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Organizational dehumanization has traditionally been conceptualized as a negative phenomenon that leads to undesirable consequences. In this research, we depart from this perspective and test the possibility that organizational dehumanization may also have an unexpected silver lining effect that extends beyond the workplace to benefit other individuals in employees' social sphere. Drawing upon self-affirmation theory, we propose that organizational dehumanization threatens employees' self-worth. To restore their self-worth, employees will reflect on their core values and social relationships, motivating them to engage in prosocial behaviors toward society (i.e., increased volunteering) and their family (i.e., increased family task performance), respectively. We anticipate that these effects will be more pronounced for employees whose self-worth is contingent on their ability to effectively help others. We test our hypotheses in two phases, encompassing six studies that employ complementary methodologies. In the first phase, we adopt a manipulation-of-mediator design that involves five interrelated experiments. In Study 1, we manipulate organizational dehumanization and measure self-worth threat; in Studies 2 and 3, we manipulate self-worth threat and measure self-affirmation of core values and social relationships, respectively; in Study 4, we manipulate self-affirmation of core values and measure volunteering; in Study 5, we manipulate self-affirmation of social relationships and measure family task performance. In the second phase, we conduct a field study (Study 6) in which we collect four-wave, dyadic (i.e., employee–partner/spouse) data aimed at testing the full moderated serial mediation model. All studies support our hypothesized relationships. Implications of our findings for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: organizational dehumanization, workplace mistreatment, self-affirmation, contingencies of self-worth, instrumental variable

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Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people; whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult—that they call holy.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

In August 1911, workers at Watertown Arsenal, a large U.S. armory located in Massachusetts, were among the first to take the streets to protest F. W. Taylor's (1911) scientific management principles aimed at bolstering labor productivity. In particular, these workers voiced their opposition to the use of stopwatches, which

were employed to time work movements and eliminate those deemed superfluous or too time-consuming (Aitken, 1960). Similar demonstrations occurred in March 1932, when workers at the Ford automobile manufacturer protested the assembly line, criticizing its disregard for individual input (Baskin, 1972). Their grievances reflected a broader concern: that their organizations were dehumanizing them, treating them as cogs in a machine rather than rational and feeling individuals deserving of dignity and respect.

Nearly a century has passed since these events, yet dehumanizing workplace practices remain a stark reality for many employees worldwide (Bell & Khoury, 2011). For instance, in September 2021, 21 employees of Blue Origin, a private U.S. spaceflight manufacturer, jointly signed an open letter condemning organizational practices that could "only [be] describe[d] as dehumanizing" and that "push employees to their limits" (Lioness, 2021, para 10). Relatedly, workers at the e-commerce company Amazon have regularly denounced inhumane working conditions, including an unreasonably fast work pace dictated by machines (Dzieza, 2019) and the necessity to urinate in water bottles to meet tight delivery schedules (Klippenstein, 2019). These conditions have led Amazon workers to stage repeated strikes, rallying behind slogans such as "We're human, not robots" (Klippenstein, 2019).

The widespread practices prompting these objections have led scholars to focus on the concept of organizational dehumanization, defined as employees' perceptions that their organizations treat them as numbers, tools, or objects to achieve organizational goals (Bell & Khoury, 2011). Organizational dehumanization represents a specific form of workplace mistreatment where employees perceive their organization as the perpetrator of a particular type of harm: the denial of their humanity. Research shows that organizational dehumanization contributes to a range of negative outcomes both within and beyond the workplace. These include increased organizational deviance and aggressive behaviors toward coworkers and family members, coupled with diminished employee performance and spousal relationship satisfaction (Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023; Lagios, Restubog, et al., 2023; Lagios et al., 2024).

However, a shift in scholarly discourse around organizational dehumanization is emerging, with recent work suggesting that, under certain conditions, it may produce unexpected effects that are not entirely negative. Notably, some scholars have called on the field "to take a more positive view of the concept and consider the potentially positive side of the phenomenon" (Stinglhamber & Caesens, 2024, p. 436). While we acknowledge the well-documented negative effects of organizational dehumanization, research also indicates that individuals can respond proactively to adversity (Maitlis, 2020). This perspective leads us to propose and test the possibility that perceptions of organizational dehumanization can, in some cases, drive employees toward socially desirable ends. To explain this paradox, we draw upon self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988), which provides a theoretical basis for understanding how self-worth threats like organizational dehumanization (Nguyen et al., 2022) can motivate constructive behaviors among employees. Our argument aligns with preliminary evidence from social psychology, which suggests that, in health care contexts, dehumanization can lead to improved patient care and increased physician well-being (Lammers & Stapel, 2011; Vaes & Muratore, 2013). By testing the possibility that organizational dehumanization can result in prosocial behaviors, our research adds to a growing body of work demonstrating how phenomena commonly perceived as unequivocally

harmful may yield unintended and desirable outcomes (e.g., Liao et al., 2021; Tröster & Van Quaquebeke, 2021; L. Zhu et al., 2012). Furthermore, it examines a widely held belief about the resilience of humanity—that ordinary people possess the inner resources to transform adversity into opportunities for self-reflection, growth, meaning making, and social outreach (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016). In doing so, we seek to present a more holistic picture of the effects of organizational dehumanization.

Our theoretical argument begins with the premise that organizational dehumanization threatens employees' self-worth (Nguyen et al., 2022). Building on this foundation, we then draw upon self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) to explain how this unpleasant state can motivate employees to reflect more deeply on their core values and social relationships as a means of defending the self from the threat posed by organizational dehumanization. We hypothesize that these reflections can prompt employees to engage in prosocial behaviors, both toward the broader society and their family. We further propose that these effects are likely to be stronger for employees whose self-worth is contingent upon their ability to help others well—that is, those with a prosocial-contingent self-worth. Our theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

This research contributes to the literature in several ways. First, by showing how organizational dehumanization may have positive consequences that transcend organizational boundaries, we complement the current body of knowledge on workplace mistreatment, which has almost exclusively focused on its detrimental effects (e.g., Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023; Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019; Tepper et al., 2017). Organizational dehumanization undoubtedly has harmful consequences. However, both history and everyday observations provide numerous examples of how the most aversive or wretched experiences have the potential to evoke socially desirable—and sometimes even heroic—capacities and motivations that might otherwise remain dormant and unseen. Failing to investigate this possibility prevents us from gaining a full and accurate understanding of the multifaceted implications of organizational dehumanization.[1]

Second, our research breaks new theoretical and empirical ground in the organizational dehumanization literature. To date, the theoretical underpinnings of organizational dehumanization have been relatively underdeveloped, as much of the existing empirical work has relied on a narrow set of theoretical perspectives to explain its consequences (e.g., displaced aggression theory, Lagios, Restubog, et al., 2023; self-determination theory, Lagios et al., 2022; spillover-crossover theory, Lagios et al., 2024). While these perspectives have provided valuable insights, they fall short in accounting for cases where organizational dehumanization may lead to prosocial behaviors. By drawing on self-affirmation theory as a key explanatory mechanism, we present a theoretically grounded rationale for why positive outcomes might occasionally emerge from organizational dehumanization. Exploring this possibility is particularly important

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[1] It is important to emphasize that our research does not endorse dehumanizing practices within organizations, even though we theorize about their potential to yield positive outcomes for societal and familial members. Our theoretical considerations should not be taken as a validation or approval of organizational dehumanization. Rather, they take organizational dehumanization as a fact about the world that warrants investigation of all its possible consequences while recognizing the abundant empirical evidence demonstrating its deleterious effects (Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023; Lagios et al., 2024; Lagios, Restubog, et al., 2023).

Figure 1
Theoretical Model
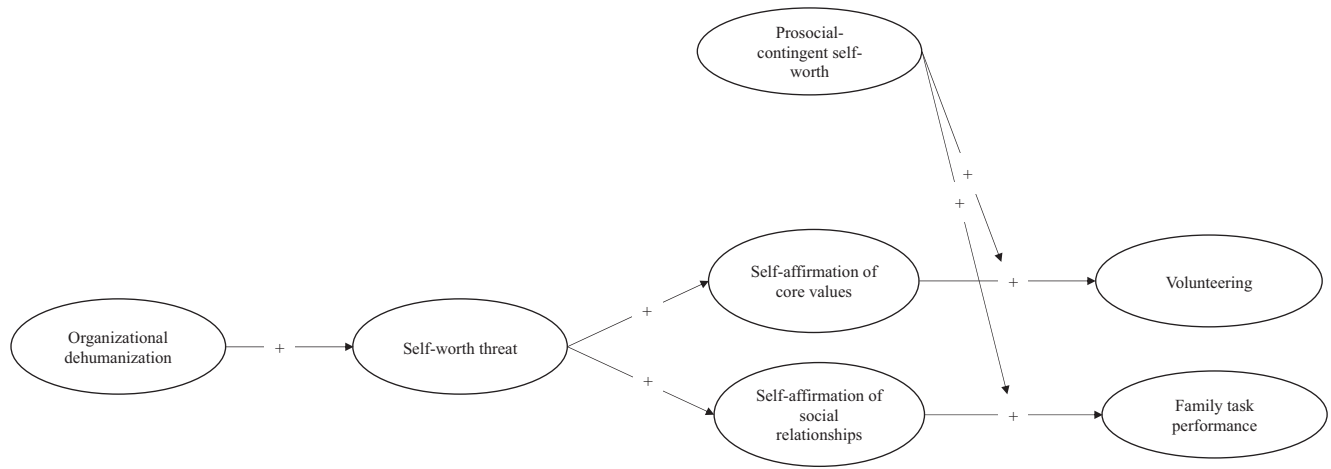
given that organizational dehumanization research is in a nascent stage, and introducing new theoretical frameworks is crucial for generating novel and relevant questions (Lagios, Restubog, et al., 2023). Moreover, in terms of empirical advancements, our study provides evidence for the distinctiveness of organizational dehumanization in predicting self-worth threat by accounting for the effects of other forms of workplace mistreatment—abusive supervision and coworker incivility. While it is theoretically plausible that any form of workplace mistreatment could undermine employees' self-worth, we contend that organizational dehumanization is particularly potent in this regard. Unlike other forms of mistreatment, organizational dehumanization uniquely strips employees of their fundamental humanity, directly challenging the essence of what it means to be human. This empirical contribution highlights the uniqueness of organizational dehumanization as a psychological phenomenon with particularly far-reaching implications for employees' sense of self-worth.

Last, our model makes two contributions to self-affirmation theory and research. On the one hand, although self-affirmation theory is well established in social psychology (see Cohen & Sherman, 2014, for an overview), its application in organizational contexts has been mostly underexplored (Deng et al., 2023). This oversight has prompted calls for more research that (a) adopts a self-affirmation lens to explain organizational phenomena and (b) investigates the effects of self-affirmation beyond the workplace (Deng et al., 2023; Mao et al., 2021). Our research directly addresses these calls by modeling volunteering and family task performance as outcomes of employees' self-affirmation following their experience of organizational dehumanization. In doing so, we expand the theoretical reach of self-affirmation theory, extending its relevance to societal and familial spheres. On the other hand, by exploring the moderating role of prosocial-contingent self-worth, we introduce a critical boundary condition that refines our understanding of the self-affirmation process. We propose that the positive effects of self-affirmation in nonwork domains are not uniform and vary among employees. Previous scholarship on the boundary conditions of self-affirmation theory has primarily focused on "the first half of the equation," investigating the factors that influence the extent to which

a given event or stimulus is perceived as a threat to one's self-worth (e.g., trait self-esteem, Steele et al., 1993; national culture, Heine & Lehman, 1997; identification with the threatened domain, Deng et al., 2023; and perceived expectations, Mao et al., 2021). We shift the focus to the "second half of the equation," exploring how individuals divergently react *after* their self-worth has been threatened.

Consequences of Organizational Dehumanization

Organizational dehumanization has been shown to produce a variety of deleterious consequences for employees (Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023) because it thwarts their fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Lagios et al., 2022). Among the documented negative outcomes of organizational dehumanization are increased emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions and diminished job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment (e.g., Bell & Khoury, 2011; Caesens et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2022). In addition, through a process of negative reciprocity, employees who feel dehumanized by their organization often exhibit higher levels of organizational deviance (Stinglhamber et al., 2023). Scholarly efforts have recently expanded the scope of organizational dehumanization research to investigate its detrimental effects outside of work. Relying on displaced aggression theory (Lagios et al., 2025), Lagios, Restubog, et al. (2023) showed in their trickle-out model that supervisors who feel dehumanized by their organization tend to displace their aggression toward their subordinates through undermining behaviors. In turn, these subordinates redirect their aggression toward their family members through undermining behaviors, which reduces the latter's relationship satisfaction and perceptions of emotional support. Another study looking at spillover-crossover effects found that organizational dehumanization increases work-to-family conflict among employees, which is associated with heightened relationship tension for family members, eventually resulting in diminished relationship satisfaction (Lagios et al., 2024).

Although there is much research showing that organizational dehumanization produces negative effects, in the present research, we depart from the dominant narrative that it inevitably does so by

suggesting that it may, under certain conditions, produce positive outcomes. Evidence from social psychology is suggestive of this possibility. Using scenario-based vignettes, Lammers and Stapel (2011) found that participants who disregarded the humanity of their hypothetical patients administered more effective, albeit more painful, medical treatments. Similarly, Vaes and Muratore (2013) showed that health care workers who were less inclined to humanize the suffering of fictitious terminally ill patients reported fewer burnout symptoms. Even though these studies focus on dehumanization in interpersonal contexts, they provide indirect evidence for the possibility that organizational dehumanization might also produce some positive outcomes. Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) provides the theoretical rationale for advancing this line of inquiry.

Toward a Self-Affirmation Model of Organizational Dehumanization

Initially introduced as an extension of cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) rapidly evolved into a distinct theoretical framework, explaining how individuals address and respond to perceived threats to their self-worth. At its core, the theory posits that individuals are intrinsically motivated to preserve and uphold their sense of self-worth, understood as their perception of being a good and upright person who is morally adequate and competent, and capable of influencing important outcomes (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). When individuals encounter information and/or experience cognitions that threaten their self-worth, the theory predicts that they will seek to restore their sense of self-worth through self-affirmation (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). Concretely, self-affirmation involves individuals consciously reflecting on and bringing to mind central and desirable aspects of the self. This process makes positive aspects of the self salient by reminding individuals of their adequacy, competence, and integrity, thereby fortifying their sense of self-worth when it has been threatened (Steele, 1988). As Sherman and Cohen (2006) stated, self-affirmation can make the "otherwise threatening events or information lose their self-threatening capacity because the individual can view them within a broader, larger view of the self" (p. 189). Importantly, self-affirmation theory assumes that the self-system is flexible, meaning that individuals can respond to a threat in one domain by affirming and finding success in unrelated domains (Sherman & Cohen, 2002, 2006; Steele, 1988). To illustrate this process, consider an individual concerned about being judged or treated unfairly due to their ethnicity. Self-affirmation theory suggests that this individual can cope with this self-worth threat by bringing to mind other positive aspects of the self, such as their strengths or accomplishments at work or in sports. By redirecting attention to these qualities and capabilities, individuals reduce the impact of the initial threat, effectively confining it to a specific and narrow aspect of the self (Brady et al., 2016). This broader perspective helps individuals maintain their overall sense of self-worth, even when faced with localized challenges.

Self-worth threats may arise from a variety of work-related events, including harsh performance reviews, layoffs, or conflicts with coworkers and supervisors (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). We contend that organizational dehumanization is particularly likely to threaten employees' self-worth because it involves the denial of their fundamental humanity (Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023; Bell & Khoury, 2011). As a result, employees may feel unworthy and inadequate, reduced to mere tools or objects that are dispensable and of little value to the organization (Bell & Khoury, 2011). Moreover, organizational dehumanization erodes employees' dignity (Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018) and leads them to doubt their competence and status (Lagios et al., 2022). This perspective is reinforced by prior research suggesting that organizational dehumanization undermines employees' positive self-evaluations (Nguyen & Stinglhamber, 2021) and self-concept (Nguyen et al., 2022). In line with this, we posit the following:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Organizational dehumanization is positively related to self-worth threat.

As outlined above, self-affirmation theory posits that when individuals face a threat to their self-worth, they turn to the positive and desirable aspects of the self as a means of restoring it (Steele, 1988). Traditionally, empirical studies on self-affirmation have focused on affirmations of the *individual* aspects of the self, examining instances where individuals reflect on their personal values and principles (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; McQueen & Klein, 2006; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). However, scholars have argued and shown that the *relational* aspects of the self, such as one's important social relationships, can also serve as affirmational resources (Burson et al., 2012; Cai et al., 2013; S. Chen & Boucher, 2008; Harris et al., 2019). Accordingly, we theorize that when employees experience a self-worth threat induced by organizational dehumanization, they will affirm both the individual (i.e., their core values) and relational (i.e., their social relationships) aspects of the self as a strategy to restore their self-worth. This process effectively broadens their self-concept, reframing the threat posed by organizational dehumanization as one that pertains to only a specific aspect of the self, rather than the self as a whole. By bringing their core values and meaningful social relationships into focus, self-affirmation enables employees to preserve their sense of self-worth despite experiencing dehumanization by their organization. Consistent with this reasoning, we hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 2a:* Self-worth threat is positively related to self-affirmation of core values.

> *Hypothesis 2b:* Self-worth threat is positively related to self-affirmation of social relationships.

Prosocial Behaviors as Outcomes of Self-Affirmation

Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) further suggests that after reflecting on the positive aspects of the self, individuals can be motivated to engage in behaviors that align with and express these positive attributes (Aronson et al., 2019; Steele, 1988). Specifically, when these desirable aspects of the self are made salient through self-affirmation, individuals may engage in prosocial behaviors in an effort to consolidate and showcase their positive self-worth. Evidence for this outcome of self-affirmation is provided in a study by Deng et al. (2023), which showed that medical professionals who perceive an ideological contract breach from their organization engage in self-affirmation, resulting in proactive and altruistic patient care. Our research extends this finding by exploring how

self-affirmation affects prosocial behaviors in domains unrelated to the immediate self-worth threat. Consistent with the notion that individuals can fulfill their self-affirmation motivations by achieving success in other, unrelated domains (Sherman & Cohen, 2002, 2006; Steele, 1988), we propose that employees who self-affirm following their experience of organizational dehumanization can bolster their positive self by engaging in prosocial behaviors toward two distinct targets outside the organization: the society and their family. In particular, we argue that self-affirmation of core values will lead to increased volunteering (i.e., within the societal domain), while self-affirmation of social relationships will enhance family task performance (i.e., within the family domain). We focus on these behaviors because they serve as tangible indicators of an individual's active contribution to improving the welfare of the broader society and the family unit.

Volunteering involves actively dedicating one's time and/or skills to a planned activity that occurs in a formal setting, such as within a nonprofit or charitable organization (Rodell, 2013; Rodell et al., 2016). Consistent with the notion that individuals are motivated "to act in ways that allow for the expression of their values" (Sagiv & Roccas, 2021, p. 1), Clary et al. (1998; Clary & Snyder, 1999) found that volunteering serves a value-expressive function, enabling individuals to express and act upon their altruistic values. When individuals affirm their core values, they usually reflect on those that transcend self-interest and foster connections with others, such as altruism, compassion, helping others, and being dedicated to causes larger than the self (e.g., Burson et al., 2012; Crocker et al., 2008; Shnabel et al., 2013). These types of self-affirmations can motivate volunteering for two reasons. First, they heighten the accessibility of altruistic values in memory, motivating individuals to volunteer as a way to align their actions with these values (Sagiv & Roccas, 2021). Second, self-affirmation redirects attention to environmental cues that provide opportunities to express positive values (Sagiv & Roccas, 2021) like volunteering. Indirect support for this proposition comes from Schneider and Weber's (2022) experimental study, which found that self-affirmed participants are more likely to donate to charity. Based on these theoretical and empirical considerations, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 3a: Self-affirmation of core values is positively related to volunteering.

Family task performance includes a range of activities and responsibilities within the family domain, such as completing household chores, managing financial matters, and performing home maintenance tasks (Y.-P. Chen et al., 2014). These activities provide more than instrumental benefits; they provide social support for family members, who often face various demands for contributions in their home life that require significant personal resources such as time, energy, and attention (Hirschi et al., 2019). Family task performance not only facilitates the smooth and efficient functioning of the family domain but also plays a key role in reinforcing family well-being and emotional connections among family members. By taking on shared responsibilities, individuals communicate affection, care, and concern for one another, strengthening relational bonds within the family unit (Solomon et al., 2022). When individuals self-affirm by bringing to mind their social relationships, they reflect on important, trusted, and loved people in their lives, foremost among them are likely to be family members

(Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Harris et al., 2019). This process heightens the salience of these relationships, which may in turn motivate individuals to engage in behaviors that demonstrate and express their commitment to these relationships. As a result, self-affirmed individuals may be more likely to perform tasks within the family unit that improve its welfare. Although no prior research has examined the relationship between self-affirmation and family-supportive behaviors, experimental evidence suggests that self-affirmed individuals are more inclined to assist others in general (Kim & McGill, 2018; Lindsay & Creswell, 2014). Thus, we examine whether this finding will be observed in the family unit as a result of an individual affirming their social relationships by testing the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3b: Self-affirmation of social relationships is positively related to family task performance.

The Moderating Role of Prosocial-Contingent Self-Worth

Our arguments thus far have led us to theorize that self-affirmation motivates employees who are dehumanized by their organization to engage in prosocial behaviors. However, it is likely that individual differences influence the extent to which acting prosocially is actually an important basis for evaluating one's self-worth. Indeed, research suggests that individuals often selectively choose the domains from which they derive their self-worth (Crocker et al., 2003). For instance, for some, self-worth might derive mostly from their sense of competence, while, for others, it might be rooted in their physical attractiveness (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). The notion that not all domains hold equal importance for an individual's self-worth is referred to as a contingent view of self-worth (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Crocker et al., 2003). This view describes an idiosyncratic domain where a person places their self-worth, meaning that their self-perception of worth hinges on "perceived successes or failures or adherence to self-standards in that domain" (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001, p. 594). In other terms, a contingent view of self-worth describes the extent to which an individual's self-worth is tied to achievements in a domain that they highly value. Although a domain of contingent self-worth may shift in response to personal experiences and social influences (e.g., social interactions, vicarious learning, cultural norms), it tends to remain relatively stable over time (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Crocker et al., 2003).

Self-worth can be contingent upon a variety of domains, including physical appearance, academic/work performance, religious faith, status, and others' approval (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Crocker et al., 2003). Given that our research focuses on prosocial behaviors benefiting society and families, we center our attention on prosocial-contingent self-worth, which we define as the extent to which an individual's self-worth is influenced by their ability to act prosocially and help others effectively. We argue that employees who engage in volunteering and family task performance as a means of consolidating their self-worth will be particularly likely to do so if their self-worth is strongly tied to helping others well. In other words, for employees whose self-worth hinges on aiding others effectively, self-affirmation may be especially potent in motivating prosocial behaviors, as such actions directly reinforce their self-perceptions of worth. We propose that this moderating effect will

manifest similarly across volunteering and family task performance, as both are indicators of prosocial behaviors. Specifically, because acting prosocially is a key source of self-worth for individuals with a prosocial-contingent self-worth, they should be equally motivated to engage in prosocial behaviors following self-affirmation, regardless of the aspects of the self that are affirmed (i.e., core values or social relationships) or the recipients of the prosocial behaviors (i.e., society or family). Based on this argument, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a: The positive relationship between self-affirmation of core values and volunteering is moderated by prosocial-contingent self-worth, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with high levels of prosocial-contingent self-worth.

Hypothesis 4b: The positive relationship between self-affirmation of social relationships and family task performance is moderated by prosocial-contingent self-worth, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with high levels of prosocial-contingent self-worth.

A Conditional Serial Mediation Model

To summarize, our theory specifies a sequential process that begins with organizational dehumanization threatening employees' self-worth. To restore their self-worth, employees reflect on their core values and social relationships, which then motivates them to engage in prosocial behaviors within their community and family unit. Additionally, we propose that this process is influenced by the extent to which employees' self-worth is contingent on helping others effectively. More specifically, we expect that employees whose self-worth is strongly tied to their ability to help others effectively are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors following self-affirmation. Taken together, these predictions form the basis of our proposed conditional serial mediation model. This hypothesized model suggests that prosocial-contingent self-worth amplifies the indirect effects of organizational dehumanization on (a) volunteering through self-worth threat and self-affirmation of core values and (b) family task performance through self-worth

threat and self-affirmation of social relationships. This integrated model aligns with self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988), which posits that self-worth threatening perceptions can result in prosocial and constructive responses, driven by individuals' motivation to restore their threatened self-worth through self-affirmation. We therefore hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis 5a: The positive relationship between organizational dehumanization and volunteering through self-worth threat and self-affirmation of core values is moderated by prosocial-contingent self-worth, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with high levels of prosocial-contingent self-worth.

Hypothesis 5b: The positive relationship between organizational dehumanization and family task performance through self-worth threat and self-affirmation of social relationships is moderated by prosocial-contingent self-worth, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with high levels of prosocial-contingent self-worth.

Overview of the Studies

We tested our hypotheses in six studies conducted in two phases and using complementary methodologies (see Table 1 for a summary). Phase 1 adopted a manipulation-of-mediator design that consisted of five interrelated experiments (Pirlott & MacKinnon, 2016; Spencer et al., 2005). In the first experiment (Study 1), we manipulated organizational dehumanization and measured self-worth threat. The second experiment (Study 2) involved manipulating self-worth threat and measuring self-affirmation of core values. In the third experiment (Study 3), we manipulated self-worth threat and measured self-affirmation of social relationships. The fourth experiment (Study 4) involved manipulating self-affirmation of core values and measuring volunteering. Finally, in the fifth experiment (Study 5), we manipulated self-affirmation of social relationships and measured family task performance.

In the second phase, we conducted a field study (Study 6) where we collected four-wave, 1-month-apart, dyadic (i.e., employee–partner/spouse) data aimed at testing the full moderated

Table 1
Summary of the Studies

Phase	Study	Hypothesis tested	Model pathway
Phase 1	Study 1 (experimental study)	Hypothesis 1	Organizational dehumanization → Self-worth threat
Phase 1	Study 2 (experimental study)	Hypothesis 2a	Self-worth threat → Self-affirmation of core values
Phase 1	Study 3 (experimental study)	Hypothesis 2b	Self-worth threat → Self-affirmation of social relationships
Phase 1	Study 4 (experimental study)	Hypothesis 3a	Self-affirmation of core values → Volunteering
Phase 1	Study 5 (experimental study)	Hypothesis 3b	Self-affirmation of social relationships → Family task performance
Phase 2	Study 6 (field study)	Hypothesis 4a	Self-Affirmation of Core Values × Prosocial-Contingent Self-Worth → Volunteering
		Hypothesis 4b	Self-Affirmation of Social Relationships × Prosocial-Contingent Self-Worth → Family Task Performance
		Hypothesis 5a	Organizational dehumanization → Self-worth threat → Self-affirmation of core values → Volunteering, moderated by prosocial-contingent self-worth
		Hypothesis 5b	Organizational dehumanization → Self-worth threat → Self-affirmation of social relationships → Family task performance, moderated by prosocial-contingent self-worth

serial mediation model. Phase 2 extends Phase 1 in two important ways. First, it examines the moderating role of prosocial-contingent self-worth. Second, it allows us to estimate the conditional serial indirect effects of organizational dehumanization on the outcomes through self-worth threat and self-affirmation. This is noteworthy because although the manipulation-of-mediator design in Phase 1 provides evidence of causal relationships, it precludes the ability to assess (conditional) indirect effects (Pirlott & MacKinnon, 2016). Overall, our approach aligns with Cohen and Sherman (2014), who observed that "field studies provide a necessary supplement to lab studies" (p. 354) when examining self-affirmation effects.

Prior research has demonstrated that the effects of self-affirmation can emerge across time frames ranging from immediately after a self-worth threat (McQueen & Klein, 2006) to as long as 2 years later (e.g., Brady et al., 2016; Cohen et al., 2009; Sherman et al., 2013). As there is no definitive temporal threshold for when self-affirmation occurs, we adopted a multimethod approach that includes both short-term (experimental studies in Phase 1) and longer-term (field study in Phase 2) effects, allowing us to explore self-affirmation across a range of time frames. Our chosen time frames were informed by previous self-affirmation research. Specifically, the experimental time frame aligns with standard procedures commonly used in self-affirmation experiments (see McQueen & Klein, 2006, for a review), while the field study time frame is similar to prior empirical work on self-affirmation (e.g., Deng et al., 2023; Sherman et al., 2013).

Transparency and Openness

We describe our sampling plan, data exclusions, manipulations, and measures used in the studies. All measures were presented in English, and all items are listed in Section 1 of the Supplemental Materials. We adhered to the *Journal of Applied Psychology* methodological checklist. All experimental studies (i.e., Studies 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) were preregistered.[2] Study 6 was not preregistered. Data and syntax are available upon request from the first author. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for all studies (Université catholique de Louvain, Institutional Review Board No. 2019-34, Title: Predictors and consequences of perceived positive and negative organizational treatment on employees' well-being, attitudes, and behaviors; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Institutional Review Board No. 23-0157, Title: Examining the bright side of organizational dehumanization). Participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Data from Studies 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 were analyzed using *IBM SPSS* (Version 28; IBM Corp, 2021), while data from Study 6 were analyzed using *Mplus* (maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors; Version 8.8; Muthén & Muthén 2022) and *Stata* (Version 18; StataCorp, 2023).

Phase 1

Study 1: Organizational Dehumanization and Self-Worth Threat

Method

Following Nguyen et al. (2022), we experimentally manipulated organizational dehumanization by using an autobiographical recall task. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions.

In the low organizational dehumanization condition, participants were given the following instructions:

> Please describe, in a few lines, a situation where you felt treated as an individual with your own needs, wishes and feelings by your organization, rather than as a tool solely devoted to achieving your organization's goals. Please try to be as precise and detailed as possible.

In contrast, participants in the high organizational dehumanization condition received the following instructions:

> Please describe, in a few lines, a situation where you felt like just one of many numbers to your organization or an instrument devoted solely to achieving your organization's goals. Please try to be as precise and detailed as possible.

In both conditions, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with their current organization (Nguyen et al., 2022). Participants then proceeded to complete an organizational dehumanization scale (i.e., manipulation check) and a self-worth threat measure (i.e., dependent variable). Finally, participants were thanked and provided with a debriefing. Using an autobiographical recall task to manipulate organizational dehumanization presents two main advantages. First, because participants are invited to think and thoroughly write about their experience of organizational dehumanization, they can relive the event and recall how they felt when it occurred (Lee et al., 2023). Second, this approach enhances ecological validity (McDermott et al., 2009), as it encourages participants to reflect on real-life experiences rather than hypothetical scenarios (e.g., scenario-based vignettes).

To ensure the validity and effectiveness of our autobiographical recall task, we conducted a pilot study ($N = 198$; $M_{Age} = 41.13$, $SD_{Age} = 13.22$; 50% of the participants were men). The objective of this pilot study was to demonstrate that the autobiographical recall task only induces organizational dehumanization, rather than other related concepts. Following the completion of the autobiographical recall task, participants reported their perceptions of organizational dehumanization, abusive supervision, coworker incivility, perceived organizational obstruction, and ideological contract breach. We specifically chose these constructs to ensure that our autobiographical recall task did not activate other forms of mistreatment, whether originating from supervisors (i.e., abusive supervision), coworkers (i.e., coworker incivility), or the organization itself (i.e., perceived organizational obstruction). We also included ideological contract breach to demonstrate that our autobiographical recall task did not trigger perceptions of organizational wrongdoing. We examined the effectiveness of our experimental manipulation by (a) inspecting participants' autobiographical recall experiences and (b) performing a series of independent-samples *t* tests. As detailed in Section 2 of the Supplemental Materials, our autobiographical task effectively induced organizational dehumanization, without eliciting related constructs.

Participants and Procedure. To determine the adequate sample size for our experimental studies, we conducted an a priori

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[2] The preregistration report for each experimental study can be found using the following link: https://www.researchbox.org/2760&PEER_REVIEW_passcode=BZAXBG.

power analysis. Based on a medium effect size ($d = 0.40$), results indicated that at least 128 participants (64 participants per experimental condition) were needed to reach a minimum power of .80 ($\alpha = .05$).[3] Accordingly, we recruited 200 participants on Prolific (participants received £0.70 for their participation). To take part in the research, participants had to (a) be native English speakers, (b) have a minimum of 90% approval rate in previous surveys completed on the platform, (c) not be self-employed, and (d) work part-time or full-time. Seven participants were removed from the analyses because they provided an incorrect answer to the attention check question (i.e., "For this statement, please choose 'strongly agree'"). As a result, our final sample consisted of 193 participants ($M_{Age} = 40.71$, $SD_{Age} = 12.51$; 49.2% of the participants were men)—97 participants were randomly assigned to the low organizational dehumanization condition, while 96 participants were assigned to the high organizational dehumanization condition (see Table 2 for participants' demographic characteristics).

Measures. All items were rated on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

Organizational Dehumanization (i.e., Manipulation Check). Organizational dehumanization was measured using the five-item scale developed and validated by Lagios et al. (2024; e.g., "My organization considers me as a number"; $\alpha = .96$, $\omega = .96$).

Self-Worth Threat. Self-worth threat was assessed with the eight items of Sherman et al.'s (2009) measure ("I am a good person"; $\alpha = .93$, $\omega = .93$).[4] Consistent with prior work (e.g., Jachimowicz et al., 2018), the items were reversed-coded so that higher values reflect higher levels of self-worth threat.

Results

As in the pilot study, we assessed the effectiveness of our experimental manipulation by inspecting participants' autobiographical recall experiences. As expected, those in the low organizational dehumanization condition described instances where they felt treated like individuals with needs. For instance, one participant wrote, "With the passing of my mother, the organization gave me as much time as I needed to take care of family matters before coming back to work," while another one shared, "My organization takes special interest in their employees' individuality. For example, they embrace my community of being LGBTQ." In contrast, participants in the high organizational dehumanization condition recalled situations where they were treated as mere tools. For example, one participant noted, "We are all ranked by our productivity numbers. Those who do not meet these expectations are vulnerable to cuts," while another remarked, "I am constantly feeling like one of many numbers. Our only purpose is to get the work done, we don't have … learning opportunities." To further demonstrate the effectiveness of our autobiographical recall task, we conducted an independent-samples t test which indicated that participants in the high organizational dehumanization condition displayed higher levels of organizational dehumanization compared to those in the low organizational dehumanization condition, $M_{Low} = 3.37$, $SD_{Low} = 1.86$; $M_{High} = 5.04$, $SD_{High} = 1.53$; $t(184.70) = -6.79$, $p < .001$. The effect size was large (Glass's $\Delta = 1.09$).

To examine how organizational dehumanization affects self-worth threat, we performed another independent-samples t test (see Table 3 for the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations between the variables). Participants in the high organizational

dehumanization condition reported higher levels of self-worth threat than those in the low organizational dehumanization condition, $M_{Low} = 2.23$, $SD_{Low} = 0.89$; $M_{High} = 3.03$, $SD_{High} = 1.19$; $t(175.44) = -5.24$, $p < .001$. The effect size was medium (Glass's $\Delta = 0.67$). These results support Hypothesis 1, suggesting that organizational dehumanization poses a threat to one's self-worth.

Study 2: Self-Worth Threat and Self-Affirmation of Core Values

Method

Consistent with previous self-affirmation research (see McQueen & Klein, 2006, for an overview), we manipulated self-worth threat by providing participants with negative feedback concerning their intelligence—in this case, their emotional intelligence. After completing an emotional intelligence test (i.e., 10 items from the Situational Test of Emotion Management; MacCann & Roberts, 2008), participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the low self-worth threat condition, participants were told that their test scores indicated above-average emotional intelligence. In the high self-worth threat condition, participants were informed that their test scores indicated a below-average emotional intelligence (Schmeichel & Demaree, 2010; Schmeichel et al., 2015; see Section 3 of the Supplemental Materials for the detailed feedback). Participants then completed a self-worth threat scale (i.e., manipulation check) and a self-affirmation of core values scale (i.e., dependent variable). Finally, they were thanked and debriefed.

Participants and Procedure. We recruited 200 participants from Prolific, applying the same criteria as those described in Study 1. Participants who took part in Study 1 were not allowed to participate in this study, and participants received £1 for their participation. One participant was excluded from the analyses due to failing the attention check question (i.e., "For this statement, please choose 'strongly agree'"). Thus, our final sample was composed of 199 participants ($M_{Age} = 39.73$, $SD_{Age} = 11.18$; 49.72% of the participants were men)—97 participants were randomly assigned to the low self-worth threat condition and 102 participants to the high self-worth threat condition (see Table 2 for participants' demographic characteristics).

Measures.

Self-Worth Threat (i.e., Manipulation Check). Self-worth threat was measured with the same scale as the one used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .95$, $\omega = .95$).

Self-Affirmation of Core Values. Self-affirmation of core values was assessed using Napper et al.'s (2009) five-item scale (e.g., "My results made me think about my values"; $\alpha = .92$, $\omega = .92$). Participants indicated their responses on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

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[3] A priori power analyses were conducted for all our experimental studies. For all studies, the recommended minimum sample size was 128 participants (64 participants per experimental condition).

[4] In developing their scale, Sherman et al. (2009) used the term "self-integrity" in lieu of "self-worth." The two terms are however used interchangeably in self-affirmation theory and research. To maintain consistency throughout this article, we use the term "self-worth" exclusively.

Table 2
Participants' Demographic Characteristics—Studies 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (Phase 1)

Variable	Study 1 (N = 193) M (SD)	Study 1 N (%)	Study 2 (N = 199) M (SD)	Study 2 N (%)	Study 3 (N = 195) M (SD)	Study 3 N (%)	Study 4 (N = 198) M (SD)	Study 4 N (%)	Study 5 (N = 176) M (SD)	Study 5 N (%)
Age	40.72 (12.51)		39.73 (11.18)		38.71 (11.16)		35.89 (11.22)		40.82 (11.66)	
Gender										
Male		95 (49.2)		105 (52.8)		93 (47.7)		90 (45.5)		87 (49.4)
Female		98 (50.8)		94 (47.2)		102 (52.3)		108 (54.5)		89 (50.6)
Other										
Education										
Primary school								1 (0.5)		
High school		13 (6.7)		19 (9.5)		24 (12.3)		14 (7.1)		14 (8)
Some college		32 (16.6)		43 (21.6)		29 (14.9)		55 (27.8)		25 (14.1)
Bachelor's degree		97 (50.3)		102 (51.3)		90 (46.2)		83 (41.9)		80 (45.5)
Master's degree		42 (21.8)		29 (14.6)		42 (21.5)		40 (20.2)		44 (25)
PhD		6 (3.1)		4 (2)		9 (4.6)		4 (2)		8 (4.5)
Other		3 (1.6)		2 (1)		1 (0.5)		1 (0.5)		5 (3)
Organizational size										
1–9 employees		7 (3.6)		9 (4.5)		23 (11.6)		21 (10.6)		10 (5.5)
10–49 employees		23 (11.9)		20 (10.1)		30 (15.1)		33 (16.7)		24 (13.6)
50–249 employees		35 (18.1)		37 (18.6)		34 (17.1)		36 (18.2)		29 (16.6)
250–499 employees		19 (9.8)		22 (11.1)		21 (10.6)		19 (9.6)		16 (9)
500–999 employees		18 (9.3)		17 (8.5)		15 (7.5)		14 (7.1)		18 (10.1)
1,000–4,999 employees		39 (20.2)		41 (20.6)		28 (22.6)		30 (25.2)		35 (20.1)
5,000–9,999 employees		14 (7.3)		16 (8)		8 (4)		7 (3.5)		12 (7)
More than 10,000 employees		38 (19.7)		37 (18.6)		36 (18.1)		38 (19.2)		32 (18.1)
Time										
Full-time		166 (86)		185 (93)		171 (87.7)		160 (80.8)		143 (88.1)
Part-time		27 (14)		14 (7)		24 (12.3)		38 (19.2)		21 (11.9)
Contract										
Permanent		182 (94.3)		169 (85)		173 (86.9)		178 (89.9)		175 (88)
Fixed term		11 (5.7)		14 (7)		26 (13.1)		20 (10.1)		24 (5.7)
Organizational sector										
Private sector		122 (63.2)		127 (63.8)		118 (60.5)		109 (55.1)		103 (58.5)
Public sector		71 (36.8)		72 (36.2)		77 (39.5)		89 (44.9)		73 (41.5)
Industry										
Information technology and information services		27 (14)		29 (14.6)		28 (14.1)		33 (16.7)		28 (15.9)
Health and social care		22 (11.4)		21 (10.6)		17 (8.5)		24 (12.1)		16 (9.1)
Teaching and education		19 (9.8)		18 (9)		25 (12.6)		21 (10.6)		20 (11.4)
Accountancy, banking, finance		19 (9.8)		20 (10.1)		11 (5.5)		7 (3.5)		15 (8.5)
Retail and sales		17 (8.8)		16 (8)		22 (11.1)		25 (12.6)		19 (10.8)
Organizational tenure	7.71 (7.35)		8.41 (7.69)		7.80 (7.2)		6.04 (5.91)		8.03 (7.83)	

Note. Only the five most frequent industries are displayed. Organizational tenure is indicated in years.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations Between the Variables—Study 1 (Phase 1)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	—					
2. Gender	.00	—				
3. Work contract	.06	−.02	—			
4. Work time	−.02	−.07	.22**	—		
5. Organizational dehumanization	.02	.05	.11	−.05	—	
6. Self-worth threat	−.13	−.03	.04	−.02	.36***	—
M	40.72					2.63
SD	12.51					1.12

Note. $N = 193$. Gender was coded 0 for *male* and 1 for *female*. Work contract was coded 0 for *permanent* and 1 for *fixed term*. Work time was coded 0 for *part-time* and 1 for *full-time*. Organizational dehumanization was coded −1 for *low organizational dehumanization* and 1 for *high organizational dehumanization*.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Results

To demonstrate the effectiveness of our experimental manipulation, we performed an independent-samples t test (see Table 4 for the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations between the variables). As expected, participants in the high self-worth threat condition appraised their emotional intelligence test scores as more self-worth threatening than participants in the low self-worth threat condition, $M_{Low} = 2.30$, $SD_{Low} = 1.03$; $M_{High} = 2.71$, $SD_{High} = 1.27$; $t(191.96) = -2.55$, $p = .011$. The effect size was small (Glass's $\Delta = 0.33$).

To test the effect of self-worth threat on self-affirmation of core values, we computed another independent-samples t test. The results showed that participants in the high self-worth threat condition reflected more strongly on their core values as compared to those in the low self-worth threat condition, $M_{Low} = 2.17$, $SD_{Low} = 0.80$; $M_{High} = 2.46$, $SD_{High} = 0.95$; $t(194.47) = -2.35$, $p = .020$. The

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations Between the Variables—Studies 2 and 3 (Phase 1)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	—	.01	.07		.11
2. Gender	−.17*	—	−.06		−.06
3. Self-worth threat	.11	.00	—		.29***
4. Self-affirmation of core values	−.06	−.11	.19*	—	
5. Self-affirmation of social relationships					—
$M_{Study\ 2}$	39.73			2.32	
$SD_{Study\ 2}$	11.18			0.89	
$M_{Study\ 3}$	38.70				2.37
$SD_{Study\ 3}$	11.16				0.91

Note. $N_{Study\ 2} = 199$, $N_{Study\ 3} = 195$. Gender was coded 0 for *male* and 1 for *female*. Self-worth threat was coded −1 for *low self-worth threat* and 1 for *high self-worth threat*. Correlations for Study 2 are shown below the diagonal, and correlations for Study 3 are shown above the diagonal.
* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

effect size was small (Glass's $\Delta = 0.31$). Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, the findings suggest that self-worth threats trigger self-affirmation of core values.

Study 3: Self-Worth Threat and Self-Affirmation of Social Relationships

Method

To examine how self-worth threat influences self-affirmation of social relationships, we used the same experimental manipulation as the one described in Study 2. After receiving feedback regarding their emotional intelligence, participants completed a self-worth threat scale (i.e., manipulation check) and a self-affirmation of social relationships scale (i.e., dependent variable). Participants were then thanked and debriefed.

Participants and Procedure. We recruited 202 participants from Prolific, applying the same criteria as those described in Study 1. Participants from Studies 1 and 2 were not eligible to participate in this study, and those who did participate received £0.76 as compensation. After excluding seven participants who failed the attention check (i.e., "For this statement, please choose 'strongly agree'"), our final sample comprised 195 participants ($M_{Age} = 38.71$, $SD_{Age} = 11.16$; 47.70% of the participants were men). Of these, 97 participants were randomly assigned to the low self-worth threat condition and 98 participants to the high self-worth threat condition (see Table 2 for participants' demographic characteristics).

Measures.

Self-Worth Threat (i.e., Manipulation Check). Self-worth threat was measured with the same scale as the one used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .95$, $\omega = .95$).

Self-Affirmation of Social Relationships. Self-affirmation of social relationships was assessed using Harris et al.'s (2019) five-item scale (e.g., "My results made me think about the people who are important to me"; $\alpha = .94$, $\omega = .94$). Participants indicated their responses on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

Results

Similar to Study 2, we performed an independent-samples t test to demonstrate the effectiveness of our experimental manipulation (see Table 4 for the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations between the variables). The results showed that participants who received negative feedback about their emotional intelligence reported higher levels of self-worth threat compared to those in the low self-worth threat condition, $M_{Low} = 2.10$, $SD_{Low} = 0.76$; $M_{High} = 2.70$, $SD_{High} = 1.08$; $t(172.91) = -4.51$, $p < .001$. The effect size was medium (Glass's $\Delta = 0.56$).

We conducted another independent-samples t test to assess the effect of self-worth threat on self-affirmation of social relationships. In line with Hypothesis 2b, the results showed that participants in the high self-worth threat condition reflected more strongly on their social relationships compared to those in the low self-worth threat condition, $M_{Low} = 2.10$, $SD_{Low} = 0.79$; $M_{High} = 2.64$, $SD_{High} = 0.95$; $t(185.94) = -4.28$, $p < .001$. The effect size was medium (Glass's $\Delta = 0.56$).

Study 4: Self-Affirmation of Core Values and Volunteering

Method

To manipulate self-affirmation of core values, we used the procedure developed and validated by Napper et al. (2009) and X. Zhu and Yzer (2019). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the control condition, participants were asked to recall details about the shops and buildings they pass during a regular commute. In the experimental condition, participants read 11 values that people usually find desirable (e.g., "I always try to keep my word") and then indicated the extent to which these values apply to them (1 = *very much unlike me* to 5 = *very much like me*). As Napper et al. (2009) and X. Zhu and Yzer (2019) explained, the objective of this task is not to measure participants' values, but to induce self-affirmation by making their positive values salient.

Participants in both conditions were then given the opportunity to engage in a volunteering task. Specifically, they were informed that our research was conducted in partnership with the American Red Cross, which aimed to enhance its fundraising efforts by incorporating in-person entertainment events alongside its existing online and social media campaigns. As part of this partnership, participants were told they had the opportunity to voluntarily review the American Red Cross's program for this in-person entertainment event. If they agreed to do so, they would have to review the program and provide suggestions and/or recommendations for further improvement. It was made clear that this additional task, expected to take between 5 and 7 min, was voluntary and uncompensated. Participants were assured that their decision would not be disclosed to the research team. In reality, participants' decision to review the American Red Cross's fundraising strategy served as our measure of volunteering. By requiring participants to actively invest time and effort in reviewing and offering suggestions regarding the program, this task aligns with the core attributes of volunteering identified by Rodell (2013; Rodell et al., 2016; see Section 4 of the Supplemental Materials for the full prompt that participants read). To ensure the credibility of our experimental task throughout the survey, participants who indicated a willingness to review the American Red Cross's fundraising strategy were given the opportunity to do so. At the conclusion of the survey, all participants were thanked and debriefed.

Before examining the effect of self-affirmation of core values on volunteering, we conducted a pilot study (N = 200; M_{Age} = 40.27, SD_{Age} = 11.45; 54.5% of the participants were men) to demonstrate the self-affirming nature of our experimental manipulation. We opted for a pilot study instead of including a manipulation check in the main survey for two reasons. First, using a self-affirmation scale as a manipulation check after inducing self-affirmation can inadvertently trigger self-affirmation itself, potentially minimizing the differences between the control and experimental conditions (Blanton et al., 2009; McQueen & Klein, 2006; X. Zhu & Yzer, 2019). Second, introducing a manipulation check may reveal the true purpose of the self-affirmation task, which could compromise its effectiveness (Sherman et al., 2009). Thus, following the recommendations of X. Zhu and Yzer (2019), we tested the effectiveness of our experimental manipulation within a separate pilot study. As described in Section 5 of the Supplemental Materials,

the pilot study confirmed that our experimental manipulation effectively induced self-affirmation of core values.

Participants and Procedure. We recruited 201 participants from Prolific, adhering to the same criteria outlined in Study 1 (participants received £3 for their participation). As before, participants who had already completed Studies 1, 2, and 3 were not eligible to take part in this study. Three participants were excluded from the analyses due to incorrect responses to the attention check question (i.e., "For this statement, please choose 'strongly agree'"). Thus, our final sample consisted of 198 participants (M_{Age} = 35.89, SD_{Age} = 11.22; 45.50% of the participants were men), with 89 participants randomly assigned to the control condition and 109 to the experimental condition (see Table 2 for participants' demographic characteristics).

Measures.

Volunteering. Volunteering was measured through participants' decision to review and provide feedback on the American Red Cross's fundraising strategy (0 = *no*; 1 = *yes*).

Results

To examine the effect on self-affirmation of core values on volunteering, we performed a 2 × 2 χ^2 test[5] (see Table 5 for the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations between the variables). Results indicated that 7.58% (N = 15) of the participants in the control condition agreed to volunteer, whereas 22.73% (N = 45) of the participants in the experimental condition agreed to volunteer. This difference was significant, $\chi^2(1)$ = 13.85, p < .001, and the effect size was medium (ϕ = 0.26). These results suggest that self-affirmation of core values induces volunteering, thus supporting Hypothesis 3a.

Study 5: Self-Affirmation of Social Relationships and Family Task Performance

Method

Self-affirmation of social relationships was manipulated using the procedure developed by McQueen (2002). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. The control condition, identical to that in Study 4, asked participants to recall details about the shops and buildings they pass during a regular commute (Napper et al., 2009; X. Zhu & Yzer, 2019). In the experimental condition, participants were instructed to think about three or four personal experiences where their relationship with their significant others made them feel particularly good about themselves. They were then asked to thoroughly describe one of these events, explaining how they felt at the time and identifying what it was about their significant others that made them feel good (McQueen, 2002).

Next, participants in both conditions read a short scenario in which an individual faces various maintenance, household, and financial tasks while their partner/spouse is away on a 2-week

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[5] Although the preregistered report specified the use of a logistic regression, an anonymous reviewer suggested conducting a 2 × 2 χ^2 test to make the interpretation of the results easier. The results of the two analyses are, however, qualitatively and quantitatively similar, with the logistic regression showing a significant and positive relationship between self-affirmation of core values (coded 0 for *the control condition* and 1 for *the experimental condition*) and volunteering (B = 1.24, p < .001).

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations Between the Variables—Studies 4 and 5 (Phase 1)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	—	−.16*					−.16*	.09
2. Gender	.05	—					−.03	.09
3. Work contract	.00	−.17*	—					
4. Work time	.05	−.19**	−.05	—				
5. Self-affirmation of core values	.08	.26***	−.08	.02	—			
6. Volunteering	−.01	.18*	−.07	−.18*	.26***	—		
7. Self-affirmation of social relationships							—	.16**
8. Family task performance								—
$M_{\text{Study 4}}$	35.89							
$SD_{\text{Study 4}}$	11.22							
$M_{\text{Study 5}}$	40.81							1.93
$SD_{\text{Study 5}}$	11.66							0.87

Note. $N_{\text{Study 4}} = 198$, $N_{\text{Study 5}} = 188$. Gender was coded 0 for *male* and 1 for *female*. Work contract was coded 0 for *permanent* and 1 for *fixed term*. Work time was coded 0 for *part-time* and 1 for *full-time*. Self-affirmation of core values was coded 0 for *the control condition* and 1 for *the experimental condition*. Volunteering was coded 0 for *no* and 1 for *yes*. Correlations for Study 4 are shown below the diagonal, and correlations for Study 5 are shown above the diagonal.
* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.   *** $p < .001$.

business trip (see Section 6 of the Supplemental Materials for the full scenario). Participants were then asked to imagine themselves in this situation and indicate how likely they would be to handle the tasks described in the scenario (i.e., mowing the lawn, mopping the kitchen floors, and paying the bills). At the end of the study, participants were thanked and debriefed.

Similar to Study 4, we first conducted a pilot study ($N = 200$; $M_{\text{Age}} = 41.85$, $SD_{\text{Age}} = 13.44$; 53.5% of the participants were men) to demonstrate that our experimental manipulation is self-affirming. As described in Section 7 of the Supplemental Materials, the pilot study showed that our experimental manipulation effectively induced self-affirmation of social relationships.

Participants and Procedure. We recruited 203 participants from Prolific, using the same criteria as the ones outlined in Study 1 (participants received £1.07 for their participation). In addition, they were required to meet the following criteria: (a) currently be in a relationship with a partner/spouse, (b) currently live with their partner/spouse, (c) currently have a partner/spouse who is employed and occasionally travels for work, and (d) occasionally experience family demands, such as responsibilities related to domestic obligations (e.g., home maintenance, household, and financial tasks). At the end of the survey, we asked participants these questions again, emphasizing that their responses would not influence their compensation. Participants who had taken part in Studies 1, 2, 3, and 4 were not eligible for this study. In total, we removed 27 participants—21 failed the attention check question (i.e., "For this statement, please choose 'I would do it all myself'"), two were not currently in a relationship with a partner/spouse, and four were not currently living with their partner/spouse. Consequently, our final sample was composed of 176 participants ($M_{\text{Age}} = 40.81$, $SD_{\text{Age}} = 11.66$; 49.40% of the participants were men), with 96 participants randomly assigned to the control condition and 80 to the experimental condition (see Table 2 for participants' demographic characteristics).

Measures.

Family Task Performance. Family task performance was measured using the following three items: "Who would most likely

complete household responsibilities?"; "Who would most likely handle tasks around the house?"; and "Who would most likely take care of these issues?" ($\alpha = .82$, $\omega = .83$). Participants indicated their responses using the following scale: 1 = *I would do it all myself*; 2 = *I would mostly do it myself*; 3 = *I would share the tasks equally with my partner/spouse*; 4 = *My partner/spouse would mostly do it*; 5 = *My partner/spouse would do it all*.

Results

To test the effect of self-affirmation of social relationships on family task performance, we conducted an independent-samples *t* test (see Table 5 for the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations between the variables). The results showed that participants in the experimental condition engaged more in family task performance behaviors compared to those in the control condition, $M_{\text{Control Condition}} = 1.81$, $SD_{\text{Control Condition}} = 0.70$; $M_{\text{Experimental Condition}} = 2.09$, $SD_{\text{Experimental Condition}} = 1.01$; $t(174) = -0.28$, $p = .031$. The effect size was small (Glass's $\Delta = 0.28$). These findings suggest that self-affirmation of social relationships induces family task performance, in line with Hypothesis 3b.

Phase 1: Discussion

Phase 1 provided initial support for our proposed relationships. Using a manipulation-of-mediator design that involved five interrelated experiments, we showed that organizational dehumanization leads to self-worth threat (Study 1), self-worth threat triggers self-affirmation of core values and social relationships (Studies 2 and 3), self-affirmation of core values promotes volunteering (Study 4), and self-affirmation of social relationships enhances family task performance (Study 5). It is worth noting that while the experimental manipulations of Studies 2 and 3 resulted in higher levels of self-worth threat among participants, the means remained relatively low, even in the high self-worth threat condition. Therefore, our results should be interpreted in a relative rather than absolute sense, as there was no "true" high self-worth threat condition.

Despite these empirical findings, Phase 1 has three notable limitations. First, it does not account for the moderating role of prosocial-contingent self-worth, preventing us from examining how the behavioral consequences of self-affirmation vary among employees. Second, it does not allow for the estimation of the full conditional serial indirect effects of organizational dehumanization on the outcomes through self-worth threat and self-affirmation. Third, the short time frames typical of experimental studies limit our ability to explore how these processes unfold over time. To address these limitations, we conducted a field study (Study 6) involving employee–partner/spouse dyads across four measurement points, 1 month apart. This study, as part of Phase 2, enables us to test the full moderated serial mediation model, controlling for other forms of workplace mistreatment (i.e., abusive supervision and coworker incivility).

Phase 2

Study 6: Conditional Serial Mediation Model

Method

Participants and Procedure. We conducted a four-wave study collecting dyadic data from employees and their partners/spouses using the Prolific data collection platform. The surveys were spaced 1 month apart over a 3-month period, consistent with prior work (Deng et al., 2023; Sherman et al., 2013). Employees completed four online surveys (Time 0 [£0.30], Time 1 [£1], Time 2 [£1.20], and Time 3 [£1.40]), while their partners/spouses completed two online surveys (Time 0 [£0.30] and Time 4 [£2]). To select suitable participants, we used Prolific's prescreening filters. Criteria included (a) being native English speakers, (b) having a minimum approval rate of 90% on previous Prolific surveys, (c) not being self-employed, (d) working part-time or full-time, and (e) having a partner/spouse with an independent Prolific account.[6] Participants who had completed the surveys in Phase 1 were not eligible to participate in this study. At Time 0, we launched two surveys. The first survey was administered to employees, informing them of our study's purpose and requesting their partner/spouse's Prolific identification code (i.e., a random alphanumeric code that is provided by Prolific). The second survey was administered to partners/spouses, who were introduced to the research objectives and formally invited to take part in the study. In total, 894 employees and 739 partners/spouses completed their survey at Time 0. At Time 1, 868 employees completed their survey (response rate = 97.1%); at Time 2, 821 employees completed their survey (response rate = 94.6%); and at Time 3, 760 employees completed their survey (response rate = 92.6%). At Time 4, 623 partners/spouses completed their survey (response rate = 84.3%).[7]

After matching employees' and partners/spouses' surveys and excluding cases where employees changed organizations and/or partner/spouse between waves, we were left with 512 employee–partner/spouse dyads. We further refined our sample by removing the dyads ($N = 48$) where at least one respondent failed to correctly answer at least one attention check question throughout the time points—two attention check questions (i.e., "For this statement, please choose 'strongly agree'" and "For this statement, please choose 'strongly disagree'") were included at each time point, except for Time 0 which did not include any.[8] As a result, our final sample consisted of 464 employee–partner/spouse dyads. All

participants completed the items, with no missing data. Participants' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 6. Data for Study 6 were part of a broader data collection effort, from which a separate article was developed (Brison et al., in press). However, the two articles address distinct research questions and do not overlap in terms of variables analyzed or findings reported.

Measures. All items were rated on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*), unless otherwise indicated. At each time point, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences over the past month.

Organizational Dehumanization (Reported by Employees at Time 1). Organizational dehumanization was measured with the same scale as the one used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .92$, $\omega = .92$).

Self-Worth Threat (Reported by Employees at Time 2). Self-worth threat was assessed using the same scale as the one used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .97$, $\omega = .97$).

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[6] To ensure data integrity, Prolific employs a rigorous two-step verification system. In the first step, Prolific verifies participants' email address, phone number, and photo identification. Individuals who fail to verify any of these elements are deemed ineligible to participate, ensuring the authenticity of the participants. The second step involves a more technical verification process, which examines individuals' Internet Protocol addresses, Internet service providers, device/browser information, and Virtual Private Network usage. This additional layer of scrutiny helps prevent individuals from masking their location, browsing anonymously, or completing a survey multiple times (Croissant, 2021).

[7] To examine whether the attrition across our different time points was random, we followed Goodman and Blum's (1996) recommendations. More specifically, we first ran a multiple logistic regression that showed that employees' probability of remaining in the sample at Time 1 was not predicted by their demographic information (i.e., gender [$B = .21$, $p = .592$], age [$B = .01$, $p = .661$], organizational tenure [$B = .04$, $p = .341$], organizational size [$B = -.09$, $p = .301$], organizational sector [$B = .05$, $p = .137$], work contract [$B = .48$, $p = .396$], work time [$B = -.52$, $p = .427$], and weekly number of days of working from home [$B = -.01$, $p = .908$]). Two additional simple logistic regressions indicated that employees' probability of remaining in the sample at Time 2 and Time 3 was not predicted by organizational dehumanization ($B = -.11$, $p = .269$) and self-worth threat ($B = -.04$, $p = .621$), respectively. A fourth, multiple logistic regression showed that partners'/spouses' probability of remaining in the sample at Time 4 was not predicted by their demographic information (i.e., gender [$B = .07$, $p = .727$], age [$B = .00$, $p = .963$], tenure of relationship with the employee [$B = .03$, $p = .101$], and weekly number of hours of interaction with the employee [$B = .00$, $p = .740$]). In sum, attrition did not lead to nonrandom sampling (i.e., the probability of completing the surveys did not depend on the study variables) and is unlikely to have influenced our analyses and results (Goodman & Blum, 1996).

[8] We performed a series of independent-samples t tests to contrast the characteristics of the participants who failed to correctly answer at least one attention check question (i.e., incorrect) with the characteristics of the participants who correctly answered the attention check questions (i.e., correct). Results indicated that the employees did not significantly differ in their levels of organizational dehumanization perceptions, $M_{Incorrect} = 4.48$, $SD_{Incorrect} = 1.49$; $M_{Correct} = 4.39$, $SD_{Correct} = 1.54$; $t(510) = 0.36$, $p = .722$; self-worth threat, $M_{Incorrect} = 3.76$, $SD_{Incorrect} = 1.71$; $M_{Correct} = 3.84$, $SD_{Correct} = 1.71$; $t(510) = -0.33$, $p = .740$; self-affirmation of social relationships, $M_{Incorrect} = 4.97$, $SD_{Incorrect} = 1.29$; $M_{Correct} = 4.89$, $SD_{Correct} = 1.51$; $t(510) = 0.36$, $p = .721$; self-affirmation of core values, $M_{Incorrect} = 4.84$, $SD_{Incorrect} = 1.32$; $M_{Correct} = 4.56$, $SD_{Correct} = 1.60$; $t(510) = 2.90$, $p = .241$; prosocial-contingent self-worth, $M_{Incorrect} = 4.77$, $SD_{Incorrect} = 0.89$; $M_{Correct} = 4.88$, $SD_{Correct} = 1.02$; $t(510) = -0.72$, $p = .475$; and family task performance, $M_{Incorrect} = 4.13$, $SD_{Incorrect} = 0.97$; $M_{Correct} = 4.06$, $SD_{Correct} = 0.95$; $t(510) = 0.49$, $p = .628$. The only difference was that employees who failed to correctly answer at least one attention check question displayed higher levels of volunteering than did employees who correctly answered the attention check questions, $M_{Incorrect} = 2.53$, $SD_{Incorrect} = 1.43$; $M_{Correct} = 2.09$, $SD_{Correct} = 1.22$; $t(54.29) = 2.05$, $p = .045$.

Table 6
Participants' Demographic Characteristics—Study 6 (Phase 2)

Variable	M (SD)	N (%)
Age[a]	39.13 (9.98)	
Gender[a]		
Male		225 (48.5)
Female		239 (51.5)
Other		
Education[a]		
Primary school		1 (0.2)
High school		51 (11)
Some college		100 (21.6)
Bachelor's degree		193 (41.6)
Master's degree		98 (21.1)
PhD		13 (2.8)
Other		8 (1.7)
Organizational size[a]		
1–9 employees		37 (8)
10–49 employees		69 (14.9)
50–249 employees		80 (17.2)
250–499 employees		38 (8.2)
500–999 employees		49 (10.6)
1,000–4,999 employees		67 (14.4)
5,000–9,999 employees		41 (8.8)
More than 10,000 employees		83 (17.9)
Time[a]		
Full-time		388 (83.6)
Part-time		76 (16.4)
Contract[a]		
Permanent		418 (90.1)
Fixed term		46 (9.9)
Organizational sector[a]		
Private sector		266 (57.3)
Public sector		198 (42.7)
Industry[a]		
Health and social care		70 (15.1)
Public administration		57 (12.3)
Retail and sales		42 (9.1)
Information technology and information services		41 (8.8)
Engineering and manufacturing		16 (9.1)
Organizational tenure[a]	12.33 (7.11)	
Weekly number of days of homeworking[a]	2 (2.03)	
Employee–partner/spouse tenure of relationship[b]	12.92 (8.99)	
Employee–partner/spouse weekly number of hours of interaction[b]	51 (32.12)	

Note. N = 464. Only the five most frequent industries are displayed. Organizational tenure and employee–partner/spouse tenure of relationship are indicated in years.
[a] Reported by employees.   [b] Reported by partners/spouses.

Self-Affirmation of Core Values (Reported by Employees at Time 3). Self-affirmation of core values was assessed using the four items developed by Harris et al. (2019; "I find myself thinking about my values"; α = .97, ω = .97).[9]

Self-Affirmation of Social Relationships (Reported by Employees at Time 3). Self-affirmation of social relationships was measured with the five-item scale by Harris et al. (2019; "I find myself thinking about the people who are important to me"; α = .96, ω = .97).

Prosocial-Contingent Self-Worth (Reported by Employees at Time 3). Prosocial-contingent self-worth was measured by slightly adapting the five-item scale by Crocker et al. (2003; e.g., "I feel better about myself when I help others well"; α = .76, ω = .77).

Specifically, we adapted the items so that employees' self-worth would be contingent on how well they help others, instead of how well they perform academically.[10]

Family Task Performance (Reported by Partners/Spouses at Time 4). Family task performance was measured with the four items developed by Y.-P. Chen et al. (2014; e.g., "My partner/spouse completes household responsibilities"; α = .95, ω = .95). Partners/spouses indicated their responses on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *does not fulfill expectations at all* to 5 = *fulfills expectations completely*).

Volunteering (Reported by Partners/Spouses at Time 4). Volunteering was assessed using the five items by Rodell (2013; e.g., "My partner/spouse gives his time to help a volunteer group"; α = .99, ω = .99). Partners/spouses indicated their responses on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *almost never* to 5 = *very often*).[11]

Control Variables. To rule out alternative explanations, several variables were controlled for in the analyses. First, to demonstrate the uniqueness of organizational dehumanization in the prediction of self-worth threat, we controlled for abusive supervision and coworker incivility as additional predictors. We measured abusive supervision (α = .92, ω = .93) and coworker incivility (α = .86, ω = .87) with the same scales as the ones used in Study 1. Second, because individuals who are predisposed to experience negative emotional states are more likely to develop a negative self-concept and have negative views of the self (Watson & Clark, 1984), we controlled for negative affectivity as an additional predictor. Negative affectivity was assessed using Yeo et al.'s (2014) three-item scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all* to 5 = *extremely*; α = .83, ω = .83).

In addition, we included a number of demographic control variables that were shown to influence our dependent variables. We controlled for employees' age because feelings of self-worth and the enactment of supportive behaviors toward the broader community and family tend to increase as people age (Bleidorn et al., 2016; Dovidio et al., 2017). We also included employees' gender because research suggests that men tend to report higher feelings of self-worth, while women are more likely to engage in supportive behaviors toward the family and the broader community (Bleidorn et al., 2016; Dovidio et al., 2017). Moreover, we controlled for employees' organizational tenure, organizational sector, work contract, and work time because the work context influences the extent to which employees engage in volunteering (Dovidio et al., 2017; Rodell et al., 2016). Finally, we controlled for several

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[9] To demonstrate that the results of Study 6 are not dependent on the self-affirmation of core values scale used, we collected an independent two-wave, self-reported data set (N = 265) that replicated Study 6, but using the scale of Napper et al. (2009; used in Study 2) instead of the scale of Harris et al.'s (2019; used in Study 6). The results were qualitatively and quantitatively similar. Moreover, we collected another data set (N = 199) that included both scales of self-affirmation of core values (i.e., Harris et al., 2019 and Napper et al., 2009). Results showed that the two scales were highly correlated (r = .86, p < .001).

[10] To ensure that our prosocial-contingent self-worth scale is psychometrically sound, we conducted three additional studies demonstrating the content, discriminant, divergent, and incremental validity (see Section 8 of the Supplemental Materials).

[11] We also measured employees' self-reported volunteering at Time 4. As indicated in Sections 9–12 of the Supplemental Materials, our results remained similar when using self-reported volunteering.

variables that may potentially influence the extent to which employees engage in supportive behaviors toward their partner/spouse. These variables include the employees' weekly number of days working from home, weekly hours of interaction with their partner/spouse, and the length of their relationship.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations between the variables are displayed in Table 7. Correlations between the variables are consistent with the hypotheses. Regarding the role of the control variables, we relied on Becker's (2005) and Becker et al.'s (2016) recommendations. Specifically, we began by examining the correlations between the control variables and the dependent variables included in our model. As shown in Table 7, the weekly number of days working from home ($r = .09$, $p = .046$), abusive supervision ($r = .10$, $p = .035$), coworker incivility ($r = .16$, $p = .001$), and negative affectivity ($r = .23$, $p < .001$) correlated significantly with self-worth threat; the weekly number of days of working from home ($r = -.10$, $p = .040$) and negative affectivity ($r = -.16$, $p = .001$) correlated significantly with self-affirmation of social relationships; negative affectivity ($r = -.20$, $p < .001$) correlated significantly with self-affirmation of core values; age ($r = .12$, $p = .009$), gender ($r = .12$, $p = .007$), and work time ($r = -.12$, $p = .010$) correlated significantly with family task performance; and age ($r = .12$, $p = .038$), employee–spouse/partner tenure of relationship ($r = .12$, $p = .012$), and negative affectivity ($r = -.11$, $p = .017$) correlated significantly with volunteering. We then ran our analyses with and without these control variables and contrasted the results. Since the interpretation of the results remained consistent when the control variables were included (see Sections 13–16 of the Supplemental Materials), we reported the results without the control variables in the article for the sake of parsimony (Becker, 2005; Becker et al., 2016).

To test our hypotheses, we used the latent moderated structural equations approach (Klein & Moosbrugger, 2000), which consists of several steps (Cheung et al., 2021; Maslowsky et al., 2015). Step 1 involves the evaluation of the measurement model. We performed confirmatory factor analyses to examine the distinctiveness of the seven latent variables included in our model (i.e., organizational dehumanization, self-worth threat, self-affirmation of core values, self-affirmation of social relationships, prosocial-contingent self-worth, volunteering, and family task performance). Results showed that the hypothesized seven-factor model fitted the data very well, $\chi^2(573) = 908.77$; root-mean-square error of approximation = .04; standardized root-mean-square residual = .03; comparative fit index = .98; Tucker–Lewis index = .98, and was superior to all alternative, more constrained models (see Section 17 of the Supplemental Materials). In addition, all the items loaded significantly on their respective factor, with standardized loadings ranging from .81 to .91 for organizational dehumanization, from .54 to .97 for self-worth threat, from .93 to .95 for self-affirmation of core values, from .91 to .95 for self-affirmation of social relationships, from .53 to .81 for prosocial-contingent self-worth, from .86 to .94 for family task performance, and from .96 to .98 for volunteering. Based on these results, we treated all constructs as distinct in our subsequent analyses.

Step 2 consists of estimating a structural model without the latent interaction terms. That is, this model only includes the main effects

of our latent independent, mediating, and moderating variables—all direct paths were estimated. This model displayed a good fit with the data, $\chi^2(578) = 947.15$; root-mean-square error of approximation = .04; standardized root-mean-square residual = .06; comparative fit index = .98; Tucker–Lewis index = .97. None of the direct paths were significant (see Table 8).

In Step 3, we estimated the full latent conditional serial mediation model, that is, the model including the effects of our latent independent, mediating, and moderating variables, as well as the effects of our latent interaction terms—all direct paths were estimated. When using latent moderated structural in *Mplus*, typical fit indices (e.g., χ^2, root-mean-square error of approximation, standardized root-mean-square residual, comparative fit index, Tucker–Lewis index) are not calculated because models with latent variable interactions are not nested within the unstructured comparison model (Kelava et al., 2011). Therefore, to assess model fit and compare the two structural models (i.e., the models without [Step 2] and with [Step 3] the latent interaction terms), we followed the recommendations of Cheung et al. (2021) and used a χ^2 difference test based on the loglikelihood values and scaling correction factors estimated from the two models, as they were both estimated using the maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard error estimator (Satorra & Bentler, 2001). Results showed that the structural model with the latent interaction terms had a better fit with the data, Δloglikelihood (2) = 14.37, $p = .001$. As shown in Table 8 and Figure 2, self-affirmation of core values significantly interacted with prosocial-contingent self-worth to positively predict volunteering ($b = .08$, $p = .020$), while self-affirmation of social relationships significantly interacted with prosocial-contingent self-worth to positively influence family task performance ($b = .06$, $p = .009$). We conducted simple slopes tests (Aiken & West, 1991) to interpret the latent interaction effects. The results indicated that the relationship between self-affirmation of core values and volunteering was significant at high, $b = .18$, $t(460) = 3.89$, $p < .001$, but not at low, $b = .02$, $t(460) = 0.39$, $p = .697$, levels of prosocial-contingent self-worth. The relationship between self-affirmation of social relationships and family task performance was significant at both high, $b = .14$, $t(460) = 4.91$, $p < .001$, and low, $b = .04$, $t(460) = 2.03$, $p = .043$, levels of prosocial-contingent self-worth. Overall, consistent with Hypothesis 4a, the relationship between self-affirmation of core values and volunteering was stronger for employees whose self-worth is contingent on helping others well (see Figure 3). Similarly, in line with Hypothesis 4b, the relationship between self-affirmation of social relationships and family task performance was stronger for employees whose self-worth is contingent on helping others well (see Figure 4).

Finally, results of latent moderated serial mediation analyses with bootstrap (1,000 samples bootstrapping; Cheung & Lau, 2017; Cheung et al., 2021) indicated that the relationship between organizational dehumanization and volunteering through self-worth threat and self-affirmation of core values was significant at high (indirect effect = .01; bias-corrected [BC] 95% CI [0.002, 0.015]) but not at low (indirect effect = .00; BC 95% CI [−0.003, 0.007]) levels of prosocial-contingent self-worth. In the same vein, the relationship between organizational dehumanization and family task performance through self-worth threat and self-affirmation of social relationships was significant at high (indirect effect = .01; BC 95% CI [0.002, 0.015]) but not at low (indirect effect = .00; BC 95% CI [−0.002, 0.005]) levels of prosocial-contingent self-worth.

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations Among Variables—Study 6 (Phase 2)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Age[a] (Time 0)	—																		
2. Gender[a] (Time 0)	-.15**	—																	
3. Organizational tenure[a] (Time 0)	.45***	-.11*	—																
4. Organizational sector[a] (Time 0)	.11*	-.16**	-.02	—															
5. Work contract[a] (Time 0)	-.14**	.02	.07	.04	—														
6. Work time[a] (Time 0)	-.12**	-.19***	.06	.01	.20***	—													
7. Weekly number of days of homeworking[a] (Time 0)	-.06	-.01	-.08	.11*	-.03	.15**	—												
8. Employee–partner/spouse weekly numbers of hours of interaction[b]	.04	.08	-.03	-.09	.03	-.01	.03	—											
9. Employee–partner/spouse tenure of relationship[b] (Time 0)	.65***	-.04	.41***	.08	-.04	-.13**	-.06	.02	—										
10. Abusive supervision[a] (Time 1)	-.03	-.04	-.02	.06	.03	.04	-.06	.03	-.03	—									
11. Coworker incivility[a] (Time 1)	-.04	-.04	-.07	.05	.01	.05	-.13**	-.06	-.07	.55***	—								
12. Negative affectivity[a] (Time 1)	-.18***	.18***	-.16***	-.07	.00	-.09*	.01	-.13	-.13**	.14**	.23***	—							
13. Organizational dehumanization[a] (Time 1)	-.12**	-.06	-.05	-.00	-.00	-.08	-.13**	.07	-.01	.26***	.33***	.17***	—						
14. Self-worth threat[a] (Time 2)	-.01	.01	-.08	.07	.01	-.04	.09*	-.13	-.02	.01*	.16**	.23***	.20***	—					
15. Self-affirmation of social relationships[a] (Time 3)	-.01	.04	.05	-.05	.01	.01	-.10*	-.09	.07	-.04	-.07	-.16**	-.02	.20***	—				
16. Self-affirmation of core values[a] (Time 3)	.05	.00	.08	-.01	-.02	.01	-.05	-.10	.08	-.02	-.02	-.20***	-.03	.20***	.69***	—			
17. Prosocial-contingent self-worth[a] (Time 3)	-.03	.13**	.10*	-.05	.07	-.01	-.07	-.05	.05	-.02	-.04	.12**	-.11	.02	.26***	.15**	—		

(table continues)

Table 7 (continued)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
18. Family task performance[b] (Time 4)	.12**	.12**	.02	.02	-.08	-.12*	-.04	-.07	.09	.01	.00	-.04	.01	.05	.10*	.11*	-.07	—	
19. Volunteering[b] (Time 4)	.12*	.02	.00	.05	.01	.00	.08	-.04	.12***	.09	-.02	-.11*	-.11	.06	.13**	.14**	.13**	.11*	—
M	39.13		7.89				2.00	51.61	12.92	1.21	1.64	2.78	4.39	3.84	4.89	4.55	4.88	4.06	2.09
SD	9.98		7.18				2.03	32.12	8.99	0.51	0.75	1.40	1.54	1.71	1.51	1.59	1.02	0.95	1.22

Note. $N = 464$. Gender was coded 0 for *male* and 1 for *female*. Organizational sector was coded 0 for *public sector* and 1 for *private sector*. Work contract was coded 0 for *permanent* and 1 for *fixed term*. Work time was coded 0 for *part-time* and 1 for *full-time.*
[a] Reported by employees. [b] Reported by partners/spouses.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Importantly, both indices of moderated serial mediation were positive and significant (index of moderated serial mediation for volunteering = .003; BC 95% CI [0.001, 0.008]; index of moderated serial mediation for family task performance = .002; BC 95% CI [0.001, 0.006]). None of the direct paths were significant (see Table 8). In sum, consistent with Hypotheses 5a and 5b, these results suggest that the relationships between organizational dehumanization and (a) volunteering through self-worth threat and self-affirmation of core values and (b) family task performance through self-worth threat and self-affirmation social relationship are stronger for employees whose self-worth is contingent on helping others well.[12]

Addressing Endogeneity. Although our data were collected using multiple measurement points, caution is warranted when drawing causal conclusions about the relationships between our variables of interest. In particular, the estimates may be subject to endogeneity due to an omitted variable. To address this limitation, we employed an instrumental variable approach (Wooldridge, 2010) to reestimate our mediation models. This method, widely used in economics, allows one to causally estimate the relationship between an endogenous predictor and an outcome variable. To do so, a third variable, called an instrument, is used to isolate the exogenous part of the variability from the endogenous predictor, which is in turn leveraged to assess the relationship of interest. In practice, we used two-stage least squares to estimate our instrumental variable: In the first stage, the endogenous predictor is regressed on the instrument to obtain its predicted value; in the second stage, the outcome is regressed on the predicted value of the predictor obtained in the first stage (Wooldridge, 2010).

Our two-stage least squares relies on Lewbel's (2012) approach. Specifically, we exploited the presence of heteroskedasticity in the error term of the first stage to generate from the control variables a set of internal instruments for each path of our mediation models. We discuss in Section 19 of the Supplemental Materials the key identifying assumptions of Lewbel's (2012) heteroskedasticity-based approach and show that they hold. In addition, we explore the robustness of our estimates to weak-instrument concerns (see Section 20 of the Supplemental Materials).

Our two-stage least squares mediation estimates yield the same conclusions as our structural equation modeling analyses. More specifically, organizational dehumanization had a positive impact on self-worth threat ($b = 0.61$, $p = .001$). Subsequently, self-worth threat positively affected self-affirmation of core values ($b = 0.87$, $p = .015$), which, in turn, had a positive association with volunteering ($b = 0.37$, $p = .044$). Similarly, self-worth threat positively influenced self-affirmation of social relationships ($b = 0.63$, $p = .037$), which, in turn, had a positive impact on family task performance ($b = 0.26$, $p = .028$). Regarding our serial indirect effects, bootstrap analyses (5,000 samples bootstrapping) showed that the indirect effect of organizational dehumanization on volunteering through self-worth threat and self-affirmation of core values was positive and significant (indirect effect = 0.19; BC 95% CI [0.16, 0.89]). The

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[12] As a robustness check, we replicated our moderated serial mediation model by adding a path between (a) self-affirmation of social relationships and volunteering and (b) self-affirmation of core values and family task performance. As shown in Section 18 of the Supplemental Materials, these additional paths were not significant, and their inclusion did not change the interpretation of our results.

Table 8
Unstandardized Path Estimates—Study 6 (Phase 2)

Step	Variable	Self-worth threat	Self-affirmation of core value	Self-affirmation of social relationship	Volunteering	Family task performance
Step 2	Predictors					
	Organizational dehumanization	.23*** (.06)	−.02 (.06)	−.02 (.06)	.07 (.04)	−.01 (.03)
	Moderators					
	Prosocial-contingent self-worth				.13* (.05)	−.09 (.05)
	Mediating variables					
	Self-worth threat		.17*** (.04)	.16*** (.04)	.10 (.03)	.01 (.03)
	Self-affirmation of core values				.09* (.03)	
	Self-affirmation of social relationships					.08* (.04)
Step 3	Predictors					
	Organizational dehumanization	.23*** (.06)	−.02 (.06)	−.02 (.06)	.06 (.04)	−.02 (.03)
	Moderators					
	Prosocial-contingent self-worth				.17** (.06)	−.06 (.05)
	Interaction effects					
	Self-Affirmation of Core Values × Prosocial-Contingent Self-Worth				.08* (.03)	
	Self-Affirmation of Social Relationships × Prosocial-Contingent Self-Worth					.06** (.02)
	Mediating variables					
	Self-worth threat		.17*** (.04)	.16*** (.04)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)
	Self-affirmation of core values				.09** (.04)	
	Self-affirmation of social relationships					.09** (.04)

Note. $N = 464$. Standard errors are indicated in parentheses.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

indirect effect of organizational dehumanization on family task performance through self-worth threat and self-affirmation of social relationships was also positive and significant (indirect effect = 0.10; BC 95% CI [0.08, 0.39]).

Phase 2: Discussion

Using four-wave data from employees and their spouses/partners, the results of Phase 2 showed that organizational dehumanization threatens employees' self-worth. In response, employees reflect on their (a) core values, motivating them to engage in volunteering, and (b) their social relationships, driving them to engage in family task performance. These effects were particularly pronounced for employees with a high prosocial-contingent self-worth. Importantly, these relationships were observed over a 3-month period, and the results remained significant even after controlling for abusive supervision, coworker incivility, and negative affectivity. Employing an instrumental variable approach to establish causal estimates enabled us to strengthen the robustness of our findings.

General Discussion

Can something good emerge from what seems inherently negative? Nietzsche's (1844/1961) opening quote answers this question affirmatively, and the data that we present in this article provide evidence to support his assertion. We proposed and tested an integrative model to explain why and for whom organizational dehumanization, which past research shows to be an undeniably negative experience, might nevertheless lead some employees to engage in prosocial behaviors that benefit others outside the workplace. Across six studies using complementary methodologies, we found that organizational dehumanization threatens employees' self-worth. This threat can initiate an attempt by employees to

restore their self-worth through two key pathways: (1) reflecting on their core values, which inspires them to engage in volunteering and (2) reflecting on their social relationships, which motivates them to contribute more actively to the effective functioning within their families. Importantly, we show that this sequence is more pronounced among employees whose self-worth is closely tied to their ability to effectively help others. Below, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings.

Theoretical Implications

Organizational dehumanization has traditionally been described as an intrinsically negative phenomenon that produces a host of deleterious and maladaptive outcomes for employees and their families (Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023; Lagios, Restubog, et al., 2023; Lagios et al., 2024). In this research, we challenged this dominant narrative by introducing a self-affirmation model that, while acknowledging its negative aspects, demonstrates that organizational dehumanization can sometimes yield positive outcomes for societal and familial constituents. In doing so, we present a more nuanced perspective about the consequences of organizational dehumanization that corroborates other research showing how workplace mistreatment can sometimes yield favorable outcomes (e.g., Liao et al., 2021; Tröster & Van Quaquebeke, 2021). Specifically, by connecting organizational dehumanization to volunteering and family task performance, we extend this nascent line of work which has almost exclusively examined prosocial behaviors within the organization (e.g., in-role performance, organizational citizenship behaviors). Our results collectively suggest that employees who experience mistreatment at work are not always passive recipients who submit to adversity, suffer from it, and resign themselves resentfully to their fate. Instead,

Figure 2

*Unstandardized Coefficients for the Structural Model—Study 6 (Phase 2)*
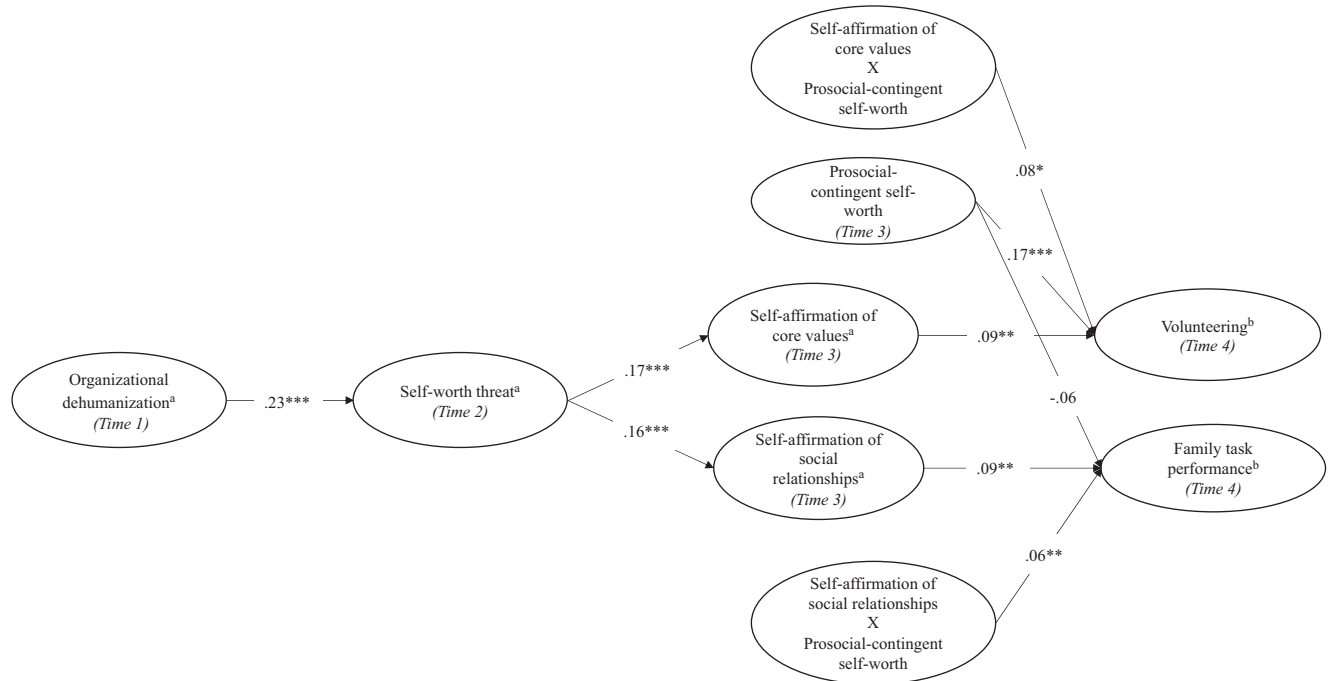
Note. $N = 464$. The direct paths between (a) organizational dehumanization and both forms of self-affirmation, (b) organizational dehumanization and the outcomes, and (c) self-worth threat and the outcomes are nonsignificant and are not reported for clarity purposes.

[a] Reported by employees. [b] Reported by partners/spouses.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

we show that they have the capacity—and sometimes the motivation—to use their suffering as a means of fortifying the self and advancing some of their most important life goals (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016).

Figure 3

Interactive Effect of Self-Affirmation of Core Values and Prosocial-Contingent Self-Worth on Volunteering—Study 6 (Phase 2)
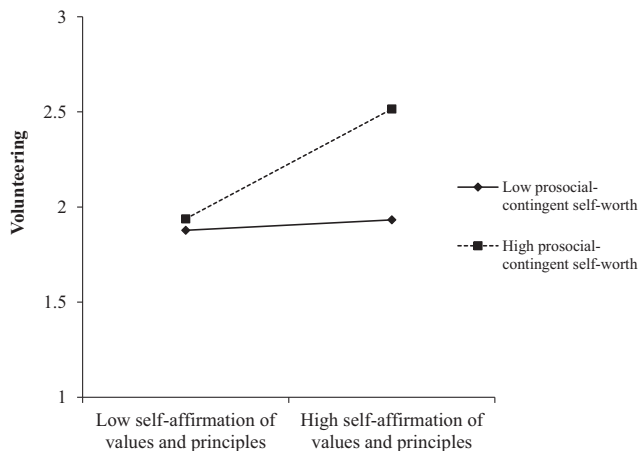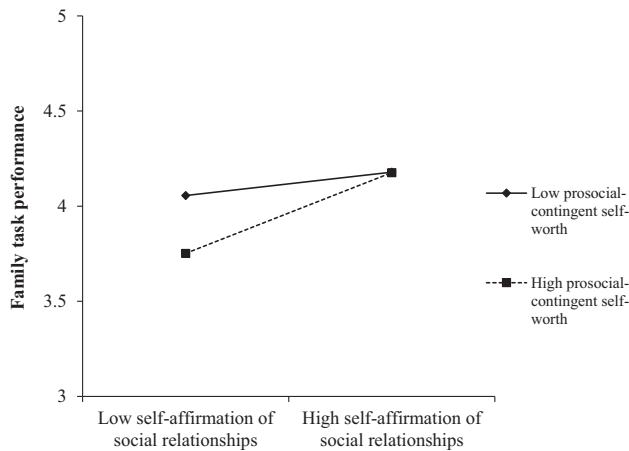

Note. $N = 464$. Self-affirmation of core values and prosocial-contingent self-worth were reported by employees. Volunteering was reported by partners/spouses.

By anchoring organizational dehumanization within a unified self-affirmation framework, we propose a novel theoretical perspective on how workplace mistreatment may affect individuals' interactions and initiatives outside the workplace. This extension is important because the existing explanations in the literature, such as displaced aggression (e.g., Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Lagios et al., 2025; Restubog et al., 2011) and spillover-crossover effects (e.g., Carlson et al., 2011; Lagios et al., 2024), fail to account for the prosocial consequences highlighted in our research. Our self-affirmation model of organizational dehumanization further allows us to conceptually integrate and explain extant findings from social psychology suggesting that dehumanization may sometimes have functional outcomes (Lammers & Stapel, 2011; Vaes & Muratore, 2013). Notably, when simultaneously considering organizational dehumanization, abusive supervision, and coworker incivility, we found that only organizational dehumanization was significantly related to self-worth threat. These results, which may be surprising considering that supervisors and coworkers are more proximal and tangible entities than the organization itself (Lavelle et al., 2007), reveal the unique nature of organizational dehumanization. Compared to abusive supervision and coworker incivility, it may be that organizational dehumanization poses a more serious threat to employees' self-worth because it more directly denies the essence of their humanity.

Our findings also contribute to the broader self-affirmation literature. By drawing on self-affirmation theory and explicitly operationalizing it in our research model, we followed the

Figure 4

Interactive Effect of Self-Affirmation of Social Relationships and Prosocial-Contingent Self-Worth on Family Task Performance— Study 6 (Phase 2)

Note. $N = 464$. Self-affirmation of social relationships and prosocial-contingent self-worth were reported by employees. Family task performance was reported by partners/spouses.

approach of Deng et al. (2023) and provided further evidence supporting their claim that self-affirmation theory is a useful theoretical framework for understanding employees' reactions to organization-related phenomena. We also extended their work by examining the consequences of self-affirmation beyond the workplace. These contributions are particularly important because, despite the extensive application of self-affirmation theory in social psychology across various contexts (e.g., communication, health, social relationships; see Cohen & Sherman, 2014, for an overview), its application in the organizational literature has been relatively limited (Deng et al., 2023; Mao et al., 2021). By exploring self-affirmation effects in a context that has been understudied thus far, we enhance the explanatory power and generalizability of the theory. Moreover, with our focus on the moderating role of prosocial-contingent self-worth, we add precision to self-affirmation theory. To date, most empirical work on self-affirmation has focused on identifying the conditions that influence the salience of the threat (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). This emphasis on the threat makes sense because it is the first step in the self-affirmation process. However, it does not permit us to consider whether the behavioral consequences of self-affirmation are the same for all employees. By showing that self-affirmation is particularly likely to result in prosocial behaviors for individuals whose self-worth is contingent on their ability to effectively help others, we identify one factor that can account for variation in its behavioral consequences, thereby increasing the potential accuracy of self-affirmation theory (Busse et al., 2017).

We reiterate that our research does not advocate for dehumanizing organizational practices, even though we showed that such practices may sometimes result in prosocial behaviors. We make no normative statement about the legitimacy and appropriateness of organizational dehumanization. Our aim is to provide a more complete test of its potential effects, whether good or ill.

Given the substantial empirical evidence showing that organizational dehumanization can have dysfunctional consequences for employees and their relational others (Baldissarri & Fourie, 2023; Lagios, Restubog, et al., 2023; Lagios et al., 2024), it is imprudent to speculate whether its potential benefits outweigh these costs.

Practical Implications

Our research offers practical implications for human resource professionals and managers in organizations. Although our results revealed that organizational dehumanization may not always be negative for others following a self-affirmation process, they also confirm its detrimental impact on employees' self-worth. Therefore, there are reasons why organizations should attempt to eliminate practices that may dehumanize employees. One way this can be achieved is by promoting organizational policies and procedures that emphasize human dignity and are aligned with principles of fairness, recognition, trust, and personal growth (e.g., Caesens et al., 2017). Prior work also highlighted the importance of providing employees with autonomy, such as through offering flexible working arrangements, fostering meaningful work experiences, and establishing and endorsing effective organizational rules (Lagios, Nguyen, et al., 2023). These measures serve as essential levers in diminishing perceptions of organizational dehumanization among employees.

Second, our findings offer insights for psychologists and counselors aiming to support employees who feel dehumanized by their organization. Understanding how individuals cope and demonstrate resilience in the face of organizational dehumanization is crucial. Interestingly, our results indicate that employees experiencing organizational dehumanization may benefit from opportunities to self-affirm in domains outside of work that hold significant importance for their self-worth. Therefore, psychologists assisting employees dealing with dehumanization should encourage them to engage in activities that can promote self-affirmation in different domains. These activities could include spending time with family or volunteering. It is essential to select activities aligned with the domains that are particularly meaningful for each individual's sense of self-worth.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

Our research presents several limitations that point to promising avenues for future studies. First, although we conceptualized organizational dehumanization as an adverse experience that threatens employees' self-worth, it is important to recognize that employees may not always perceive it as such. In certain industries, comparing employees to machines or robots may not necessarily be seen as demeaning and may be interpreted as a compliment that speaks of perseverance, skills, work ethic, and performance (Utych & Fowler, 2022). For example, in the financial industry, the term "machine" is often used to describe high-performing employees who excel at processing large amounts of data or completing tasks with speed and precision. In such contexts, organizational dehumanization may be less likely to be viewed as a self-worth threat, reducing the need for self-affirmation. Interindividual differences among employees may also influence the strength of the relationship between organizational dehumanization and self-worth threat. For instance, employees with low private self-consciousness, who are

less inclined to reflect on their sense of self (Scheier & Carver, 1985), may be less likely to perceive a threat to their self-worth, thereby reducing the need to self-affirm. We encourage future scholarship to explore the contextual and personal factors that shape employees' perceptions of and responses to the self-worth threat posed by organizational dehumanization.

Second, our empirical investigation solely focused on prosocial behaviors occurring outside the organization, consistent with the notion that individuals can respond to threats in one domain by affirming in other, unrelated domains (Sherman & Cohen, 2002, 2006; Steele, 1988). Yet, self-affirmation theory holds that individuals can also self-affirm in the same domain as the threat (Steele, 1988). Therefore, future research could investigate whether employees who are dehumanized by their organization may also engage in prosocial behaviors within the work domain, such as mentoring their coworkers or helping customers. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that "when given a choice, people tend to choose to affirm the self in a domain unrelated to the perceived threat" (Sherman & Cohen, 2006, p. 202) because doing so minimizes the salience of the self-worth threat (Aronson et al., 1995). Examining the conditions favoring self-affirmation in a related *versus* unrelated domain would further deepen our understanding of self-affirmation in organizations.

Third, although our study findings showed that the self-affirmation process triggered by organizational dehumanization can result in prosocial outcomes that extend beyond the workplace, it is important to consider the long-term impacts of prosocial behaviors for employees and those they interact with. Engaging in activities such as volunteering or increasing commitment to family tasks requires employees to draw upon their personal resources, such as time and effort, which may ultimately deplete them and leave them unable to effectively meet work and family demands in the long run. For instance, employees might find themselves lacking the necessary resources to assist with childcare or provide emotional support, potentially leading to frustration, irritation, and dissatisfaction among family members (Carlson et al., 2011; Lagios et al., 2024). From a resource-based perspective, self-affirmation could have long-term negative consequences for family well-being and functioning. Future research should explore both the self-affirmation and spillover-crossover (Lagios et al., 2024) processes triggered by organizational dehumanization to gain a more comprehensive understanding of differential effects.

Fourth, our samples of participants were rather homogeneous, representing employees from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic societies. As cultural differences influence self-affirmation (Sherman & Cohen, 2006), future research could replicate and extend our findings to non-Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic samples (Kawas & Ogolsky, 2023). Cultural variations in the standards for being a "good person" and the role of societal and familial support may influence employees' self-affirmation process (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). For example, in collectivistic cultures where there is a strong emphasis on family harmony and support (Triandis, 1995), it could be that engaging in family task performance may not necessarily restore individuals' self-worth because such behaviors are considered as normative and expected. Consequently, employees from collectivistic cultures may paradoxically be less inclined to perform family-supportive behaviors after engaging in self-affirmation. On the other hand, given that individuals in collectivistic cultures often define the self in relation to others (Triandis, 1995),

helping and supporting their family members could enhance their self-worth. Therefore, employees from collectivistic cultures may be more inclined to perform family-supportive behaviors after they engaged in self-affirmation.

Fifth, it is important to note that in Studies 2 and 3, we operationalized self-worth threat through negative feedback on emotional intelligence. The magnitude of the effect sizes suggests that self-worth threats affect self-affirmation in distinct ways. Specifically, informing participants that their emotional intelligence was below average elicited stronger affirmation of social relationships compared to core values. One interpretation of this pattern is that the nature of the self-worth threat shapes the specific aspects of the self that are affirmed. For instance, had the self-worth threat been focused on unethicality or immorality, we may have observed the opposite pattern, with participants affirming core values more strongly than social relationships.

Sixth, all our samples were recruited on Prolific. While online panels, and Prolific in particular, provide high-quality data that are often comparable to traditional samples (Aguinis et al., 2021; Peer et al., 2017; Porter et al., 2019), future research should examine whether our findings replicate in other samples. We do want to note, however, that we followed best practice recommendations to ensure data quality (e.g., surveying "high-reputation workers" [i.e., those with a minimum of 90% approval rate], including attention check questions throughout the surveys, administering short surveys; Aguinis et al., 2021; Porter et al., 2019).

Last, the conditional serial indirect effects that we observed were relatively small in magnitude. However, considering that our moderated serial mediation model was tested across four waves, with 1-month intervals, and utilized multisource data from both employees and their partner/spouse, small effect sizes are to be expected (A. B. Taylor et al., 2008). In addition, these smaller effects are consistent with prior empirical studies (e.g., Deng et al., 2023; Schneider & Weber, 2022) and meta-analyses (e.g., Epton et al., 2015; Sweeney & Moyer, 2015) showing that effect sizes in self-affirmation research tend to be small. That said, it would be interesting for future research to use alternative time frames to better understand the longevity and evolution of self-affirmation effects—in particular, the point at which the effects begin to decline.

Conclusion

Drawing upon self-affirmation theory, this research demonstrates that employees who experience dehumanization by their organization face a self-worth threat that compels them to self-affirm through prosocial behaviors in both family and societal domains. Specifically, in response to the self-worth threat posed by organizational dehumanization, employees reflect on (a) their core values, prompting them to engage in volunteering, and (b) their social relationships, motivating them to engage in family task performance. Notably, these effects are amplified among employees whose self-worth is contingent on their ability to help others well. These findings challenge the predominantly negative narrative surrounding organizational dehumanization, offering a more nuanced perspective that recognizes its potential to inspire positive outcomes for societal and familial stakeholders. By shedding light on this paradox, our research broadens the understanding of organizational dehumanization, underscoring its complex and multifaceted nature.

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