Terror management theory

Description

In social psychology, terror management theory (abbr. TMT) proposes a basic psychological conflict that results from having a self-preservation instinct, whilst realizing that death is inevitable and to some extent unpredictable. Researchers in the field of “experimental existential psychology” (XXP) investigate the effects of, for example, mortality salience on various social, emotional, cognitive, and physiological processes. More at Wikipedia

Further References

Greenberg, J., & Arndt, J.. (2012). Terror management theory. In Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology: Volume 1

Plain numerical DOI: 10.4135/9781446249215.n20
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

“Terror management theory was developed to explain the motivational underpinnings of phenomena such as self-esteem defense and prejudice. the theory is rooted in a long tradition of thought regarding human awareness of death and its role in psychological functioning. the theory posits that to manage the potential for terror engendered by the awareness of mortaility, humans sustain faith in worldviews which provide a sense that they are significant beings in an enduring, meaningful world rather than mere material animals fated only to obliteration upon death. the theory is supported by a wide range of studies showing that self-esteem and worldviews provide protection against anxiety and death-related cognition, reminders of mortality instigate worldview bolstering and self-esteem striving, and the threats

to the worldview and self-esteem increase the accessibility of death-related thoughts. the research has also led to a dual defense model of responses to concious and unconcious death thoughts. we then focus on two of many topics informed by the theory; attitudes and behavior regarding physical health, an political preferences and intergroup conflict. we then consider factors that mitigate destructive forms of terror management. finally, we briefly summarize the contribution of terror management work so far and where it's heading."
Harmon-Jones, E., Simon, L., Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., Pyszczynski, T., & McGregor, H.. (1997). Terror Management Theory and Self-Esteem: Evidence That Increased Self-Esteem Reduces Mortality Salience Effects. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.72.1.24
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"On the basis of the terror management theory proposition that self-esteem provides protection against concerns about mortality, it was hypothesized that self-esteem would reduce the worldview defense produced by mortality salience (ms). the results of experiments 1 and 2 confirmed this hypothesis by showing that individuals with high self-esteem (manipulated in experiment 1; dispositional in experiment 2) did not respond to ms with increased worldview defense, whereas individuals with moderate self-esteem did. the results of experiment 3 suggested that the effects of the first 2 experiments may have occurred because high self-esteem facilitates the suppression of death con-structs following ms. the questions of why individuals need self-esteem and how they cope with their awareness of death are challenging ones that have fascinated and puzzled philosophers and social theo-rists (e.g., plato, kierkegaard, norman brown, william james) for centuries. terror management theory, based primarily on the writings of ernest becker (1962, 1971, 1973, 1975) and otto rank (1936, 1941), posits that self-esteem is sought because it provides protection against the fear of death (greenberg, pysz-czynski, & solomon, 1986; solomon, greenberg, & pyszczyn-ski, 1991a). from this perspective, the fear of death is rooted in an instinct for self-preservation that humans share with other species. although we share this instinct with other species, only we are aware that death is inevitable–that is, that our self-preservation instinct will inevitably be thwarted. this combina-tion of an instinctive drive for self-preservation with an aware-ness of the inevitability of death creates the potential for paralyz-ing terror. this potential for terror is managed by a cultural anxiety buffer, consisting of the cultural worldview and self-esteem. the cultural worldview is defined as a set of beliefs about the nature"
Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., & Pyszczynski, T.. (1997). Terror Management Theory of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews: Empirical Assessments and Conceptual Refinements. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60016-7
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"This chapter proposes that the potential for abject terror created by the awareness of the inevitability

of death in an animal instinctively programmed for self-preservation and continued experience lies at the root of a great deal of human motivation and behavior. this chapter presents the results of a substantial body of research that attests to the broad influence of the problem of death on human social behavior and illuminates the processes through which concerns about mortality exert their influence. the chapter overviews the primary assumptions and propositions of terror management theory and a description of the initial research conducted to test the theory. it presents a detailed consideration of more recent research that establishes the convergent and discriminant validity of the mortality salience treatment and the robustness of its effects through the use of alternative mortality salience treatments and comparison treatments, and replications by other researchers; it extends the range of interpersonal behaviors that are demonstrably influenced by terror management concerns. moreover, it demonstrates the interaction of mortality salience with other theoretically relevant situational and dispositional variables, and provides an account of the cognitive processes through which mortality salience produces its effects. finally, this chapter discusses the relation of terror management motives to other psychological motives and gives a consideration of issues requiring further investigation."
Burke, B. L., Martens, A., & Faucher, E. H.. (2010). Two decades of terror management theory: A meta-analysis of mortality salience research. Personality and Social Psychology Review

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1177/1088868309352321
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"A meta-analysis was conducted on empirical trials investigating the mortality salience (ms) hypothesis of terror management theory (tmt). tmt postulates that investment in cultural worldviews and self-esteem serves to buffer the potential for death anxiety; the ms hypothesis states that, as a consequence, accessibility of death-related thought (ms) should instigate increased worldview and self-esteem defense and striving. overall, 164 articles with 277 experiments were included. ms yielded moderate effects (r =.35) on a range of worldview- and self-esteem-related dependent variables (dvs), with effects increased for experiments using (a) american participants,(b) college students,(c) a longer delay between ms and the dv,and (d) people-related attitudes as the dv. gender and self-esteem may moderate ms effects differently than previously thought. results are compared to other reviews and examined with regard to alternative explanations of tmt. finally, suggestions for future research are offered."
Simon, L., Greenberg, J., Harmon-Jones, E., Pyszczynski, T., Solomon, S., Arndt, J., & Abend, T.. (1997). Terror management and cognitive-experiential self-theory: Evidence that terror management occurs in the experiential system. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.72.5.1132
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"The authors hypothesized, on the basis of terror management theory and cognitive-experiential self-theory, that participants in an experiential mode of thinking would respond to mortality salience with

increased worldview defense and increased accessibility of death-related thoughts, whereas participants in a rational mode would not. results from 3 studies provided convergent evidence that when participants were in an experiential mode, mortality salience produced the typical worldview defense effect, but when participants were in a rational mode it did not. study 4 revealed that mortality salience also led to a delayed increase in the accessibility of death-related thoughts only when participants were in an experiential mode. these results supported the notion that worldwide defense is intensified only if individuals are in an experiential mode when considering their mortality. discussion focuses on implications for understanding terror management processes."
Castano, E., Yzerbyt, V., Paladino, M. P., & Sacchi, S.. (2002). I belong, therefore, I exist: Ingroup identification, ingroup entitativity, and ingroup bias. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1177/0146167202282001
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"Merging insights from the intergroup relations literature and terror management theory, the authors conducted an experiment in which they assessed the impact of death-related thoughts on a series of ingroup measures. participants in the mortality salience condition displayed stronger ingroup identification, perceived greater ingroup entitativily, and scored higher on ingroup bias measures. also, perceived ingroup entitativily as well as ingroup identification mediated the effect of the mortality salience manipulation on ingroup bias. the findings are discussed in relation to theories of intergroup relations and terror management theory. a new perspective on the function of group belonging also is presented."
Vail, K. E., Rothschild, Z. K., Weise, D. R., Solomon, S., Pyszczynski, T., & Greenberg, J.. (2010). A terror management analysis of the psychological functions of religion. Personality and Social Psychology Review

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1177/1088868309351165
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"From a terror management theory (tmt) perspective, religion serves to manage the potential terror engendered by the uniquely human awareness of death by affording a sense of psychological security and hope of immortality. although secular beliefs can also serve a terror management function, religious beliefs are particularly well suited to mitigate death anxiety because they are all encompassing, rely on concepts that are not easily disconfirmed, and promise literal immortality. research is reviewed demonstrating that mortality salience produces increased belief in afterlife, supernatural agency, human ascension from nature, and spiritual distinctions between mind and body. the social costs and benefits of religious beliefs are considered and compared to those of secular worldviews. the terror management functions of, and benefits and costs associated with, different types of religious orientation, such as intrinsic religiosity, quest, and religious fundamentalism, are then examined. finally, the tmt analysis is compared to other accounts of religion."

Cohen, F., & Solomon, S.. (2011). The politics of mortal terror. Current Directions in Psychological Science

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1177/0963721411416570
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

“Terror-management theory is used to examine how political preferences are altered when existential concerns are aroused. the theory posits that the uniquely human awareness of death engenders potentially debilitating terror that is managed through devotion to cultural worldviews that give individuals a sense that life has meaning and that they have value. research shows that mortality salience increases adherence to cherished cultural values and instigates efforts to bolster self-esteem. here we review research documenting the role of terror-management processes in promoting support for charismatic leaders who share one’s cherished beliefs and aggression against those who hold rival beliefs. implications for fostering effective participatory democracy are considered.”
Martens, A., Goldenberg, J. L., & Greenberg, J.. (2005). A terror management perspective on ageism. Journal of Social Issues

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00403.x
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

“In the present article, we present a theoretical perspective on ageism that is derived from terror management theory. according to the theory, human beings manage deeply-rooted fears about their vulnerability to death through symbolic constructions of meaning and corresponding standards of value. we extend this perspective to suggest that elderly individuals present an existential threat for the non-elderly because they remind us all that: (a) death is inescapable, (b) the body is fallible, and (c) the bases by which we may secure self-esteem (and manage death anxiety) are transitory. we review some recent empirical evidence in support of these ideas and then discuss possible avenues for combating ageism.”
Pyszczynski, T., Solomon, S., & Greenberg, J.. (2015). Thirty Years of Terror Management Theory: From Genesis to Revelation. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1016/bs.aesp.2015.03.001
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

“Terror management theory posits that human awareness of the inevitability of death exerts a profound influence on diverse aspects of human thought, emotion, motivation, and behavior. people manage the potential for anxiety that results from this awareness by maintaining: (1) faith in the absolute validity of

their cultural worldviews and (2) self-esteem by living up to the standards of value that are part of their worldviews. in this chapter, we take stock of the past 30 years of research and conceptual development inspired by this theory. after a brief review of evidence supporting the theory's fundamental propositions, we discuss extensions of the theory to shed light on: (1) the psychological mechanisms through which thoughts of death affect subsequent thought and behavior; (2) how the anxiety-buffering systems develop over childhood and beyond; (3) how awareness of death influenced the evolution of mind, culture, morality, and religion; (4) how death concerns lead people to distance from their physical bodies and seek solace in concepts of mind and spirit; and (5) the role of death concerns in maladaptive and pathological behavior. we also consider various criticisms of the theory and alternative conceptualizations that have been proposed. we conclude with a discussion of what we view as the most pressing issues for further research and theory development that have been inspired by the theory's first 30 years."
Heine, S. J., Harihara, M., & Niiya, Y.. (2002). Terror management in Japan. Asian Journal of Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1111/1467-839X.00103
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"Do terror management effects generalize to non-western cultures? this question is significant because terror management theory offers an explanation of the origin of self-esteem, whereas other research finds divergent self-esteem motivations across cultures. the effects of mortality salience (ms) on the dual-component anxiety buffer were investigated in japan. a control group and a ms group were given an opportunity: (i) to defend their cultural worldview by derogating an anti-japan essay writer; and (ii) to boost their value within their cultures by indicating a greater desire for high-status over low-status products. replicating past research with western samples, japanese in a ms condition were more critical of the anti-japan essay writer and they indicated a marginal tendency to prefer high- over low-status products, compared with a control group. the theoretical implications are discussed."
Jonas, E., Martens, A., Kayser, D. N., Fritsche, I., Sullivan, D., & Greenberg, J.. (2008). Focus Theory of Normative Conduct and Terror-Management Theory: The Interactive Impact of Mortality Salience and Norm Salience on Social Judgment. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1037/a0013593
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"Research on terror-management theory has shown that after mortality salience (ms) people attempt to live up to cultural values. but cultures often value very different and sometimes even contradictory standards, leading to difficulties in predicting behavior as a consequence of terror-management needs. the authors report 4 studies to demonstrate that the effect of ms on people's social judgments depends on the salience of norms. in study 1, making salient opposite norms (prosocial vs. proself) led to reactions consistent with the activated norms following ms compared with the control condition. study 2 showed that, in combination with a pacifism prime, ms increased pacifistic attitudes. in study 3, making

salient a conservatism/security prime led people to recommend harsher bonds for an illegal prostitute when they were reminded of death, whereas a benevolence prime counteracted this effect. in study 4 a help prime, combined with ms, increased people's helpfulness. discussion focuses briefly on how these findings inform both terror-management theory and the focus theory of normative conduct."
Pyszczynski, T., Solomon, S., Greenberg, J., Arndt, J., & Schimel, J.. (2004). Why do people need self-esteem? A theoretical and empirical review. Psychological Bulletin

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1007/11759966_7
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"Terror management theory (tmt; j. greenberg, t. pyszczynski, & s. solomon, 1986) posits that people are motivated to pursue positive self-evaluations because self-esteem provides a buffer against the omnipresent potential for anxiety engendered by the uniquely human awareness of mortality. empirical evidence relevant to the theory is reviewed showing that high levels of self-esteem reduce anxiety and anxiety-related defensive behavior, reminders of one's mortality increase self-esteem striving and defense of self-esteem against threats in a variety of domains, high levels of self-esteem eliminate the effect of reminders of mortality on both self-esteem striving and the accessibility of death-related thoughts, and convincing people of the existence of an afterlife eliminates the effect of mortality salience on self-esteem striving. tmt is compared with other explanations for why people need self-esteem, and a critique of the most prominent of these, sociometer theory, is provided."
Solomon, S., Greenberg, J., & Pyszczynski, T.. (1991). A Terror Management Theory of Social Behavior: The Psychological Functions of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60328-7
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"This chapter deals with terror management theory that attempts to contribute to the understanding of social behavior by focusing on the essential being and circumstance of the human animal. the theory posits that all human motives are ultimately derived from a biologically based instinct for self-preservation. relative equanimity in the face of these existential realities is possible through the creation and maintenance of culture, which serves to minimize the terror by providing a shared symbolic context that imbues the universe with order, meaning, stability, and permanence. the theory provides a theoretical link between superficially unrelated substantive areas, and focuses on one particular motive that makes it distinctly human and, unfortunately, distinctly destructive. theories serve a variety of equally important functions, all of which are oriented towards improving the ability to think about and understand the subject matter of discipline. the chapter discusses the dual-component cultural anxiety buffer: worldview and self-esteem, the development and functioning of the cultural anxiety buffer for the individual, and a terror management analysis of social behavior in great detail. © 1991 academic press inc."

Greenberg, J., & Kosloff, S.. (2008). Terror Management Theory: Implications for Understanding Prejudice, Stereotyping, Intergroup Conflict, and Political Attitudes. Social and Personality Psychology Compass

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00144.x
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

“Terror management theory posits that to maintain psychological security despite the awareness of personal mortality, humans must maintain faith in cultural worldviews. these worldviews provide ways for humans to believe they are significant enduring beings in a world of meaning rather than mere animals fated only to obliteration upon death. we review basic support for terror management theory and research exploring the implications of terror management theory for understanding prejudice, stereo- typing, intergroup conflict, and political attitudes. this research shows that when the psychological need to defend these worldviews is heightened by reminders of death (mortality salience), prejudice, stereotyping, and support for charismatic leaders and aggression against outgroups is increased. terror management concerns also lead targets of prejudice to disidentify with their ingroup and confirm negative stereotypes of their group. we conclude by considering the implications of terror management theory and research for the alleviation of prejudice and intergroup conflict.”
Greenberg, J., Pyszczynski, T., & Solomon, S.. (1986). The Causes and Consequences of a Need for Self-Esteem: A Terror Management Theory. In Public Self and Private Self

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4613-9564-5_10
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

“Four selves, two motives, and a substitute process self-regulation model”
Landau, M. J., Solomon, S., Greenberg, J., Cohen, F., Pyszczynski, T., Arndt, J., … Cook, A.. (2004). Deliver us from evil: The effects of mortality salience and reminders of 9/11 on support for President George W. Bush. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1177/0146167204267988
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

“According to terror management theory, heightened concerns about mortality should intensify the appeal of charismatic lead- ers. to assess this idea, we investigated how thoughts about death and the 9/11 terrorist attacks influence americans’ atti- tudes toward current u.s. president george w. bush. study 1 found that reminding people of their own mortality (mortality salience) increased support for

bush and his counterterrorism policies. study 2 demonstrated that subliminal exposure to 9/ 11-related stimuli brought death-related thoughts closer to con- sciousness. study 3 showed that reminders of both mortality and 9/11 increased support for bush. in study 4, mortality salience led participants to become more favorable toward bush and vot- ing for him in the upcoming election but less favorable toward presidential candidate john kerry and voting for him. discus- sion focused on the role of terror management processes in allegiance to charismatic leaders and political decision making."
Jonas, E., & Fischer, P.. (2006). Terror management and religion: Evidence that intrinsic religiousness mitigates worldview defense following mortality salience. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.91.3.553
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"Terror management theory suggests that people cope with awareness of death by investing in some kind of literal or symbolic immortality. given the centrality of death transcendence beliefs in most religions, the authors hypothesized that religious beliefs play a protective role in managing terror of death. the authors report three studies suggesting that affirming intrinsic religiousness reduces both death-thought accessibility following mortality salience and the use of terror management defenses with regard to a secular belief system. study 1 showed that after a naturally occurring reminder of mortality, people who scored high on intrinsic religiousness did not react with worldview defense, whereas people low on intrinsic religiousness did. study 2 specified that intrinsic religious belief mitigated worldview defense only if participants had the opportunity to affirm their religious beliefs. study 3 illustrated that affirmation of religious belief decreased death-thought accessibility following mortality salience only for those participants who scored high on the intrinsic religiousness scale. taken as a whole, these results suggest that only those people who are intrinsically vested in their religion derive terror management benefits from religious beliefs."
Cozzolino, P. J., Staples, A. D., Meyers, L. S., & Samboceti, J.. (2004). Greed, Death, and Values: From Terror Management to Transcendence Management Theory. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1177/0146167203260716
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"Research supporting terror management theory has shown that participants facing their death (via mortality salience) exhibit more greed than do control participants. the present research attempts to distinguish mortality salience from other forms of mortality awareness. specifically, the authors look to reports of near-death experiences and posttraumatic growth which reveal that many people who nearly die come to view seeking wealth and possession as empty and meaningless. guided by these reports, a manipulation called death reflection was generated. in study 1, highly extrinsic participants who experienced death reflection exhibited intrinsic behavior. in study 2, the manipulation was validated, and in study 3, death reflection and mortality salience manipulations were compared. results showed that mortality salience led highly extrinsic participants to manifest greed, whereas death reflection

again generated intrinsic, unselfish behavior. the construct of value orientation is discussed along with the contrast between death reflection manipulation and mortality salience."
Florian, V., & Mikulincer, M.. (1997). Fear of death and the judgment of social transgressions: A multidimensional test of terror management theory.. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1037//0022-3514.73.2.369
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"The purpose of the research was to integrate a multidimensional approach to fear of personal death with terror management theory. in study 1, 190 students were divided according to the manipulation of death salience and the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of fear of death and were asked to judge transgressions that have either intrapersonal or interpersonal consequences. study 2 was a conceptual replication of study 1, with the exception that the manipulation of mortality salience included conditions that made salient either intrapersonal or interpersonal aspects of death. findings indicate that the effects of mortality salience depend on the aspect of death that is made salient, the aspect of death that individuals most fear, and the type of the judged transgression. more severe judgments of transgressions after death salience manipulation were found mainly when there was a fit between these 3 factors. findings are discussed in light of terror management theory."
Arndt, J., Solomon, S., Kasser, T., & Sheldon, K. M.. (2004). The urge to splurge: A terror management account of materialism and consumer behavior. Journal of Consumer Psychology

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1207/s15327663jcp1403_2
DOI URL
directSciHub download

Show/hide publication abstract

"This article presents terror management theory (tmt) as a way to understand how the human awareness of death affects materialism, conspicuous consumption, and consumer decisions. the pursuit of wealth and culturally desired commodities are hypothesized to reinforce those beliefs that function to protect people from existential anxieties. following a brief overview of tmt and research, evidence is reviewed that explicates how intimations of mortality increase materialism as a way to enhance self-esteem and affects consumer decisions that support one's cultural worldview. adverse consequences of materialistic and consumeristic worldviews are described and the challenges for future research to discover ways to alleviate them are considered."
Category

1. General
2. Neuropolitics
3. Politics
4. Psychopolitics
5. Social psychology
6. Sociology

Tags

1. in-group bias
2. mortality salience
3. out-group bias
4. unconscious processes

Date Created
November 2018
Author
web45