

SHADOWS OF HUMANITY: INTERPLAY OF SENSATION SEEKING, DEVIANT ASSOCIATIONS, AND ALIENATION IN PREDICTING DEHUMANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Dehumanization is the tendency to regard others as lacking the attributes of a full human, shaping how we treat people. This research examined whether sensation seeking, deviant association, and social alienation predict dehumanization. A data set of 354 individuals (prisoners, drug rehabilitation, college, and online) was obtained after they completed measures of sensation seeking, deviant association, social alienation, and dehumanization. We analyzed the data using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression. Sensation seeking ($r = .238$, $p < .01$), deviant association ($r = .280$, $p < .01$), and social alienation ($r = .345$, $p < .01$) were all significantly and positively correlated with dehumanization. Sensation seeking ($p < .001$, $\beta = .254$), deviant association ($p < .001$, $\beta = .255$), and social alienation ($p < .01$, $\beta = .200$) were all found to be significant. The results indicate that dehumanization is associated with individual dispositions as well as social experiences, specifically, with need for stimulation, association with deviant peers, and sense of social disconnection, and suggest that it is beneficial to adopt a psychological and social perspective on dehumanization.

I. INTRODUCTION

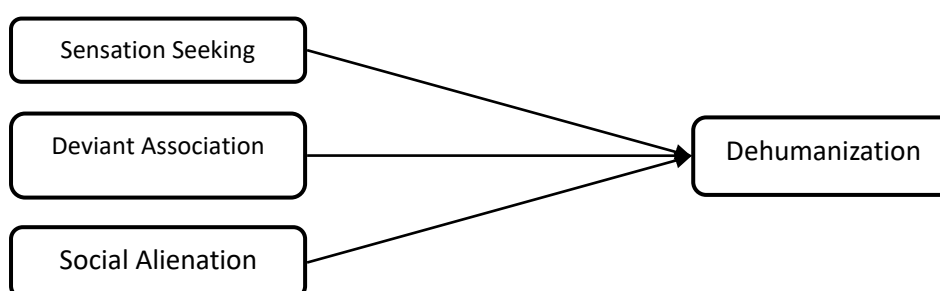
Dehumanization refers to the tendency to perceive other people as lacking qualities normally associated with being fully human. It is often discussed in relation to extreme situations such as intergroup conflict, violence, and discrimination, but research suggests it also occurs in everyday social relationships. In subtler forms, people may distance themselves from others, view them as less worthy of consideration, or become less responsive to their thoughts and feelings. Dehumanization is hence both a societal issue and a psychological mechanism that influences individuals' perceptions and reactions toward others (Haslam, 2006). Recent research links dehumanization to social alienation and exclusion, suggesting that the nature of an individual's social connections shapes perceptions of others (Haslam, 2022). Social estrangement is one element that could lead to these detrimental views. Alienation includes a sense of isolation from others in the social world and can involve the feeling of powerlessness, lack of meaning, absence of norms, and social seclusion (Seeman, 1959). When people lack attachment to others and a sense of belonging, they may lose their social identity. In line with this association, studies on social exclusion support the link: Experiences of rejection and isolation have been shown to affect conceptions of humanity, driving out those who are excluded so that they sometimes think of themselves and others as anything but human. (Bastian & Haslam, 2010). Alienation might help explain why some people develop

the ability to dissociate emotionally from others. Some personality and behavioral differences can also play a role. Sensation seeking involves behaviors that seek out intense sensations, such as a need for novelty, thrill, and profound experiences; these have been correlated with risk-taking and a number of potentially harmful behaviors (Zuckerman, 1994).

People susceptible to higher levels of stress tend to engage in unusual or risky behaviors in social encounters. This doesn't mean that sensation seeking is bad, per se, but that its not beneficial impact is probably contingent upon the wider social contexts and interpersonal connections in which it transpires. Sensation seeking has been shown to relate to social behaviors and was compared with a regression model that included only demographic factors. The association with deviant peers was also tested as a predictor of problematic behaviors, compared with a regression model that included only demographic variables. The effect on behavior (Dishion et al., 2015): the social element of deviant association is relevant and refers to interactions with peers or networks that condone rule-breaking and anti-social behavior. Social contexts influence perspectives and behavior that are set by models of acceptable behavior, and associations with deviant peers have been found to be significant factors correlated with various adverse consequences – especially in combination with personal characteristics such as sensation seeking (Li et al., 2017). People who want to try their luck at exciting experiences while keeping their heads held high may then face social norms that differ from those they are accustomed to. Negative or unfavorable views of others become more acceptable. Sensation seeking, deviant affiliation, and social estrangement are indicators of independent but perhaps interrelated pathways through which people might become psychologically disconnected from others.

Prior studies have investigated these elements concerning delinquency and aggressiveness, and despite their combined connotations of dehumanization, they are often put together under the heading of 'social exclusion,' which is relatively overlooked. This is a discrepancy because when individuals are dehumanized, they lose empathy and a sense of humanity, which is an important factor. Social bonds, and thereby those that are severe and harmful, are rationalized. This idea is reinforced in modern appraisals, which recognize the importance of taking into account individual differences and variations; situational elements have a role in dehumanizing beliefs, and advocate for investigations that discuss dehumanization in a broader psychological and social context (Karantzias & Simpson, 2026).

Figure I: Conceptual Model



Hypotheses

- H1: Sensation seeking, deviant association and alienation will higher the dehumanizing behavior.
- H2: There will be a significant correlation between the study variables.

II. METHOD

Participants

This research involved 354 individuals nominated by purposive selection from four distinct environments: correctional facilities, drug rehab centers, educational institutions, and digital platforms. The group consisted of 33.1% imprisoned individuals (n = 117), 13.8% substance abusers (n = 49), 24.9% university students (n = 88), and 28.2% virtual respondents (n = 100). Most of the respondents were male (79.7%, n = 282) with females comprising

the remaining 20.3% (n = 72). Regarding educational attainment, 70.6% (n = 250) completed FSc while 23.4% (n = 83) were pursuing their bachelor's degree, 5.1% (n = 18) completed their matriculation and 0.8% (n = 3) had master's. In terms of marital status, 34.7% (n = 123) were married, while 65.3% (n = 231) stayed single. Only 9 people in the entire sample (2.5%) reported having a mental disorder, out of the 105 persons classified as prisoners. Throughout the research, ethical considerations were fully respected: participants were respected, their identity was well protected, informed consent was willingly gained and confidentiality was fully maintained in all data collection and analysis.

Measures

[I] Sensation seeking was computed through a 6-item sensation seeking scale developed by Zuckerman et al. (1964). The SSS scored on a Likert format with (1=not agree at all) to (7=very strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha was .58. [II] Deviant association was measured by 8 item scale developed by (Moyano, 2011) deviant associations scale. To test people association with deviant peers. Sample was “My friends talk about fights and violence all the time. The scale scored on these items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1=Not agree at all) to (5=strongly agree). The value of Cronbach alpha was .78. [III] Social alienation was measured with a 6-item scale validated by (Bélanger et al., 2019). Participants responded on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from (1=strongly disagree) to (7=strongly agree). The value of Cronbach's alpha was satisfactory. [IV] Dehumanization was measured through the scale developed by Viki et al. (2006). It was a 7-item scale and was intended to assess attitudes toward the dehumanization of others and the reasoning for violence. Each item must be completed from (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores showing a stronger leaning to dehumanize and justify violent actions toward others.

Procedure

In the initial stage, permission was obtained from the authorities of the concerned organization/institution. Purposive sampling technique was used to approach students, prisoners, and drug addicts in the second step. In the third step, researchers provided a comprehensive explanation, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation and clarifying that no academic credit would be granted as an incentive for participating in the research survey. Questionnaires were distributed to participants and took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Following the conclusion of data collection, all questionnaire responses were concluded, and the data were inputted into data management software, namely SPSS and subsequently subjected to analyzation. SPSS was used to conduct statistical studies. Descriptive statistics were computed based on the sample's characteristics. Regression analyses were used to determine whether sensation seeking, deviant association, and social alienation significantly predicted dehumanization. Correlational analyses were used to examine relationships among the study variables. For this study, scale reliability, based on Cronbach's alpha, was satisfactory. We obtained informed consent from participants and explained the purpose of the research. No such committee exists in our institute; therefore, all the ethical procedures were taken into examination during the entire process.

III.RESULTS

Table I: Regression Analysis between Sensation Seeking, Deviant Association, Social Alienation and Dehumanization

Variables	B	95% CI		SE B	β	R ²	ΔR ²
		LL	UL				
(Constant)	8.86	[2.78	14.94]	3.08		.201	.201***
Sensation Seeking	.342***	[.158	.526]	.093	.254***		
Deviant Association	.188***	[.081	.296]	.055	.255***		
Social Alienation	.281**	[.077	.485]	.103	.200**		

Note. CI = Confidence Interval

***P<.001.

A multiple regression analysis examined whether sensation seeking, deviant association, and social alienation significantly predicted dehumanization. The overall regression model explained approximately 20.1% of the

variance in dehumanization ($R^2 = .201$, $\Delta R^2 = .201$), suggesting that the three predictors collectively accounted for a meaningful proportion of individual differences in dehumanizing attitudes. Sensation seeking emerged as a significant positive predictor of dehumanization, $B = .342$, $SE = .093$, $\beta = .254$, 95% CI [.158, .526], $p < .001$. This indicates that individuals with higher levels of sensation seeking tended to report higher levels of dehumanization. Deviant association was also a significant positive predictor, $B = .188$, $SE = .055$, $\beta = .255$, $p < .001$. Similarly, social alienation significantly and positively predicted dehumanization, $B = .281$, $SE = .103$, $\beta = .200$, $p < .01$. Overall, the findings indicate that all three variables contributed significantly to explaining differences in dehumanization.

Table II: Pearson Correlation among Variables of the Study Model (N=354)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Sensation Seeking	21.26	5.18	-			
2. Deviant Association	33.14	9.46	-.206**	-		
3. Social Alienation	26.34	4.97	.182*	.390**	-	
4. Dehumanization	29.79	7.00	.238**	.280**	.345**	-

** $p < .01$

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships among sensation seeking, deviant association, social alienation, and dehumanization. The results showed a significant positive relationship between sensation seeking and dehumanization, $r = .238$, $p < .01$. Deviant association was also positively related to dehumanization, $r = .280$, $p < .01$. The strongest association with dehumanization was observed for social alienation, $r = .345$, $p < .01$. These findings suggest that participants who reported greater sensation seeking, stronger associations with deviant others, and greater feelings of social alienation also tended to report higher levels of dehumanization. In addition, sensation seeking was negatively associated with deviant association ($r = -.206$, $p < .01$), whereas sensation seeking was positively associated with social alienation ($r = .182$, $p < .05$). Deviant association showed a relatively strong positive association with social alienation ($r = .390$, $p < .01$).

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether sensation seeking, deviant association, and social alienation predict dehumanization. The findings support the proposed model: all three variables were positively related to dehumanization, and each contributed significantly to its prediction. Together, they accounted for 20.1% of the variance in dehumanization, suggesting that these psychological and social experiences offer a meaningful — though partial — explanation for individual differences in how people perceive the humanity of others. There was a positive correlation between sensation seeking and dehumanization; people who were more sensation hungry were more likely to be more dehumanized. Those who were more sensation seeking also demonstrated higher levels of dehumanization. This correlation was significant and remained significant when the other two predictors were considered. One possible explanation is that more adventurous, thrill-seeking individuals are more likely to enjoy it. Tending to go beyond the boundaries of society. Sensation seeking itself is not bad, still, if it overlaps with unfavorable social encounters or environments, it could be related to a focus on unusual interpersonal factors (Zuckerman, 1994).

Dehumanization, here, might help to breach some of the lines. The deviant connection had a similar pattern and was significantly correlated with dehumanization. Accidents and the variables were significantly positively correlated, except for age which was also a significant predictor in the regression analysis. This reflects the importance of social context on people's attitudes towards others. Attitudes are not formed in isolation; they are created by friends, peers, and broader social networks that shape what an individual sees as normal, acceptable, or justified. Attitudes may become abnormal when exposed to people that have deviant or antisocial behaviors for a long period of time that do not adhere to social norms or rights of others more common, conforming to social learning theories that focus on the acquisition of behavior and attitudes from Observation, interaction, and reinforcement. The results about social estrangement were particularly notable. Of the three variables, was found to have the strongest link with dehumanization and was also strongly related to the other three factors. It was predicted in the regression analysis. Feeling out of place or out of touch with others in society seems intricately

linked to individuals' perceptions of others. Alienation includes a sense of difference, isolation, or lack of integration, and ongoing experiences of rejection, isolation, or exclusion; it gradually reduces empathy for others and makes them seem distant or personally uninvolved. It corresponds to earlier studies that have linked social exclusion to ideas of humanity – in particular, Bastian and Haslam (2010) found that social exclusion could result in dehumanization, which can affect people's self-perceptions and their perceptions of others. The current findings are further characterized by results that show dehumanization even when controlling for sensation seeking and deviant associations, rather than merely at the correlational level.

The relationships between the predictors are also important. There was a significant correlation: those who were more deviant were more socially alienated. The more alienated the individual is, the bigger their deviant peer groups. One possible reason is that people who feel marginalized by because traditional social circles can seek affiliation in alternative settings, and alternative social circles may afford them the feeling of having a home, they may feel more open to connections made by one another. In general, they would be regarded as socially inappropriate. Meanwhile, alienation and deviant affiliations might mutually reinforce each other, although the cross-sectional approach used here would differ. Is not able to find a cause-and-effect relationship. Sensation seeking had a little negative correlation with deviant association. There was a small positive correlation with social alienation and a weak negative correlation with social rejection. This means that the three predictors do not correspond to three different aspects of one underlying experience separate dimensions: sensation seeking as an individual propensity for stimulation, social antisocial as a way of being in conformable to the social environment, and deviant Association as social networks, in which one is linked. Collectively, these results endorse the perspective that dehumanization arises from a synthesis of personal traits and social encounters. An individual who feels disconnected from society, pursues extreme experiences, or engages in unconventional social interactions may be more likely to develop attitudes that foster psychological detachment from others. Nonetheless, none of this is definitive – the model explained slightly more than one-fifth of the variance, leaving the majority unaccounted for. Empathy, moral disengagement, social identity, perceived injustice, interpersonal experiences, and cultural context are elements that can influence dehumanizing attitudes.

Limitations

Many restrictions apply to these results. Because the study used purposive sampling, the findings may not apply broadly to the larger population. However, because of the cross-sectional nature of the study, causal relationships cannot be inferred: Intolerance of social constraints, sensation seeking and aberrant association are strong and consistent predictors of dehumanization, but does not mean that these exactly cause it. Over time, dehumanizing views can also result in social isolation or changes in relationships. Longitudinal studies will be useful to clarify the nature of the impacts over time. Future studies may examine whether moral disengagement, empathy, social identity, perceived injustice, or perceived life meaning can account for or help explain the relationships found here; preliminary studies should explore whether group disengagement is an antecedent to engaging in deviant networks versus if engaging in deviant networks contributes to a sense of disengagement. Especially helpful in elucidating these pathways would be mediation and longitudinal methodologies.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study reveals that the conception of dehumanization as a one-dimensional lens which sees others as 'not human, but rather like things' is closely linked to how people see themselves, how they interact with others, and how they fit in with their social environment. The significant relationships found between thrill seeking and the other variables were as follows: The dehumanization, social estrangement, and deviant affiliations highlighted here emphasize the need for a focus on investigating individual and community factors that are used to understand why people have thoughts detached from others.

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