a 10-point scale (from 1 = “Completely disagree” to 10 = “Completely agree”), to assess the degree to which participants perceived the other as responsible for the offense ($\alpha = .82$).

Regarding time, we asked participants to report the number of months since the incident.

We finally asked participants to answer the following three questions, measuring, respectively: (i) how apologetic the offender had been, (ii) to what extent they had made amends, and (iii) to what extent they had shown regret. All the items were rated on a Likert scale (from 0 = “Not at all” to 10 = “Completely”).

2.3 Statistical Analysis

The effects of dehumanization uniqueness and nature (predictor variables) on IF, avoidance, and revenge intentions (criteria variables) were tested by means of three separate multiple regression models. We used SPSS 23.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) for all the analyses.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables are reported in Table 1.

The results from the first analysis showed that apology, time from the offense, and age were positively and significantly related to IF, whereas attribution of responsibility was negatively and significantly related to IF. Importantly, dehumanization-uniqueness was not significantly related to IF, whereas dehumanization-nature was negatively and significantly related to IF, suggesting that perceiving oneself to have been treated like an object significantly rose resistance in granting IF.

In the second analysis, the avoidance scores were regressed on both dehumanization-uniqueness and dehumanization-nature, after controlling for the same previously illustrated covariates. Table 2 summarizes the results of the regression analyses.

Results showed that apology and age were significantly and negatively related to avoidance, whereas attribution of responsibility was significantly and positively related to it. Dehumanization-uniqueness was not significantly related to avoidance, whereas dehumanization-nature was significantly and positively related to it, suggesting that perceiving oneself to have been treated like an object impacted upon the victims’ intentions to avoid the offender.

In the third analysis, the revenge scores were regressed on both dehumanization-uniqueness and dehumanization-nature, after controlling for the covariates. Results showed that dehumanization-uniqueness was not significantly related to revenge, whereas dehumanization-nature was significantly and positively related to it, suggesting that perceiving oneself to have been treated like an object impacted upon the victims’ intentions to revenge against the offender.

4. Discussion

The present study investigated whether the perceptions of a victim of an offense to be dehumanized by the offender influences interpersonal forgiveness (IF), avoidance, and revenge intentions, and by further differenti-

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables (N = 149)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Interpersonal Forgiveness	2.16	1.07	(.91)								
2. Avoidance	3.28	1.57	-.88***	(.97)							
3. Revenge	2.03	1.43	-.69***	.66***	(.81)						
4. Dehumanization-Nature	5.2	1.86	-.68***	.71***	.55***	(.87)					
5. Dehumanization-Uniqueness	5.12	2.11	-.47***	.49***	.48***	.69***	(.94)				
6. Apology	3.96	3.56	.56***	-.53***	-.34***	-.38***	.25**	(.97)			
7. Offense Severity	8.80	2.00	-.48***	.41***	.37***	.47***	.38***	-.07	(.80)		
8. Other's Responsibility	8.82	1.52	-.56***	.53***	.45***	.53***	.43***	-.24**	.70***	(.73)	
9. Time from the offense (months)	30.74	56.10	.19*	-.14	-.20*	-.07	-.16	.03	-.19*	-.09	-

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$. In bracket [r (Spearman-Brown, corrected) for Offense Severity, and Cronbach's α for all the other variables].

Table 2

Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses

	Interpersonal Forgiveness			
	β	t	SE	95% C.I.
Dehumanization-Nature	-.44***	-5.36	.05	-.34 to -.16
Dehumanization-Uniqueness	.05	.64	.04	-.05 to .10
Apology	.36***	6.32	.02	.07 to .14
Offense Severity	-.11	-1.44	.04	-.14 to .02
Other's Responsibility	-.17*	-2.21	.05	-.22 to -.01
Time from the offense (months)	.12*	2.32	.001	.00 to .004
Gender	.06	1.24	.11	-.08 to .36
Age	.10*	1.94	.01	.00 to .02
	Avoidance			
	β	t	SE	95% C.I.
Dehumanization-Nature	.50***	6.10	.07	.29 to .57
Dehumanization-Uniqueness	.01	.17	.06	-.10 to .12
Apology	-.32***	-5.50	.03	-.19 to -.09
Offense Severity	.01	.17	.06	-.11 to .13
Other's Responsibility	.16*	2.01	.08	.00 to .32
Time from the offense (months)	-.07	-1.32	.002	-.01 to .001
Gender	-.03	-.53	.17	-.42 to .25
Age	-.13*	-2.32	.01	-.03 to -.02
	Revenge			
	β	t	SE	95% C.I.
Dehumanization-Nature	.30**	2.78	.08	.07 to .39
Dehumanization-Uniqueness	.13	1.30	.07	-.05 to .22
Apology	-.14	-1.88	.03	-.12 to .003
Offense Severity	.01	.12	.07	-.13 to .15
Other's Responsibility	.17	1.72	.08	-.03 to .35
Time from the offense (months)	-.15	-2.15	.002	-.01 to .00
Gender	-.08	-1.17	.20	-.62 to .16
Age	-.03	-.38	.01	-.02 to .01

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$. Gender (Male = 0; Female = 1).

ating between the effects of human nature's denial on IF and human uniqueness' denial on IF. The results of this exploratory cross-sectional study provided evidence that dehumanization was significantly associated with IF in a sample of individuals from the community. Specifically, although the results showed that both types of perceived

dehumanization were negatively associated with IF and positively related to avoidance and revenge intentions, after controlling for known antecedents of interpersonal forgiveness (i.e., perceived severity of the offense, degree of responsibility attributed to the offender, time from the transgression, and presence of an apology), the per-

ceived “nature” dehumanization but not the denial of the victim’s human uniqueness was associated to lower IF, higher avoidance, and revenge intentions.

These findings are in line with previous research that found human “nature” characteristics to be more highly affected by various forms of maltreatments compared to human uniqueness characteristics (Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011). Moreover, these results bring together insights from the currently quite distinct literatures on dehumanization and forgiveness, expanding theory in each. In particular, we believe that these findings will advance the current understanding of dehumanization by considering its interpersonal consequences from the victims’ perspective, such as whether dehumanization leads to a victim’s intentions to forgive, avoid, and/or seeking revenge against the perpetrator of the relevant offense. Therefore, not only do these results contribute to the growing literature on dehumanization in everyday interpersonal relationships (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011; Renger, et al., 2016), they are also possibly conducive to a revised conceptualization of the psychological dynamics of interpersonal conflict. In fact, our findings showed that mechanistic dehumanization determined greater victims’ intentions to seek revenge against the perpetrators of the relevant offense. Notwithstanding such findings, further research is needed to explore the specific mechanisms underlying this relationship. For instance, it is possible that the anger elicited in the victim by the offense and the subsequent reciprocal process of dehumanization motivate the victim’s revenge intentions and future aggressive behavior. This idea would be consistent with Kteily and colleagues’ findings (2016) of reciprocal dehumanization in intergroup relations and support for violent reactions against outgroup members.

These results also contribute to the literature on forgiveness, specifically, by providing a novel insight into the antecedent of forgiveness. In fact, to the extent of our knowledge, no study had previously investigated whether victims’ perceptions of being treated in dehumanized fashion were related to forgiveness. This is a significant gap because, as suggested by Scobie and Scobie (1998), we know that forgiveness is largely influenced by how transgressions and offenses are perceived. Thus, considering findings from previous research showing that interpersonal maltreatments affect the victims’ perceptions of being dehumanized and their subsequent emotional and cognitive responses (Bastian & Haslam, 2010, 2011), the results from the current study provide further insight on the role of the victims’ perceptions of being dehumanized and its association with forgiveness, which future research would benefit from taking into account to gain a wider and more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal conflict.

Nevertheless, our study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of this study did not allow for causality inference, requiring caution in the in-

terpretation of the results. Manipulations of the types of perceived dehumanization, and/or longitudinal designs are needed to disentangle the effects of dehumanization on forgiveness and evaluate these effects in the long term. Second, we assessed our dependent variables by using self-reported measures, thus leaving possible impression management issues unresolved. In fact, participants might have declared to forgive their transgressor to enhance their social desirability rather than being animated by a true desire to forgive. Future research is warranted to replicate our hypotheses, specifically by supplementing self-reports with more robust methodologies in the measurement of IF, avoidance, and revenge. In addition, future research will need to address the question as to why and when being dehumanized prevents or hinders IF. In the following paragraphs, we propose some hypotheses. First, as previous studies showed that dehumanization is linked to a lower sense of social connectedness in victims of an offense (Bastian & Haslam, 2010), a reduced social connection may act upon the link between dehumanization and IF (see Bono et al., 2008). Second, rumination about the offense may also be involved in the relationship between dehumanization and IF. In this vein, previous studies showed that reducing the ruminative thoughts about an offense helps increasing a victim’s likelihood to forgive the offender (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998). Also, because social mistreatments were found to negatively impact upon self-regulation, which is necessary to control, prevent, and stop rumination (Baumeister et al., 2005), it can be hypothesized that a victim’s perceptions of being dehumanized hinders forgiveness and facilitates avoidance and/or revenge through a lack of regulatory capacities, for example, by failing to inhibit intrusive thoughts and negative feelings about the offense and the offender. Third, empathy is another promising mediator in the relationship between dehumanization and IF, which will require further investigation. People may find extraordinarily difficult to empathize with perpetrators that dehumanized them, and considering that empathy enables forgiveness (McCullough, et al., 1998; Worthington, 1998), an inability to empathize with a dehumanizing offender might cause individuals to interpret and categorise the offense as hardly forgivable.

Moreover, we think that another interesting question for future research is whether some of the victim-related factors interact with the victim’s perception of being dehumanized. For instance, an offense that denies one’s human nature (vs. uniqueness) may be perceived as especially stressful and threatening by someone higher in narcissistic traits and with a less robust sense of self-worth. This may in turn reduce the chances for IF and induce avoidance and/or revenge intentions against the offender. Similarly, higher (vs. lower) levels of assessment regulatory mode or need for cognitive closure, both found to be negative correlates of IF (Pica et al., 2021;

Pierro et al., 2018; 2021), may moderate the relationship between dehumanization and IF, avoidance, and revenge intentions, respectively. Regarding the need for cognitive closure, we hypothesize that it may exacerbate a victim's negative experience and appraisal of the offense, possibly determining closed-minded and arrogant verbal or behavioral responses towards the offender, in line with findings from recent research (Pica et al., 2021).

We believe that the present findings also have significant practical and clinical implications. People are often involved in interpersonal conflicts that need to be interpreted, addressed, and possibly solved to ensure their well-being. Our findings suggests that dehumanization perceptions affect an individual's capacity for forgiveness, particularly when they prompt a victim's sense of having been reduced to an object through the offense and when carrying low empathic concerns (i.e., mechanistic dehumanization). If confirmed by further experimental and/or longitudinal research, these results may open the way to novel evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies in community and clinical contexts, for example, based on a cognitive re-interpretation of the offense, specifically aimed at reducing the perception of the offense as a dehumanizing experience.

5. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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