Path from Deviant Association, Passion for Religion and Dehumanization towards Self Sacrifice

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the predictive role of deviant association, passion for religion, and dehumanization in relation to self-sacrificial behavior. A total of 354 participants completed a set of validated self-report measures, including the Deviant Behavior Variety Scale (DBVS), Passion Scale, Self-Dehumanization Scale (SDS), and Self-Sacrifice Scale. The results shows that the overall regression model was significant and explained 20.5% of the variance in self-sacrifice (R² = .205, p < .001). Deviant association (B = .21, p < .01), passion for religion (B= .25, p < .001), and dehumanization (B = .17, p < .05) each emerged as significant positive predictors of self-sacrificial behavior. While correlational analysis revealed a non-significant relationship between deviant association and self-sacrifice (r = .118, p > .05), regression analysis shows a significant predictive role, which suggest that the influence of peer exposure may operate in more complex ways. Passion for religion and dehumanization also showed significant positive correlations with self-sacrifice, which support theoretical models such as the Dualistic Model of Passion and Radicalization Theory. The findings contribute to a growing body of literature on the psychological mechanisms underlying extreme prosocial behavior and highlight the importance of cognitive and social factors in predicting self-sacrifice.

Keywords: Deviant Association; Passion for Religion; Dehumanization; Self Sacrifice

Introduction

Human beings *don't* only want comfort, safety, short working-hours, hygiene, birth-control and, in general, common sense; they also, at least intermittently, want struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags and loyalty-parades. George Orwell in a review of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (Orwell, 2017 [1940]).

Self-sacrifice, which is a psychological and behavioral construct, refers to the voluntary act of giving up one's own comfort, needs or even life for the benefit of others, a group, or a cause (Whitehouse, 2018). In social contexts, a noble and altruistic act is often seen as a self-sacrifice, which is important for maintaining interpersonal bonds and social cohesion (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004). This same behaviour can take on more tragic developments in extremist contexts, such as suicide bombings, martyrdom operations and radical protest movements, where the act of self-sacrifice defies the natural instinct of self-preservation and serves ideological, political, or religious agendas (Borum, 2011; Horgan, 2005). Understanding the psychological foundations of such extreme behaviour is critical in contemporary times, especially in societies facing ideological polarization, collective grievances, and identity-based conflicts.

The present study investigates the extent to which three psychological factors such as deviant association, passion for religion, and dehumanization influence an individual's natural tendency for self-sacrificial behavior. Deviant association refers to the influence of peer groups or social circles that normalize or promote antisocial, non-normative, or extremist behaviors. According to Sutherland's (1947) Differential Association Theory, individuals acquire behaviors, values, and motivations from their closest associations. Exposure to deviant peer groups can not only desensitize individuals to violence but also frame self-sacrifice as an admirable or necessary act for collective benefit (Warr, 2002).

Passion for religion is conceptualized through Vallerand et al.'s (2003) dualistic model of passion harmonious and obsessive. Harmonious passion is characterized by a balanced and flexible integration of religious faith into one's identity allowing for critical thought and adaptive functioning. According to Vallerand et al. (2003), passion can be defined as "a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy" (p. 757). Thus, for an activity to represent a passion for people, it has to be significant in their lives, something that they like, Obsessive passion refers to compulsive internalization of religious values, which leads to rigid thinking, heightened emotional investment, and vulnerability to radical narratives (Vallerand et al., 2003; Mageau et al., 2005). Obsessive passion can lead individuals to experience identity fusion a visceral sense of oneness with a group or cause increasing their willingness to engage in extreme acts, including self-sacrifice, particularly when such acts are portrayed as spiritually redemptive or morally obligatory (Swann et al., 2009).

Dehumanization is defined as the denial of the qualities deemed essential to being human (e.g., what separates us from animals and machines) and has both historical and current relevance (Haslam, Citation2006). Historically, animalistic dehumanization has been used as means of moral justification to oppress, discriminate, exclude, or marginalize certain individuals or groups, predominately through language and imagery which associates the dehumanized group with characteristics typically attributed to animals such as savagery, irrationality, or lack of civility that directly contrasts human uniqueness (Bandura et al., Citation1975; Haslam, Citation2006). Relatedly, mechanistic dehumanization may derive from portraying the subject of marginalization as lacking autonomy, better characterized in terms of efficiency, predictability, and functionality over their emotional, social, and unique individual qualities, and, therefore, sharing likeness to machines/objects (Haslam, Citation2006).

In the context of intergroup conflict or radical ideology, dehumanization reduces empathy and moral restraint, creating a psychological climate in which harming or sacrificing oneself for the sake of in-group superiority becomes justified (Bandura, 1999). Research shows that dehumanization is the prominent feature in propaganda, hate speech, and extremist ideology, often used to depict out-groups as subhuman threats that must be eliminated (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) provides insight into how individuals derive a sense of identity from their group memberships. When this identification becomes extreme, particularly in situations of perceived threat or injustice, individuals may experience identity fusion—a psychological merging of the self with the group—which increases the likelihood of self-sacrifice for the group's welfare (Swann et al., 2009).

Each of these variables in the context of aggression, extremism and ideological commitment has been independently studied while few studies have examined their combined influence on self-sacrificial behaviour. Regardless of the individual significance of deviant association, passion for religion, and dehumanization in predicting extreme behaviors, there is a noticeable scarcity of empirical studies that examine their combined influence on self-sacrificial behaviour. Most earlier existing research tends to explore these constructs in isolation and in relation to broader themes like radicalization and violent extremism. The direct psychological pathway from these factors toward self-sacrifice remains underexplored. This gap highlights the need for an integrated approach to understanding how these variables interact to encourage a willingness to sacrifice one's own life or well-being for ideological and social causes. Therefore, the present study hypothesizes that deviant association, passion for religion, and dehumanization collectively and significantly predict self-sacrificial behavior.

Study Conceptual Model
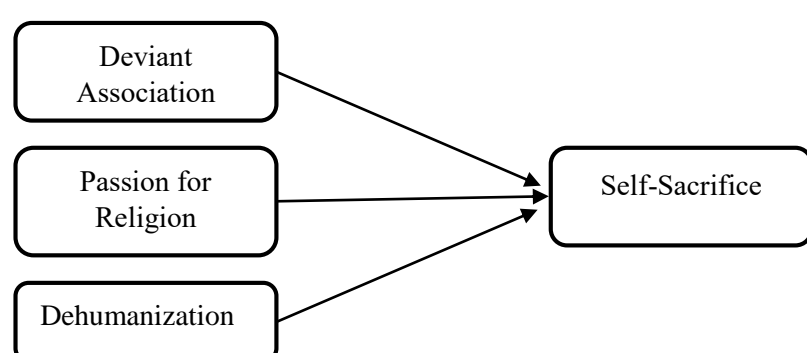
Hypotheses

H1: Deviant association, passion for religion and dehumanization lead to self-sacrifice.

Method

Participants

The population of this study where we collected data from different location and different people i-e form prisoners, drug addicts and college students. Total 354 individual were involved in participation; data was collected from four different place. The data collected from people out of which prisoners were 33.1% (n=117), drug addicts were 13.8% (n=49), students were 24.9% (n=88) and online participants were 28.2% (n=100). Out of all the participants 79.7% (n=282) were males and 20.3% (n=72) were females. Based on education 23.4% (n=83) were bachelors students, 70.6% (n=250) have done FSc, 5.1% (n=18) have done Matric, 0.8% (n=3) were masters students. Of the participants 34.7% (n=123) were married and 65.3% (n=231) were unmarried. From the participants 105 individuals were prisoners and only 2.5% (n=9) participants mentioned that they some type of mental illness. The treatment of participants, their anonymity, the acquisition of their free and informed consent, and the maintenance of complete confidentiality were all conducted following ethical principles. The purposive sampling method was used in the study and collected data.

Measurement Instruments

Deviant Association

Deviant Behavior Variety Scale (DBVS; Sanches et al., 2016) is a self-report scale. It consists of 19 items answered using a dichotomous scale (yes/no) about whether the participants performed any of the 19 deviant behaviors during the previous year (12-month DBV). The Cronbach alpha value for Deviant Behavior Variety Scale is .86.

Passion for religion

For measuring passion for religion, we used a 16 items passion scale developed by (Vallerand et al., 2003). It used to assess two dimensions, with 8 item measuring harmonious passion and 8 items measures obsessive passion. The passion scale scored on a Likert format with 1 (not agree at all) to 7 (very strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha value for harmonious passion .84 and for obsessive passion it was .79.

Self-Dehumanization Scale (SDS)

The initial SDS included 25 items to assess self-dehumanization. These items asked respondents to answer on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (See Online Supplemental Materials for the initial item pool).

Self-Sacrifice

Self-sacrifice was measured with the 10-item Self-Sacrifice Scale proposed by (Bélanger et al, 2014). A sample item is "I would be ready to give my life for a cause that is extremely dear to me" and was given to be completed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not agree at all) to 7 (very strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha value was .79.

Procedure

In initial stage was taking permission from the authorities of the concern organization\institution. Purposive sampling technique was used to approach students, prisoners and drug addicts in the second step. In the third step, individuals were provided with a comprehensive explanation, emphasizing the voluntary role of their participation and clarifying that no academic credit would be granted as an incentive for participating in the research survey. Questionnaires were distributed among participants, with which spending approximately 15 to 20 minutes on completion. Following the conclusion of data collection, all questionnaire responses were concluded, and the data were inputted into data management software, namely SPSS and AMOS, and subsequently subjected to analyzation.

Analytic Approach

SPSS and AMOS were used to conduct statistical studies. Descriptive statistics were computed based on the sample's characteristics. Regression analyses were used to determine whether the moral disengagement and suicidal ideation significantly predicted attitudes towards peace and war. For this study, the reliability of scales according to Cronbach's alpha was satisfactory.

Ethical approval

Informed consent was taken from the participants, and explained the participants about the purpose of the current research. No such committee exists in our institute; therefore, all the ethical procedures were taken into examination during the entire process.

Result Study

Table 1 Regression Analysis between Deviant Association, Passion for Religion, Dehumanization and Self-Sacrifice.

Variables	B	95%CI		SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		LB	UB				
						.205	.205***
Constant	11.49	[2.78	20.20]	4.41			
Deviant Association	.213**	[.08	.345]	.067	.247**		
Passion for Religion	.255***	[.162	.349]	.047	.412***		
Dehumanization	.171*	[.009	.334]	.082	.149*		

Note. CI = Confidence Interval

***P<.001.

The table 1 shows that the overall model is significant and explained 20.5 % of the variance in self- sacrifice (R² = .205, ΔR² = .205, p < .001). Deviant association was found to be a significant positive predictor of self-sacrifice (B = .213, SE = .067, β = .247, 95% CI [.08, .345], p < .01), shows that individuals with higher levels of deviant associations were more likely to engage in self-sacrificial behavior. Passion for religion also significantly predicted self-sacrifice (B = .255, SE = .047, β = .412, 95% CI [.162, .349], p < .001), Shows that greater religious passion is strongly associated with increased self-sacrifice. Dehumanization also a significant predictor (B = .171, SE = .082, β = .149, 95% CI [.009, .334], p < .05), Shows that individuals who dehumanize others are also more likely to exhibit self-sacrificial tendencies.

Table 2 - *Evaluation Table of Correlation among Variables of the study model (N=354)*

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Deviant Association	33.11	9.46	-	-	-	-	-
Passion for Religion	68.23	12.95	-.435**	-	-	-	-
Dehumanization	29.79	7.00	.280**	.174*	-	-	-
Self-Sacrifice	41.11	8.02	.118	.330**	.287**	-	-

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

The correlation table shows that there is a negative correlation between deviant association and passion for religion (r = –.435, p < .001) which means that individuals with deviant peer influence are less likely to be religious. Deviant association is significantly associated with dehumanization (r = .280, p < .001). Deviant association has a non-significant relationship with self-sacrifice (r = .118), which means that it has no influence on self-sacrifice. Passion for religion has a moderate correlation with dehumanization (r = .174, p< 0.05), and passion for religion also has a moderate correlation with self-sacrifice (r = .330, p < 0.01). The dehumanization also shows a moderate correlation (r = .287, p < .001) with self-sacrifice.

General Discussion

The present study examines whether deviant association, passion for religion, and dehumanization predict self-sacrificial behavior. Our results provided overall support for the hypothesis as all three variables are significantly predictor of self-sacrifice in the

regression analysis, which explains 20.5% of the variance in self-sacrificial behavior.

Firstly, deviant association was found to be a significant predictor of self-sacrifice (B = .213, p < .01), which means that individuals who has more interaction and connection with deviant peer groups are more likely to engage in self-sacrificial behavior. This means that exposure to radicalized networks and deviant peer influences may create social pressure that encourages individuals' extreme acts. While there were no significant association between deviant association and self-sacrifice (r = .118), its significance emerged in the regression model which shows its predictive strength when other variables are controlled. Our results provides a new contribution to the literature as previous research particularly within Western contexts has focused heavily on peer influence in relation to general aggression or criminal behavior but not specifically self-sacrifice. The present study thus fills a research gap by explaining that deviant association can indeed foster self-sacrificial tendencies especially within different cultural or ideological contexts.

Passion for religion was found to be a significant predictor of self-sacrifice (B = .255, p < .001), and it shows a moderate and significant correlation between passion for religion and self-sacrifice (r = .330, p < .01). The finding confirms that individuals with strong religious passion are more likely to commit to extreme acts as self-sacrifice which possibly due to internalized moral obligations and internalized motivations. Our study did not differentiate between harmonious and obsessive passion, the findings are consistent with the Dualistic Model of Passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) where obsessive passion is more likely to lead to potentially harmful behaviors and rigid thinking. Our findings are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Fredman et al., 2017) that emphasis how strong religious passion can lead to identity fusion and willingness to sacrifice oneself for a cause.

Dehumanization also significantly predicted self-sacrifice (B = .171, p < .05), and have moderate positive correlation between dehumanization and self-sacrifice (r = .287, p < .001). Our results align with and confirms theoretical expectations from Radicalization Theory (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which suggest that viewing others as less human enables moral disengagement. Dehumanization may reduce empathy and it allows individuals to justify and defend their extremist acts, such as self-sacrifice, especially when such acts are framed as religiously justified.

Deviant association was significantly associated with dehumanization (r = .280, p < .001), which means that deviant peer groups may encourage dehumanizing beliefs which could in turn encourage self-sacrificial behavior indirectly. This points toward a possible mediated pathway, where deviant association leads to dehumanization which then contributes to self-sacrifice—an avenue future studies could explore.

In comparison with previous literature, our study offers unique insights. Earlier research has not directly examined these three variables together in predicting self-sacrifice. Especially the predictive role of deviant association on self-sacrifice has been largely overlooked and where explored results have been mixed or non-significant. The current findings, therefore, differ and may reflect the influence of cultural context, religious values, and collectivist social norms that shape how deviant peer influence operates. In this sample, it appears that deviant associations may act more through other psychological mechanisms such as dehumanization. The findings on passion for religion and dehumanization are consistent with earlier empirical research (e.g., Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009; Haslam, 2006). The non-significance of deviant association contrasts with studies from Western radicalization contexts where peer influence plays a central role (Christmann, 2012). This difference could be attributed to contextual factors, such as collectivist cultural norms,

varying definitions of deviance, or religious moderation in the study's population, which may reduce the direct impact of deviant peer exposure.

Theoretically, the study reinforces the importance of cognitive and emotional mechanisms—such as passion and dehumanization over purely social mechanisms like peer influence when it comes to self-sacrificial behavior. The findings imply that internalized belief systems and moral disengagement processes may play a more crucial role than external associations alone. This contributes to refining radicalization models, suggesting a greater need to assess individual psychological frameworks rather than focusing solely on social networks. In conclusion while deviant association did not significantly predict self-sacrifice, religious passion and dehumanization emerged as significant psychological predictors. These findings have important implications for preventive interventions, education, and policy, emphasizing the need to promote balanced religious engagement and empathy-based education to counteract extreme self-sacrificial ideologies. Future research should further explore the mediating or moderating roles of these variables and distinguish between obsessive and harmonious forms of religious passion to better understand their unique effects.

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