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TERROR MANAGEMENT AND POLITICS

Comparing and Integrating the "Conservative Shift" and "Political Worldview Defense" Hypotheses

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> Civilization, in fact, grows more and more maudlin and hysterical; especially under democracy it tends to degenerate into a mere combat of crazes; the whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, most of them imaginary.
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> —H. L. Mencken, In Defense of Women (1922, p. 53)

The role of fear in politics is, in itself, quite frightening. The injection of unchecked emotion into processes by which civilizations rise and fall runs counter to the rationalist principles upon which democracies are founded. But how, in particular, do fear and anxiety govern us? How do real or imagined vulnerabilities influence the content of our political worldviews?

Some insights come from lines of research in social, personality, and political psychology examining the roles of motivational and emotional processes in the formation and maintenance of political beliefs and attitudes (e.g., Rokeach, 1960; Westen, 2007). This work highlights how largely unconscious existential threats—triggered by a political environment of war, murder, and corruption—condition the positions people take on socioeconomic issues, how they vote, and their perceptions of reality as a whole. But important questions remain.

The present chapter endeavors to compare and integrate competing perspectives and research on the impact of these existential threats, particularly those linked to the awareness of death. In one view, death-related threats provoke defensive clinging to distinctively conservative ideologies—clamping down on the status quo for dear life in order to combat the uncertainties of existence, even if doing so runs against the grain of a liberal's preexisting worldview (e.g., Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a). The competing view from terror management theory posits such threats have a polarizing effect, motivating individuals to seize upon whatever political ideology has served their personal death-denying needs in the past, be it liberal or conservative (e.g., Anson, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2009).

Substantial evidence exists in support of both points of view. Relevant studies examine effects of *mortality salience* (MS)—temporary reminders of one's mortality—on political outcomes. A meta-analysis of these studies ($k = 31$) showed the effect sizes of conservative shifting ($r = .35$) to be significant and statistically equivalent ($r = .22$) and defense of preexisting political worldviews (Burke, Kosloff, & Landau, 2013). Both perspectives thus contribute substantially to the emerging existential psychology of political life, yet they remain unreconciled. The present chapter endeavors to integrate these alternative explanations through consideration of specific research findings, theoretical boundary conditions, and historical context.

Evidence of Conservative Shifting

In the decades since Theodore Adorno's seminal studies of the relationship between personality and political ideology (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), psychologists' attention to ideology has been sporadic. The subject was revived with the publication of a meta-analysis by Jost and colleagues (2003a), which identified associations between political conservatism and an array of individual differences in personality, cognition, and motivation. Ultimately, the review cast political conservatism as a rigid and defensive ideology, characterized by low tolerance for ambiguity, low openness to experience, high personal need for structured knowledge, and chronic fear of death.

Those results appeared consistent with an uncertainty-threat model of political conservatism (Jost & Napier, 2012), according to which resistance to change and opposition to equality are core components of right-wing ideology and function to mitigate uncertainty and threat. Further, Jost and colleagues' (2003a) findings lined up neatly with the claim from system justification theory (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) that people gain certainty and security by perpetuating the social system as it stands—adopting a conservative orientation to the status quo. Progressive left-wing ideologies, by contrast, are considered less reliable bases of security; they embrace change and social equality principles that question the status quo instead of maintaining it, thus implying chaos and unpredictability (Jost & Napier, 2012). These theories form the basis for the *conservative shift hypothesis*: threatening conditions will motivate people to gravitate toward right-wing ideologies and away from left-wing ideologies (cf. Tetlock, 1989).

In support of this perspective, Jost et al. (2007) found perceptions of status quo threat and self-reported death anxiety to predict higher levels of conservatism. Critically, these factors did not predict ideological extremism—that is, endorsement of *either* extremely conservative or extremely liberal ideologies—suggesting conservatism, but not liberalism, is uniquely associated with threat

sensitivity. Nail, McGregor, Drinkwater, Steele, and Thompson (2009) provided converging experimental evidence. In their research, participants in a threat condition read an article designed to undermine perception of a just social system (by describing corporate corruption). Self-identified liberals responded to this threat with increased patriotism to levels generally observed among their more conservative counterparts. Similar effects occur even among individuals relatively disadvantaged by existing social systems. For instance, Miljev, Greaves, Osborne, & Sibley (2015) observed New Zealanders of low socioeconomic status to become more conservative following the 2007–2008 global financial crisis.

Failures of social systems thus elicit defense of the status quo, and some terror management research suggests that death reminders may have a similar effect. For example, studies show mortality salience causes people to think about the social world in simple, familiar ways. When reminded of death, people increasingly process social information in a heuristic manner (Landau et al., 2004), rely on stereotypes (Schimel et al., 1999), and proclaim the existing social system to be just (Hirschberger, 2006). MS often seems to promote black-and-white thinking that reinforces established social guidelines. In an early terror management study, for instance, Greenberg and colleagues (1990) observed MS to increase municipal court judges' fines for a prostitute, reflecting a strengthened emphasis on the application of law and opposition to moral violation. Along similar lines, Cuillier (2009) recently found MS to reduce journalism students' favorability to relativistic thinking, motivating them instead to promote clear ethical journalistic duties and harshly punish those who violate them.

Similarly, the well-established effect of MS to amplify preference for ingroups over outgroups may be interpreted as conservative advocacy for the status quo—as championing a comfortable, preset sense of social order and hierarchy. Greenberg et al. (1990), for instance, observed MS to increase Americans' preference for a person expressing positive (vs. negative) opinions of the United States. Similarly, Bassett and Connelly (2011) found MS caused Americans to negatively evaluate an undocumented Mexican immigrant. Mortality-inspired preference for familiar features of one's ingroup and culture may at times be so potent as to overshadow important personality factors, as findings from van der Zee, van Oudenhoven, and Grijs (2004) suggest. They observed Openness (a personality trait associated with more liberal worldviews) to positively predict attraction to foreign cultures; yet under MS, both high and low in Openness individuals showed comparable preference for their own culture over others.

The most commonly cited evidence for conservative shifting in response to existential threat pertains to Westerners' enhanced nationalism following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As noted by Christie (2006), in the months following 9/11, Americans' nationalistic sentiments reached peak levels, with 97 percent agreeing that they would rather be Americans than citizens of any other country (an increase of 7 percentage points) and 85 percent

reporting that America was a better country than others (5-point increase). Nearly half (49 percent) agreed that the 'world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like Americans' (11-point increase), and disagreement with the idea that there are aspects of America to be ashamed of was up 22 points (from 18 percent to 40 percent). The nationalistic climate was fueled by rhetoric that emphasized essentialism, divisiveness, and moral mandates. (p. 22)

This flag-waving proved psychologically protective to many Americans. Kumagai and Ohbuchi (2002) found that, shortly after the attacks, New Yorkers who strongly identified with the United States felt especially secure from terror. Similarly, Dunkel (2002) observed reminders of 9/11 to heighten anxiety among Midwesterners unless they had an established, well-defined identity to keep them buffered.

Tragically, this boost in nationalistic fervor coincided with intensification of a wide range of hate crimes against individuals of Middle Eastern descent—as well as those who simply did not "look American" by virtue of their appearance (e.g., Sikhs)—including employment discrimination, verbal harassment, racial profiling, and violence (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2002; Singh, 2002). Remnants of Americans' intensified urge to protect their nationalistic identity from perceived terrorist threats can be observed even a decade later. In 2010, Gallup News Service reported that 53% of Americans held a negative view of the Islamic faith and, from 2000 to 2006, the average American's wariness about having a Muslim neighbor increased by 8% (Schafer & Shaw, 2009). In related experimental findings by Kugler and Cooper (2010), mortality-salient Americans advocated for extended detainment and against procedural protections for a fictional terrorist suspect if he was described as Saudi citizen Abdal-Karim Arif, but not if he was described as Jason Lockhart from the United States.

Joint effects of war, terror, and death on motivation to bolster faith in a core nationalistic identity have been observed in studies throughout the world. Chartard et al. (2011) found students living in a staunchly pro-government region of the war-torn Ivory Coast responded to MS with enhanced support of their government and its military action. Dechesne, van den Berg, and Soeters (2007) found Dutch military personnel exhibited greater concern about death while stationed in Afghanistan (compared to when at home in Europe), which predicted decreased willingness to collaborate with citizens from other nations. Similarly, Kökdemir and Yeniçeri (2010) found Muslims in Turkey responded to MS with decreased interest in sustaining international relations with England and Greece.

Similar pro-status quo effects have been shown in response to even subtle mortality reminders, such as those encountered in the media. Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof, and Vermeulen (2009) found that, after the highly publicized murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by Muslim extremists, exposing

Dutch participants to a terrorism-related news clip increased the accessibility of death-related thoughts, which in turn predicted increased belief that Arabs in the Netherlands remain loyal to their home countries, thus making the Netherlands unsafe. Further, results on an implicit association test showed terrorism-related news amplified White Europeans' implicit anti-Arab attitudes and Muslim participants' implicit anti-European attitudes, suggesting perceived threat led the opposed groups to cling to their respective visions of the status quo. Hong, Wong, and Liu (2001) reported similar findings in China.

Existential threats inspire people to bolster their ties not only to the broad nationalistic system with which they identify, but also to leaders who represent that system's strength and provide inspiration in the face of adversity. Charismatic political figures have often served as bastions of psychological security in trying times, from Winston Churchill and Nelson Mandela to Bashar Al-Assad and Adolph Hitler. Research suggests that, in the wake of 9/11, Americans looked to then-president George W. Bush to affirm the righteousness of the American way of life and ensure its security against terrorist threats. Several studies showed MS to increase Americans' support for Bush and his antiterrorist policies (e.g., Cohen, Ogilvie, Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2005; Landau et al., 2004). Such findings are typically construed as support for the conservative shift hypothesis, because even liberal participants responded to MS with enhanced favorability to the staunchly Republican Bush.

In sum, a substantial body of work suggests various forms of psychological threat (terrorism, death, deficient government systems) can motivate individuals to adopt a more conservative worldview, one based on a closed style of thinking that shuns outsiders and defends current laws, ethics, national identity, and leaders against anything that undermines their validity.

Evidence of Political Worldview Defense

Conservative shifting may be only part of the total picture, however. Consider the fact that extreme right-wing *and* left-wing ideologies have served as bases for defensive, inflexible thinking and repressive totalitarian regimes (Greenberg & Jonas, 2003). In parallel with corrosive right-wing social movements like Hitler's Nazism and Mussolini's Fascism stand hardline left-wing communist movements from the Stalinist Soviet Union, Mao's China, and Castro's Cuba. Despite pretensions to progressiveness and social equality, communist societies have historically instituted oppressive policies of social control and imprisonment (e.g., the Stasi of the former German Democratic Republic) and developed hierarchical organizations privileging a select few (e.g., Leonhard, 1986). Moreover, extreme communist beliefs and opposition to capitalism—including extreme endorsement of egalitarianism—correlate positively with authoritarianism (e.g., McFarland, Ageyev, & Abalakina-Paap, 1992). These observations are difficult to explain from the conservative shift perspective.

Closer empirical investigations show, in fact, that responses to real-world threats do not inevitably indicate a conservative shift. For instance, in the aftermath of 9/11, many Americans did not exhibit increased prejudice and intolerance, but rather showed the opposite response (Morgan, Wisneski, & Skitka, 2011; Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003). Many opened their hearts to close others and sought out new social connections. Blood donations, charitable giving, volunteerism, and political engagement increased (Morgan et al., 2011). In one survey, 57.8% of Americans came to believe 9/11 had some positive consequences, including heightened senses of the preciousness of life, social closeness, and altruism (Poulin, Silver, Gil-Rivas, Holman, & McIntosh, 2009; Yum & Schenck-Hamlin, 2005). Research by Rutjens, van der Pligt, and van Harreveld (2009) supports the idea that such progressive hope is existentially securing. They found having participants think about progressively solving personal, environmental, and social problems in the near or distant future eliminated the effect of MS to elevate death-thought accessibility, and relaxed negative reactions to a worldview-threatening essay.

Just as historical regimes and responses to impactful events do not invariably produce conservative shifting, neither does MS. Rather, a wealth of terror management research supports the *political worldview defense hypothesis*: Reminders of death will cause conservatives to become more conservative while causing liberals to become more liberal.

For instance, MS intensifies conservative leanings among conservatives, but has no such effect among liberals. A dynamic experimental example comes from Pyszczynski et al. (2006), who observed MS and reminders of terrorism to increase conservatives' support for the use of extreme military measures in the War on Terror (e.g., chemical and nuclear weapons), but to have no such effects among liberal participants. Likewise, Lavine, Lodge, and Freitas (2005) observed high-authoritarian Americans (in comparison to low-authoritarians) to respond to MS with increased interest in pro-death penalty arguments and diminished interest in more balanced, two-sided arguments on that issue (cf. Greenberg et al., 1990). Using diverse correlational survey techniques, McCann (2009) found the degree of social, economic, or political unrest perceived as threatening to the American way of life to predict greater state-level support for Republican candidates, but only in conservative states.

Is the reverse true as well—does MS amplify liberal tendencies among liberals, but not among conservatives? Research suggests it can. The earliest such evidence was provided by Greenberg et al. (1992), who found liberals responded to a death reminder with greater tolerance of a person described as conservative, whereas conservatives instead responded with firmer rejection of a liberal. Although liberals' defensiveness in that study appeared weaker than that of conservatives (the effect among liberals was statistically marginal), recent work by Castano et al. (2011) shows threatened liberals do indeed robustly defend diverse aspects of their liberalism. Across several studies of liberals from New

York City (a relatively liberal location), Castano and colleagues (2011) observed MS to amplify left-leaning views on a host of politically charged issues, including endorsement of stem cell research, government-sponsored national health care, and legalization of same-sex marriages. Furthermore, MS prompted the liberal participants to become particularly anticonservative by more avidly rejecting authoritarianism (a well-known correlate of conservatism in Western culture; Altemeyer, 1998) and more strongly opposing strict sentencing for drug offenders, tightened immigration restrictions, abolishing welfare, the idea that abortion is amoral, and reference to God in the pledge of allegiance.

Research thus shows worldview defense can be observed independently among conservatives or liberals. Measuring participants' attitudes toward hot-button political issues of a conservative nature (e.g., Pyszczynski et al's [2006] measure of extreme military support) detects pronounced defensiveness among conservatives; while measuring attitudes toward hot-button liberal issues detects liberals' defensiveness (Castano et al., 2011). Notably, however, the political landscape frequently features liberals and conservatives acting defensively at the same time. Incessant partisan quibbling and congressional gridlock commonly result from rigidity occurring in tandem on both sides of political debates. When it comes to the broad issue of science, for instance, Nisbet, Cooper, and Garrett (2015) recently found both liberals and conservatives resist information that does not "fit" with their respective party lines: Conservatives exhibit negative emotions and resistance to scientific claims regarding climate change and evolution, while liberals show the same defensive motivational and emotional reactions to scientific claims about nuclear power and fracking.

Many terror management studies similarly show that MS elicits directionally opposite responses among liberals and conservatives—that the same underlying existential concerns provoke diametrically opposed defensive responses. Such effects often occur with respect to the evaluation of those who overtly derogate a person's political orientation or the views associated with it. For example, McGregor et al. (1998) found that, after MS, Democrats and Republicans alike negatively evaluated critics of their respective political beliefs and even aggressed against their political opponents by doling out large amounts of painfully spicy hot sauce for them to ingest in a supposed taste testing study. In a more issue-specific example, Castano et al. (2011) found MS caused conservatives to reject the author of a pro-evolution essay and embrace the author of a pro-creationism essay, yet liberal participants showed precisely the opposite pattern of author evaluations following MS. Further, on the contentious subject of immigration, Weise, Arciszewski, Verhiac, Pyszczynski, and Greenberg (2012) observed French and American participants with high levels of right-wing authoritarianism to evaluate an immigrant target especially negatively after MS, whereas low authoritarianism participants showed a significant effect in the opposite direction, becoming more positively inclined to the immigrant following MS (cf. Bassett, 2010). Attitudinal polarization even occurs with respect to evaluation of

charismatic political figures. In a hypothetical gubernatorial election scenario, Kosloff, Greenberg, Weise, and Solomon (2010) found MS to enhance people's favoritism toward a charismatic candidate of their own (liberal or conservative) political ideology while diminishing their liking for a charismatic candidate of the opposing ideology.

Divergent responses to existential threat also occur with respect to political issues themselves, regardless of their direct linkage to a specific target person. Vail, Arndt, Motyl, and Pyszczynski (2012) found exposure to images of destroyed buildings reminiscent of the 9/11 terrorist attacks heightened liberals' and conservatives' death-thought accessibility and elicited greater dogmatic certainty in their respective preexisting political beliefs about various issues, including women's rights, homosexuality, atheism, authoritarian control, and traditionalism. Nail et al. (2009) obtained similar results, finding MS increased liberals' conviction regarding their preexisting attitudes toward capital punishment and abortion, up to levels comparable to the conviction of conservative participants. Cuillier, Duell, and Joireman (2009) observed attitudes toward national security moderated responses to MS regarding the press's right to access government information. The study found MS decreased support for press access among people who highly valued national security, but increased press access support among those who least valued national security. Further, Routledge, Juhl, and Vess (2010) showed thoughts of terrorism increased traditionalist tendencies and opposition to adoption of the Euro among Brits high in the dispositional tendency to prefer structure, order, and consistency; yet those low in such dispositional tendencies had the opposite response.

Importantly, the politically polarizing effect of death-related concerns has been observed outside the laboratory, in a wide variety of cultural contexts, and consequent of various forms of real-world threats that render mortality salient. For instance, McCann (2008) demonstrated homicide rates influence attitudes toward the death penalty differently in Red states than in Blue states, with more conservative states becoming more pro–death penalty and more liberal states becoming more opposed to it as homicides rates rise. Laufer, Solomon, and Levine (2010) demonstrated that direct exposure to terrorist attacks increased both liberal and conservative Israeli citizens' commitment to engaging in demonstrations supporting their respective political views and disdain for those who would fail to do so. Further, a longitudinal study by Chatard, Arndt, and Pyszczynski (2010) found Swiss individuals who had experienced the death of a close other over a 6-year period exhibited increasingly polarized political attitudes, with liberals and conservatives more extremely endorsing their respective party-line views regarding the Swiss army, social programs, joining the European Union, providing opportunities for foreigners, environmental protection, taxing the rich, and nuclear energy policy (notably, though, this effect was weaker among liberals).

In sum, liberal ideologies *and* conservative ideologies can afford existential security. Contrary to Jost et al.'s (2007) findings, a large body of research shows that psychological threats are often polarizing and push people to espouse greater conviction in their preexisting left-leaning or right-leaning beliefs and attitudes. The threat of death can motivate people not simply to become more conservative, but to become more firmly entrenched in whatever bases of value and meaning are of essential importance to them.

Integrating the Worldview Defense and Conservative Shift Hypotheses

Clear differences exist between the terror management theory and uncertainty-threat/system justification models of motivated political cognition. How can we reconcile these findings? One starting point is to reconsider the conceptualization of *status quo*, a phrase that translates roughly as "the existing state of affairs." A central tenet of the conservative shift perspective is that motivation to adhere to or defend the status quo is directly linked to conservatism. Yet this framing may refer to "psychological conservatism"—as in, sustaining the system as it stands—rather than "political conservatism," per se. In this way, this framing may muddy the picture: Are we talking about conserving versus progressing the "system," or bolstering support for conservative versus liberal positions on socioeconomic issues and candidates? Conservative shift advocates often toggle between these distinct dimensions yet arguably are referring to the former. Keeping them distinct, though, points to an illuminating possibility: The motivation to conserve the system may be orthogonal to the specific norms, values, and socioeconomic premises propagated by that system, which can be left or right wing.

Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003b) proposed the compromise view that "rigidity of the left can and does occur, but it is less common than rigidity of the right" (p. 383). They suggested progressive movements at their early stages (liberal, Democratic, neo-Marxist, radical, socialist) are highly open to change and uncertainty, whereas conservative movements at their early stages (religious right, military rule, fascist, neo-Nazi) are only moderately so. Likewise, so-called "old" progressive regimes (Soviet Union, People's Republic of China, Cuba) are only moderately open to change and uncertainty, whereas old conservative regimes (feudalism, monarchy, religious authority, patriarchy) are not open at all. Moreover, Jost and colleagues' rigorous meta-analytic overview (2003b) showed psychological rigidity to correlate with both extreme right-wing tendencies *and* ideological extremity in either direction, though more studies support the former.

Why then do so many terror management studies show distinct and often comparably strong and opposed defensive responses to MS? And why did Burke and colleagues' (2013) meta-analysis show significant effect sizes for both conservative

shifting ($r = .22$) and political worldview defense ($r = .35$), with the latter effect being directionally stronger?

Methods and Mechanisms

One possibility is that Jost et al.'s (2003a, 2003b) hypothesis is only partly correct. Greenberg and Jonas (2003) provided thoughtful counterpoints to the claims that conservatism but not liberalism is historically associated with resistance to change and intolerance of equality. For example, they observed that American social conservatives routinely clamor for systematic change (e.g., reducing consumer safety, environmental, and weapons regulations, taxation, and the size of government) and, as noted earlier, that authoritarian views can emerge on behalf of either type of ideology.

It is feasible that differences between each theoretical camp's research methods may partly explain the lack of fit in their respective findings. An experiment testing how MS impacts political leanings may elicit different psychological processes—and thus produce different psychological outcomes—than a correlational test of the association between political ideology and self-reported death anxiety. Perhaps the former are more unconscious. Terror management research shows conscious death thoughts cause people to seek concrete, literal security, whereas unconscious death thoughts motivate efforts to defend one's worldview (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999). The correlation between subjective death anxiety and conservatism observed by Jost and colleagues (2003a) may therefore reflect motivation to feel literally secure and protected from psychologically overt concerns with uncertainty and vulnerability (e.g., "I want my nation and military to assure my safety!"); conversely, laboratory MS effects instead show reliance on long-standing beliefs and values particular to a person's worldview (e.g., "I will not tolerate the intolerant!"). A simple study to assess this possibility has yet to be done: test whether supraliminal death primes enhance conservative leanings, whereas subliminal death primes have a polarizing effect.

At the theoretical level, Anson and colleagues (2009) importantly noted system justification needs emphasize factors *external* to the individual—such as the perception that the social system is consistent, just, and structured. By contrast, terror management needs emphasize more *internal* factors—that is, motivation to reduce death-related anxiety by finding meaning and value in life. This may be why threats to the perceived certainty/control afforded by external social systems so often elicit generalized system justifying responses in a uniform manner across individuals, whereas death reminders typically elicit defense of worldviews more specific to a given individual's internalized vision of reality.

In line with this view, Rutjens and Loseman (2010) have suggested terror management and system justification operate on the basis of distinct self-regulatory mechanisms. Worldview defense, they claim, is a meaning-seeking response to existential anxiety provoked by MS, while system justification is a

control-seeking response to concerns with uncertainty about the world. Indeed, they found MS heightened Dutch participants' death-thought accessibility and elicited highly negative attitudes toward the author of an essay expressing anti-Western sentiments, but had no effect on participants' justification of the Dutch social system. Yet, in another condition, participants completed a taxing task designed to deplete their sense of control instead of inducing MS; neither death-thought accessibility, nor worldview defense were heightened, but system justification was.

Additional research supports the independence of these two processes. Ullrich and Cohrs (2007) found reminding Germans of terrorism heightened their system justification (agreement with items such as "In general the German political system operates as it should"), yet did so without increasing existential concerns (i.e., death-thought accessibility). Conversely, in the terror management literature, numerous studies have shown MS effects are different from uncertainty salience effects (Burke, Martens, & Faucher, 2010) and, further, that MS amplifies risky and thus control-reducing behaviors if they serve a person's strivings for meaning and value (e.g., Landau & Greenberg, 2006; Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2000).

In sum, multiple mechanisms likely come into play where defense of political ideology is concerned, suggesting conservative shifting and political worldview defense may ultimately be best viewed as complementary rather than competing processes.

Historical, Dispositional, and Situational Fluctuations in Perception of the Status Quo

Although different threats may elicit different processes, the research reviewed earlier in this chapter showed the same variable, mortality salience, elicits conservative shifting in some studies but polarizing political worldview defense in others, even when it is manipulated using similar methods and thus likely engaging similar processes. So how can the full body of MS effects be explained?

A crucial factor to consider here is that worldviews fluctuate across history, culture, people, and situations, and thus so do the particular beliefs and values people rely upon for existential security. We have already noted zeitgeists associated with massive historic social movements can precipitate authoritarian tendencies of a left-wing or right-wing nature. However, even within one culture over time, there may be noticeable population-level shifts in preference for liberal or conservative ideology. At those respective historical junctures, the currently dominant ideology may serve as a primary ideological rallying point. For instance, in post-Depression era America, the New Deal created social security and FDR's "fireside chats" presented Americans with a comforting liberal face; whereas, in post-9/11 America, the War on Terror established radical national security measures behind the confident assertions of conservative George W. Bush.

This raises an important question: To what extent do MS-induced conservative shift effects represent clinging to historically and culturally concurrent trends in nationalism rather than conservatism per se? The reader may have noticed most evidence for conservative shifting after MS shows individuals gravitating toward beliefs, attitudes, and figures that are multidimensional in nature, representing not only a conservative worldview but also standing tall on behalf of nationalistic identity and the current president or positions on issues reflecting concerns for the nation as a whole (e.g., terrorism, immigration). For example, as mentioned earlier, portrayals of terrorism in the media amplify people's defense of the status quo against terrorist outsiders (Das et al., 2009). Indeed, Nail and McGregor (2009) found liberals and conservatives alike reported greater conservatism following the 9/11 attacks, but this effect was most pronounced on items assessing support for then-president Bush and increased military spending and much less pronounced on more politically divisive issues like socialized medicine.

Longitudinal research is needed to determine whether responses to death-related thoughts shift people leftward or rightward over time in parallel with the pendulum swings of the political landscape. Yet, it is clear from evidence to date that individual differences in political orientation moderate MS effects at our current moment in history and in many cultures. Perhaps different worldviews render different features of the human experience chronically accessible or salient, including values otherwise generally important to most people—part of a universal human worldview. For instance, most people, when pushed, will acknowledge that getting along with others and demonstrating compassion are crucial for human survival; likewise, most will acknowledge that excessive taxation and government overreach are undesirable. Yet long-standing adherence to a particular liberal or conservative ideology is likely to render norms and values associated with each respective point of view chronically accessible, and thus highly likely to condition politically defensive responses to MS. This idea is akin to contemporary positions on attachment, which often attribute secure/insecure attachment to the chronic or situational activation of specific relationship schemas.

Consistent with this view, a wealth of evidence shows salient situational information moderates MS effects (Fritsche, Jonas, Niesta Kayser, & Koranyi, 2010; Gailliot, Sillman, Schmeichel, Maner, & Plant, 2008; Jonas et al., 2008). Findings indicate that when situational primes make liberal principles and positions salient (e.g., prosociality, benevolence, egalitarianism, pacifism, helpfulness, protection of the environment), MS amplifies thought and behavior consistent with those norms. Conversely, when conservative principles and positions are rendered salient (e.g., punitiveness, pro-selfness), MS causes people to act in line with those norms instead.

Greenberg et al. (1992) presented the earliest of such evidence, showing that priming individuals with words related to tolerance eliminated the effect of MS to

enhance negative evaluation of the author of an anti–United States essay. More recently, Abdollahi, Henthorn, and Pyszczynski (2009) found that, among Iranian college students, MS increased support for martyrdom attacks against Western targets, but this effect was eliminated if participants were first presented with information indicating the majority of Iranians opposed such violence. Similarly, Rothschild, Abdollahi, and Pyszczynski (2009) found presenting compassion-oriented Biblical verses to American religious fundamentalists reduced the effect of MS to amplify their support for extreme military interventions in the Middle East, and priming compassion-oriented Koran verses to Iranian Shiite Muslims eliminated the ability of MS to heighten anti-Western sentiment. Such moderation effects also occur with respect to support for political figures: During the 2008 U.S. presidential election, Vail, Arndt, Motyl, and Pyszczynski (2009) found MS elevated support for Republican candidate John McCain, but if individuals were first primed with compassionate values advocating love and understanding, MS instead elevated support for Democratic candidate Barak Obama.

In a similar vein, Weise et al. (2008) observed a generalized liberal shift due to situationally salient information, finding that, among American liberals and conservatives primed with thoughts of secure interpersonal attachments, MS decreased support for the use of extreme military measures (e.g., chemical and nuclear weapons) in the War on Terror. Yet Vail et al. (2012) demonstrated salient information can also promote a warmongering mentality, finding that presenting images of destroyed buildings and deadly terrorist attacks heightened the accessibility of death-related thoughts, which in turn mediated intensified support for aggressive military action against Iran among both liberal and conservative Americans.

In sum, predicting whether existential concerns elicit a conservative or a liberal shift requires consideration of factors contributing to changes/differences in perception of the status quo across history, culture, people, and situations. Worldviews are individualized psychological structures internalized over the course of socialization, and, consequently, prevailing views espoused by the culture at large and highlighted by particular historical, social, and situational forces can alter how one perceives and defends the state of affairs.

Conclusion

Regardless of whether they operate in tandem or independently, detrimental effects of terror management and system justification processes on the political landscape are palpable and numerous. Beliefs, attitudes, and voting behavior are skewed by our insecurities and defensive ideological clinging, contradicting the rationalist principles of Jeffersonian democracy and undermining desperately needed efforts for humans to find common understanding before we bring about our own extinction. After reading this chapter, it may not be surprising to

learn that emotional and motivational processes interfere with citizens' abilities to rationally examine legitimate evidence of state crimes against democracy and thereby pave the way for governments to manipulate their citizenries (Manwell, 2010). An existentially anxious population is a controllable population. Learning about the various ways in which defensiveness shapes political ideology is an essential step toward reinstating reason in the political world.

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4

BRIDGING HEALTH

Insights and Questions F...
Management Health Mo...

Melissa Spina, Jamie Arndt, P...
and Jamie Goldenberg

Terror management theory (TMT; Gree...
assumption that much of human social...
age the troubling psychological implica...
the inevitability of death (see Chapter 1...
make physical health decisions that work...
avoid mortality. Consider how in the U...
$4.9 billion on indoor tanning each year...
42.1 million people smoke cigarettes (CD...
by ultraviolet radiation and, especially,...
decisions seem ironic in light of TMT, the...
Kurt Lewin's (1951, p.169) classic quote, "...
theory," is often taken to suggest a theory...
everyday social circumstances. But there i...
cal *problem*. A practical problem—as evid...
decisions—provides an opportunity from...
and enriched by evaluating, not just what...
in the world (Rothman & Salovey, 2007)....

In this vein, an interdisciplinary applica...
ents a unique opportunity to explore bo...
harmful and beneficial health decisions,...
of how people manage existential insecur...
health model (TMHM) was proposed (...
had little to say about how the awareness...
decisions. And the silence was reciprocal....
about how health decisions might be infl...