

BRIDGING THE SACRED GAP: THE INTERPLAY OF SOCIAL DISCONNECTION, DEHUMANIZATION, AND MEANING IN LIFE IN SHAPING RELIGIOUS PASSION

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Abstract

The study examines the relationships between meaning in life, dehumanization, social alienation and passion for religion among drug addicts, prisoners and students. A total of 354 individuals from various departments, prisons, and different drug rehabilitation centers participated in the study, comprising both male and female respondents. Using a purposive sampling technique, participants completed validated scales, including the Meaning in Life Scale, dehumanization scale, social alienation scale, and Passion Scale. The results show a **positive association** between meaning in life ($\beta = 0.278, p < 0.001$) and dehumanization ($\beta = 0.163, p < 0.05$), as well as passion for religion. In contrast, social alienation ($\beta = -0.159, p < 0.05$) negatively predicts this relationship. The correlation analysis also revealed a significant positive relationship between meaning in life, dehumanization, and social alienation. In contrast, passion for religion was positively associated with meaning in life ($r = .251, p < .001$), but showed no significant connection with social alienation. The results of the study highlight the multifaceted role of established meaning and dehumanizing propensities in shaping religious passion, while also suggesting that alienation may decrease such passion. The study suggests considering the psychological and social dynamic forces underlying religious obligation and proposes that future studies investigate the protective aspects, such as social assimilation and community integration, to alleviate the negative effects of alienation and dehumanization.

INTRODUCTION

The meaning in life is a vital component that enables people to sense happiness in their lives (Hu, Liu, & Wang, 2022). A study found that meaning in life is also associated with better physical health and longevity, as individuals who perceive their lives as purposeful are more likely to engage in healthier behaviors (Hill & Turiano, 2014). An experiment presented that individual happiness is linked to the meaning in one's life (Steger et al., 2007). The pursuit of meaning and the being of meaning are two aspects

of existential implication (Steger & Shin, 2010). Meaning in life reveals the sensation that one's being has important, drive, and unity (Heintzelman & King, 2014). Meaning therapy theory suggests that the primary motivation for human existence is to continually seek meaning and purpose in life (Frankl, 1963). In a study, it was found that meaning in life is related to both intense feelings of existential suffering and overall life satisfaction (Heintzelman & King, 2014). The secretiveness close to meaning in life

means that efforts to measure and describe it are likely to be met with displeasure, if not complete doubt (Heintzelman & King, 2013a).

Studies have shown that a pure sense of meaning can alleviate undesirable psychological consequences, such as feelings of alienation and addictive behaviors, in thought-provoking situations, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Hu, Liu, & Wang, 2022). Research has additionally reinforced this opinion, presenting that people with a clear understanding of meaningful tales experience advanced levels of life satisfaction and lower amounts of depression and anxiety (Steger, 2009). In Viktor Frankl's influential work emphasized the human ability to discover meaning even in the aspect of sorrow, suggesting that the sense of persistence is vital for mental flexibility (Frankl, 1985). In a study, it was examined that a meaningful life is linked to a pleasurable life, and has been represented as somehow improved, scarcer, and more ethically honest (Ward & King, 2016a). Furthermore, meaning in life serves as a barrier against stress and contributes to emotional resilience, enhancing people's ability to handle difficulties (Steger, 2009).

Dehumanization is the action of considering somebody as if they are less than human, or as if they lack mental abilities that people have. It can include rejecting someone's humanity or reducing them to the level of nonhuman creatures. Agreeing to a twin model of dehumanization, there are two methods of dehumanization that are reliable with two different procedures of humanness presence repudiated (Haslam, 2006). Dehumanization is usually argued in feminist literature on the depiction of women in pornography (LeMoncheck, 1985; MacKinnon, 1987).

One is an "animalistic" method of dehumanization in which people are deprived of abilities that are reflected to differentiate them from animals—abilities such as alteration, willpower, intellect, and wisdom. This type of dehumanization is frequently argued in the framework of civilization, rivalry, and related topics such as immigration and massacre (Kelman, 1976; Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990). Dehumanization can also range from transparent and plain to understated and comparatively warm (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Additionally, lately, though, a prolonged view of dehumanization has arisen. This

extended view reveals that dehumanization can occur in social as well as intergroup settings, and is not limited to situations of evident conflict (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). In a study, it was noted that dehumanizing performances can manifest as indirect contempt, arrogance, negligence, social isolation, and other interpersonal offenses, which are often only apparent in the appearances, movements, and tones of voice (Bastian & Haslam, 2011). In one study, it was presented that to escape dehumanizing approaches toward the disabled, we must feature sophisticated approaches to them, see them as separate people with unique potentials, observe them as appealing in mutual behavior, and provide them with a "social place" within a shared component (Bogdan & Taylor, 1989). In a study, the ethical extents of dehumanization in the setting of formal bulk violence were explored, focusing on the situations under which usual ethical limitations on violence are faded (Kelman, 1976). Educational theorists criticize the dehumanizing suggestions of homogeneous calculation and teaching (Courts & McNerney, 1993).

The word alienation, derived from the Latin noun *alienatio*, which originated from the Latin verb *alienare*, meaning 'to take away', 'remove', or cause a parting to occur, was first promoted in religious literature (Sarfraz, 1997; Banat, 2005). Alienation, overall, is a procedure in which the person places him/herself for the sake of a pious purpose for the masses (Schacht, 1980). Social alienation is a theory that leads to social helplessness, insignificance, normlessness, and loneliness (Albdwawi & Nashwan, 2024). Social alienation refers to the reduction of a person's coherence in their social, cultural, and natural environment, leading to enforced aloneness and a sense of fruitlessness (Kongar, 1979). In a study, it was stated that if polyglots shorten their plans to observe what researchers and philosophers inscribe in our time, then the word "alienation" will gain importance in relation to its occurrence (Rajab, 1986). It was proposed that the inevitable consequence of social alienation may be self-stigmatization and disgrace (Sas, 1992).

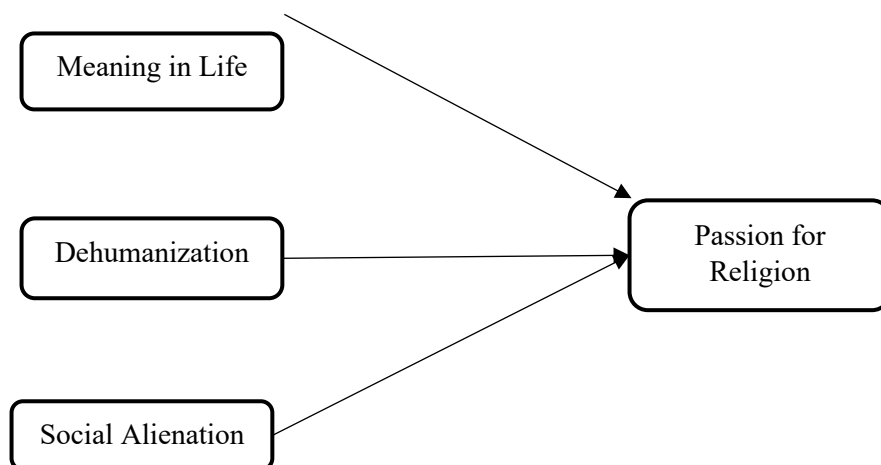
In one study, it was suggested that accepting radicalization and support for political violence is based on social alienation as a cause (Lobato et al., 2023). We established that individuals with a high

sense of meaning in life tend to be less socially alienated, which in turn leads to increased social participation. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are narrowly connected with loneliness, social separation and depressive signs (Mer & Jak, 2013; Hevlin et al., 2015). The person who senses that there are few chances for him/her to affect this procedure in the public is reflected as political alienation (Ahmad, 2022). Many people suffer from the illness and usually surface difficulties such as anxiety, depression, and somatic dysfunction, which leads them to become closed in social communication and makes it hard for them to form good relations with other people (Song & Yao, 2024; Dewar et al., 2021). There is no single explanation that can completely define the many reasons of religion because it is complex and multidimensional (Malone & Dadswell, 2018). In a study, it was determined that feelings of prejudice have been found to be dominant to both spiritual and radical extremism (Midlarsky, 2011; Van den Bos, 2018). In one study, it was noted that faith is a system of beliefs, views, and standards that binds an individual to the nature of the current and the creation, frequently involving a belief in one or more blissful or mystical beings (Elsayed et al., 2023). In one study, it was reported that in the United States,

approximately 96% of youths express trust in God (Princeton Religious Research Center, 1996), and 72% identify religion as the most significant factor or influence in their lives (Bergin & Jensen, 1990).

In studies, typical analyses display associations between psychological alterations and religion, highlighting the role of stress in shaping the form of religion through basic, usually single-item, processes of religion and examining it from a more mutual, unpredictable viewpoint (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). A recent study found that a passion for religion is often associated with a significant component of social alienation, including isolation from social gatherings and social surroundings. Another study established that religion can provide people with a sense of connection and purpose in life by offering answers to questions about the nature of existence, being, and the meaning of suffering (Davis et al., 2019). In studies of religion, several narratives recount the use of supplications, rites, and worship to connect with the divine or to express an individual's belief, and may also comprise a set of moral and ethical values that guide decision-making and behavior (Liyanapathirana & Akroyd, 2023).

Conceptual Model



Hypothesis

H1: Meaning in life, dehumanization and social alienation lead to the development of high passion for religion.

Method

Participants

We collected data from the population of this study, which was composed of different locations and different people, i.e, from prisoners, drug addicts and college students. A total of 354 people participated, with data collected from four different locations. The data were collected from individuals, with the following breakdown: prisoners, 33.1% (n=117); drug addicts, 13.8% (n=49); students, 24.9% (n=88); and online participants, 28.2% (n=100). Among all contributors, 79.7% (n = 282) were male and 20.3% (n = 72) were female. Based on education, 23.4% (n=83) were bachelor's students, 70.6% (n=250) had done FSc, 5.1% (n=18) had done Matric, and 0.8% (n=3) were master's students. Of the participants, 34.7% (n=123) were married and 65.3% (n=231) were unmarried. From the members, 105 people were prisoners, and only 2.5% (n=9) members stated that they have some type of mental disorder. The treatment of contributors, their confidentiality, and the completion of their permitted and informed consent were all focused on following ethical values. The purposive sampling method was used in the study to collect data.

Measurement Instruments

1. Meaning In Life

The Concept of Meaning in life was dignified with the 10-item meaning in life scale proposed by Steger et al. (2006). Every item required to be finished on a 7-point Likert-type scale, going from (1 = Not agree at all, 7 = Very strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha value was satisfactory.

2. Dehumanization

The Dehumanization was analyzed through the scale advanced by Viki et al. (2006). It was a 7-item dignified and projected to measure attitudes toward the dehumanization of others and the thought of violence. Each item must be finished from (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree), with high scores showing a stronger inclination to dehumanize and defend violent actions toward other people.

3. Social Alienation

Social alienation was measured using a 6-item scale proven by Bélanger et al. (2019). Every point was given to be completed on a 7-point Likert-style scale, fluctuating from (1=Not agree at all, 7=Very strongly agree). The value of Cronbach's alpha was satisfactory.

4. Passion for Religion

Passion for religion was measured with the 16-item passion scale established by Vallerand et al. (2003). It is used to measure two proportions: 8 items measure harmonious passion, and 8 items measure obsessive passion. Every item needed to be completed on a Likert scale with 1 (not at all agree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha value for harmonious passion was 0.84, and for obsessive passion, it was 0.79.

Procedure

In the first stage, it involved obtaining consent from the authorities of the relevant organization or institution. In the second step purposive sampling technique was used to approach students, prisoners and drug addicts. In the third step, individuals were provided with an extensive clarification, underlining the voluntary nature of their involvement and stating that no academic credit would be awarded as an incentive for contributing to the research survey. Questionnaires were distributed among members, which took about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Following the collection of data, all questionnaire answers were recorded, and the data were entered into data analysis software called SPSS for further analysis.

Analytic Approach

SPSS was used to comportment statistical studies. Descriptive statistics were intended based on the sample's features. Regression analyses were used to determine whether meaning in life, dehumanization, and social alienation significantly predicted passion for religion. For this study, the reliability of scales, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was satisfactory.

Ethical approval

Informed consent was obtained from the members, and they were informed about the purpose of this study. No such committee exists in our institute;

therefore, all ethical dealings were brought to attention throughout the entire procedure.

Result Study

Table 1. Regression Analysis between Meaning in Life, Dehumanization, Social Alienation and Passion for Religion.

Variables	<i>B</i>	95%CI LB UB	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
					.097	.097***
Constant	52.88	[41.39 64.37]	5.82			
Meaning in Life	.684***	[.314 1.05]	.187	.278***		
Dehumanization	.303*	[.032 .574]	.137	.163*		
Social Alienation	-.413*	[-.817 -.009]	.205	-.159*		

Note. CI = Confidence Interval

****p*<.001.

Table 1 shows the impact of meaning in life, dehumanization and social alienation on prisoners, drug addicts and students' passion for religion. The *R*² value of (.97) revealed meaning in life reveals a 9% variance in passion for religion level of drug addicts, prisoners and students with *F*=6.73, *p*<.001. The findings revealed Meaning in life (β = .278, *p*<.001), dehumanization (β = .163, *p*<.05) positively predicted while social alienation (β = -.159, *p*<.05) negatively predicted passion for religion.

Table 3 - Evaluation Table of Correlation among Variables of the study model (N=354)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Meaning in Life	25.08	5.29	-	-	-	-	-
Dehumanization	29.79	7.00	.243**	-	-	-	-
Social Alienation	26.34	4.97	.413**	.345**	-	-	-
Passion for Religion	68.23	12.95	.251**	.174*	.012	-	-

p<.001 *. Correlation is significant at level of 0.01 (2-tailed).

The table 2 showed that a correlation analysis was run to examine the association between meaning in life, dehumanization, social alienation and passion for religion between the samples of 354 individuals. Meaning in life showed a little but significant positive

correlation with dehumanization (*r* = .243, *p*<.001), which means that people who meaning in life likely to show slight level of dehumanization, also meaning in life showed positively significant correlation with social alienation (*r* = .413, *p*<.001), and meaning in

life also showed positive correlation with passion for religion ($r = .251, p < .001$) indicating that people with stronger religious passion will have a greater sense of meaning in life. Dehumanization showed a positive and significant correlation with social alienation ($r = .345, p < .001$) and a little but positive association with passion for religion ($r = .174, p < .01$). Although passion for religion and social alienation showed a non-significant relation among them ($r = .012, p < .05$).

General Discussion

The findings of this study provide us with some clear insights, as well as some surprising ones. First, we observed that a sense of meaning in life has a strong and positive impact on passion for religion. This is not shocking because many people go to religion when they want to understand why life matters and what the purpose of living is. Religion often provides comfort and hope during difficult times. So, when someone feels their life already has meaning, it is easier for them to be more passionate about their religion. It also shows that people who think deeply about their existence may find religion to be a primary source of guidance.

The study found that higher dehumanization is also linked with higher passion for religion. At first, this may seem strange, because we normally think that religion teaches respect and love for all humans. However, in some cases, religion can also be connected with perceiving a difference between “us” and “them”. For example, strong religious groups sometimes create a boundary, making members feel a higher sense of belonging to the group and less empathy for outsiders. This may explain why some people who dehumanize others still show strong passion for their religion, because religion for them is more about group loyalty and less about universal humanity. This is an important point because it shows that religion can have two sides: it can give meaning, but it can also sometimes create separation.

It was found that social alienation has a negative effect on passion for religion. People who feel cut off, lonely, or disconnected from society tend to be less passionate about religion. This may be because religion is not only about belief in God but also about community, rituals, prayers together, festivals, and social bonds. If a person is already alienated, they may

not participate in these activities, which can weaken their connection with religion. This finding is important, especially for prisoners and drug addicts who often suffer from alienation. It shows that without strong social support, their religious passion may not grow.

Our study had mixed groups: prisoners, drug addicts, students, and online participants. Each group brings different experiences. Prisoners might turn to religion more strongly because they look for forgiveness or hope. Drug addicts may use religion as a way to recover, but alienation can block them. Students may be in a stage of searching for meaning, so religion becomes an integral part of their identity-building process. Because of this mix, our findings cannot be applied universally to every group in society, but they provide the first step in understanding how these variables connect.

Our study explained a variance which was not very high, only about 9 percent. This means other factors also play a role in passion for religion, which we did not include, such as family upbringing, culture, personal trauma, or mental health. Our model is useful, but not comprehensive. Still, the three main predictors provide a good starting point for future work.

Conclusion

This research finds that meaning in life and dehumanization increase passion for religion, while social alienation decreases it. So, people with a strong purpose and those with a harsh view of others can still turn to religion for strength. But if someone is very socially isolated, their passion for religion can become weaker. The findings show that religion can be a strong source of meaning and direction, but also depends on social connections. For practice, this means that giving people a chance to feel included and respected in the community can help them grow in positive religious passion. This study is limited because we only use a purposive sample and different groups, such as prisoners and addicts. The design is cross-sectional, so we cannot say cause and effect with full certainty. In the future, more research with a larger and random sample is needed to better understand how social alienation and meaning in life play a role in religion.

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