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The association between religiosity and alcohol use: the mediating role of meaning in life and media exposure

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ABSTRACT
We examined whether meaning in life and exposure to media mediate the association between religiosity and alcohol use among members of the Jewish-orthodox community in Israel. One hundred and ten young adult men self-identified as orthodox (n = 57) or secular (n = 53) participated in the study. Participants completed self-report measures designed to assess meaning in life, media exposure, alcohol use, and craving. Our findings show that orthodox participants consumed less alcohol and reported less alcohol craving compared to their secular counterparts. Importantly, search for meaning in life and media exposure mediated the relationship between religiosity and alcohol craving. Our findings suggest that religion provides a sense of meaning that serves as a protective factor against alcohol craving, supporting existential theories. Furthermore, our studies show that practices that are associated with a religious lifestyle such as low exposure to mass media also serve as protective factors for alcohol use and craving.

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KEYWORDS
Alcohol use; religiosity; meaning in life; media exposure; Israel

Excessive use of alcohol is a major health-risk among young adults in many western countries, including Israel (Bar Hamburger, Ezrachi, Roziner, & Nirel, 2009; Monti, O'leary Tevyaw, & Borsari, 2004–2005; US Dept of Health Human Services, 2014). Degree of religiosity has consistently been associated with lower levels of alcohol consumption (Wills, Yaeger, & Sandy, 2003). Some monotheist religions prohibit the use of alcohol, such as Islam, while others such as Christianity and Judaism allow and even encourages moderate use in traditionally religious contexts (Miller, 1998).

The Old Testament as well as later Jewish writings acknowledges the dual nature of alcohol. On the one hand, alcohol is proclaimed to have a cheerful, uplifting effect when used moderately, yet, it recognises the risks associated with excessive use. Indeed, even when compared to other monotheist religions, Jewish culturally supported beliefs discourage alcohol use as ways of coping with stress (Loewenthal, Lee, MacLeod, Cook, & Goldblatt, 2003; Loewenthal, MacLeod, Cook, Lee, & Goldblatt, 2003). For example, studies have documented the lower use of alcohol among Jews compared with Protestants (Loewenthal, MacLeod et al., 2003). Jews also described alcohol-related...
behaviour as threatening to self-control and loss of inhibition as unenjoyable and dangerous (Loewenthal, Lee et al., 2003).

Given these religious guidelines, it is not surprising that consistent findings show that high levels of religiosity are related to less alcohol use and lower prevalence of alcohol addiction (Michalak, Trocki, & Bond, 2007). Studies, mainly among Christians in the United States, found that highly religious individuals drank less frequently and experienced fewer alcohol-related problems, in comparison to secular people (Dulin, Hill, & Ellingson, 2006; Galen & Rogers, 2004; Nonnemaker, McNeely, & Blum, 2003; VonDras, Schmitt, & Marx, 2007; Wills et al., 2003). Furthermore, high levels of religiosity were also related to lower rates of alcohol use among adolescents (Nonnemaker et al., 2003; Wills et al., 2003) and college students (Dulin et al., 2006; Galen & Rogers, 2004; Nelms, Hutchins, Hutchins, & Pursley, 2007). This negative association between religiosity and alcohol use has been also found in studies conducted among Jewish individuals in Israel (Neumark, Rahav, Teichman, & Hasin, 2001; Rahav, Taichman, Rosenblum, & Bar-Hamburger, 2002).

Despite the extensive research documenting the negative association between religiosity and alcohol use, the underlying psychological mechanisms for this association remain largely unknown. One possible factor relates to the sense of meaning in life that characterises religious individuals. The extent to which a person experiences his life as meaningful has been shown to have a protective function in the risk for excessive alcohol use. Indeed, several studies documented that feelings of emptiness and frustration, caused by a poor sense of meaning in life, are related to inadequate coping strategies such as substance abuse (Schnetzer, Schulenberg, & Buchanan, 2013; Schulenberg, Hutzell, Nassif, & Rogina, 2008). For instance, college students who experience their life goals as less meaningful were more likely to drink heavily and often experienced more alcohol-related negative consequences (Palfai, Ralston, & Wright, 2011). In a similar study, having meaningful life goals was associated with less frequent drinking, while a lack of sense of meaning in life goals was related to emotional distress and higher motivation to drink, which in turn, predicted alcohol-related problems (Lecci, MacLean, & Croteau, 2002).

More recently, Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006) developed a new multidimensional conceptualisation of meaning in life, which includes two orthogonal concepts, the presence of meaning in life, and the search for meaning in life. Some individuals may experience a high presence of meaning in life and still might be searching for additional sources of meaning, while others may lack a presence of meaning and therefore search for it.

Studies have shown that high levels of religiosity tend to strengthen a person’s sense of meaning in life (Idler, 1987; Petersen & Roy, 1985; Pollner, 1989). Religiousness can be defined as a spiritual search for meaning (Pargament, 1997). Some theorise that religion evolves from human desire to understand the deepest problems of our universe (Geertz, 1966). Whether religion stems uniquely from the need for meaning or simply promotes it, it constitutes an organised belief system that provides ways to understand and give meaning to loss and suffering (Kotarba, 1983). It does so because it serves as a basic scheme that includes beliefs about the self, the world, and their interactions, thus allowing a person to interpret and understand his life events (McIntosh, 1995). Previous studies have documented positive associations between meaning in life and various measures of religiosity (Dezutter, Soenens, & Hutsebaut, 2006; French & Joseph, 1999; Pöhlmann, Gruss, & Joraschky, 2006). A survey conducted in 2001 among members of synagogues,
churches, and other faith-based communities in the United States, found that 63% of respondents highly agreed with a statement saying that “because of my faith, I have meaning and purpose in my life” (Winseman, 2002).

Since religion promotes internal quest for meaning, it is plausible that it will reject external distractions such as exposure to mass media. Secularisation theory is one of the dominant paradigms in the study of religion and mass media (Buddenbaum & Stout, 1996). This theory argues that a strong religious affiliation reflects a lifestyle that is traditional in nature, and that this lifestyle is coming under increasing attack from a growing secularism that is spreading across the globe (Swatos & Christiano, 2000). All forms of mass media are theorised to reflect the move toward greater secularisation, presenting a predominantly secular image of the world we live in. Subsequently, strong religious affiliation is hypothesised to be negatively related to all forms of mass media use because a vast majority of media content does not reflect traditional religious values. Indeed, previous studies have demonstrated that religious individuals in general (Armfield & Holbert, 2003; Hamilton & Rubin, 1992), and members of the Jewish-orthodox community in Israel, in particular (Gilboa, 2008), are characterised by relatively low media exposure. Religious mosaics influence the consumption and selection of media in general and potentially “unhealthy” media (that may affect the young adult’s well-being) in particular. Religiously devoted adolescents were found to consume less media compared with youth who are religiously disengaged (Bobkowski, 2009).

The effect of media exposure on alcohol use has been widely documented (Hanewinkel & Sargent, 2009; Michalak et al., 2007; Robinson, Chen, & Killen, 1998) and is often attributed to the positive portrayal of alcohol use in the media and the implied associations with positive behavioural outcomes of the consumption of alcohol (Engels, Hermans, Van Baaren, Hollenstein, & Bot, 2009). Characters in films and TV shows, as well as TV commercials that endorse the purchase and use of alcohol, help legitimise the use alcohol. Numerous studies have found that this legitimisation can lead to increased alcohol use among young adults (Distefan, Pierce, & Gilpin, 2004; Ellickson, Collins, Hambardzumians, & McCaffrey, 2005; Grube, 1993; Van den Bulck, Beullens, & Mulder, 2006). For example, Engels et al., (2009) found that male participants who watched a movie or a commercial advertisement that displayed alcohol drank an average of 1.5 alcoholic drinks more than those who were not exposed to any alcohol-related content. These results support the premise that exposure to alcohol-related content in the media can substantially increase alcohol use. Therefore, it is possible that low exposure to media, which characterises the orthodox-Jewish community in Israel (Gilboa, 2008), may be associated with lower rates of alcohol use.

In the present study, we examined the mediating role of meaning in life and media exposure, in the relationship between religiosity and alcohol use and craving among young Jewish-orthodox and secular men in Israel. We hypothesised that: (1) levels of religiosity will be associated with alcohol use and craving, such that compared to secular participants, young orthodox-Jews will use less alcohol and report less alcohol craving; (2) orthodox participants will experience greater presence of meaning in life, and will be less exposed to the media compared to their secular counterparts; and (3) meaning in life and media exposure will mediate the relationship between religiosity and alcohol use and craving.
Method

Participants

A convenience sample of orthodox \((n = 57)\) and secular \((n = 53)\) Jewish men participated in the study. All participants were young adults \((M \text{ age} = 22.36, SD = 2.39)\). Orthodox participants were recruited at a “Chabad yeshiva”, where they attend higher Jewish religious studies. Members of the Yeshiva were invited to participate by the head of the Yeshiva. Participation was anonymous. All secular participants were recruited in universities and colleges in Central Israel through snowball sampling.

Procedure

After informed consent was obtained, participants completed a survey that included self-report questionnaires assessing alcohol use (AUQ) and craving, meaning in life (MLQ), media exposure, emotional distress (GHQ 12), and socio-demographic information. The questionnaires were administered in random order in order to control for order-effects. The study was approved by the University’s Ethics committee and data collection was in accordance with ethical guidelines.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire

This include a self-report questionnaire assessing: age, marital status (single or married), country of origin (Israel or other country), years of formal education, occupation (full-time, part time, not working, and looking for a job/not looking for a job, homemaker, student, or other), perceived religiousness (one item, ranging from 1 – not at all to 10 – very much), and household income (much less than average, slightly below the average, average, slightly above the average, and much more than the average).

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ 12; Goldberg, 1978)

This 12-item scale is a well-documented screening measure for emotional distress in the last month. It has been subject of tests in many countries (Kessler & Ustun, 2008), including Israel (Nakash, Nagar, & Levav, 2014). Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale. Final score was computed as the summary for all items. The results ranged from 12 to 48, with higher scores indicating higher emotional distress. The overall internal consistency for the scale was good \((\alpha = .76)\).

Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006)

The self-report questionnaire is composed of 10 items assessing the search (MLQ-S) and presence (MLQ-P) of meaning in life. Each scale consists of 5 items, each rated on 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “absolutely untrue” to 7 “absolutely true”. Final scores are calculated by summing all items in each scale. Both scales range from 5 to 35, with high scores indicating high levels of search for and presence of meaning in life. In the present study, both scales were found to have high internal consistency \((\text{MLQ-S } \alpha = .88; \text{MLQ-P } \alpha = .87)\).
**Media exposure questionnaire**

This is a self-report questionnaire developed especially for the present research and consists of five items assessing participant’s accessibility to different media instruments: radio, TV, cell phone, newspapers, Internet, for example, “Do you have a Television?” Respondents were asked to answer “yes” or “no”, and their positive answers were up for final score. High scores indicated a high level of accessibility to the media. Internal consistency was high (α = .82).

**Alcohol Use Questionnaire (AUG; Mehrabian & Russell, 1978)**

This questionnaire is composed of 12 items assessing participant’s drinking behavioural habits. The AUQ gives an estimate of the average number of weekly alcohol consumption over the previous six months, speed of drinking (number of drinks per hour), the number of episodes of alcohol intoxication in the past six months, and the percentage of alcohol intoxications out of the total number of times of going out drinking. For the purpose of the current study, we only used measures of weekly alcohol consumption. To measure weekly alcohol consumption, the participants were required to answer three questions regarding the consumption of wine, beer, and other alcohol drinks per week. The scores were calculated by summing up the number of drinks reported in each item, so that high scores indicated a high level of alcohol use, while low scores indicated a low level of alcohol use or the absence of it. A study conducted in Israel among social workers demonstrated that the AUQ is a reliable measure of drinking quantity and drinking patterns (Miller, 2009).

**Alcohol craving single item (Field, Mogg, Mann, Bennett, & Bradley, 2013; Papachristou et al., 2013)**

Participants were asked to rate “How much would you like to drink alcohol at this present moment?” on a scale ranging from 1 “not at all” to 10 “very much”. This measurement of craving is widely used both in clinical and laboratory settings (Drobes & Thomas, 1999).

**Statistical analysis**

Analyses were performed using the SPSS version 20.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). Socio-demographic characteristics between the two groups were compared by the chi-square for categorical variables, and t-tests for continuous variables. Differences in meaning in life and media exposure between the groups were examined using t-tests. Pearson’s r and Kendall’s tau correlations were used to examine relationship between continuous and categorical variables.

In order to examine the mediation effect of media exposure, presence of meaning, and search for meaning on weekly consumption of alcohol and alcohol craving, structural equation model (SEM) analysis was conducted. Analysis was conducted using AMOS21 (SPSS Inc.) with the maximum likelihood estimation procedure. Following Hoyle and Panter (1995), the fit of the model to the data was evaluated using five goodness-of-fit indices. Two of these indices were absolute: the χ² statistic and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The remaining three indices were incremental: the normed fit index (NFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI). RMSEA below .06 in combination with NFI, CFI, and TLI above .95 indicate excellent fit, whereas values below .08 and above .90, respectively, indicate adequate fit. The mediating effect in the present study was tested for
a significance by adopted the Bootstrap estimation procedure in AMOS. This procedure was used due to the relatively small sample size, which did not allow the assumption of normal distribution of the coefficients, and prevented the use of Sobel test.

Results

Demographic and clinical characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample by religiosity group are presented in Table 1. Orthodox participants were younger and had lower income when compared with their secular counterparts. As expected, significant difference in self-report degree of religiosity was found between the groups. Orthodox participants reported being highly religious in comparison to the secular participants. Approximately three-quarters of the orthodox participants were single compared to 96.2% of the secular participants. Additionally, 72% of the orthodox participants were unemployed, when compared with 38% of their secular counterparts. Orthodox participants reported significantly higher levels of emotional distress when compared with secular participants.

Differences in meaning in life and media exposure between orthodox and secular participants

Significant differences were found in alcohol use and craving between orthodox and secular participants (Table 2). Secular participants reported higher weekly consumption of alcohol, as well as higher craving to use alcohol compared to their orthodox counterparts. In addition, orthodox participants reported higher presence of meaning, lower search for meaning, and lower media exposure compared to their secular counterparts (Table 2).

Relationships among meaning in life, alcohol consumption, and craving and religiosity

Bivariate correlations between independent and dependent variables among participants are presented in Table 3. Presence of meaning was negatively associated with search for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age years, Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived religiousness, Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income, Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status; % (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/in a relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nativty (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Israel born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional distress, Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


meaning and emotional distress. Presence of meaning also negatively correlated with weekly alcohol consumption and alcohol craving. Search for meaning positively correlated with weekly alcohol consumption and alcohol craving. Higher media exposure was related to lower presence of meaning, and higher search for meaning and craving, and lower emotional distress.

SEM analysis included the direct effect of religiosity on alcohol consumption and craving, as well as the mediating effects of meaning in life (search for and presence of meaning) and media exposure. The model fit was adequate for RMSEA (equals .068) and excellent for all other indexes ($\chi^2(1) = 1.498$, ns; NFI = .995; CFI = .998; TLI = .971). All effects of the factors were found to be statistically significant, with the exception of the direct effect of search for meaning on media exposure ($\beta = .13, B = .02, p = .058$), the direct effect of religiosity and the direct effect of media exposure on alcohol craving ($\beta = -.29, B = -1.50, p = .063$; and $\beta = .21, B = 1.62, p = .065$, respectively) that were marginally significant, and the effects of presence of meaning on alcohol use and craving ($\beta = .02, B = .11, ns$; and $\beta = .09, B = .22, ns$, respectively), and the effect of search for meaning on alcohol use ($\beta = -.02, B = -.07, ns$) that were not significant.

### Table 2. Means and standard deviations of presence and search for meaning, media exposure, weekly alcohol consumption and alcohol craving among orthodox and secular participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Total sample (N = 110)</th>
<th>Orthodox (N = 57)</th>
<th>Secular (N = 53)</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presence of meaning</td>
<td>5.9 (1.0)</td>
<td>6.6 (.5)</td>
<td>5.1 (.8)</td>
<td>t(88.8) = 11.63 p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for meaning</td>
<td>4.3 (1.9)</td>
<td>3.6 (2.0)</td>
<td>5.0 (1.3)</td>
<td>t(96.4) = 4.39 p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media exposure</td>
<td>.5 (.3)</td>
<td>.3 (.2)</td>
<td>.8 (.3)</td>
<td>t(85.2) = 10.30 p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly alcohol consumption</td>
<td>4.7 (5.7)</td>
<td>2.2 (2.4)</td>
<td>7.4 (6.8)</td>
<td>t(63.6) = 5.27 p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol craving</td>
<td>2.9 (2.6)</td>
<td>1.7 (1.7)</td>
<td>4.1 (2.8)</td>
<td>t(83) = 5.50 p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3. Bivariate correlations between independent and dependent variables among orthodox and secular participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>2.</th>
<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
<th>5.</th>
<th>6.</th>
<th>7.</th>
<th>8.</th>
<th>9.</th>
<th>10.</th>
<th>11.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Religiosity</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-.63**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>-.44**</td>
<td>-.48**</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Media exposure</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Presence of meaning</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-.36**</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>-.32**</td>
<td>-.48**</td>
<td>-.35**</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Search for meaning</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Weekly consumption of alcohol</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Craving to use alcohol</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Emotional distress</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Age</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Income</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Marital status</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>11. Employment</td>
<td>–</td>
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</table>

Notes: For religiosity, secular = 0, orthodox = 1. For marital status, single = 0, married = 1. For employment, unemployed = 0, employed = 1. Kendall's tau-bs were calculated for religiosity, marital status and employment. All other correlation coefficients represent Pearson's $r$.

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$. 
Based on Bentler and Moojaaart (1989), we arrived at the most parsimonious model by omitting the non-significant structural paths between presence of meaning and alcohol use and craving. The final model, presented in Figure 1, displayed an excellent fit ($\chi^2(3) = 2.016$, ns; RMSEA = .000; NFI = .993; CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.019). Then the mediating effect was tested by adopting the Bootstrap estimation procedure (a bootstrap sample of 2000 was specified). Full mediation effect was found to the connection between religiosity and alcohol craving (direct effect 95%CI $-2.34$ to .13; indirect effect 95%CI $-2.48$ to .28), and to the connection between search for meaning and alcohol use (direct effect 95%CI $-0.62$ to .33; indirect effect 95%CI .00 to .48). The mediation effect of media exposure on the connection between religiosity and alcohol use approached significance (direct effect 95%CI $-5.88$ to .18; indirect effect 95%CI $-5.62$ to .01).

Our results show that being orthodox is associated with lower alcohol use and craving when compared with being secular. Additionally, orthodox participants report lower media exposure, lower search for meaning and higher presence of meaning, when compared with secular participants. Higher media exposure is related to higher alcohol use and craving, and higher search for meaning is related to higher reports of alcohol craving. Our results further show that the effect of religiosity on alcohol craving was fully mediated by search for meaning and media exposure. Furthermore, our results indicate that the connection between search for meaning and alcohol use is fully mediated by media exposure.

**Figure 1.** The most parsimonious model of mediating effects of meaning in life and media exposure on the connection between religiosity and alcohol use and craving, presenting standardised path coefficients obtained by SEM.

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, +p = .06
Discussion

In the present study, we examined the mediating role of meaning in life and media exposure in the association between religiosity and alcohol use and craving among orthodox and secular Jews in Israel. Consistent with previous research (Dulin et al., 2006; Galen & Rogers, 2004; Nonnemaker et al., 2003; VonDras et al., 2007; Wills et al., 2003), our findings show that religiosity is negatively associated with alcohol consumption and craving, such that orthodox young adults reported consuming and craving significantly less alcohol compared to their secular counterparts. Our findings further expand this literature and show that search for meaning in life and media exposure mediate the relationship between religiosity and alcohol craving. Moreover, our study showed that meaning in life also has an indirect effect on alcohol use, through media exposure.

Previous research shows that people who perceive their lives as having no meaning tend to consume alcohol more frequently (Palfai et al., 2011; Schnetzer et al., 2013). Within the framework of existential philosophy, Frankl (1959) believed that the core of the human experience is searching for meaning and purpose. Moreover, Frankl and Crumbaugh (1967) argued that a search for meaning that is repressed or blocked will result in the individual experiencing “existential vacuum” (i.e., the feeling that life has no purpose). This existential vacuum, coupled with life stressors, can lead to the use of alcohol and drugs as a source of relief from emotional suffering. This inadaptive coping mechanism results in adverse consequences to the individual and his surrounding family members and communities.

Religiosity has been defined as a spiritual search for meaning (Pargament, 1997) and previous studies have already associated religiosity with greater sense of meaning in life (Idler, 1987; Petersen & Roy, 1985; Pollner, 1989). From the existential point of view as presented by Frankl and Crumbaugh (1967), religiosity can be viewed as an adaptive way to manage the existential vacuum. Our findings suggest that the beneficial effect of religious belief and practice over alcohol consumption is largely explained by the higher sense of meaning in life that characterises religious individuals compared with those who identify themselves as secular. Indeed, our findings also show that orthodox individuals experience higher presence of meaning and search less for meaning in life than their secular counterparts. Our findings also suggest that alongside the continuous quest of meaning that characterises religious believers, religion provides a sense of meaning that serves as a protective factor against alcohol craving. Rossiter (2001) maintains that for many people religion is the basic essence for meaning of life. She further writes that religion provides the ultimate meaning to life and the universe, and sees them as God’s complex creation (Rossiter, 2001).

Our findings further show that media exposure is lower among orthodox young adults when compared to their secular counterparts. These findings are consistent with previous studies that reported low media accessibility among highly religious individuals (Armfield & Holbert, 2003; Bobkowski, 2009; Hamilton & Rubin, 1992). Moreover, our findings highlight the role of media exposure in the association between religiosity and alcohol consumption. These findings are consistent with previous studies which concluded that exposure to media portraying alcohol use positively increases alcohol consumption (Ellickson et al., 2005; Van den Bulck et al., 2006), and that members of the orthodox community in Israel are less exposed to these contents (Gilboa, 2008). It is possible that highly religious young adults consume less alcohol due to the fact that they are restricted from using “unhealthy” media, including that is portraying alcohol in positive light in mass media.
This study has several of limitations. First, selection bias may exist as recruitment included a convenience sample. Second, although special attention was paid to ensure participants confidentiality to promote openness in response to questionnaires, response bias may occur as study instruments included self-report measure. Third, due to the difficulties in recruiting orthodox participants, our sample was rather small. Lastly, in our study we referred to religiosity as a dichotomous construct (secular/orthodox). Religiosity is often viewed as a complex construct. Allport (1966) distinguished between external and internal religion (Donahue, 1985). External religion refers to the use of religion as means to acquire confidence, comfort, status, or social support. Internal religion, on the other hand, is non-instrumental in which “religion is an end”. Internal religion has been found related to internal focus of control, meaning in life, and absence of anxiety, while external religion was associated with dogmatism, prejudice, trait anxiety, fear of death, and un-altruism (Donahue, 1985). Future studies should examine the connection between different dimensions of religiosity and alcohol use and craving.

Despite these limitations, our findings identify some of the mechanisms that underlie the association between religiosity and alcohol consumption and craving. They add to the extensive literature documenting the protective factor that religious belief and practice have on alcohol consumption (Dulin et al., 2006) and extends this literature to show the important roles of both search for meaning in life and media exposure to the relationship between religiosity and alcohol consumption and craving.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References


