

**BAR- ILAN UNIVERSITY**

**The Relationship between Religious Identity, Spirituality, and  
Emotional Labor of Religious Students and Study Motivation and  
Satisfaction**

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## Abstract

The focus of this study is to investigate how religious identity, spirituality and Emotional Labor Theory impact the motivation and satisfaction of religious female students in three undergraduate academic programs that combine scholastic studies with religious instruction – seminary studies, religious instruction in a college setting, and seminary studies at university. The research goal was to characterize the religious identification, spiritual dimension, and emotional labor of these students, to gain an understanding of the possible effect these parameters had on their motivation and the satisfaction they derived from their studies.

Academic studies combine diverse requirements; academic-professional, and also emotional. Previously, academic and professional training of students in academic settings was considered centrally important. However, during recent years, the emotional sphere has gained increasing practical and research focus, drawing attention to student satisfaction and study motivation. Recent researched factors include positive experiences, including social support, personal connection, and positive interaction with lecturers and administration. These factors have proved dominant and influential regarding the choice where to study – and later affecting satisfaction from the study program, and from the institution in general.

‘Emotional Labor Theory’ is a term first introduced by Arlie R. Hochschild in 1983, to define the emotional requirements of service employees and the various techniques developed to meet these requirements. Hochschild and other researchers identified three techniques: a) “Surface acting” – presentation of ideal emotions which do not represent real feelings; b) “Deep acting” – changing the ideal emotions to real emotions c) “Natural” emotions, or genuine emotions, a representation of authentic emotions which align with ideal emotions, without the need for manipulating these feelings.<sup>1</sup>

The current study will focus on two independent variables: the students’ religious identity; and the extent of spirituality of these students. The intervening variable is the ‘emotional labor style’, as discussed further. The two dependent variables are study motivation and satisfaction from the program.

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<sup>1</sup> My academic supervisor aided me in translating these terms into my native Hebrew for research purposes. Alternative definitions exist in Hebrew for these terms. (For example, see Ginat, 2011; Oplatka, 2011)

The meta-goal of this research was to pinpoint practical and theoretical awareness of the importance of emotion management during the study process, so that this awareness would mediate between the preliminary parameters of 'religious identity' and 'spirituality', and study motivation and satisfaction of female students in programs that combine religious and academic studies. Research would hopefully lead to correct and optimal adoption of good emotional labor styles, to enhance study processes in these programs, to contribute to motivation, and to improve satisfaction from religious studies in the specified institutions.

An operative goal was derived from this meta-goal: identification of the correlation between these parameters amongst the study population, and identification of the differences between the three research groups (seminary, college and university students) regarding the various parameters. In addition, this study aimed to identify the extent to which students enacted each of the three emotional labor styles (deep, surface and natural), to enable structuring of an integrative action plan, with holistic combination of all student dimensions: the internal/spiritual dimension, the interpersonal/emotional, and the academic-professional. Combine of the three dimensions exemplify the optimal study experience for the specified students.

Ten central assumptions were set for the current study:

1. The existence of a positive correlation between the strength of religious identify and study motivation.
2. The existence of a positive correlation between the spiritual dimension and study motivation.
3. The existence of a positive correlation between the strength of religious identify and satisfaction from the religious instruction.
4. The existence of a positive correlation between the spiritual dimension and satisfaction from the religious instruction.
5. The existence of differences regarding strength of religious identity between students from different study frameworks.
6. The existence of differences regarding the spiritual dimension between students from different study frameworks.
7. The existence of differences regarding study motivation between students from different study frameworks.
8. The existence of differences regarding satisfaction from religious instruction between students from different study frameworks.

9. The existence of differences regarding the three emotional labor styles, and the extent of emotional investment, across the different research groups.
10. The existence of differences regarding the three emotional labor styles, for the three degrees of religiosity: strictly religious, observant, and traditional, and the extent of emotional investment.

The theoretical model for this study was structured such that the parameters were congruent with the accompanying research assumptions.

The study population included 136 participants: 51 students from the 'Noy' seminary [female religious students who studied in the equivalent of the male yeshiva], 50 students from the 'Segev' seminary [a study unit within a university], and 35 students from 'Tiferet' college [religious studies in a college]. All participants were defined on the religious spectrum [from 'traditional' to 'strictly religious']. The research paradigm is both quantitative and qualitative - mixed methods methodology. In the first stage, all participants filled out six self-report questionnaires: Adolescent Racial and Ethnic Socialization Scale (ARESS) and Multi Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (El Kader, 2018); a 'Spirituality' questionnaire (Underwood & Teresi, 2002); Levine-Brown's Teacher Emotional Labor Scale (TELS, 2011), an original survey which was revised and adapted for current research requirements, i.e. testing emotional labor of students; Motivation Strategies for Learning Questionnaire ((MSLQ) Pintrich et al. 1993); a Study Satisfaction Questionnaire (Romanov, 2010); and a demographic survey, designed for the current study.

SPSS software was used for data analysis, and included testing for reliability, Varimax factor analysis, and study parameters' mean and standard deviation values. For the assumption testing stage, the following statistical tools were implemented: the Pearson correlation coefficient, oneway MANOVA, oneway repeated measure analysis, and SEM Path Analysis. During the second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted for 9 of the 136 participants – three students from each study framework. The interviews were aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of quantitative results and to gain insights that are difficult to glean from purely quantitative methods.

Research findings display a significant mediating correlation between spirituality and study motivation and satisfaction, channeled through 'Deep acting' and 'Natural' emotional representation. Therefore, the student's emotional labor can be considered greatly significant in the learning-educational-spiritual process during her undergraduate study years. . Emotional

labor can additionally be seen as imperative for understanding the emotional world of students in general, Emotional labor can be considered especially crucial in the building of spiritual and religious identity of female religious students. Research findings also display many significant correlations between the study parameters, with most significance appearing amongst students studying at the 'Segev' seminary, the university body. An investigation of parameter value differences between the three study groups showed that most study assumptions were confirmed (partially or fully), and that findings conformed with the suggested study model.

Qualitative research findings indicated that students who studied religious studies at 'Tiferet', hold ambivalent attitudes towards several dimensions. Regarding the professional/academic dimension: students tend to choose a prestigious institution, but a heavy study load and high requirements and demands are also a noted price. The interpersonal/emotional dimension is also divided between complex student-lecturer relationships, and importance and relevance of content and religious instruction for life. Investigation of the spiritual/internal dimension shows that 'Tiferet' students regard the mandatory religious studies as an opportunity for spiritual growth, but this finding does not necessarily have connection to, or bearing on, their religious identity. Conversely, students who study at the higher institutional seminaries Noy and Segev, voiced the same opinions about the interpersonal/emotional and the spiritual/internal dimensions. However, a difference appears between these research groups for the professional/academic dimension.

Study conclusions underscored and emphasized the significance of the correlations found between the quantitative results, and the criteria proven as highly influential for the study cohort, were supported by the qualitative research. The three main themes that arose from the interviews create a complete unit, which can offer institutions the opportunity, interest and responsibility of creating holistic study environments for their students. Such environments could improve staff-student relationships, build a strong and supportive social infrastructure in the study courses and the entire body, and elevate the academic-professional level of these institutions of learning. After discussion of the study conclusions, additional discussion will be devoted practical suggestions applicable to institutions of higher education in Israel and to suggestions for further relevant studies.