

The Siren's Call: Terror Management and the Threat of Men's Sexual Attraction to Women

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Why do sexually appealing women often attract derogation and aggression? According to terror management theory, women's sexual allure threatens to increase men's awareness of their corporeality and thus mortality. Accordingly, in Study 1 a subliminal mortality prime decreased men's but not women's attractiveness ratings of alluring women. In Study 2, mortality salience (MS) led men to downplay their sexual intent toward a sexy woman. In Study 3, MS decreased men's interest in a seductive but not a wholesome woman. In Study 4, MS decreased men's but not women's attraction to a sexy opposite-sex target. In Study 5, MS and a corporeal lust prime increased men's tolerance of aggression toward women. Discussion focuses on mortality concerns and male sexual ambivalence.

Keywords: gender, physical attraction, sexism, sexuality, terror management

The high, thrilling song of the Sirens will transfix him, lolling there in their meadow, round them heaps of corpses rotting away, rags of skin shriveling on their bones . . . Race straight past that course!

—Homer, *The Odyssey*

Cross-culturally and historically, men¹ harbor profound ambivalence toward women's power to provoke sexual desires. Exhilarated by women's sexual allure, men celebrate their virility, wantonly pursue mating opportunities, and exalt distinctly captivating women to divine status. Yet men also experience anxiety over

sexual provocations, leading them to renounce base desires and in some cases punish the women allegedly responsible for inciting their arousal. Existentially oriented theorists such as Otto Rank (1930/1998), Norman O. Brown (1959), and Ernest Becker (1973) have proposed that the human body—especially the physicality of sex—is problematic because it serves as a perpetual reminder of the inevitability of death to an animal oriented toward staying alive. In support of these ideas, research derived from terror management theory (TMT; e.g., Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986) has demonstrated that uneasiness over the physical aspects of sex stems in part from mortality concerns (see Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000, for a review). Extending this analysis, men's ambivalence toward sexual attraction and women in general might be understood as a response to the existential threat posed by the power of provoked sexual interest to make one's corporeal, and thus mortal, nature apparent (see also Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004). The current article presents the results of five experiments testing this idea.

Mad About You

In almost every culture of which we are aware, men have disparaged and feared women almost as vigorously as they have

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This work was partially supported by National Science Foundation Grants SBR 9729946 and BCS 0241371. We thank Dena Norris, Jeremy Fahrenbrink, and Samantha Zipp for their assistance in data collection. Many thanks go to Eric Osborne for help with materials. Jim Dobbins also assisted in data collection and made contributions to a draft of this article.

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¹ For the purposes of this article, our use of the term *men* refers to heterosexual men.

adored and pursued them (see Gilmore, 2001, for a historical overview). Most of the earliest writings, folklore, and holy texts (e.g., the Bible, the Qur'an, Buddhist and Hindu scripture) depict women as contaminating, iniquitous personifications of danger and evil (e.g., the Siren's intoxicating charm luring innocent men into oblivion; Pandora and Eve introducing suffering to the world; the association of the vagina with danger, suffering, and social disorder in peoples ranging from the Wichita Indians of Kansas to the Muria of central India; see Hays, 1964). Even in contemporary Western societies, women are often branded as temptresses maliciously bent on perverting reason, swaying men from righteousness, defiling all that is sacred and pure, and undermining the moral fabric of culture (Gilmore, 2001; Lakoff, 1987; Spiro, 1997).

A pervasive theme underlying men's fearful and derisive attitudes toward women is ambivalence toward their own sexual inclinations. On the one hand, there is a marked gender asymmetry in desire for sex (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Clark & Hatfield, 1989). Compared with women, men think about sex more, have more favorable attitudes toward it (Oliver & Hyde, 1993), desire to copulate with a wider variety of partners (Symons, 1979), exaggerate their number of partners (N. R. Brown & Sinclair, 1999; Regan & Dreyer, 1999), seek and initiate more sex (Byers & Heinlein, 1989), consume massive amounts of pornography, sometimes obtain sex by force, and sacrifice resources to induce consent or to purchase sex outright. However, there is also ample evidence that men are distressed over their sexual responses (Barlow, 1986; Koukounas & McCabe, 2001), deny sexual interest, and condemn provocative women.

These guarded reactions to woman and sexuality are commonly observed in religious traditions. Many Christian texts (e.g., the *Malleus Maleficarum*, 1486), for example, designate women's sexual lure as the principal cause of sin in the world. The Torah prohibits women from cooking on the Sabbath day lest they disrupt men's religious aims by bending over the oven. Catholic churches also once mandated that women cover their heads during mass to prevent angels from being overwhelmed with lust, and female cantors were prohibited on account of their distractingly erotic voices. As expressed by a contemporary minister, "sexual 'thorns-in-the-flesh' are surely the greatest instruments of humility to bring the clergy to their knees in prayer" (quoted in Balswick & Thoburn, 1991, p. 280). In Buddhist traditions, "sex is a base drive and an insurmountable obstacle to ultimate salvation (nirvana) whose achievement requires, among other things, the extinction of sexual desire" (Spiro, 1997, p. 154). To protect themselves against sexual enticement, men have embraced various forms of asceticism (from hermetic retreats and self-castrations to cults of virginity and straightedge subcultures; see Atkinson, 2003; Hayt, 2002) that emphasize self-restraint and bodily purity as a protest against hedonistic bodily indulgences.

Outside the domain of religion, men have also feared the power of women's sexual lure in undermining societal order (e.g., pornography regulations) and personal control (Edgerton, 1971; Freud, 1931; Gilmore, 2001). Women's sexual influence has even been branded as debilitating, poisonous, and fatal (Spiro, 1997). For example, men in the 19th century were encouraged to use diet and exercise to temper "venereal excess," which was associated with a host of health complications. Also, many different peoples have independently associated ejaculation with the loss of virtue

and vital life force (e.g., Lederer, 1968) and depicted women as transforming man's unique nature into lowly life forms (e.g., squealing pigs; Dinnerstein, 1976).

Men's sexual preoccupations have had dire consequences for women's lives and well-being. Even in the most purportedly egalitarian societies, women who commit the slightest transgressions against local sexual regulations face strict sanctions (Lindenaub, 1976). For example, women constituted 80% of the alleged witches (whose evil derives from their carnal lust) who were humiliated, banished, and executed in 17th-century New England (Lehman & Myers, 1993). The Mundurucu of Brazil prohibit women from being in proximity to sacramental tools at the cost of gang rape or execution (Murphy, 1960). Also, many cultures practice female circumcision and even infibulation, in which not only is the clitoris removed but the vagina is stitched up until marriage. In other extremes, serial killers, both real (e.g., Christopher Wilder, Jack the Ripper, Ted Bundy) and fictitious (popular in slasher movies), have favored prostitutes and other allegedly iniquitous women. More insidiously, many of the prevalent derogatory terms for women are explicitly sexual (e.g., *slut*, *whore*), and women who are typically associated with sex (sex industry workers, sorority girls, even blondes; Pitman, 2003) are targets of belittlement, harassment, physical and sexual abuse, social censure, and victim derogation. Men tend to juxtapose these attitudes and practices with an equally strong aforementioned tendency to adore and even worship women, resulting in what many have referred to as the *Madonna-whore dichotomy* (Tanzer, 1985) or *pedestal-gutter syndrome* (Tavris & Wade, 1984).

In sum, one significant dimension underlying men's misogynistic attitudes and behavior has been a deep-seated concern over women's power to provoke sexual desire. Although cross-cultural and historical evidence attests to the influence of this concern on men's responses to sex and women, few efforts have been made to systematically address why sexual desire is sometimes regarded with profound suspicion, and why sexually appealing women often attract derogation and even aggression. Below we present an existential account of sexual ambivalence that may cast some light on these and related issues.

An Existential Approach

Our account of men's sexual ambivalence is derived from TMT (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991) and its theoretical antecedents, such as Søren Kierkegaard, Otto Rank, Norman Brown, and Ernest Becker, who converged on the notion that shame, anxiety, and disgust surrounding the physical aspects of the self reflect an underlying concern with vulnerability and mortality. Like all life forms, humans have a basic predisposition to avoid threats to continued existence. They accomplish this in large part by virtue of their distinctive and immensely adaptive intellectual capabilities (e.g., extended temporal thought, self-awareness, and the associated capacity for abstract, symbolic thinking). These skills are a paradoxical achievement, however, as they render the individual aware of the utter fragility of life and the inevitability of his or her own death. Even in the absence of any immediate threat, people recognize that their desire to live will inevitably be thwarted—a recognition that threatens to overwhelm them with paralyzing anxiety. To maintain psychological equanimity and enable routine activity, people construct shared, symbolic conceptions of

reality that imbue the world and one's own existence with transcendent meaning, order, and permanence. By viewing their life as playing out within a symbolically meaningful reality, the individual can sustain the feeling that he or she is more than a mere transient animal fated only to annihilation upon death. According to TMT, we can understand a wide range of behaviors as attempts to maintain meaning and value in the ultimate service of managing deeply held mortality concerns.

From this perspective, the body is problematic. Although people perceive themselves as unique individuals with meaningful histories and lofty life projects, they are nonetheless encased in a lumbering body that aches, bleeds, and binds them to the fate of every other living thing, namely inevitable decay and death. People are at some level aware that their body is, in effect, their inviolable contract with death—a constant reminder of their fallibility—and go to great lengths to deny this by elevating themselves above their mere animal existence to something more dignified, unique, and permanent. This antagonism between the mental (eternal, ethereal, sacred) and the corporeal (temporal, material, profane) is expressed in many intellectual traditions (e.g., dualism), religious convictions (e.g., the soul), and cultural practices (e.g., excessive grooming and adornment), all seeking to instill humankind with an immortal essence independent of the body and thus view the self as free from accidental termination or eventual dissolution from the ravages of time. In short, people have regarded the corporeal with shame and disgust and have placed great value on erecting what Stephen Jay Gould (2002) referred to as *golden barriers* to set themselves apart from the rest of the animal kingdom, in large part because of an awareness of the connection between the physical and the mortal.

Extending TMT to address the question of why sex is so often a source of anxiety, guilt, and general distress, Goldenberg and colleagues (e.g., Goldenberg, Cox, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2002; Goldenberg et al., 2000; Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, McCoy, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999) claimed that although sex can be immensely pleasurable, it also threatens to make apparent one's physicalness and thus mortality. As with menstruation, eating, excretion, and other bodily activities, one response to this threat is the rigid imposition of culturally constructed regulations, such as with rules about who can engage in which sexual activity with whom and under what conditions. People also become highly invested in imbuing the physical act of sex with symbolic significance (e.g., by equating sex with uniquely human values like romantic love, spiritual ascendancy, etc.). Moreover, they attempt to override biological inclinations through extensive self-regulation (e.g., denying temptation and denouncing "pleasures of the flesh"). Although these ways of relating to sex may also serve other, more practical functions, Goldenberg et al. (e.g., 1999) proposed that people's frequent uneasiness with sex, and their vigorous efforts to mask its raw physicality, are at least in part (quite unconscious) attempts to obscure the link between sex and death.

Empirical Assessment of the Existential Approach

According to TMT's mortality salience (MS) hypothesis, heightening the salience of mortality should intensify reliance on and defense of psychological structures that help one sustain faith in the meaningfulness and significance of one's life. Over 200

experiments to date have supported hypotheses derived from this idea. For example, MS has led to polarized attitudes toward those who uphold or violate cultural values (Greenberg et al., 1990), increased discomfort for those behaving in ways that violate cultural standards (Greenberg, Simon, Porteus, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1995), and heightened aggression against those who challenge one's beliefs (McGregor et al., 1998). Furthermore, these effects have been obtained with diverse operationalizations of MS, including subliminal priming (Arndt, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1997) and proximity to a funeral home (Pyszczynski et al., 1996).

Further, MS effects have been shown to be specific to mortality; they are not elicited by other aversive stimuli, increased self-focus, or the salience of cultural values (e.g., Greenberg, Simon, Harmon-Jones, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1995). The model by which thoughts of death affect behavior (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999) posits that conscious contemplation of mortality first arouses direct, threat-focused proximal defenses involving suppression of death-related thoughts or denying vulnerability to various risk factors. Once death-related thought is no longer in focal awareness, distal symbolic terror management defenses, which serve to bolster faith in a meaningful worldview and one's sense of self as special and permanent, are activated to manage the potential for anxiety engendered by the heightened accessibility of implicit death-related thought. For explicit MS inductions, this increase in symbolic defense occurs most reliably following a delay and distraction. Also, Arndt et al. (1997) found that presenting death-related words beneath conscious awareness led to an immediate increase in death thought accessibility and symbolic defenses relative to neutral or control words (for a recent review of research supporting this model, see Arndt, Cook, & Routledge, 2004). This and other evidence supports the central claim of TMT that specific concerns about death influence a wide range of behaviors directed toward sustaining faith in a meaningful worldview and a sense of personal significance (see Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997; Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003).

More pertinent for our present purposes, Goldenberg et al. (2001) focused on the threat of corporeality and found that MS, but not another aversive prime, increased preference for an essay distinguishing humans from other animals and increased disgust reactions to bodily products and functions. More recently, Goldenberg et al. (2002) found that thinking about aspects of one's physicality led to an increased accessibility of death-related thoughts, and Goldenberg et al. (2004) found that, among individuals high in neuroticism (who lack an effective buffer against death concerns; Hoelter & Hoelter, 1978), MS increased avoidance of even pleasurable physical sensation.

Focusing specifically on sex, Goldenberg et al. (1999) found that individuals high in neuroticism responded to MS with less interest in the physical aspects of sex (e.g., "feeling my genitals respond sexually") and increased accessibility of death-related thought when reminded of those physical aspects. Goldenberg et al. (2002) found that these effects held for both individuals high in neuroticism and individuals low in neuroticism when humans' similarity to other animals was made salient. In short, the claim that uneasiness about sex is rooted in mortality concerns is supported by evidence that MS results in an intensified need to distance from the physical aspects of sex, especially when one's

creaturely nature is made apparent, and that reminders of the physical, but not romantic, aspects of sex increase death accessibility. Further, symbolic or meaning-lending constructions (e.g., love) have been shown to buffer the threatening association between physical sex and death (Goldenberg et al., 1999; Study 3). Indeed, Mikulincer and colleagues (see Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003) have shown in a large body of research that long-term romantic partners serve a fundamental role in assuaging mortality concerns.

Fatal Attraction

Considering our original question—what is threatening to men about women’s sexual allure?—from a terror management perspective, we think it plausible that the threat derives in part from the power of attraction to undermine the man’s sustained avoidance of mortality concerns. The experience of raw sexual attraction, unembellished by symbolic interpretations, transforms the individual from something unique and special to an impulsive, animalistic, material, and finite piece of biological protoplasm (Rank, 1930/1998). Even subtle reminders that he is at the mercy of his libidinal appetites may thus threaten the man’s symbolic defenses against mortality concerns. Although this proposal is consistent with a long theoretical tradition, the present research is the first to examine the role of mortality concerns in the threat of women’s sexual allure.

Is the threat of sexual attraction unique to men? We think that underlying existential concerns motivate men and women alike to see themselves as unbounded to their creaturely instincts and appetites and that yielding to sexual temptation can potentially undermine this striving and engender much of the guilt and anxiety that men and women experience regarding sex. However, as Goldenberg and Roberts (2004) have recently proposed, because of men’s ardent sexual desire and their relatively more body-centered sexuality (i.e., tied more to physical attraction and pleasure than women’s because of various aspects of their physiology, socialization, etc.; e.g., Buss, 1989), they may be especially vulnerable to confrontations with their own corporeality via sexual attraction. This is consistent with the historical prevalence of men’s association between women’s sexual allure and death, hypervigilance over yielding to the pleasures of the flesh, and contempt and derision for women who provoke lustful thoughts. For these reasons, and because men’s ambivalence toward women has had severe social repercussions, the current studies focus primarily, but not exclusively, on men’s responses to women.

In sum, prior terror management research suggests that MS leads people to react unfavorably to anyone or anything that renders their corporeality salient. Accordingly, we propose that the experience of sexual attraction can exert this regressive pull on men and will thus lead to denial of sexual attraction and derogation of women when mortality is salient. On the basis of these ideas, Study 1 tested the hypothesis that subliminal mortality primes would reduce objective ratings of alluring women’s physical attractiveness and sexiness among male but not female raters. Study 2 assessed whether mortality-salient men minimize their perceived sexual, but not friendly, intent in an interaction with a sexually appealing woman. Study 3 evaluated the hypothesis that MS would result in unfavorable attitudes toward seductive, but not wholesome, women. Study 4 examined men and women to assess

whether women exhibited mortality-induced distaste for a seductive member of the opposite sex. Finally, Study 5 tested the idea that MS combined with reminders of carnal lust would increase men’s tolerance for aggression against women.

Study 1

We claim that men harbor ambivalence toward sexually alluring women in part because of the existential threat of sexual attraction. This ambivalence has contributed to the tendency for some men to dissociate themselves from their own creaturely impulses (Becker, 1973; N. O. Brown, 1959). Study 1 was designed to test the hypothesis that death-primed men will give lower objective ratings of the physical attractiveness and sexiness of alluring women. To test this, we subliminally primed participants with death or pain and then asked them to judge the attractiveness of anonymous, sexy women.

Another goal of Study 1 was to show that the effects of death reminders on evaluations of sexy women are specific to men. Prior research by Roberts, Goldenberg, Power, and Pyszczynski (2002) has demonstrated that when a female confederate inadvertently dropped a tampon (as opposed to a hair clip), both male and female participants responded to her unfavorably. These findings were interpreted as demonstrating a reaction against the creatureliness inherent in another’s body, in this case women. Goldenberg and Roberts (2004) even suggested that there may be an existential threat inherent in women’s bodies due to more obvious associations with reproduction (e.g., menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation). However, in the current series of experiments, we were explicitly interested in how mortality concerns associated with men’s desire contribute to ambivalent reactions toward sexually attractive women. In other words, we claim that the role of mortality concerns in negative reactions toward sexy women reflects a threat inherent in one’s own body, when men’s own animalistic inclinations are incited by women, and are not primarily a reaction against alluring women per se. If the threat of sexual attraction indeed represents an internal conflict between the pursuit of sex and the denial of corporeality, rather than an inherent threat associated with women’s bodies, then mortality primes should reduce men’s, but not women’s, attractiveness ratings of alluring women.

Method

Participants

A total of 64 (18 men and 46 women)² undergraduates participated in exchange for extra credit. All participants reported to be heterosexual.

Materials and Procedure

Mixed-sex groups were run in a laboratory setting by a male experimenter. They were asked to participate in two ostensibly separate studies—one a computerized word task and the other an evaluation exercise.

² The unequal number of men and women reflects the distribution of sex in the participant pool. When we performed the primary analysis after randomly removing 28 women to equalize cell sizes, the results revealed an equivalent pattern of means, and the critical interaction and pairwise comparisons remained significant.

Subliminal mortality manipulation. The experimenter led participants through a computer program designed to subliminally present death or a control prime outside of conscious awareness (Arndt et al., 1997). The experimenter first gave the instructions for the word-relation task, which required participants to decide as quickly as possible whether two words that flashed sequentially on the screen were semantically related or unrelated by pressing the right shift key or the left shift key, respectively. For example, if the words *flower* and *rose* were presented, participants were to press the right shift key to indicate that they are related, but if the words *sneaker* and *fajita* were presented, they were to press the left shift key to indicate that they are not. The experimenter then turned off the cubicle light to reduce glare on the screen. The appropriate keys were marked with luminous stickers.

Stimuli were presented on a 15-in Gateway color monitor controlled by an IBM-compatible computer. The task was presented with DMASTR display software, developed at Monash University and at the University of Arizona by K. I. Forster and J. C. Forster (2001). The program synchronizes the timing of the display and uses normal bit-mapped fonts. The first few frames presented instructions and three practice stimuli centered on the screen. There were then 10 trials sequentially presenting three words centered on the screen. The first and third words were the target words for which participants were supposed to determine the presence or absence of a relationship. Actually these two words served as a forward mask (and fixation point) and backward mask, respectively, and were displayed for 427.5 ms. The critical subliminal prime, either *DEAD* or *PAIN*, depending on the condition, was presented between the two masking words for 42.8 ms. The control prime, *PAIN*, was chosen because it matched *DEAD* in word size and frequency and because it is negative in valence. The experimenter was blind to priming condition.

Upon completion of the computer task, participants were given a packet of materials for the second study.

Target pictures and evaluations. The first part of the packet included six pictures of six notably attractive women. To minimize familiarity, we chose women who were not currently undergraduates at the university. They wore diverse outfits, but all were dressed in a sexually appealing though not aberrant manner (e.g., short skirts), and all smiled and looked at the camera. They all sat on a waist-height stool and assumed slightly different poses. The setting was a plain white hallway. The pictures were randomized in order prior to the experiment. Participants were asked to evaluate each target on six dimensions: attractive, alluring, beautiful, desirable, inviting, and sexy. Responses were made on 9-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much so*).

Priming questionnaire. Participants were then asked a series of manipulation check questions to assess their awareness of the stimuli display:

How many words did you see in each display? Did you ever see more than two words flashed at a time? If yes, was it the same word or a different word from the others you saw? If you think it was a different word, list what you think it may have been.

On a separate page were the instructions "Assume that there was an additional word that flashed across the computer screen. Out of the four words, guess which one it might have been" followed by four words: *fail*, *dead*, *pain*, and *hurt*. Participants inserted completed packets into a confidential box and were fully debriefed.

Results and Discussion

Checks on Awareness of Subliminal Stimuli

To assess participants' awareness of the subliminal stimuli, we examined their responses to the priming questionnaire. Only 5 participants indicated that they saw three rather than two words in each trial display; none of them chose *dead* as the additional word. When asked to guess what a possible third word was from a list of

four words, participants in the death condition chose *dead* (from four choices) less than 15% of the time, and those in the pain condition chose *pain* less than 16% of the time. Thus, as in previous research using this manipulation (e.g., Arndt et al., 1997), there was no conscious retrospective awareness of the prime.

Target Evaluations

The six evaluation dimensions were internally reliable (for each target, alphas ranged from .88 to .96) and were thus averaged to form a composite attractiveness rating. Analyses using target as a within-subjects variable yielded no significant main effects or interactions with our primary variables, so we collapsed the ratings across targets (actual composite scores ranged from 1.19 to 7.19). These scores were submitted to a 2 (death vs. pain prime) \times 2 (sex) analysis of variance (ANOVA). Not surprisingly, we found a main effect for sex such that men rated the female targets as more attractive ($M = 5.5$, $SD = 1.59$) than did women ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 1.19$), $F(1, 60) = 6.39$, $p = .01$. This was qualified by the predicted Prime \times Sex interaction, $F(1, 60) = 6.84$, $p = .01$ (means are presented in Table 1). Pairwise comparisons revealed that death primes caused a significant decrease in perceived attractiveness among men, $F(1, 60) = 6.28$, $p = .02$. Indeed, whereas in the pain prime condition men gave higher attractiveness ratings than did women, $F(1, 60) = 9.06$, $p = .01$, there was no sex difference in the death prime condition ($F < 1$, $p > .90$). In contrast to men, women's attractiveness ratings were not affected by priming condition ($F < 1$, $p > .40$).

These results confirmed our hypothesis that mortality primes would decrease men's, but not women's, objective ratings of alluring women's physical and sexual attractiveness. These findings provide support for the claim that men's ambivalent reactions to sexually attractive women are at least partly rooted in mortality concerns. If the threat stemmed primarily from the female targets' bodies per se, then death-primed women should have also rated the target women as objectively less attractive.

Study 2

Study 1 provides evidence that, for men, mortality primes reduced perceived attractiveness of sexually alluring women. In Study 2, we examined men's perceptions of their sexual intent toward a sexually alluring woman in a dyadic interaction. We also assessed other positive but nonsexual reactions to the woman. We hypothesized that men who encounter an attractive, friendly

Table 1
Attractiveness Ratings of Sexy Women as a Function of Subliminal Mortality and Control Primes and Participant Sex in Study 1

Sex	Prime			
	Mortality salience		Control	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men	4.59 _a	1.55	6.41 _b	0.71
Women	4.63 _a	0.96	4.32 _a	1.38

Note. Scale ranged from 1 to 9. Higher scores indicate higher perceived attractiveness. Means with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

woman under conditions of MS would be less likely to admit sexual intent, but self-perceived friendliness, much like the romantic aspects of sex (Goldenberg et al., 1999), would not be adversely affected by MS. To test this idea, we had mortality- and control-primed men interact with a sexually attractive female confederate and then evaluate her and their own sexual behavior as well as other nonsexual behaviors generally associated with friendliness.

We also controlled for the potential influence of self-perceived mate value on participants' evaluation of their own sexual intent. There is evidence that those prone to anxiety (e.g., people high in depression and neuroticism) report lower self-perceived mate value and are more sensitive about social losses (e.g., being rejected) than gains (Kirsner, Figueredo, & Jacobs, 2003). On the basis of these findings, an alternative explanation for our expected pattern of results might be that MS results in a more conservative self-esteem strategy, negatively influencing what men feel is realistically attainable (i.e., reduced mate value) and consequently reducing their investment in appearing sexually engaged. To account for this alternative, we included a Mate Value Inventory (MVI). We predicted that MS would not affect self-perceived mate value, nor would mate value mediate the hypothesized MS effects.

Method

Participants

Participants were 17³ heterosexual undergraduate men recruited to participate in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

Materials and Procedure

The experiment was run with participants individually in a lab setting. A male experimenter ushered the participant into an anteroom and asked him to wait for the other participant. The participant sat in one of two chairs positioned on opposing sides of a small table. The chairs were placed equidistantly from the table to control for proximity. A female confederate (blind to priming condition) in an adjacent room began timing at the moment the participant entered the lab and then entered 15 s later, inquiring whether this was the correct room for the experiment. The experimenter invited her to sit in the second chair. The confederate was a distinctly attractive blonde wearing revealing denim shorts and a form-fitting top. The outfit was chosen to be sexy but not at all aberrant for the area and the season. In addition to her outfit, her perfume, hair, and makeup (all attractively prepared) were consistent across sessions. The experimenter explained that they would be participating in a study on first impressions and the getting-acquainted process. They would be asked to complete some standard personality questionnaires, briefly interact with each other in a short task, and then privately give their impressions of the interaction. Participants then entered separate cubicles, and the experimenter (blind to condition) administered the packet of personality questionnaires described below.

MS manipulation and delay. The MS manipulation followed two filler questionnaires included to sustain the cover story and obscure the true purpose of the study. In the MS condition, participants responded to two open-ended questions (used in prior TMT studies; e.g., Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989): "Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you," and "Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you as you physically die and once you are physically dead." To ensure that the effects are specific to thoughts of death and not merely generalized reactions to aversive thoughts, we asked participants in the control condition to respond to parallel questions about dental pain. A delay and distraction was then

created by having participants complete a self-report mood scale (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule—Expanded Form [PANAS-X]; Watson & Clark, 1991)⁴ as previous research (e.g., Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, & Breus, 1994) has shown that the effects of an explicit MS prime are more robust after a delay.

Participants inserted completed packets into envelopes and a box and then cracked their cubicle door, at which point the confederate in the adjacent cubicle counted 10 s and then opened her door. The experimenter asked them both to return to their seats in the main room. He explained that the next part of the study was concerned with how unacquainted people form impressions of others on the basis of short interactions. After confirming that the participant and the confederate were indeed strangers, he instructed them to interact for a few minutes and encouraged them to relax and be themselves throughout the interaction. They were then told that to structure the interaction they would be given forms with questions to ask the other person. They drew slips of paper to determine whether they received Form A or Form B. In reality, both slips of paper were marked A, and the confederate always announced B. They were then administered separate forms.

The experimenter encouraged both to get a sense of the other's personality and then left the room for exactly 4 min, during which the participant and confederate exchanged questions and answers. The confederate's answers were scripted to give the impression that she was single, inviting, and enjoyed a good time. A sample question asked of the confederate was "What do you think of the dating scene at U of A.?" to which she responded "I've dated a few guys here and there but nothing serious, ya' know? I'm still looking for the right guy, but I guess I haven't found him yet . . . yeah I guess I'm still on the hunt, ya' know?" To minimize variability in the participant's responses to her queries, we directed the confederate to ask questions with straightforward answers (e.g., "What restaurants do you like to go to?"). The confederate was well practiced in being equally friendly to all participants on a range of communicative dimensions (e.g., eye contact, smiling, intonation, attentiveness, etc.). The experimenter returned and explained that they would now have a chance to privately report their impressions of the other person and the interaction. They returned to separate cubicles, where the experimenter administered the packet described below. The participants were instructed to complete the packet and then place it in the unmarked envelope provided and drop the envelope in a box in the cubicle to ensure the anonymity of their responses.

Interaction rating forms. The interaction rating forms were modeled after similar measures used by Abbey (1982). One form asked participants to think about the conversation and then rate, on a 7-point scale ranging

³ Although this is a low sample size, we felt it necessary to terminate the study early because debriefings revealed that the deception involved with the procedure was disturbing for some participants, suggesting that our female confederate was indeed convincing and alluring.

⁴ Use of the PANAS-X also allowed us to assess the possibility of affective consequences of the MS inductions and to assess whether mood played any mediating role in the reported effects. For Studies 2, 4, and 5, we performed an MS × Control Prime multivariate analysis of variance as well as ANOVAs on the various subscales of the PANAS-X and ANOVAs on the aggregate positive and negative affect scores. Consistent with prior research, these analyses revealed no indication that MS influenced positive or negative affect or their constitutive subscales. To ensure that MS effects were not mediated by affect, we conducted analyses of covariance with the affect subscales scores (including positive and negative affect) as covariates, and the effects of MS remained statistically intact (the pattern of significant results for all studies remained the same when positive and negative affect were covaried out). Thus, we can be quite confident that, as in past research, the reported findings are not caused by affective differences between the MS and control conditions.

from 1 (*not trying at all to be*) to 7 (*trying very hard to be*), how much they thought their interaction partner was trying to behave with respect to a number of characteristics. Of these, 5 characteristics indicated sexual intent: sexy, promiscuous, attractive, seductive, and flirtatious. To divert participants' attention from the centrality of the sexual items as well as assess the specificity of MS effects on sexual interest, we asked participants to rate their partner on 15 positive but sexually neutral characteristics: considerate, cheerful, interesting, talkative, likable, funny, warm, kind, lively, assertive, intelligent, sincere, friendly, polite, and sociable. Another form asked participants to rate their own behavior on the same 20 characteristics. Self- and other ratings were counterbalanced. A preliminary analysis revealed no main effects or interactions for order of presentation, so this variable was excluded from subsequent analyses.

Self-rated MVI. Participants were then administered Kirsner et al.'s (2003) MVI to assess how they rated themselves on a number of purported evolutionarily relevant categories indicative of value as a mate (e.g., wealth and status, physical appearance, sexual fidelity). The scale demonstrated acceptable internal reliability ($\alpha = .85$).

Results and Discussion

We expected that death-primed men would downplay their sexual, but not friendly, intent toward the alluring woman compared with control-primed men. Thus, we averaged participants' ratings for the 5 items indicating how much they were trying to be sexually flirtatious ($\alpha = .83$; range: 1.0–4.4), how much their partner was perceived as being flirtatious ($\alpha = .85$; range: 1.4–4.4), the 15 items indicating their own friendliness ($\alpha = .93$; range: 3.1–5.6), and their partner's friendliness ($\alpha = .90$; range: 3.4–5.3). See Table 2 for correlations between these measures.

A 2 (MS vs. dental-pain prime; between) \times 2 (self vs. other ratings; within) \times 2 (sexual vs. friendly intent; within) ANOVA revealed a main effect for sexual versus friendly intent, $F(1, 15) = 488.96$, $p < .01$, and an interaction between self- versus other ratings and sexual versus friendly intent ratings, $F(1, 15) = 5.47$, $p = .03$, both of which were qualified by the predicted three-way interaction, $F(1, 15) = 4.40$, $p = .05$. To interpret this interaction we performed separate ANOVAs for sexual and friendly intent.

Sexual Intent

We submitted sexual intent ratings to a 2 (MS vs. pain; between) \times 2 (self vs. other; within) ANOVA. The analysis revealed

Table 2
Correlations (Overall and by Condition) Among Measures of Self and Other's Sexual and Friendly Intent Used in Study 2

Condition	Other's sexual intent	Self's sexual intent	Other's friendliness
Overall ($N = 17$)			
Self's sexual intent	.60*	—	
Other's friendliness	.20	.56*	—
Self's friendliness	.22	.46	.92**
Mortality salience ($n = 9$)			
Self's sexual intent	.75*	—	
Other's friendliness	.08	.49	—
Self's friendliness	.22	.43	.93**
Dental pain ($n = 8$)			
Self's sexual intent	.48	—	
Other's friendliness	.38	.56	—
Self's friendliness	.18	.46	.91**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

no main effects ($F_s < 1$). However, the predicted two-way interaction emerged, $F(1, 15) = 6.64$, $p = .02$ (see relevant means in Table 3). Pairwise comparisons demonstrated that, within the MS condition, men's self-perceived sexual intent was lower than other-perceived sexual intent, $F(1, 15) = 7.65$, $p = .01$. Furthermore, men's self-perceived sexual intent was lower in the MS condition than in the dental-pain condition, $F(1, 15) = 7.15$, $p = .02$. No other comparisons attained significance ($F_s < 1$).

Friendliness

To assess whether the reduced interest was specifically sexual, we performed a second mixed ANOVA on self- and other-friendliness ratings. Results revealed a main effect for self- versus other ratings, such that men perceived themselves as trying to be more friendly ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 0.71$) than the confederate ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.64$), $F(1, 15) = 7.10$, $p = .02$. However, there was no trace of an interaction with MS ($F < 1$).

To test whether MS influenced participants' estimates of their own desirability as a mate, we conducted an MS \times Self versus Other ANOVA with MVI scores as our dependent measure. There were no changes in perceptions of self-perceived mate value ($p_s > .90$). Furthermore, including MVI scores as a covariate resulted in the same pattern of significant results relevant to our key predictions, further suggesting that MVI did not mediate the effects of MS on willingness to admit sexual intentions.

These results confirmed our hypothesis that, in the context of a natural interaction with a sexy woman, MS would reduce men's perception of their own sexual interest but not perceptions of their partner's sexual interest or the extent to which either was trying to be friendly. These results provide further evidence that mortality concerns underlie men's defensive distancing from their own reactions to a sexually alluring woman.

One limitation of the present study is that, despite the multiple measures taken to assure participants of confidentiality, they may have still been concerned that their conversation partner would see their responses, and therefore we cannot definitively rule out the possibility that death-primed men were motivated to protect self-esteem (e.g., Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2004) and were thus reluctant to admit their sexual intent for fear of rejection or embarrassment. Although we think this alternative explanation is unlikely for a number of reasons (e.g., it would be equally embarrassing to assume sexual intent on the part of one's partner, but there were no effects on this measure), the remaining studies, like Study 1, were designed such that targets were not present. That said, the realism provided by an actual woman in a relatively natural context is a strength of this study.

Study 3

The findings of Studies 1 and 2 demonstrate that death reminders result in men downplaying the sexual attraction of and their sexual intent toward alluring women. However, it is unclear whether mortality concerns cause men to respond negatively to all women or whether the effects are specific to sexually provocative women. On the basis of the idea that people respond to mortality by imbuing threatening aspects of existence with symbolic meaning (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1997) as well as the specific findings of Goldenberg et al. (1999, 2002), showing that MS leads to negative

Table 3
*Self and Other Sexual Intent as a Function of Mortality
 Salience in Study 2*

Sexual intent	Prime			
	Mortality salience		Control	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self's	2.00 _a	1.01	3.34 _b	1.02
Other's	2.80 _b	1.12	3.00	0.97

Note. Scale ranged from 1 to 7. Higher scores indicate more sexual intent. Means with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

reactions to the physical, but not the romantic, aspects of sex, we think that men defend against the threatening aspects of animalistic attraction to women by raising some women to a special status of wholesome, virginal creatures (indeed, men have often clung to feminized figures of cosmic beauty, fertility, and nurturance such as the Madonna and child or Mother Earth). Attraction to women who appear pure and wholesome should thus pose minimal existential threat.

In this vein, Glick and Fiske (2001) have provided evidence that men polarize their perceptions of women, exalting some to a pedestal and consigning others to the gutter. In particular, Glick and Fiske propose that women who challenge or attempt to steal men's power, either through nontraditional gender roles or seduction, elicit hostile sexism, whereas women who conform to traditional gender roles and comply with men are responded to with a benevolent sexism, which is subjectively favorable but still promotes inequity. We agree with Glick and Fiske that men exhibit a curious mix of reverential and contemptuous attitudes toward women and that women who threaten to undermine important goals are often denigrated. We add that the particular threat of women as seductresses also has existential implications for men who are threatened by perceptions of themselves as mere fornicating animals (see also Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004). We therefore hypothesized that MS would reduce attraction to a seductive woman but not a wholesome-appearing woman. To test this idea, we asked mortality- or control-primed men to rate their attraction to and interest in dating a young woman portrayed in either a very wholesome or a very seductive manner.

Method

Participants

Participants were 55 male undergraduates who participated for course credit. All reported being either heterosexual or bisexual except for one individual who did not respond to the sexual orientation item and therefore was not included in the analysis. Because interest in dating the woman was assessed in this study, we collected information on participants' relationship status: 55% were single, 29% were in a committed, nonmarried relationship, and 16% were married.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were tested in small groups by a male experimenter and told that they would be completing two ostensibly separate studies. The first study was described as a personality assessment of college men and included the MS manipulation; the second study was described as a film

study. The experimenter explained that he was involved in making a short film and needed input on choosing which actress would be featured in the film. He said that because this was an all-male study and because the psychology study was extremely short, they were going to be asked to provide their impressions of a woman on the basis of her picture. The picture varied as to whether the woman was dressed seductively or conservatively.

MS manipulation and delay. As in Study 2, the MS manipulation followed a couple of fillers intended to maintain the cover story. A word-search puzzle was included immediately after the MS or dental-pain prime to provide the necessary delay and distraction.

Seductiveness of the woman. To assess attraction to women as a function of seductiveness, we asked male participants to provide their reactions to a woman who was supposedly responding to an advertisement to star in a short film. The advertisement was depicted as follows:

Wanted: Women from ages 18 to 26 to play the leading part in a short film. Please send 2 to 3 pictures of yourself as you look on an average day. We are looking for someone that naturally fits this role, so please send pictures that accurately portray who you are.

Each participant was given one picture to evaluate. Participants were shown a photograph of an attractive college-aged woman with long blond hair. In the wholesome condition, she was dressed in a long-sleeved sweater and blue jeans and smiled pleasantly. In the seductive condition, she was wearing a very short miniskirt and a sleeveless top and assumed a seductive expression (i.e., a coquettish grin) and posture.

We performed a pilot study to ensure that participants judged the seductive target as more seductive than the wholesome target. We presented the pictures to 30 participants (15 men) and asked them, "To what extent do you think the model in the photograph is attempting to appear seductive (that is, how much is she trying to be sexually attractive)?" and "To what extent do you think she is attractive?" Responses were made on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*). A *t* test confirmed that our manipulation was effective: Participants judged the seductive female target as more seductive ($M = 5.3, SD = 1.53$) than the wholesome target ($M = 2.3, SD = 1.03$), $t(28) = 6.28, p < .01$. Further, there was no difference in how attractive the targets were rated as a function of the seductive-wholesome manipulation ($M_s = 3.1$ and 3.3 , respectively, $p = .73$). Considering only men's responses, the seductive model was still rated as more seductive than the wholesome model, $t(13) = 2.89, p = .01$, and still equally attractive, $p = .68$.

Attraction and interest in dating. Attraction to the woman was assessed with seven items reflecting varying degrees of interest. Participants were instructed to "use your imagination. If you were to meet the person in this picture face to face, what would your reaction be? Those of you who are currently not single, please pretend that you are for this exercise." They were then asked to rate, on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*), the likelihood of the following statements: "I would think this woman is attractive"; "I would be particularly attracted to this woman"; "I could be 'turned on' by this woman"; "I would be interested in going on a date with this woman"; "If this date was a positive experience, I would be interested in dating for a significant period of time"; "I would think that this is the type of person with whom I could have a lasting relationship"; "I would be willing to engage in a one-night-stand with this woman if the opportunity presented itself."

Results and Discussion

The seven items had a high degree of internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$) and were therefore averaged to form a composite measure of attraction (actual scores ranged from 1.2 to 6.0). The results of a 2 (MS vs. pain) \times 2 (seductive vs. wholesome woman) ANOVA revealed a main effect in which MS decreased attraction to the

woman, $F(1, 52) = 14.62, p < .01$. However, this effect was qualified by a significant interaction such that MS decreased attraction to the woman only when she was dressed seductively, $F(1, 52) = 6.97, p = .01$ (see relevant means in Table 4).⁵ Pairwise comparisons revealed that men were less attracted to the seductive woman after MS, $F(1, 52) = 20.88, p < .01$, whereas there were no effects of MS in the wholesome woman condition ($p = .41$). Looked at differently, whereas in the absence of MS there was actually a nonsignificant trend for greater attraction to the seductive woman ($p = .12$), the trend was reversed in the MS condition, and participants reported being significantly less attracted to the seductive woman, $F(1, 52) = 4.55, p = .04$. There were no effects of participants' relationship status, nor was there any interaction of relationship status with our manipulated variables ($ps > .35$); further, including relationship status as a covariate did not affect our significant pattern of results.

These results confirmed our hypothesis that MS would decrease men's attraction to a woman portrayed as seductive but not the same woman portrayed as wholesome. By showing that MS effects on attraction were specific to targets of a certain type, these results are consistent with other research (e.g., Goldenberg et al., 1999) demonstrating that sex is not perceived as threatening when it is transformed into something culturally meaningful and valued (e.g., love). Our findings supplement Glick and Fiske's (2001) explanations for men's dichotomized attitudes toward women. Although we agree that power and other sociopolitical factors contribute to polarized attitudes toward women, these data strongly suggest that existential concerns associated with sexuality also influence which women are degraded and which are deified.

Study 4

The preceding studies have focused primarily on men's judgments of sexually attractive women in part because men's ambivalence toward women's sexual influence seems to have important social repercussions. However, one implication of our analysis remains to be tested—namely, that the threat of sexual attraction is largely unique to men. Note that we are not claiming that women don't experience strong sexual attraction or that women are unthreatened by confrontations with their own corporeality. Rather, we suspect that women's sexual attraction to men, particularly in response to visual stimuli (Feingold, 1990; Herz & Cahill, 1997; Janssen, Carpenter, & Graham, 2003), is less likely to be as focused on the physical aspects of sex and sexual arousal than is

men's attraction to women (Ellis & Symons, 1990; Knoth, Boyd, & Singer, 1988; Leitenberg & Henning, 1995) and is thus less likely to be a source of existential threat. If this is correct, then men but not women will deny their attraction to and interest in a sexually provocative opposite-sex other following MS. This hypothesis was tested in the present study.

This study was also designed to address two potential limitations of the preceding studies. The first involves whether pain (implicitly or explicitly primed) provides an adequate control condition for comparison with MS. Although pain controls have often been used in past research, we cannot yet rule out the possibility that the observed effects are due to increases in attraction and interest when pain is made salient (perhaps owing to pain's association with sexual sadism).⁶ We address this possibility in the current study by replacing the pain prime with uncertainty salience as our aversive comparison condition.⁷ Furthermore, we included a neutral prime condition—imagining the experience of shelving books—to assess attraction and interest when no aversive thoughts are made salient. We predicted that reminders of uncertainty or shelving books would not function like MS in decreasing men's sexual interest. The second concern involves whether the use of male experimenters in the other studies affected responses, perhaps by making competitive motives salient among male participants. The current study therefore used a female experimenter. To test our hypothesis, we primed men and women with death, uncertainty, or shelving books and, in an ostensibly separate study, had them rate their attraction to and interest in a sexually seductive opposite-sex target.

Method

Participants

Participants were 86 (41 men and 45 women) undergraduates who participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Of these, 5 men and 1 woman reported being gay or lesbian and were therefore not included in the analysis. Regarding relationship status, 58% were single, 42% were in a committed romantic relationship, and none were married.

⁵ Although a factor analysis of these seven items revealed only one factor, it is relevant to note that the two items reflecting longer term interest (i.e., interest in dating for a long time and forming a lasting relationship) are not responsible for the results. When these items were removed, we obtained the same significant pattern of results (and on their own, the interaction on the composite of these items did not reach statistical significance; $p = .11$). Thus, although perhaps it would not be surprising if MS made men more selective about a long-term commitment to a partner (perhaps because of concern about maternal responsibility for their offspring), these results, along with the others, show that mortality concerns affect men's general sexual attraction.

⁶ We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

⁷ McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer (2001) and van den Bos (2001) have recently suggested general uncertainty as a possible alternative explanation of MS effects, according to which MS may be a special case of the general impact of uncertainty. Although a large body of evidence suggests that MS effects are generally not the result of uncertainty concerns and are specific to death (Goldenberg et al., 2001; Greenberg et al., 1997; Landau et al., 2004; Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003), our use of the uncertainty-salience prime afforded a further test of this alternative.

Table 4
Attraction to Women as a Function of Mortality Salience and Target Seductiveness in Study 3

	Prime			
	Mortality salience		Control	
Target woman	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Wholesome	3.92 _a	1.63	4.30	0.92
Seductive	2.95 _b	1.26	5.02 _a	0.78

Note. Scale ranged from 1 to 7. Higher scores indicate more sexual attraction. Means with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

Materials and Procedure

The materials and procedure were similar to those of Study 3, except that we used only a seductive target. Mixed-sex groups of about 5 participants were run in a lab setting by a female experimenter who explained that they would be participating in two separate studies, the first a personality survey, the second a pilot study on how people make judgments about others. In cubicles, participants were administered the personality packets described below.

MS manipulation and delay. As in Studies 2 and 3, the MS manipulation followed a couple of filler questionnaires. Control-prime participants responded to parallel questions pertaining to either uncertainty or shelving books. Specifically, we used van den Bos's (2001) uncertainty salience induction, in which participants respond to the following open-ended questions: "Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your being uncertain arouses in you" and "Please write down, as specifically as you can, what you think physically will happen to you as you feel uncertain." The PANAS-X and a neutral filler served as the delay and distraction.

After inserting their completed packets into confidential envelopes and dropping them into a box, participants began the second experiment by turning on the monitor in front of them and following the instructions on the screen. Using MediaLab software (Jarvis, 2004), participants completed some filler questions (e.g., "Are you right or left-handed?") and were then told that they would see a picture of a person and make some judgments. On the basis of participants' earlier indication of their sex, the computer automatically presented them with a picture of a sexually seductive opposite-sex target (both pictures were matched in size and contrast).

Target attractiveness and seductiveness. We conducted a pilot study to ensure that men and women gave comparable attractiveness and seductiveness ratings for their respective targets. We gathered pictures of potential targets from a popular Web site—www.hotornot.com—where people submit their picture to have their attractiveness assessed by anonymous viewers. We chose targets who (a) appeared to be sexually inviting the viewer, (b) received attractiveness ratings of 9.5 or above (on a 10-point scale), and (c) who had been evaluated by at least 800 visitors of the site. In a classroom setting, we presented 33 women and 19 men from the same participant pool used in the main study with high-definition color photographs of six of the most appropriate opposite-sex targets. For each picture, participants were asked to rate, on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*), the following: "To what extent do you think this person is physically attractive?" (means ranged from 2.5 to 5.1 for female raters; 3.6 to 6.5 for male raters); "To what extent do you think the person in the photograph is attempting to appear seductive (that is, how much are they trying to be sexually attractive)?" (means ranged from 3.6 to 6.5 for female raters; 4.5 to 6.5 for male raters); "How much is this person trying to appeal to the viewer in a sexual way (that is, trying to 'turn the viewer on' sexually)?" (means ranged from 3.7 to 6.4 for female raters; 4.7 to 6.4 for male raters). The pictures were presented in one of three random orders,

and preliminary analyses found no effects for order. We conducted a series of *t* tests comparing pairs of male versus female targets (there were no effects for order in these analyses), and although men gave higher ratings in many cases, one target pair received equivalently high attractiveness and seductiveness ratings. The final female target looked seductively at the viewer and was provocatively lifting up her shirt with one hand (although only a small portion of her bare midsection was visible). She received an attractiveness rating of 5.3 (out of 7; *SD* = 1.11), a seductiveness rating of 6.5 (*SD* = 0.69), and a sexual appeal rating of 6.4 (*SD* = 0.76). The male target wore a revealing athletic shirt, smiled seductively at the viewer, and was displaying his muscular arms and chest. He received an attractiveness rating of 5.1 (*SD* = 1.40), a seductiveness rating of 6.5 (*SD* = 0.62), and a sexual appeal rating of 6.4 (*SD* = 0.75). These ratings were not statistically different (*t*s < 1, *p*s > .60).

Attraction and interest in dating. For the current study, the instructions above the picture stated, "If you were to meet the person in the picture face to face, what would your reaction be? Those of you who are not currently single, please pretend that you are for this exercise." Three questions adapted from Study 3 appeared on the screen (one at a time): "I would think this person is attractive; I would be particularly attracted to this person; I would be interested in going on a date with this person." All responses were made on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). After making their ratings, participants were asked to indicate their sexual orientation, current relationship status, and religious affiliation. They were then fully debriefed.

Results and Discussion

The three attraction/interest items had a high degree of internal consistency (alpha for male raters = .91, for female raters = .91) so we analyzed their average (actual scores ranged from 2 to 7). The results of a 3 (MS vs. uncertainty vs. neutral) × 2 (sex) ANOVA revealed no main effects (*p*s > .20) but a significant interaction, $F(2, 74) = 3.09, p = .05$ (see relevant means in Table 5). Consistent with our hypothesis, the pattern of means and pairwise comparisons revealed that mortality-salient men showed less attraction for the female target compared with uncertainty-salient men ($p < .02$), neutrally primed men ($p < .02$), and mortality-salient women judging male targets ($p < .01$). No other pairwise comparisons approached significance (all *p*s > .35). It is noteworthy that, as in Studies 1 and 3, the mean for men in the control-prime conditions is on the high-attraction side of the scale's midpoint, whereas the mean in the MS condition is on the low-attraction side. As in Study 3, there were no effects of relationship status, nor was there any interaction of relationship status with any other variables (*F*s < 1, *p*s > .40). Also, including relationship status or length of current relationships as covariates

Table 5
Attraction to a Seductive Opposite-Sex Target as a Function of Mortality Salience and Participant Sex in Study 4

Sex	Prime					
	Mortality salience		Uncertainty		Shelving books	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men	3.79 _a	1.62	5.22 _b	1.15	5.12 _b	1.44
Women	5.28 _b	1.33	4.80	1.69	5.29	1.00

Note. Scale ranged from 1 to 7. Higher scores indicate more sexual attraction. Means with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

did not affect our significant pattern of results. Further, there were no main effects, interactions, or covariation effects of religious affiliation ($F_s < 1$).

These results confirmed our hypothesis that MS would decrease men's, but not women's, attraction to and interest in a sexually seductive opposite-sex target compared with aversive and nonaversive controls. These findings support our claim that, although women generally respond defensively to reminders of their corporeality, the threat is not as inherent in their experience of sexual attraction as it is for men. We suspect that women do not perceive such a threat when viewing a sexually seductive man because women's sexual attraction, particularly that based on visual information, is less directly tied to physical arousal (Knoth et al., 1988).

Study 5

Taken together, the results of the preceding studies demonstrate that men respond to mortality reminders with decreased sexual attraction to and interest in women who may inspire lust, but not those who appear chaste and wholesome. These findings support the idea that mortality concerns contribute to men's historically robust ambivalence with their own sexual arousal and the women who cause it. We believe this may be a particularly important finding because widespread patterns of violence against women (sexual assault and rape, wife battering, dowry death, female genital mutilation, sadistic pornography) seem to be partly rooted in men's sexual ambivalence. In many cultures, women who are not appropriately modest or discreet in behavior may be physically punished and even murdered (e.g., some Muslim cultures; see Antoun, 1968; Bouhdiba, 1985). Similarly, in cases of domestic violence, which cause American women more injuries than automobile accidents, muggings, and rapes combined (see Teays, 1998), abused women inevitably say that men use four words when swearing at them: *bitch*, *cunt*, *whore*, and *slut* (Dutton, 1995, p. 16).

From our perspective, violence against women is due in part to men's resentment toward the purported source of their underlying awareness of death. Men who are trying to transcend their hedonistic bodily needs are constantly being "pulled back" by women's appeal, and this may contribute to violence against women. We therefore wanted to see in Study 5 whether mortality-induced concerns about sexual interest also heighten tolerance for aggression against women. If women's sexual allure serves as an unwanted reminder for men of their own corporeality and thereby undermines terror management, then reminders of one's susceptibility to women's seductive influence should, under conditions of MS, incite negative feelings toward women. Specifically, we hypothesized that death-primed men who were made to think about their vulnerability to animal-like lust would be more forgiving toward those who aggress against women. To test this hypothesis, we primed men with either mortality or a control topic and then had them write about either a time when they experienced intense, animal-like sexual lust or an experience with intense, sports-related excitement, a topic that we expected would result in equal, if not greater, arousal for men. This allowed us to test the hypothesis that it is not generic arousal per se but the existential threat of attraction that triggers negativity toward women. In an ostensibly separate study, men were then asked to review two domestic violence police reports—one reporting male-on-male violence, the

other reporting male-on-female violence—and then indicate what they thought was an appropriate sentence for the perpetrator. Generally, given prevailing cultural norms, we expected overall harsher relative sentencing for the male–female perpetrator; however, on the basis of our analysis, we expected more lenience toward this perpetrator following MS and lust primes.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 56 heterosexual male undergraduates who participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Of these, 2 participants were dropped from the data analyses because they did not complete the materials as instructed, and 1 reported a statistically extreme score (exceeding three standard deviations from the condition mean), leaving a total of 53 participants.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were run in a lab setting by a male experimenter who explained that they would take part in two unrelated studies—the first a survey of personality characteristics, the second a prescreening of materials for future jury research. Participants were told that they would be asked to review a couple of cases and report what they felt to be appropriate sentences for the perpetrators. In cubicles, participants received the personality packet described below.

MS manipulation and delay. As in Studies 2 and 3, randomly assigned participants received a couple of filler personality questionnaires followed by either the MS prime or the dental-pain control prime. As in Studies 2 and 4, the PANAS-X served as the necessary delay and distraction.

Lust versus sports primes. The following page was a "Personal Experiences Questionnaire," a projective personality test purportedly designed to assess how men respond to common experiences. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to write about a time when an anonymous woman or women aroused intense, animal-like sexual lust in them, as distinct from a time when they experienced strong romantic feelings. To ensure that the effects were specific to feelings of lust and not simply generic reactions to arousing events, we had the other participants write about a time when viewing a sports event aroused in them intense game excitement (see Appendix for exact wording). Participants were (often shamelessly) candid in their responses to both primes, describing in detail the event that aroused intense sexual or sports-related arousal (e.g., lust: "Right then I just wanted to pull her shorts down and start boning her," "She had a great walk and great legs—she looked at me and I caught her looking"; and sports: "Arizona is my favorite team so watching the game gave me butterfly [*sic*] in my stomach," "The ball seemed to float in the air forever. And it cleared the wall, I couldn't control myself. I felt all tingly and happy inside."). To assess self-reported general arousal, we included two questions following the prime: "How strong were your feelings of excitement during this episode?" and "How intense was the physical arousal you experienced?" Both questions were rated on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all strong/intense*) to 9 (*extremely strong/intense*).

Participants placed their completed packets in an envelope and a confidential box. The experimenter then administered the packet for the second study.

Police reports and sentencing forms. Participants were presented with two official New York state trooper domestic violence incident reports (DIRs). The contents of the two reports were fabricated with the guidance of a senior state trooper to closely resemble actual DIRs. One report described an incident involving a woman and her live-in boyfriend. After a verbal altercation, the man is reported to have physically attacked the woman, causing various bodily injuries. The other report described a parallel incident involving a man who attacked his male friend following a

verbal conflict. The scenarios were written such that the male and female victims acted in similar ways prior to the attacks, both sustained verbal as well as physical attacks, and both incurred injury of approximately equal severity. In both cases, the victim requested arrest and the official charge stood at third-degree assault. The perpetrator had the same arrest history in both scenarios. The two forms were written in different handwriting to maximize credibility. On both forms, all personal information was blacked out, and participants were instructed to read over each case thoroughly and then complete the attached questionnaire. Following each DIR, participants were given the following instructions:

Now we'd like your opinion on an appropriate sentence for the perpetrator in the preceding scenario. Below are some common punishments for 3rd degree assault, listed in increasing severity. Take the role of a judge and circle the number next to one of the punishment options that you think would be most appropriate in this case.

The responses ranged from 1 (*defendant is given a written warning*) to 12 (*3 years in county jail with no parole*). The sentencing options were written with the guidance of the state trooper to reflect the actual sentences typical of domestic violence cases. The two DIRs were counterbalanced in order. After inserting their completed materials into a confidential envelope and box, participants were fully debriefed.

Results and Discussion

The sentencing scores for the male–female perpetrator ranged from 3 to 12 and for the male–male perpetrator, 1 to 11. Not surprisingly, a paired *t* test indicated that participants gave more severe sentences for the male–female perpetrator ($M = 7.5$, $SD = 2.05$) than for the male–male perpetrator ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 1.76$), $t(52) = 8.77$, $p < .01$. To examine the participants' relative tolerance for aggression toward women, we computed a difference score by subtracting sentencing ratings for the male–male perpetrator from sentencing ratings for the male–female perpetrator, such that higher scores indicate more punitive sentencing for a target that aggressed against a woman (actual scores ranged from 0–10). These scores were then submitted to a 2 (MS vs. pain) \times 2 (lust vs. sports prime) \times 2 (order of scenario) ANOVA.⁸ The predicted MS \times Lust Prime interaction emerged, $F(1, 45) = 5.05$, $p = .03$ (see relevant means in Table 6). Pairwise comparisons revealed that pain-salient men who wrote about lust did not differ in their sentencing decisions from those who wrote about sports ($p = .30$). However, mortality-salient men who wrote about lust assigned more lenient relative punishments to the male–female perpetrator compared with those who wrote about sports, $F(1,$

45) = 4.17, $p = .05$. Also, among men who wrote about lust, those in the MS condition gave more lenient relative sentences to the male–female perpetrator compared with those in the dental-pain condition, $F(1, 45) = 7.39$, $p = .01$. Those who wrote about sports did not change their judgments as a function of MS ($p = .69$).

The analysis also revealed two unexpected order effects. First there was a Lust versus Sports Prime \times Order interaction, $F(1, 45) = 4.04$, $p = .05$. Inspection of means does not suggest any clear interpretation, and because the interaction did not involve MS, we did not consider it further. In addition, an unanticipated MS \times Order interaction emerged, $F(1, 45) = 5.84$, $p = .02$ (see Table 7 for relevant means). The means suggest that MS primes led to less punitive relative judgments for the male–female perpetrator when this scenario was read first. There was no trace of a three-way interaction ($F < 1$), suggesting that order did not affect the interaction of the two variables of interest.

To assess the extent to which these effects were due to generalized arousal, we performed a *t* test comparing the lust-prime conditions on the questions following the primes. Results indicated that participants who completed sports primes rated their experiences as more exciting ($M = 8.1$, $SD = 1.27$) than those who completed lust primes ($M = 6.0$, $SD = 2.03$), $t(51) = 4.57$, $p < .01$. Sports-primed participants also rated their experiences as more physically arousing ($M = 6.7$, $SD = 2.40$) than lust-primed participants ($M = 4.6$, $SD = 2.09$), $t(51) = 3.27$, $p = .01$. To examine whether the findings of our primary analyses could be attributed to generalized arousal, we included self-reports of excitement and arousal as covariates and found that they did not alter the significant pattern of results. These results cannot be accounted for by general arousal per se because arousal in response to the sporting event was actually greater than arousal in response to the lust-inspiring event, and entering self-rated arousal as a covariate did not significantly alter the pattern of significant results.

We additionally wanted to address two other alternatives: (a) a general frustration hypothesis, according to which the lust prime led men to think more about experiences (in this case, sexual encounters) that they felt prevented from having; and (b) a self-esteem threat hypothesis, according to which writing about anonymous sexually attractive women threatened men's self-esteem. To assess these alternatives, we had two raters who were blind to MS condition count frustration-relevant words (explicit mention of feelings of frustration, anger, or resentment) and self-esteem-relevant words (explicit mention of feeling negative self-regard in response to the event) in the open-ended responses to the lust- and sports-primes. Interrater reliability was .93, and inconsistencies were resolved by verbal discussion. Contrary to the frustration- and self-esteem-threat alternatives, the lust- and sports-prime responses did not differ in the number of frustration- or self-esteem-relevant words (both $ps > .78$). Further, entering these word counts as covariates did not affect the key predicted effects. The overall means for frustration and self-esteem-relevant words were

Table 6
Mean Relative Sentencing Judgments of a Male–Female Abuser as a Function of Mortality Salience and Lust Versus Sports Primes in Study 5

Prime	Prime			
	Mortality salience		Control	
Prime	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Lust	1.50 _a	1.06	3.92 _b	2.67
Sports	3.46 _b	2.34	3.08	2.24

Note. Scale ranged from –11 to 11. Higher scores indicate more punitive relative sentencing. Means with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

⁸ We have reported difference scores to simplify presentation. If we include the two sentencing decisions as a fourth independent variable, the predicted three-way interaction is significant, and the predicted two-way interaction (MS \times Lust) is significant for the female-abuser sentencing (both $ps < .05$) but not for the male-abuser sentencing ($F < 1$). There was no four-way interaction with order ($F < 1$).

Table 7
Mean Relative Sentencing Judgments of a Male–Female Abuser as a Function of Mortality Salience and Order of Scenarios in Study 5

First scenario	Prime			
	Mortality salience		Control	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Male–male perpetrator	3.50 _a	1.96	3.02	2.11
Male–female perpetrator	1.46 _b	1.73	3.98 _a	2.80

Note. Scale ranged from –11 to 11. Higher scores indicate more punitive relative sentencing. Means with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

.25 and .10, respectively, suggesting very little spontaneous reference to these feelings. These results render simple frustration- and self-esteem-threat alternatives highly unlikely. The low frequencies of these words suggest that frustration and self-esteem threat were not salient aspects of the recalled experiences. However, given these low frequencies, it is not surprising that these frustration- and self-esteem-threat scores did not show effects of condition or covary significantly with the dependent measure. Thus, a more sensitive measure of frustration and self-esteem threat may be necessary to fully evaluate the potential roles of these variables.

These results confirmed our hypothesis that MS combined with reminders of women's carnal allure would lead men to recommend a more lenient sentence for a perpetrator of male–female, relative to male–male, violence. As in the preceding studies, men generally expressed favorable attitudes toward women: Overall, the sentencing was higher for the male–female perpetrator than for the male–male perpetrator. As predicted, however, juxtaposing reminders of death with reminders of one's susceptibility to raw, physical lust resulted in the lowest relative sentencing, almost the same as that recommended for the male–male perpetrator. Unlike the previous studies, the target woman exhibited no trace of sexual availability. Rather, the results seem to stem from a generalized negative attitude toward women among men who are simultaneously confronted with their mortality and susceptibility to carnal desire. These results provide the first evidence that death-related thought combined with the experience of provoked sexual interest contribute to aggressive tendencies against women.

Another possible alternative explanation comes from just-world theory (Lerner, 1980), according to which people are inclined to believe that the world is a fair place. Perhaps MS was causing some people to attribute more blame to the female domestic violence victim, and thereby less to the perpetrator, to reassert faith in a just world. This alternative, however, would have difficulty explaining why MS would contribute to lighter sentencing for the perpetrator only when the target was a woman. Given evidence that victim derogation is most common when the perceiver fears that the victim's fate might befall him or her (Lerner & Miller, 1978), one would predict that, if anything, male raters would give more lenient sentencing to the male–male perpetrator. Rather, the results strongly support our hypothesis that lust, in conjunction with concerns about one's mortality, would lead men to be more tolerant of aggression toward women.

The findings of Study 5—increased tolerance for aggression—might be interpreted as inconsistent with the finding in Study 2 that MS did not decrease men's friendly intent in an interaction with a sexy woman. However, we would note that (a) the friendliness means in Study 2 for men in the MS and control conditions were 4.2 and 4.5, respectively (on a 7-point scale), suggesting that men did not perceive themselves as especially friendly in either condition; (b) there was likely to be some social desirability involved in not wanting to report being less than minimally cordial to a live conversant—it would reflect poorly on the participant to acknowledge being unfriendly; (c) Study 5 made sexual lust particularly salient and then involved a very different paradigm that indirectly assessed attitudes toward women through sentencing of a nonpresent female victim, rather than a paradigm that directly assessed self-perceived friendliness. For these reasons, we don't think that the friendliness findings in Study 2 are difficult to explain or that they create a problem for interpreting the findings of Study 5.

General Discussion

Taken together, the results of five studies provide converging support for the claim that terror management concerns play a part in heterosexual men's negative reactions toward sexual attraction and women in general. Specifically, Study 1 demonstrated that a subliminal mortality induction reduced men's, but not women's, attractiveness ratings of sexually alluring women. Study 2 showed that MS led men to downplay their sexual, but not friendly, intent toward a friendly, attractive woman. In Study 3, MS led men to decrease their interest in a seductive woman, but this effect was eliminated when the woman appeared more wholesome. Study 4 found that the threat of sexual attraction may be specific to men: Women didn't respond to MS with a decreased attraction to a sexually seductive man. Finally, Study 5 demonstrated that men reminded of their corporeal lust following MS exhibited greater tolerance of aggression toward women. In accounting for men's ambivalence toward women—vacillating between desire and derision—the present results suggest that it is because of intense desire, combined with distinctly human concerns about death, that men sometimes distance from attraction to women and generally devalue them.

Some Caveats and Complexities Regarding the Implications of These Findings

Limitations of the Research

Some potential limitations of these studies are worth noting. First, the participants in all these studies were college students; future work is needed with older participants. Second, the results of Studies 1 and 2 should be interpreted with caution given their relatively small sample size (approximately 9 per cell). However, the results of these studies are statistically significant in the predicted direction and are consistent with those of Studies 3–5, which had larger sample sizes. As a third issue, the results of Study 4 indicate that women do not respond to mortality reminders with decreased attraction to sexually provocative men, suggesting that the findings from the other studies are relatively unique to men. These results should be interpreted with caution, though, because Study 4 differed from the others in its use of a female experimenter

and in its use of control primes other than dental pain. However, we do not think these differences undermine the generalizability of the results. For one, Study 4 replicated the MS effect among men from Study 3, and it is difficult to see why a female experimenter would affect women's but not men's responses. Second, the uncertainty-salience control has been successfully used in a number of published studies (e.g., Friedman & Arndt, 2005; Landau, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Martens, in press; Landau et al., 2004; Martens, Greenberg, Schimel, & Landau, 2004). Indeed, Landau et al. (2004; Study 5) directly assessed whether the dental-pain and uncertainty control conditions led to different effects and found that they did not differ from each other but differed significantly from MS. The present results of Study 4 similarly show no differences in sexual attraction between the uncertainty salience and a neutral control condition (shelving books). For these reasons, we do not feel that Study 4's changes in experimenter sex and control prime detract from its relevance to the other findings, although future studies may benefit by directly comparing these variables.

Men's Views of Women and Sex

We want to emphasize that we are not claiming that men distance from and devalue all women or even those they find attractive. Clearly, men generally celebrate both their virility and sexually appealing women. Indeed, the findings that men in the control conditions are generally attracted to appealing women (Studies 1, 3, and 4) and invested in communicating sexual intent (Study 2) are hardly surprising given prior research (e.g., Abbey, 1982; Schmitt, Couden, & Baker, 2001). Also, in Study 3 we found that men in the control condition were marginally more attracted to a sexually seductive woman than to a sexually conservative woman. Furthermore, men in Study 5 exhibited a stronger tendency to penalize a man who aggressed against a woman rather than against another man. Nevertheless, the effects of mortality reminders in all our studies suggest that because of terror management concerns, men rarely harbor unconditionally positive attitudes toward women or their sexual attraction to them.

More generally, we do not claim that mortality concerns lead men (or women) to unconditionally devalue sex. Sex is "of the flesh" yet it often brings to mind meaningful symbolic constructs (e.g., love) that neutralize the potential threat posed by the merely physical act. Accordingly, Goldenberg et al. (1999) found that mortality-salient participants distanced from the physical but not the romantic aspects of sex. Sex may even serve a role in assuaging mortality concerns when it functions as a source of self-esteem. When sex is conceived of as a sport, for example, laying claim to many and prestigious sexual conquests can bolster one's self-image. Along these lines, Goldenberg, McCoy, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon (2000; Study 2) found that MS increased the appeal of sex for those who derive self-esteem from their appearance. In another sense, sex may even remind people of reproduction, which could be protective by offering a type of symbolic immortality through one's offspring. Although this may occur under some conditions, Goldenberg et al.'s (1999) findings suggest that the thought or experience of sexual arousal does not necessarily bring the possible procreative function of sex to mind. We suspect that men, given their susceptibility to and the prevalence of visual sexually stimulating imagery (e.g., TV, magazines),

think of sex far more often than they consider its role in producing children. We think this is particularly likely to be true in the present context, in which, with the possible exception of Study 2, the male participants are reacting to sexy women who are potentially arousing but are not actually available to serve procreative functions for them.

Comparisons with Dutton and Aron (1974)

The present findings seem to run counter to Dutton and Aron's (1974) classic bridge studies of attraction. Dutton and Aron found that men interviewed by a female experimenter while crossing a scary, narrow bridge over a deep gorge were more attracted to and interested in the woman than men similarly interviewed while crossing a very safe bridge. Presumably this occurred because the men misattributed some of their fear-induced arousal to attraction to the young woman. However, in addition to creating arousal, the scary bridge may have brought thoughts of death to mind. Yet, our findings indicate that MS leads to less rather than more attraction.

Although on the surface this set of findings may seem contradictory, a number of features of this earlier work can explain why the scary bridge led to more rather than less sexual attraction. The most obvious is that the scary bridge probably created substantial actual physiological arousal, whereas none of our conditions probably did so. In addition, the female interviewer in those studies was not wearing revealing clothing and was trained to be task oriented rather than seductive (Donald G. Dutton, personal communication, 2005). Thus, she was closer to wholesome than sexually provocative, and Study 3 shows that the MS-induced reduction in attraction does not occur if the woman is not highly seductive in appearance.

Another important difference is that, while on the bridge, the male participants, if scared, were likely to be consciously thinking about death while interacting with the woman. A large body of research shows that the effects of MS are quite different when death thoughts are in focal attention rather than on the fringes of consciousness (e.g., Arndt et al., 2004; Pyszczynski et al., 1999); the defenses predicted by TMT are limited to the latter condition. Consequently, the present research, like prior TMT research, introduced a delay following the MS induction before exposure to the women to be assessed. This difference between Dutton and Aron (1974) and the present research suggests it would be interesting for additional research to assess male feelings of attraction when death thoughts are salient versus on the fringes of consciousness.

Gender Differences

We are not claiming that confronting the corporeality inherent in one's sexuality is a gender-specific problem. Indeed, the awareness of death makes the body and sex problematic for men and women alike (e.g., Goldenberg et al., 1999). That said, there is a clear gender differentiation in sexual attitudes and responsiveness that we suspect renders men more prone to raw, basic impulses for physical sex and therefore more vulnerable to corporeality reminders in the sexual attraction realm. Put differently, whereas women are equally concerned with their corporeality, there is reason to believe that they are not constantly confronted with it via their own sexual attraction to men. Women are less motivated for sex (Davis,

Shaver, & Vernon, 2004), they report less spontaneous desire and think about sex less often (Knoth et al., 1988), and their motivations for sex, as compared with men's, focus less on obtaining physical pleasure (Davis et al., 2004) and more on giving and receiving affection (Hill & Preston, 1996; Leigh, 1989). Further, women have fewer sexual fantasies than men (Leitenberg & Henning, 1995), and women's fantasies contain fewer references to explicit, anatomically detailed sex acts and more references to affection, romance, commitment, and emotional context (Barclay, 1973; Ellis & Symons, 1990; Follingstad & Kimbrell, 1986; Hardin & Gold, 1988; Kelley, 1984). The historical and anthropological evidence touched on at the outset of this article suggests that the problem may indeed be greater among men; certainly women are disproportionately the targets of derogatory attitudes. Perhaps women harbor less ambivalence about their own desire and more about being the object of desire ("A sex symbol becomes a thing . . . I just hate to be a thing"—Marilyn Monroe).

Misogyny

We also want to clarify that we are not claiming that existential concerns associated with men's lust constitute a complete explanation for misogyny. There are certainly biological, social, and political factors that contribute to the nature and expression of attitudes toward women, and derogatory attitudes toward women clearly help men to maintain their status and power. For such a context, in which men tend to harbor more societal influence, it becomes difficult to disentangle psychological causes from sociological and political influences on men's attitudes toward women. However, in these experiments, we were able to demonstrate that mortality concerns do play a causal role in men's responses to women and that, furthermore, these effects are moderated by lust salience and target seductiveness. These findings strongly suggest that an understanding of misogyny can be enhanced by considering its deeply rooted motivational underpinnings. Gilmore (2001) recently came to a similar conclusion:

Antiwoman feelings are usually driven by an irrational emotionality that is not the same as the simple expediency that characterizes political oppression or economic exploitation. Oppressing someone does not necessarily lead the oppressor to create a justifying ideology attributing pollution and magical danger to the oppressed. There must be some other, more visceral, more emotional element involved. (p. 181)

Our analysis provides evidence that mortality concern is one source of this more visceral element.

Implications for Relationships and Misogynistic Violence

In this section we briefly consider some of the detrimental consequences of men's ambivalence toward sexual attraction and women. In line with similar perspectives, we maintain that men are often of two minds with regard to women: intensely attracted to them but also prone to view them with suspicion and even contempt. We add, however, that it is partly because of intense attraction that such hostility exists. Glick and Fiske (2001) argued that because men need women, they tend to pacify them by blending hostile sexism with benevolent attitudes. There may be something to that, but the present study suggests that such benev-

olent attitudes also serve men's intrapsychic terror management needs; men don't just need women, they are wildly attracted to them and are therefore motivated to hold particular women in high esteem to protect themselves from the threatening existential implications of their own sexual desire.

As Glick and Fiske (2001) note, these ambivalent attitudes are often expressed by subtyping women as, for example, Madonnas and whores. In reality, however, people rarely fit into such simplistic categories, and we suspect that men's efforts to maintain perceptions of their romantic partner as the Madonna rather than the whore may contribute to relationship difficulties. For one, because the expectations for appropriate female sexuality are usually quite stringent, many women may be prone to disappoint. In addition, the appeal of extrapair affairs may stem in part from the opportunity to fulfill the desire for both types of women. Furthermore, men may respond with hostility to a "good" woman who falls short of idealized expectations. Indeed, when men aggress against women, it is often to punish them for (often imagined) sexual transgressions (Dutton, 1995). Consigning some women to the "whore" category may allow men to perceive them as objects, which might heighten their willingness to aggress. The ambivalence highlighted in the present article may also play a role in rape. The dichotomization of women may contribute to the rape myth, whereby women are perceived to have provoked or even deserved a rape assault (Burt, 1998). Indeed, compared with women, men are more likely to believe that rape victims in some way provoked the attack, and rapists tend to have attitudes toward women consistent with the view of them as evil temptresses (Burt, 1980). In the act of rape, the man can satisfy his animalistic desires while at the same time punish the source of his temptation. Similar attitudes in response to the existential threat of sexual attraction may contribute to sexual harassment and other forms of gender bias.

How can we apply the present research and theory to help offset negative attitudes and behaviors toward women? As with other problems in which self-threat leads to negativity toward others (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998, on narcissism and aggression; Fein & Spencer, 1997, on self-esteem threat and prejudice; Kernis, Cornell, Chirm-Ru, Berry, & Harlow, 1993, on unstable self-esteem and hostility; Martens et al., 2004, on ageism; Schimel, Greenberg, & Martens, 2003, on projection), one strategy is to try to minimize the self-threat underlying that negativity. At the broadest level, the current work implies that if men were more able to accept their mortality, they could better accept their corporeality and better embrace and even celebrate it without the backdrop of fear and loathing. Education in existential perspectives and death-awareness courses could facilitate such a process. Terror management research also suggests that psychological resources such as high self-esteem and low neuroticism can help people face their mortality and corporeality with less defensiveness (e.g., Goldenberg et al., 1999). Future research could examine the worldviews and bases of self-worth of men who seem to have particularly healthy attitudes regarding women and physical sex to see whether such resources are what allow them to experience sexual attraction with less ambivalence. We can also develop ways to encourage men to accept and assume responsibility for their own lust, rather than view the sexually provocative woman as the source. We have focused in the present article on the threat of sexual attraction, but we must also note that sexual excitement can serve as a potent reminder that one is indeed alive. Knowing this, perhaps we can

encourage men to focus on the affirmation of life, rather than the specter of death, inherent in attraction.

Conclusion

Do you not know that each of you is Eve? *You* are the Devil's Gateway. *You* are the unsealer of the forbidden tree. *You* are the first deserter of the divine Law. *You* are she who persuaded him whom the Devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert[ion], that is death, even the Son of God had to die.

—Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*

Despite the pervasiveness of men's concerns over their susceptibility to the awesome force of sexual lust across times and cultures and the role of these concerns in various forms of misogyny, their core psychological underpinnings have received little attention. From our perspective, men's awareness of their mortality engenders negative reactions toward sexual attraction and provocative women because they confront men with their own animal, mortal nature. Being reminded of their susceptibility to sexual arousal can force men to confront the fact that they are appetite-driven mammals; when death-related thought is also close to consciousness, this confrontation is unsettling enough to evoke a denial of sexual interest and negativity toward women. Although this may be only one strand in the fabric of men's sexuality, the dire consequences of male sexual ambivalence for both men and women's well-being suggest that it is an important one.

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Appendix

Lust and Sports Arousal Primes

Lust

A common experience among men is to be sexually aroused by a female whom they don't know personally. This can happen when a male views a sexually provocative female or females on TV or movies, but also happens when males see anonymous girls at dance clubs, parties, the beach, etc. Please think about a recent time in your life when seeing a female or females aroused *intense feelings of sexual lust and excitement*. This should *not* be a time when you felt romantic interest, but rather a time when an anonymous woman in a magazine, on film, or simply walking around campus made you want to simply have sex with her, caused you to feel *strong sexual urges*, and *physiologically aroused you*. In the space below, please write about this experience. Please use the entire space provided to write about what you saw and describe how it felt to have the anonymous female or females cause you to feel *intense sexual lust*.

Sports

A common experience among men is to be excited by a sports event (e.g., football game) in which they're not participating. This can happen when a male views a sports event on TV, but also happens when males attend sporting events. Please think about a recent time in your life when witnessing a sports event aroused *intense feelings of excitement*. This should *not* be a time when you were simply interested in the score, but rather a time when a sports event on TV or that you attended made you want to jump up in excitement, caused you to feel *strong team-pride*, and *physiologically aroused you*. In the space below, please write about this experience. Please use the entire space provided to write about what you saw and describe how it felt to have this sports event cause you to feel *intense game excitement*.

Received December 16, 2003

Revision received May 30, 2005

Accepted June 6, 2005 ■