Deconstructing Hate: The Role of Dehumanization in Hate Perceptions

of Moral Transgressors

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Abstract

Research has found a noteworthy relationship between hate and dehumanization, but its nature remains disputed. The goal of this study was to investigate the role of dehumanization in the experience of hate feelings directed towards moral transgressors. Based on the general consensus that moral perpetrators are denied humanness and on research showing that dehumanized groups are often targets of hate, it was expected that different moral transgressions predict distinct levels of hatred and dehumanization, that dehumanization predicts hate, and that perpetrators are hated more because they are dehumanized more. To test this, (N = 220) adults from the United States participated in a within-subjects experimental study that measured hate and dehumanization levels in regards to four different transgressors described in vignettes (engaging in sexual harassment, injustice, physical harm, and stealing). The results showed that sexual harassers and justice transgressors are hated significantly more than those engaging in harming behaviors and in stealing, that sexual harassers and transgressors inflicting harm are dehumanized significantly more than justice transgressors and those who steal, that dehumanization predicts hate, and that the effect of dehumanization on hate is more pronounced in the cases of stealing and sexual harassment. The implications for diminishing biases in the justice system and reducing hate crimes were discussed.

Keywords: hate, dehumanization, moral transgressions, sexual harassment, injustice

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of Moral Transgressors

The rates of hate-based crimes have been steadily increasing all over the world in the past decade (Pretus et al., 2022). Only in the United States, authorities documented 11.634 hate-motivated offenses in 2022 – a rise from the 10.840 recorded in the preceding year (Oladipo, 2023). Hate crimes harm the victims and the community in unique ways. They affect the victims psychologically, transmitting a message of threat and inferiority based on their unchangeable characteristics (Kauppinen, 2014), and they enhance tensions that already existed in society, stimulating other people to commit similar offenses (Seymour, 1996). Moreover, they lead to more severe emotional and physical injuries to the victims (e.g., sleep disorders, hypertension, psychosis) than other types of crimes (Bakken, 2002). Consequently, hate crime has become an increasingly important topic in contemporary society, especially considering the growing ability of digital media to intensify and transmit hatred and news of it instantly everywhere (Haslam & Murphy, 2020).

At the same time, hate is an understudied emotion in psychology, despite the rich literature on related issues, such as aggression, anger, prejudice, and discrimination (Haslam & Murphy, 2020). More specifically, there is a critical gap in the research on the relationship between hate and dehumanization. Historically, intergroup hate has been characterized by the dehumanization of victims (Haslam & Murphy, 2020). For instance, Tutsis were referred to as cockroaches by Hutus in the Rwandan genocide, and natives were declared primitive savages by colonialists. Thus, there seems to be a link between the two concepts, but the exact nature of the relationship is still understudied (Haslam & Murphy, 2020). Recognizing how dehumanization and morally-fueled hate lead to violent acts like hate crimes could contribute to their reduction (Rai et al., 2017; Tang & Harris, 2015). Therefore, it is highly important to

address this lack of research. Accordingly, the present study's main goal is examining the role of dehumanization in the development of hate feelings towards different transgressors.

The current study intends to add to the scarce literature on the association between dehumanization and hate. I aim to understand the nature of their relationship in the context of interpersonal hate, and more specifically to examine the role of dehumanization in the experience of hate feelings towards different moral transgressors. Based on existing literature on the dehumanization of transgressors and hate feelings, I expect that, depending on the type of moral transgression, people experience different levels of hate towards different transgressors (H1), dehumanize them to different degrees (H2), and that dehumanization predicts hate (H3). Therefore, there is an interaction between the type of transgressor and the degree to which people dehumanize them, explaining the hate feelings experienced towards them (H4).

Hate and Moral Transgressors

Hate is an intense, negative emotional reaction to a target considered intrinsically malicious and unchangeable in its evilness (Fischer et al., 2018). The hated object is seen as dangerous, a threat to one's values and identity, so the aim is its social, physical, mental, and symbolic destruction. A distinction can be made between interpersonal and intergroup hate, depending on whether the target is hated because of their membership to a particular group or their personal characteristics (Fischer et al., 2018).

In the case of the current research, the focus is on interpersonal hate, and the targets are moral transgressors. Moral transgressions are actions perceived as objectively wrong in a rigid manner (Tang & Harris, 2015). Moral transgressors were chosen as hate targets for this study because framing an act in terms of its morality causes more intense emotional reactions, including hate, so moral violations are more likely to predict hate feelings (Pretus et al., 2022). Moreover, hating a target is significantly associated with considering it fundamentally

immoral and with increased levels of anger, contempt, and disgust – moral emotions that are highly correlated with hate in terms of their action tendencies (Fischer et al., 2018). Therefore, moral transgressors are suitable targets of hate feelings.

The relationship between moral transgressions and hate can be explained in three ways (Pretus et al., 2022). On the one hand, moral transgressions are disliked; this negative evaluation develops into hate when "something one values has been violated" (Allport, 1954, p. 364), such as moral norms. Another justification is that perceiving someone as transgressing and lacking morality or an action as wrong, intentional, and performed by an inherently evil person leads to hating that individual (Pretus et al., 2022). Lastly, hate is conceptualized as a triangular structure consisting of anger, contempt, and disgust – as stated in Sternberg's (2003) triangular theory of hate – and these primary emotions occur in response to moral transgressions. Therefore, hate does, too (Pretus et al., 2022).

The particular transgressions presented in this study are stealing (i.e., pickpocketing), physical harm, injustice (i.e., corruption), and sexual harassment. Graham et al.'s (2013) version of the moral foundations theory, adapted from Haidt (2012), presents five foundations of morality, each with its specific triggers. Sexual transgressions are significant triggers of the sanctity/degradation criterion (Graham et al., 2013), and I would argue that they also violate the harm/care foundation – the most fundamental facet of morality (Maninger & Shank, 2022) –, because they tamper with the victim's autonomy over their own body, causing harm (Rozin et al., 1999). Corruption is a violation of the fairness/cheating and the authority/subversion foundations, as it involves taking unfair advantage of public resources, undermining the authority of political and justice systems, and hindering economic development (Amundsen, 1999). On the other hand, transgressors who cause physical harm trigger only the care/harm criterion (Graham et al., 2013), and pickpocketing is solely a violation of the fairness/cheating foundation, since cheating as a concept overlaps significantly with stealing (Bloomquist,

2010). Furthermore, pickpocketers affect a limited number of people, compared to the extent of the damage caused by corruption. Thus, sexual harassment and injustice violate more foundations of morality and to higher degrees than harm and theft do. Taking this into account, my first hypothesis is that different moral transgressions lead to different levels of hate feelings towards transgressors, so there is a main effect of transgression type on hate. Specifically, transgressors of sexual harassment and injustice are more hated than transgressors who steal and harm.

Dehumanization and Hate

Haslam (2006) conceptualized dehumanization as denying someone's basic humanness. It can be observed in various social contexts, from dehumanizing marginalized groups (women, racial and ethnic groups, disabled individuals) to viewing medical patients, students, and criminals as lacking individuality and agency (Haslam, 2006; Tang & Harris, 2015).

There are two contradictory perspectives on the dehumanization of moral transgressors. The moral typecasting theory (Gray & Wegner, 2009) claims that they are agentive and humanized by others (Haslam & Murphy, 2020; Rai et al., 2017), while the more supported general agreement of dehumanization literature is that they are denied humanness. In six studies, Khamitov et al. (2016) found that people are more likely to deny transgressors' agency, which is one aspect of humanness (Haslam, 2006). This was found across various conditions (i.e., the transgressor was a human or a company, across different degrees of harmfulness, using two distinct operationalizations of agency) and while controlling for multiple variables (i.e., the transgressor's likeability and specific actions). This emphasizes the large extent of moral perpetrators' dehumanization. Bastian et al. (2013) supported this, revealing that morally reprehensible behavior is strongly associated with the transgressor's

dehumanization, especially in the case of sex offenders. Consequently, I expect that moral transgressors are generally dehumanized.

Considering these findings, my second hypothesis is that different moral transgressors are dehumanized to different extents. Therefore, I expect a main effect of transgression type on dehumanization. More specifically, transgressors of sexual harassment and injustice are more dehumanized than transgressors who steal and harm. Participants in Levenson et al.'s (2007) study significantly overestimated the recidivism risk of sex offenders; few believed that they are a heterogenous population, and they all doubted the effectiveness of treatment. Endorsing these myths about sex offenders, which have been largely debunked, indicates how much sexual transgressors are denied human characteristics like agency and potential to improve. Furthermore, corruption leads to institutional decay, citizens losing trust in the government, and misallocation of public resources (Amundsen, 1999). These effects are particularly severe, impacting a large number of people and entire systems. On the other hand, Rose et al. (2006) found that pickpocketing is seen as far less severe. Because people view pickpocketers as less deserving of punishment and their victims as less affected, it is likely that they are less dehumanized.

Throughout history, dehumanized groups were also targets of hate (e.g., Jews, Tutsis, natives, African slaves) (Haslam & Murphy, 2020). Thus, when researchers first directed their attention towards the link between hate and dehumanization, the implicit consensus was that they are inseparable. However, contemporary studies have found that hatred is not inherently dehumanizing (Brudholm & Lang, 2021; Haslam & Murphy, 2020). Still, there are cases where they develop concomitantly, since there is a correlation of approximately 0.5 between them (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). My third hypothesis is that moral transgressions constitute such a case, so dehumanization predicts stronger hate feelings; in other words, there is a main effect of dehumanization on hate.

Bastian et al. (2013) found evidence for a strong positive correlation between dehumanization and moral outrage. Moral outrage is conceptually related to hate, because it is generally defined as a mix of anger and disgust (Ginther et al., 2022), which are also highly associated with hate, due to their action tendencies (Fischer et al., 2018). Thus, dehumanization and hate might be linked. Moreover, people are less willing to grant ethical standing to dehumanized perpetrators (e.g., recognize their rights) (Khamitov et al., 2016) and more willing to punish them more harshly, regardless of crime severity, type, and consequences (Bastian et al., 2013). Vasquez et al. (2014) found that dehumanizing descriptions of criminals caused the participants to give them more serious punishing decrees and identified the perceived risk of reoffending as a mediator, which could relate to dehumanization, since the transgressor is viewed as lacking the agency to stop reoffending. Viki et al. (2012) discovered that the dehumanization of sex offenders is positively associated with a lack of support for their rehabilitation, rejection of their reintegration in society, and support for longer prison sentences and for violent treatment. These studies contribute to the notion that people might feel stronger hate feelings towards more dehumanized transgressors, based on punitive motives.

Based on the three hypotheses mentioned thus far, a fourth hypothesis develops regarding the relationship between dehumanization and hate: some moral transgressors are hated more than others *because* they are dehumanized more strongly. The interaction effect between transgression type and transgressor dehumanization explains why people hate certain transgressors more than others. The lack of support for rehabilitation (Viki et al., 2012) indicates that the dehumanized transgressors are perceived as unchangeably malicious, as hate targets are (Fischer et al., 2018). Moreover, not granting them moral standing (Khamitov et al., 2016), the desire to punish them more strongly (Bastian et al., 2013; Vasquez et al., 2014; Viki et al., 2012), encouraging violent treatment towards them, and the disapproval of their

social inclusion (Viki et al., 2012) point to perceiving hate targets as a threat to one's values and to the aim of eliminating them (Fischer et al., 2018). Thus, research on how people treat dehumanized transgressors justifies the belief that it is the dehumanization of perpetrators that explains the increased hate feelings towards them.

The Current Research

In sum, the current study seeks to examine the role of dehumanization in the experience of hatred towards moral transgressors, by analyzing whether moral violations predict different levels of hate (H1) and different levels of perpetrator dehumanization (H2), if dehumanization predicts hate (H3), and whether people hate moral transgressors because they dehumanize them (H4). To test these hypotheses, vignettes depicting the various transgressors will be used, and hate and dehumanization will be measured across them.

<center>**Method**</center>

Participants

After an a priori power analysis was conducted for the larger project, suggesting what sample size would be enough to detect small to medium effect sizes, a random sample of healthy adults (N = 269) from the United States was recruited through the online research platform Prolific. The pilot data (N = 31) and participants who either failed both attention check questions (N = 4) or submitted an incomplete survey (N = 14) were excluded from further analyses. After exclusion, a total sample of N = 220 remained: 48.6% were male, 48.2% were female, and 3.2% identified as "other". Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 77 ($M = 42$, $SD = 14.5$). The majority of the sample was white (57.3%) and has obtained an undergraduate degree (39.5%).

Instruments

The survey completed by the participants was designed using Qualtrics, and it was distributed on Prolific. A pilot study was conducted prior to data collection on a small

convenience sample via Qualtrics, to check the functionality of the survey, to gather general

feedback, and to make adjustments to the instruments as needed. Based on this feedback,

minor changes were made to the phrasing of the vignettes (e.g., typos were corrected) and to

the presentation of the scale points. The responses from the pilot study were not included in

the main study, and these participants were not paid.

Vignettes

The survey's manipulation consisted of four vignettes, in which the transgression was

described in approximately 6–8 sentences. The vignettes were inspired by true news

headlines, consisting of one of the following four moral transgressions being acted upon by a

transgressor: a) stealing, b) harming, c) sexual harassment, and d) injustice. The moral

transgressions were depicted as the following scenarios: stealing in the form of pickpocketing,

harming in the form of punching someone following a conflict, sexual harassment in the form

of inappropriate behavior in the workplace, and injustice in the form of corruption (see the

complete vignettes in Appendix A). All transgressors in the vignettes were male, as these

types of transgressors are typically men (Wallwork, 2009).

Measures

Participants were exposed to the vignettes in random order. The dependent measures

followed after each vignette, also in random order. As the present study is part of a larger

project, multiple variables were measured regarding each transgressor: evilness,

changeableness, severity of transgression, dehumanization, and hate. Dehumanization and

hate are the variables relevant for the current study.

Dehumanization. The participants were asked to rate 12 adjectives on a 7-point scale

(1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely*), based on how well they fit the participant's perception of the

transgressor. This scale is an adapted version of the Ascent measure of blatant

dehumanization scale used by Kteily et al. (2015), Kteily et al. (2016), and Bastian et al.

(2013) (α = .77), which has a rating system from 0 to 100 (100 indicating full humanity). For the current study, it was adjusted to yield an average dehumanization score on a scale from 1 to 7. Thus, this scale operationalizes dehumanization, measuring how dehumanized each transgressor is. The adjectives paired to the points are "backward", "lacking self-restraint", "like an animal", "capable of self-control", "rational", "savage", "primitive", "uncivilized", "mature", "cultured", "barbaric", and "unsophisticated". The items "capable of self-control", "rational", "mature", and "cultured" were reverse-coded.

Hate. Hate was measured in this study using an adaptation of the Passionate Hate Scale, originally developed by Zeki and Romaya (2008). It is based on the triangular theory of hate (Sternberg, 2004). Accordingly, this measure involves three subscales: contempt, anger, and disgust. Each subscale comprises four items each (12 items in total), operationalized as statements reflecting the participant's attitude towards the transgressor. Examples of statements are "I really despise this person" (contempt), "I cannot control my anger towards this person" (anger), and "This person is really disgusting" (disgust). Answers were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), so the scale yielded an average hate score between 1 and 7. Certain items were reverse-coded when needed. Two attention checks were included within the scale, where the participant was asked to select a specific answer. The Passionate Hate Scale showed good reliability (α = .93).

Procedure

The current study is part of a broader project containing five research papers seeking to answer distinct, but related questions about hate and moral transgressions. The data collection of the main study took place on the 3rd of April 2024 via Prolific. Before completing the online questionnaire, participants read a short overview of the general nature of the study and the survey, including instructions. Giving informed consent was needed to confirm anonymous participation and proceed with the survey. Following this, participants

were exposed to the four within-subjects conditions in a randomized order. After reading each vignette, they had to complete the dependent measures described above (the dehumanization scale and the adapted Passionate Hate Scale) in relation to that specific vignette. Both the vignettes and the questions were presented in a counterbalanced order, to control for carryover and sequential effects.

At the end of the study, the respondents provided sociodemographic information. Finally, they read a debriefing form describing the aim and the content of the study further, and received the contact details of the researcher. The survey took on average 14 minutes and 23 seconds to complete, and each person was paid $2.30 for their participation. Ethical approval for this cross-sectional study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen prior to data collection.

Analytical Strategy

All statistical analyses were conducted using jamovi (Version 2.3.28). A General Linear Model was conducted first, with moral transgression as the categorical independent variable (IV) with four distinct levels, hate as the continuous dependent variable (DV), and dehumanization as a continuous covariate. With this model, I examined the main effect of transgression condition on hate (H1), the main effect of dehumanization on hate (H3), and the interaction between the transgression type and dehumanization on hate (H4). The main effect of transgression condition on dehumanization (H2) was studied running a one-way ANOVA with transgression type as the IV and dehumanization as the DV. For examining significant effects by condition and interpreting significant interactions, post-hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted using the Tukey correction. All tests were two-tailed and a significance level of .05 was chosen for all analyses.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to the data analysis, a QQ plot was created to visually represent the distribution of residuals of the dependent variable hate, testing the normality of the distribution. Although the data points are not perfectly aligned, the distribution looks fairly Normal (Pleil, 2016) (see Appendix B, Figure B1). Therefore, the current dataset came from a Normal distribution. The outliers were not excluded from the data.

Main Analysis

Hate and dehumanization were found to be moderately positively correlated ($r = .46$, $p < .001$), and descriptive statistics by condition are summarized in Table 1. To test the hypothesis that different moral transgressions predict different levels of hate feelings towards the transgressors (H1), the General Linear Model yielded a significant main effect of transgression condition on hate ($F(3, 872) = 26.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .084$).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Variables of Interest, Depending on Transgression Type

|	Hate M (SD)	Dehumanization M (SD)
Stealing	4.81 (1.04)	5.03 (1.11)
Harming	4.96 (0.86)	5.86 (0.93)
Harassing	5.62 (0.85)	5.88 (0.9)
Injustice	5.31 (0.88)	5.05 (1.18)

Note. M, mean; SD, standard deviation.

Upon conducting post-hoc pairwise comparisons using the Tukey correction, there was a significant difference between the mean levels of hate towards transgressors inflicting harm and transgressors who sexually harass $M_{diff} = -0.598$, $t(872) = -7.18$, $p < .001$, a significant difference between the mean levels of hate towards transgressors inflicting harm and transgressors who endorse injustice $M_{diff} = -0.623$, $t(872) = -7.65$, $p < .001$, a significant difference between the mean levels of hate towards transgressors who steal and sexual

harassers $M_{diff} = -0.358$, $t(872) = -4.34$, $p < .001$, and a significant difference between the mean levels of hate towards transgressors who steal and justice transgressors $M_{diff} = -0.383$, $t(872) = -4.749$, $p < .001$. Thus, sexual harassers and justice transgressors are significantly more hated than transgressors who steal and harm (results summarized in Figure 1).

Figure 1.

*Hate Feelings Across Transgressions*
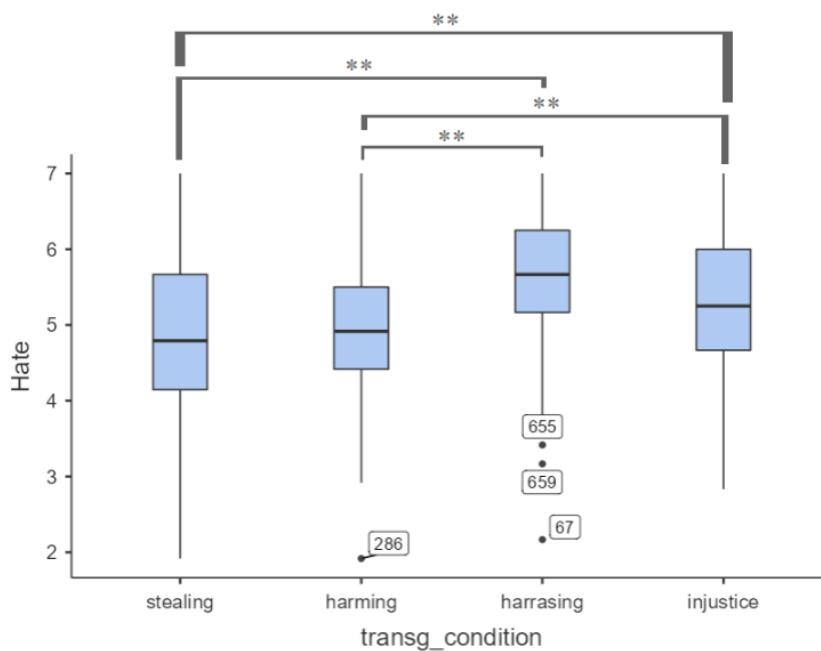
Note. **, $p < .001$.

The one-way ANOVA testing the hypothesis that different moral transgressors are dehumanized to different extents (H2) showed a significant main effect of transgression condition on dehumanization ($F(3, 876) = 47$, $p < .001$). Upon conducting post-hoc pairwise comparisons using the Tukey correction, there was a significant mean difference $M_{diff} = -0.836$, $p < .001$ between the levels of dehumanization of transgressors who steal and those inflicting harm, a significant mean difference $M_{diff} = -0.85$, $p < .001$, between the levels of

dehumanization of transgressors who steal and sexual harassers, a significant mean difference $M_{diff} = 0.8$, $p < .001$, between how dehumanized the transgressors inflicting harm and those who endorse injustice are, and a significant mean difference $M_{diff} = 0.832$, $p < .001$, between how dehumanized sexual harassers and justice transgressors are (results summarized in Figure 2). Thus, transgressors who engage in harming behaviors and those who sexually harass are significantly more dehumanized than those who steal and those who endorse injustice.

Figure 2

*Dehumanization Across Transgressions*
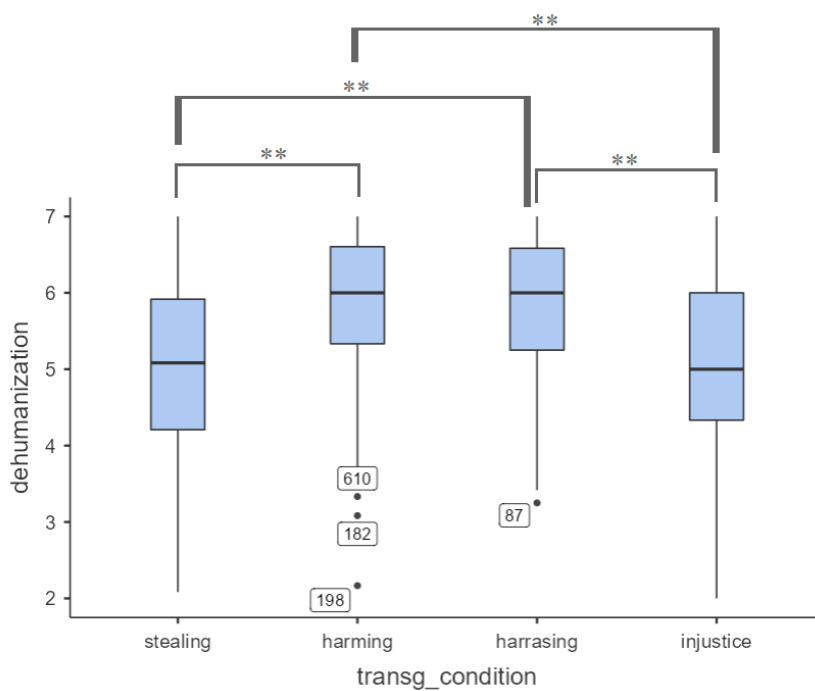
Note. **, $p < .001$.

To test the hypothesis that dehumanization predicts hate (H3), the General Linear Model showed a significant main effect of dehumanization on hate feelings, $F(1, 872) = 260.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$, indicating that dehumanizing a transgressor predicts that they will be hated ($\beta = 0.497$, $t(872) = 4.749$, $p < .001$).

Lastly, the hypothesis that there is an interaction between transgression type and dehumanization of the transgressor (H4) was tested. The General Linear Model showed a significant interaction effect between the type of moral transgression and the level of transgressor dehumanization on hate ($F(3, 872) = 6.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .021$). Therefore, dehumanization predicts hate depending on the type of moral transgression. When both dehumanization and type of transgression were used as predictors for hate, they accounted for 31.8% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.323$, $R_{adj}^2 = 0.318$).

The simple effect of dehumanization on hate was significant in the case of stealing ($F(1, 872) = 120.2$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .121$), $\beta = 0.616$, $t(872) = 10.96$, $p < .001$; significant in the case of harming ($F(1, 872) = 44.4$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .048$), $\beta = .447$, $t(872) = 6.66$, $p < .001$; significant in the case of sexual harassment ($F(1, 872) = 77.8$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .082$), $\beta = .609$, $t(872) = 8.82$, $p < .001$, and significant in the case of injustice transgressions ($F(1, 872) = 36.3$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$), $\beta = .317$, $t(872) = 6.02$, $p < .001$. Thus, the effect of dehumanization on hate is significant across all conditions. However, it is more pronounced in the cases of stealing and sexual harassment, compared to harming and injustice. This can also be observed in Figure 3, as the slopes of the lines for stealing and sexual harassment are steeper.

Figure 3

The Interaction Effect Between the Type of Moral Transgression and the Level of Transgressor Dehumanization on Hate
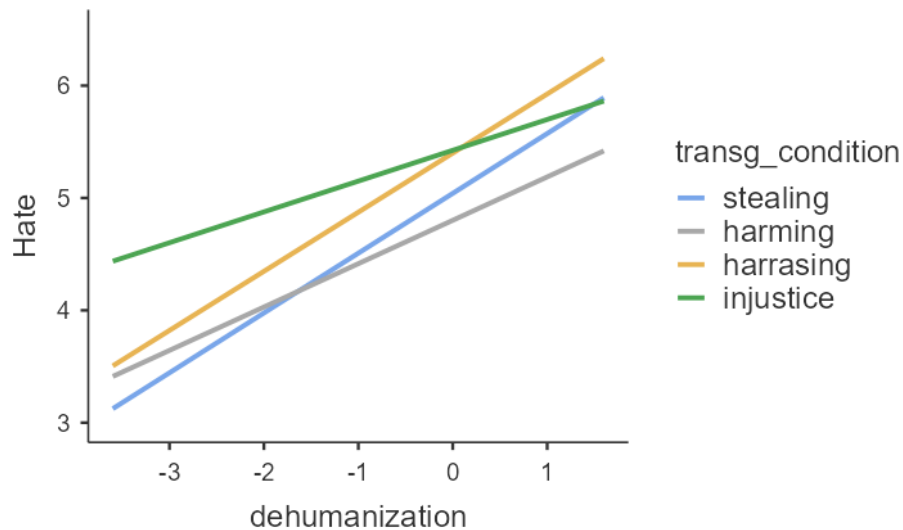
Discussion

Substantial research has addressed the notions of dehumanization and hate separately, yet the literature on the relationship between them is scarce. Therefore, the goal of the present study was to investigate the role that dehumanization plays in people's experience of hate feelings towards various moral transgressors (who harm, steal, sexually harass, or engage in injustice). Thus, four hypotheses were tested, and they were all supported by the study's findings. First, the level of hate felt towards different transgressors does depend on the type of transgression they committed (H1). In particular, perpetrators engaging in sexual harassment and injustice are hated significantly more than those who steal or harm others. Second, the type of transgression does account for how dehumanized different perpetrators are (H2). However, the results show a different relationship than what was expected: sexual harassers and transgressors inflicting harm are significantly more dehumanized than those who steal or endorse injustice. Finally, dehumanization predicts hate (H3), and people hate transgressors *because* they dehumanize them (H4).

The fact that certain moral transgressors were found to be significantly more hated than others is in line with Opotow (2005), who states that hate exists on a continuum, from

milder to more extreme. Schweppe and Perry (2021) also support that, adding that the ends of the continuum correspond to specific manifestations of hate – from microaggressions like hate speech to genocide and terrorism. They claim that even the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crimes of Genocide recognizes the existence of a spectrum of hatred, so there is evidence that some targets of hate are hated more than others. The different levels of hate are determined by a broad range of factors, including the nature of the hate target (Opotow, 2005), which is especially important and in line with my findings, because, by definition, hate feelings focus on the essence and innate characteristics of the hate object (Fischer et al., 2018). Pretus et al. (2022) showed that the immoral nature of certain acts drives people to hate those committing the acts, rather than merely disliking them. Since there is evidence that hate could be conceptualized as a continuum (e.g., Opotow, 2005; Schweppe & Perry, 2021), it is thus likely that the immorality of certain acts also predicts varying degrees of hatred towards the individuals committing the acts. This is consistent with the results of the current study: different moral transgressions are hated to varying degrees.

Furthermore, among moral transgressors, those engaging in sexual harassment and injustice were found to be hated significantly more than those who steal or engage in harming behaviors. Sexual transgressions and injustice in the form of corruption violate multiple foundations of morality, while stealing and harming each trigger only one such foundation (Graham et al., 2013). Considering the positive relationship between transgressions of morality and hate (Pretus et al., 2022), this suggests that corruption and sexual harassment, since they violate more foundational criteria of morality, are associated with higher levels of hatred, compared to harming and stealing. Rozin et al. (1999) also found that individuals who harass sexually and endorse injustice elicit more affective states associated with hate – anger, contempt, disgust – Fischer et al., 2018), and to higher degrees, so this is congruent with the present study's results.

A significant main effect of transgression type was also revealed on dehumanization –
some perpetrators are dehumanized more than others. This is consistent with Oliver (2010),
who recognizes that it is possible to conceptualize dehumanization as a matter of degree, with
forms of dehumanization ranging from mild to severe. According to Haslam and Loughan
(2012), the phenomenon of infrahumanization – attributing humanness to one's ingroup while
viewing the outgroup as lacking humanness (Leyens et al., 2000) – also implies that
dehumanization itself exists on a continuum. By introducing both the concepts of
dehumanization (less human) and superhumanization (more human), Smith (2011) further
reinforces the idea of degrees of dehumanization. Humanness is a core element of social
perception that exists as a spectrum, so dehumanization follows the same pattern. Therefore,
considering that the general consensus of dehumanization literature is that moral transgressors
are typically dehumanized (e.g., Bastian et al., 2013; Haslam & Loughan, 2014; Khamitov et
al., 2016; Leidner et al., 2013; Viki et al., 2012), this suggests that moral perpetrators are
dehumanized to varying degrees.

However, against expectations, transgressors who inflict harm and harass sexually
were found to be more dehumanized than those who steal and endorse injustice. This could be
explained by the fact that the dehumanization scale that was used relates to animalistic
dehumanization in particular, as its items allude to evolutionary progress (e.g., "savage",
"primitive") (Kteily et al., 2015), and there is a significant body of work arguing that violent
criminals are perceived as literally animalistic (e.g., Bastian et al., 2013; Farr, 2000; Goff et
al., 2008), while transgressors involved in more deliberate behaviors (e.g., corruption) might
be perceived as more human. Animalistic dehumanization involves denying someone's self-
control, civility, and higher cognitive skills, likening them to a beast (Haslam, 2006). Thus,
since physical assault, as depicted in the vignette, is considered a violent transgression
because it involves physical violence (Victims of Crime, 2023), the high dehumanization of

these perpetrators is coherent. Sexual transgressors are also highly animalistically dehumanized, which is suggested by the numerous myths that people endorse about sex offenders: by overestimating their recidivism risk (Levenson et al., 2007), underestimating the efficiency of rehabilitation (Viki et al., 2012), and giving them harsher punishments (Vasquez et al., 2014), they deny that sexual transgressors possess self-control or the ability to improve, as humans would.

At the same time, pickpocketers and corrupt politicians were significantly less dehumanized, perhaps because these transgressions are seen as requiring cognitive abilities. For instance, advanced security systems might actually entice more intelligent thieves (Hill, 1992), so managing to steal a laptop (as in the vignette) could be viewed as requiring wit, judgement, and subtlety, to avoid being caught – skills opposed to the animalistic traits used in the dehumanization scale (Kteily et al., 2015). Certain transgressions also require agency – the rational choice framework suggests that some crimes involve the active intention to offend, because the transgression is "explained as a means to an end, such as paying bills" (Lindegaard & Jacques, 2013, p. 86). Stealing and corruption could both be consistent with this, since their goal is obtaining money or valuable items, and because they necessitate calculated moves – not just assaulting someone. When agency is involved, it is coherent that the transgressors would not be dehumanized (Khamitov et al., 2016). Moreover, in regards to injustice, I theorize that corruption actually indicates that the transgressor is intelligent and thus "human" (Haslam, 2006), since they have the necessary cognitive skills (e.g., being calculated) to both commit the fraud and escape punishment. At the same time, it could be argued that justice transgressors are dehumanized, but not animalistically. White-collar criminals may in fact be mechanistically dehumanized (Viki et al., 2012), which is defined as being perceived as cold and rigid, lacking empathy (Haslam, 2006). However, even

mechanistic dehumanization imposes that the target is seen as lacking agency, which contradicts the idea that corrupt politicians are intentional and calculated.

In addition, a significant main effect of dehumanization was found on hate: dehumanization predicts hate. This is consistent with Bastian et al. (2013), who detected for the first time a positive association between dehumanizing transgressors and feeling moral outrage towards them, regardless of the severity or the type of transgression. Moral outrage has been conceptualized as the combination of disgust and anger (Ginther et al., 2022), which are highly correlated to hate (Fischer et al., 2018), so this is evidence for a relationship between dehumanization and hate, which is also reinforced by their correlation of approximately 0.5 (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). Findings on people's attitudes towards dehumanized criminals offer more nuance to this relationship. Dehumanized transgressors are less likely to be granted ethical standing (e.g., have their rights recognized) and more likely to be punished more harshly (Bastian et al., 2013; Vasquez et al., 2014; Viki et al., 2012). This desire to punish dehumanized perpetrators in particular could be explained through hate. When people hate a target and wish to achieve an instrumental goal (in this case, the punishment of the target), they may dehumanize the target, so they could feel less guilty and more righteous for wanting to inflict punishment (Haslam & Murphy, 2020). Brudholm and Lang (2021) also support this, by claiming that dehumanizing hate (hate occurring concomitantly with dehumanization) is common in criminal justice – where the instrumental goal of punishing the transgressor is essentially the goal. This is in line with the notion that a highly dehumanized individual is also highly hated, especially when the individual has done something wrong, such as a moral transgression.

Finally, a significant interaction effect was detected between transgression type and dehumanization of the transgressor on hate. The fact that dehumanization predicts hate feelings has already been established, but the interaction effect suggests that this prediction

depends on the type of moral transgression. More specifically, the relationship between dehumanization and hate is stronger in the cases of sexual harassers and pickpocketers: people hate transgressors of sexual harassment more *because* they dehumanize them more, and they hate pickpocketers less *because* they dehumanize them less. In the case of sexual harassers, this can be explained by the research on the consequences of dehumanizing sex offenders. Their rehabilitation is disapproved of (Viki et al., 2012) because they are dehumanized, indicating that they are viewed as immutably malicious – just like hate targets (Fischer et al., 2018). People also want to treat them more violently, exclude them socially (Viki et al., 2012), and punish them more strongly (Bastian et al., 2013; Vasquez et al., 2014; Viki et al., 2012), suggesting that they are perceived as threats to one's values that need to be eliminated, which aligns with the definition of a hate object (Fischer et al., 2018). Consequently, transgressors of sexual harassment are hated more because they are dehumanized more as well. The literature on transgressors who steal is more limited and less straightforward. Pickpocketers are seen as less deserving of punishment (Rose et al., 2006), indicating that they are less dehumanized, but no study besides the current one has linked this to the fact they are also less hated, as far as the author is concerned.

By contrast, those inflicting harm are less hated but more dehumanized, and those who engage in injustice are more hated but less dehumanized, which is why the association between dehumanization and hate is weaker in these instances. People hate injustice transgressors significantly more, but not necessarily entirely because they consider them less human. Their dehumanization is part of the reason, but its effect on hate is significantly weaker than in the case of sexual harassers, because they are dehumanized less. Similarly, the dehumanization of transgressors engaging in harming behaviors does not account for the hate felt towards them as much as it does in the case of sexual harassers, because they are hated significantly less. Overall, dehumanization has a stronger impact on how hated transgressors

who harass sexually and steal are than on the hate felt towards those who inflict harm and engage in injustice.

In sum, sexual harassers are hated significantly more than pickpocketers and transgressors engaged in harm, because they are perceived as unchangeably malicious. Justice transgressors are hated to a similar high degree, despite being dehumanized significantly less. This might occur either because they are dehumanized mechanistically, or because they are actually viewed as cognitively skilled. Transgressors inflicting harm are dehumanized to a high degree, perhaps because people acting violently are seen as lacking control and civility, but they are hated less, since the extent of their damage is less severe. Finally, perpetrators who steal are dehumanized less, perhaps either because their transgression is not violent, or since they may require certain skills, and they are also hated less, due to the limited extent of their injury.

Implications

This study's findings present, first and foremost, implications for research. Discovering that moral transgressors are dehumanized adds to literature that opposes the moral-typecasting theory (Gray & Wegner, 2008), and the results regarding both hate and dehumanization contribute to the study of their relationship, by giving it more nuance, particularly in the context of moral perpetrators. From these, practical implications can be inferred. First, the findings show that moral transgressors are generally dehumanized. This has significance for how offenders are being treated by society and the justice system. Research on sex offenders specifically has suggested that their dehumanization leads to people wanting to exclude them and punish them more harshly (Bastian et al., 2013; Vasquez et al., 2014; Viki et al., 2012), instead of supporting their rehabilitation, and this might be the case with other transgressors too, but more research is needed. It is important that future studies explore this tendency within the population that creates laws and determines punishments (e.g.,

judges, lawmakers) in particular, to find whether the dehumanization of offenders leads to them actually receiving harsher sentences than offenders who have not been dehumanized. This is relevant because the effects of harsher prison sentences on recidivism are generally either absent or negative – that is, transgressors commit even more crimes (Antonowicz, 2005; Cullen & Andre, 2000). By contrast, rehabilitation programs reduce the recidivism risk (Antonowicz, 2005; Berman, 2004). Thus, it is important to diminish the dehumanization levels of transgressors, to decrease their negative consequences.

Another implication is in regards to hate crimes. At least in the context of moral transgressors, higher levels of dehumanization were found to be associated with increased levels of hate. When hate targets specific groups, it can lead to hate crimes (Gerstenfeld, 2018). At the same time, the groups that are generally victims of hate crimes also tend to be dehumanized (e.g., marginalized ethnic and racial groups, women, disabled people) (Haslam, 2006). Therefore, the association between dehumanization and hate could be relevant for the reduction of hate crimes, but further research should focus on it in relation to dehumanized populations besides moral transgressors, to gain insights into hate crimes specifically. A particularly interesting population consists of moral transgressors who are also members of dehumanized social groups, and the aforementioned implications concerning offenders in the justice system are also applicable to them.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study shows meaningful strengths. Firstly, as far as the author is concerned, no other studies have examined the association between dehumanization and hate in the context of moral transgressions. By approaching this completely novel topic, it is expected that doors will be opened towards unexplored matters, which can also have important real-life implications. Secondly, the study has an experimental design, allowing for causal inferences to be drawn. Thirdly, the study used a within-subjects design, so a smaller

sample size was sufficient, and the internal validity of the experiment did not depend on the random assignment of the participants (Charness et al., 2012). The limitations of within-subjects designs (e.g., demand effects, carry-over effects) were also accounted for by randomizing the sequence in which the conditions and their respective measures were presented, and by keeping the vignettes and measures concise, so the experiment would not be tiring. Moreover, the study was well powered and the sample was sufficient. Lastly, the coherence of the vignettes and the measures was improved based on feedback from individuals who participated in the pilot study prior to the main data collection, and the measures that were used are validated, with relatively high internal consistencies suggesting high reliability ($\alpha = .77$ for the Ascent blatant dehumanization scale, $\alpha = .93$ for the Passionate Hate Scale).

At the same time, the present study also has limitations. On the one hand, the sample was confined to users of a specific online platform who live in the United States, and the evidence is based on a Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic (WEIRD) population. Thus, the generalizability of the results is limited. Future research should address this by gathering data in nationally representative samples, and by expanding data collection to other countries. Furthermore, the current study's findings depend exclusively on participants' self-reports, which increases the chances of biased answers and diminishes the validity of the data. Future studies should employ alternative and complementary research methods that decrease the likelihood of biased responses, such as behavioral measures, physiological measures, and implicit-association tests. A final limitation is that, due to the research design used, H3 and H4 could not establish causal relations, so future experiments should strive to manipulate the dehumanization and hate variables too, and not just the moral transgression type.

Conclusion

The present study showed that, consistent with the general understanding of the literature (e.g., Bastian et al., 2013; Khamitov et al., 2016), moral transgressors are dehumanized, albeit to various extents. They are also targets of hate, as dehumanized populations often are (Haslam & Murphy, 2020). Moreover, dehumanization itself was found to predict hate feelings. By integrating these findings, it was revealed that moral transgressors are hated to different extents *because* they are dehumanized. However, since the perpetrators that were hated more were not necessarily dehumanized more too, the relationship is not straightforward: dehumanization predicts hate depending on the specific transgression. Thus, the nuances may be shaped by the extents of the damages done by the transgressors, by the nature of their acts (e.g., impulsive or calculated), or by the skills that they are perceived to be possessing (e.g., intelligence). The dehumanization of transgressors engaging in sexual harassment and harm, seen as violent and impulsive, has a more pronounced effect on how hated they are, compared to the cases of justice transgressors and pickpocketers, who might be perceived as more cognitively skilled and deliberate in their actions. Nonetheless, dehumanizing and hating transgressors may enhance retributive justice, which has detrimental effects, and the relationship between hatred and dehumanization in general may offer insights regarding the rates of hate crimes.

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Appendix A

Vignettes

Vignette About Transgressor Stealing

A man has been pickpocketing in the metro without being caught. He usually stands by the door during rush hours, waiting until people are distracted to slide his hand into their pockets and steal their small but valuable items such as wallets and mobile phones. One day, the man sees a great opportunity. A young woman is distracted while having a phone conversation and has her backpack open with her laptop exposed. The man waits until the next stop and slowly takes her laptop from her backpack, leaving the metro without her noticing.

Vignette About Transgressor Engaging in Harming Behaviors

Driver A is in a busy parking lot looking for a spot. Someone is just leaving, so a place is about to be available. However, another car (Driver B) was waiting across looking for the same spot for even longer, so Driver B rightfully proceeds to park his car. Driver A gets really angry, steps out of his car, and confronts Driver B, who is also stepping out. Driver B is willing to negotiate, so he starts to explain the situation in a calm and reasonable way. But without waiting, or saying a word, Driver A punches Driver B in the face and leaves.

Vignette About Transgressor Engaging in Sexual Harassment

The manager of a small company has been inappropriately approaching his female employees. One day, he asks one of them to stay after work to help him with a project. While working on the tasks, he makes inappropriate comments about her appearance and touches her thigh. After she refuses, he insists and tries to kiss her. She resists again and claims to be feeling uncomfortable and that she wants to leave. He replies that if she leaves now, she better not come the next day because she will lose her job.

Vignette About Transgressor Engaging in Injustice

A politician was in charge of managing the taxpayers' money for developing community projects and building a public school in a deprived area. Because of some administrative and legal gaps, he sees the opportunity to delay the projects indefinitely and create a parallel account for keeping the money for himself and some of his associates. Later, the case is discovered, and he is convicted of embezzlement. However, using the same funds, he bribes the jury in charge of his case, and is declared innocent, after which he leaves the country.

Appendix B

Figures Supporting the Tests of Statistical Assumptions

Figure B1.

Normal QQ plot of the dependent variable hate, covariate dehumanization, and fixed factor transgression