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COMMUNICATION AND THE CAUSES AND COSTS OF TERRORISM

A Terror Management Theory Perspective*

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As witnessed in the current volume, communication theory and research can shed light on many of the diverse aspects of terrorism. The strength of a communication approach lies in its ability to offer analyses of the *proximal* or specific mechanisms involved in the ways people think about and respond to terrorism. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how an empirical existential perspective known as terror management theory (TMT; see Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997, for a review) can complement this endeavor by providing an account of the *distal* motivational systems underlying the maintenance and defense of key psychological structures central to the nature, operation, and understanding of terrorism. More specifically, TMT's analysis of why people need a sense of culturally derived meaning and self-esteem, and why different or

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at any moment for reasons we can no more anticipate than control. According to Becker, these existential concerns conflict with our survival imperative (i.e., with our will to live) and, in the absence of certain compelling psychological protective mechanisms, this knowledge of our own mortality threatens to overwhelm us with paralyzing terror.

T.M.T. acknowledges Becker's proposition that humans respond to this existential dilemma by constructing or simply subscribing to a cultural worldview (CWV)—a set of consensually held beliefs about the nature of reality that imbues the world and our lives with meaning, order, and permanence. For example, CWVs provide convincing answers to universal cosmological questions about the nature of life (Where did I come from? What am I doing here? Where am I going when I'm no longer here?), and stipulate a set of appropriate social roles and associated requirements for acceptable and valued conduct. Moreover, CWVs provide the promise of immortality, either literal (e.g., Heaven, Paradise, Nirvana) or symbolic (e.g., recognition, fame, prizes, celebrity, and cultural accomplishments) to those who uphold these standards. A similar conclusion was reached by Otto Rank, who also maintained that one's CWV develops primarily from an inner spiritual need for a sense of meaning found beyond one's biological or social existence. Thus, the human CWV is "a continuous translation of supernatural conceptions into rational terms" conceived of as "an expression of the irrational self seeking material immortalization in lasting achievements" (Rank, 1941, p. 84). In short, our CWV provides us with a coherent and meaningful framework of understanding, one that is useful in organizing our experience and making sense of our existence. Our CWV is also responsible for establishing the standards of value for guiding our actions, and furthermore, for those who meet or exceed the relevant cultural prescriptions, our CWV promises the basis for both symbolic as well as literal forms of immortality.

Although the meaning and promise of immortality derived from faith in a CWV are essential, they are not sufficient to maintain psychological equanimity. Following William James (1890, 1893), Becker noted that each of us also needs to believe we, as individuals, serve a valuable and significant role within our own socially constructed reality. Likewise, Rank asserted the CWV serves dual functions—both of which impact on our sense of self-esteem: One function gives permanence to the preservation of primitive spiritual life values, and the other provides a direct opportunity for the average group member to create, maintain, and participate in a permanent cultural symbolic meaning. Along similar lines, Becker (1973) defined self-esteem as the sustained perception of oneself as satisfying internalized cultural standards of value. Specifically, our childhood association between being "good" (i.e., acting in a socially condoned manner) and pleasing our parents (and being rewarded by them), carries over into later stages of development, to a time when we can look to the broader social structures of religion and culture to tell us how to be "good" and thereby qualify for social adulation and symbolic immortality. Self-esteem is thus the perception of oneself as a person of value in a world of meaning, hence it is the psychological mechanism by which

A TERROR MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS OF THE DARK SIDE OF HUMAN MOTIVATION

dissimilar others can at times pose such a profound threat, offers valuable insights for communication theorists regarding the nature of terrorism, as well as the social environment within which it operates.

In this chapter, we review T.M.T. and its analysis of intergroup conflict. We then consider several important aspects of terrorism—both from the victims' and the perpetrator's perspective—and attempt to show how insights provided by communication theory may be augmented by T.M.T. in empirically substantiated ways. We conclude with a discussion of how the combined insight of communication perspectives and T.M.T. may help us escape further acts of violence and destruction.

A characteristic feature of human beings is their curious inability to peacefully co-exist with dissimilar others. Throughout history, people have often gone to extraordinary lengths to humiliate, subjugate, and even obliterate each other. In the past century alone, we must reckon with the horrors of World War I, Nazi Germany, the nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Joseph Stalin, the legacy of Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge, and countless other episodes of human beings perpetrating every manner of atrocious act on other human beings. What is more, with the events of 9/11 and the continuing carnage and strife in the Middle East, the prospects for the 21st century do not appear particularly promising. Such a dim outlook is evidenced by the recent increased frequency of bloody suicide attacks by fanatical extremists targeting innocent and defenseless civilians, and by our nation's resolved commitment to a costly and protracted war on terrorism.

How can we begin to understand the capacity of some people to commit such malevolently brutal acts on other human beings? T.M.T., an interdisciplinary perspective based on the work of late cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker (1971, 1973, 1975), offers a meta-theoretical viewpoint from which to address this disturbingly crucial issue. Becker believed an understanding of human evil must be based in a general conception of motivation, and thus started by noting that humans share with all life forms a basic biological predisposition toward self-preservation: that is, people like to continue living.

Becker went on to assert that humans manage to survive in large part because of their uniquely symbolic intelligence and temporally extended self-awareness, but he posited these sophisticated cognitive capacities also have the unexpected consequence of rendering individuals aware of and sensitive to the certainty of their own death. That is, despite all the sublime joy that can arise from knowing we are alive, there is also the knowledge we are mortal and our lives may well end

SINS WITHOUT ATONEMENT: A TMT ACCOUNT OF HUMAN EVIL

Life is tragic simply because the earth turns and the sun inexorably rises and sets, and one day, for each of us, the sun will go down for the last, last time. Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have. (Baldwin, 1963, p. 123)

How does TMT help us understand the propensity for some human beings to be so scornful and at times viciously brutal toward dissimilar others? From a TMT perspective, there are two interacting dynamics: First, culture consists of a set of humanly constructed beliefs about the nature of reality. The somewhat arbitrary structure and content of these beliefs, although feeling and appearing to be substantial and absolute, are, in point of fact, rather fragile social constructions. Thus, because we can never be confident our meaning systems are absolutely true, we must rely on social consensus to sustain our delicate self-confidence. Therefore, the extent beliefs about the nature of reality serve a death-denying function, encounters with alternative conceptions are potentially threatening, because accepting the validity of such alien perspectives necessarily undermines the confidence with which we subscribe to our own beliefs. Simply put, the mere existence of someone else endorsing a system of fundamentally differing beliefs destabilizes our own worldview. Such an erosion of our CWV thereby exposes us to the potentially overwhelming anxiety and terror these attitudes and beliefs were constructed to avert, instigating a host of compensatory psychological mechanisms designed to restore and bolster faith in the CWV.

At its root, culture functions as a symbolic endeavor to overcome the physical reality of death. Yet no symbol can eradicate the physical fact of death, and as a consequence, we feel the residual "tumbling" of anxiety beneath the surface of consciousness. Therefore, a second dynamic of TMT involves the pacifying and diversionary need we have for scapegoating. That is to say, if we were all of the same mind, if we could find no *real* dissimilar others to derogate, we should have to invent them, explicitly designating another group as inferior. When death is made salient, by the alarming news of recent terrorism, our unconscious reflex is to instinctively and spontaneously project the resultant anxiety onto dissimilar others. As in the biblical story of the Day of Atonement, when Aaron placed the sins of the people upon the sacrificial goat (Leviticus 16, King James Version), we seek out our own scapegoat, designating him or her as the all-encompassing repository of evil—as the one who should suffer or perish in our place.

culture exerts its anxiety-buffering, death-denying (or perhaps more aptly, "oblivion-denying") influence.

For this reason, despite the surface variations found among differing cultures, all CWVs serve a common defensive function through their endowment of meaning and value to people's lives. In so doing, an effective CWV is capable of fostering psychological equanimity, even in the inevitable face of death. From the perspective of this analysis of human motivation, Becker maintained we can understand a wide range of human behaviors as efforts to preserve both culturally derived meaning, as well as personal significance, in the ultimate service of managing our deeply rooted fears surrounding mortality.

In summary, TMT follows Becker and others in positing that the uniquely human awareness of death creates the potential for overwhelming terror, which is managed through the sustained perception of ourselves as persons of enduring value in a world of culturally derived meaning. The empirical assessments of TMT have largely focused on what has been termed the mortality salience (MS) hypothesis: That is, if self-esteem and the CWV expressly protect people from death-related concerns, then reminders of death should lead to increased efforts to bolster and defend these two psychological constructs. Support for this hypothesis has been found in a large body of evidence showing that MS (bringing notions of one's death into momentary prominence) intensifies people's determination to protect and fortify aspects of their worldview as well as bolster their self-esteem.

Although we review specific findings later, it is important to note these programs of research have also established the convergent and discriminant validity of a variety of mortality salience MS inductions (i.e., manipulations to induce MS—e.g., open-ended questions about death, fear of death scales, gory accident footage, proximity to funeral homes and cemeteries, and subliminal death primes) and their effects on diverse cognitive and behavioral efforts to defend or bolster central aspects of the individual's worldview and self-worth (Greenberg et al., 1997; Solomon et al., 2004). These inductions have also been shown to have different effects than simply making salient or accessible a variety of other negative thoughts, such as pain, failure, social exclusion, uncertainty, general anxieties and worries, meaninglessness, and paralysis (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Goldenberg, 2003).

TMT research has also delineated the role of conscious and unconscious processes that produce MS effects (see Greenberg et al., 1997; Greenberg, Martens, & Jonas, 2003; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999; Pyszczynski et al., 2003). These studies strongly indicate the critical condition for MS effects to occur is heightened accessibility of death-related thoughts outside of focal attention. Although heightened death thought accessibility does not increase self-reported negative affect or physiological arousal, it nonetheless motivates defenses by signaling a heightened potential to experience anxiety (Greenberg et al., 2003). In the following section we explore the implications of TMT for understanding humanity's dark heritage of cruelty and terrorism.

measured out on several universal symbols of our economic power and military might, the attacks also represented a massive blow to the venerated social achievements that are so central to our Western values.

In considering some of the more symbolic reactions to terrorism, how might we integrate a TMT analysis into many of the prevailing themes within communication theory? Stated generally, cultures dictate, to a large degree, the frames or classes of schemata their members use to organize and interpret experience. Moreover, cultures also regulate the nature of the responses people will produce when such schematic knowledge structures are threatened. Although communication theories do an efficient job of explaining how the various contextual frames are constructed and transmitted, TMT complements this endeavor by giving one account for *why* these frameworks of understanding are psychologically significant at all. When we encounter terrorism or other threats to our worldview, we do not passively rely on our culturally derived organizational frames to make sense of the experience, but rather we defensively and energetically cling to our worldview, reacting with great vigor for or against those who bolster or violate our sensibilities. In the following section, we attempt to show how an integration of TMT and communication perspectives can lead insight into some of the more problematic responses to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, such as increased nationalism, stereotyping, hostility, in-group identity, solidarity and its relation to the media, and the role of sexuality and moral emotions in our response to terrorism.

Love of Country

One of our more conspicuous reactions to 9/11 was witnessed in the upsurge of patriotic paraphernalia. Statues of Liberty, the American eagle, and other symbols of American nationalism were proudly exhibited in prominent places, while patriotic songs, images, and narratives flooded the media. People everywhere adorned their houses with flags, and their cars with bumper stickers and flag decals. Following the attacks, we also expressed unprecedented support for the actions taken by our government as mandated by the U.S. Patriot Act of 2001, evidenced by our ready willingness to embrace the many increased security measures (Morin & Deane, 2001), or forgo certain privacy rights formerly considered all but sacred (such as the attorney general's authorization—subject to specific procedural safeguards—for the Bureau of Prisons to monitor certain prisoners' mail or communications with attorneys).

From a communication perspective, patriotic symbols constitute some of the central elements within the shared context of meaning Americans use to define, understand, and experience the world. From an early age, Americans are enculturated (i.e., taught at home, in school, and through the media) to associate such symbols—the American flag, Statue of Liberty, bald eagle, Liberty Bell, and the faces of their forefathers—with American strength, pride, permanence, power, and

So it is that we either encounter people we perceive as different, or target strangers who fail to share our special and particular death-denying vision of reality. What then do we do? Borrowing from Berger and Luckman (1966), TMT notes the singular and compelling way the "other" may become "fully real" through conversation and social intercourse, thus necessitating their derogation as a first line of psychological defense. Therefore we diminish the challenge posed by possessors of an alternative worldview by denigrating them as subhuman individuals. In the event we find the mere use of source derogation unsatisfying, an alternative reaction is to attempt to divert dissimilar others of their version of reality and persuade them with missionary fervor to adopt our own conceptions. Still another option is found in accommodation, whereby we extract fragments of the others' worldview, and—by folding them into our own—neutralize the threat. The "final solution," as so many despotic monsters have concluded, is, of course, to simply obliterate such heathens from the face of the planet.

In summary, TMT claims intergroup strife results in large part from a psychological inability to tolerate alternative death-denying cultural constructions. Wars are essentially collisions between competing death-denying ideologies (Lifton, 1979/1983). This is not to suggest there are no festering geographic, political, or economic considerations permeating human conflict. We nonetheless maintain the bloodshed would continue even if such practical considerations were minimized. Support for this conclusion is reflected in the rousing rhetorical use of terms such as "cursed infidels," or "evil empire," or in the more recent warnings of threat from "the great Satan," or "the axis of evil."

TMT, COMMUNICATION, AND REACTIONS TO TERRORISM

Although the 9/11 terrorist attacks were responsible for a small fraction of the casualties a moderately severe earthquake, hurricane, or tsunami might produce, their psychological impact was and continues to be more powerful and far-reaching. Many of the initial responses to the event were more practically aimed at minimizing the risk of falling victim to another attack (e.g., reducing air travel) or managing one's affairs in such an unfortunate event (e.g., writing wills). Of course, other, equally prominent types of responses were less pragmatic and seemed to be aimed more at reestablishing feelings of security, meaning, and justice. From a TMT perspective, these symbolic defenses arose in response to the dual-pronged threat 9/11 posed to the anxiety buffering function of our destabilized and now seriously vulnerable CWV. Not only did the attacks serve as a vivid depiction of mass murder and devastation—images that certainly made evident our sheer defenselessness and utter mortality, but through the destruction and damage

to conceptualize others (Allport, 1954). Uncertainty reduction theory (URT; Berger & Cabarese, 1975) similarly assumes people are fundamentally inclined to reduce uncertainty, and predicts how this need affects communication behaviors such as verbal output, nonverbal warmth, information seeking, self-disclosure, similarity, and liking. Heider (1958) and others have posited that stereotypes also manage other threats. According to Heider, people seek to avoid the potential for pain and suffering at the hands of others by remaining vigilant to potential threats and their likely causes. Stereotyping minimally allows the perceiver to identify potential adversaries, if not come to comprehend their intent or motivations.

TMT offers a complementary account of another fundamental threat stereotypes may serve to assuage. TMT posits that maintaining stable conceptions of others serves a terror management function by making the social world seem more predictable, meaningful, and orderly. That is, stereotypes provide us with simple and coherent ways of thinking about others, and although such knowledge can be practically useful, it also allows us to lend meanings (however erroneous) to the social world. Thus, stereotyping is both an instrument of economy (as it frees us from having to think too carefully), as well as a defense against fear (as it reassures us that all is unsurprisingly predictable). In support of this notion, Schimmel et al. (1999) found that MS increases preferences for others who behave in stereotypic ways. In a series of studies, participants completed MS or control primes and then were asked to evaluate African Americans, Germans, women, and homosexual men who either conformed or failed to conform to the cultural stereotype of their respective groups. Although participants in the control condition expressed more favorable evaluations for the counter-stereotypical target, MS resulted in increased preference for stereotypic targets.

More recently, Landau et al. (2003) found people who are especially inclined to structure their world in meaningful ways respond to MS with an increased need to maintain clear and orderly conceptions of others, even in relatively "non-specific" or basic ways. For example, MS led some individuals to negatively evaluate a person who behaved in an inconsistent manner, even on neutrally valenced dimensions, such as genetic behavioral consistency. These and other findings suggest thinking about others in simple ways that confirm one's conception of social reality functions in part to hold dearth thoughts at bay. This is consistent with the notion that prejudice and the application of stereotypes may stem in part from the human need to quickly, if not efficiently, make sense of so many of the threatening existential inconsistencies we are faced with in our environment.

Hostility

The prejudicial use of stereotypes would be less lamentable perhaps, were it not for the menacing fact that such crude ways of conceptualizing others are often accompanied by hostility, and at times even violence. In just over 2 years following the attacks on 9/11, the FBI had investigated more than 500 hate crimes

Stereotyping

Even the words, *liberty*, *justice*, and *freedom* have come to hold a special symbolism uniquely, if not exclusively, applied to American values and the American way of life. Other terms and phrases hold special—almost sacramental—power in our culture as well; for example, *democracy*, *equality*, *opportunity*, *family values*, *freedom of speech*, and *respect for law and order*. For many Americans, these and other such phrases have taken on an almost sacred quality, one with which most people closely identify; hence, they are not to be sullied or casually profaned. From a TMT perspective, these terms and symbols are integral to the meaningfulness of a CWV capable of allaying concerns about mortality. Evidence in support of these claims derives from experiments demonstrating how subtle reminders of death (i.e., instances of MS) result in especially positive evaluations of those who praise or validate significant aspects of one's worldview. For example, Greenberg, Solomon and Pyszczynski (1990) had participants briefly contemplate their own death, or another aversive topic, and then, in a different context, evaluate essays that expressed either pro- or anti-American sentiments. As predicted, those given MS expressed especially positive evaluations of the pro-American essay and its author relative to those in control conditions. These results indicate positive evaluations for things or people who uphold our CWV are, to a measurable and significant extent, rooted in terror management needs for meaning.

In another study, Greenberg, Simon, Proulx, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1995) explored the effects of MS on how willing people are to be personally responsible for upholding culturally meaningful symbols. To test this idea, participants completed death or control primes and then, in an ostensibly separate study, were asked to complete some creative problem-solving tasks. For some participants, the only effective solutions to the tasks involved using cherished cultural icons in a clearly inappropriate way (e.g., sitting sand through an American flag or using a crucifix as a hammer). As predicted, MS resulted in more distress over having personally transgressed against the worldview through the misuse of culturally sacred objects. These and other results indicate MS inductions increase people's investment in their core religious and national symbols, and hence increases their preference for anyone who validates their worldview or shows an opposite reluctance to use its symbols inappropriately.

In the wake of 9/11, cultural icons were not the only entities Americans cling to with great vigor; many were especially spirited in their use and application of intercultural stereotypes as well. Although Arabic stereotypes were the most popular, in numerous cases the only requirement for denunciation and rejection was dark skin. Stereotyping in times of conflict has the well-known effect of dehumanizing those depicted as the enemy, and firm beliefs in impermeable group boundaries help to reduce uncertainty and provide a convenient way

Subsequent research has demonstrated how MS influences behavioral consequences of out-group hostility. For example, Ochsman and Marby (1994) found German students physically distanced themselves from a Turkish confederate after MS. On a similar note, MS has been found to exaggerate people's active attempts to aggress against others who do not share their political orientation (McGregor et al., 1998). Such biases against outgroup members need not be based on anything as recognizable as skin color, costume, or political persuasion, for these defensive behaviors can hold even when group membership is based on relatively unimportant inclinations, as for example, one's preference for obscure abstract art (Harmon-Jones, Greenberg, Solomon, & Simon, 1996).

Solidarity and In-Group Identity

Strong in-group solidarity is characteristic of many subcultures within the United States. Our close relationships give us a sense of camaraderie and belonging, and this fellowship forms the basis of a social unity that is enhanced through common history and tradition. We form our in-group relationships in countless ways based on a range of relations such as sharing the same alma mater, birthplace, workplace, social club, or church. Often the fact that two people are simply from the same school or hometown is enough to connect them with an immediate and warm bond of camaraderie. These connections grow stronger as we subsequently share activities and interactions, particularly if we experience hardships together, where, in many cases, the solidarity we feel and the bonds we form may last entire lifetimes. Durkheim theorized there are two kinds of social solidarity: mechanical solidarity, which connects people through similarities of beliefs, positions, and behaviors; and organic solidarity, which organizes social structure through differences and functional interdependencies. Primary groups are characterized by close relationships among members, where the relationships can be either positive or negative, and members are committed and connected to each other for some clear purpose. Secondary groups are larger collections made up of less personal relationships. In the wake of 9/11, Americans exhibited a renewed sense of primary group identification with fellow Americans: Relationships within the community, work, and school that were merely instrumental or even negative were, over the course of a few days, transformed into a strong superordinate group identity: "Americans."

One basic assumption in social science is that comparison processes are central to personal identity and the ways we connect and interact with others. Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison and Merton's (1968) work on reference groups offer excellent accounts of this principle. Much of the empirical research on intergroup conflict concludes that ethnocentrism, in-group bias, and prejudice are the prevailing norms on which identity-related discriminations are made. More specifically, there is strong evidence that in-group love and out-group hate are reciprocally related (Brewer, 1999). On the other hand, Allport (1954)

against Arab-, Muslim-, and Sikh Americans (FBI, 2003). Moreover, such antagonism often seemed to be extended to those who shared only a superficial resemblance to the supposed enemy. In the 12 months following the attacks, authorities prosecuted 80 serious hate crimes committed against people of Latin, Indian, and Native American heritage, whose appearances made them convenient targets for 9/11-related retaliatory violence. As an example, Babir Sodhi, one of many Sikhs of Indian descent mistaken as an Islamic of Arabic descent, was shot and killed in the parking lot of his family's gas station. "My brother was innocent," Harjit Sodhi asserted after the killing. "What was he guilty of—that he looked like Osama bin Laden?" (Purwal, 2001).

Surely even the most prejudiced and hateful person should be capable of distinguishing between the perpetrators of 9/11 and some innocent, otherwise law-abiding, dark-complected individuals in ethnic headgear. What motivates such blind aggression? Obviously, seeking accurate information or simply reducing uncertainty are not the only ways—or perhaps even the most essential ways—people respond to real or imagined social threats. We are also motivated to select, our prejudices, needs, and desires (Heider, 1958). Defensive attribution theory (Shaver, 1970; Thornton, 1984; Walster, 1966) offers one explanation of how such defensive biasing may often lead to hostility. The theory argues that, for severe consequences, we attribute more responsibility and/or blame to dissimilar others' dispositions, while discounting situational factors, in order to distance ourselves from a world where such negative events are likely to happen to us. This formulation is somewhat analogous to the just-world hypothesis (Lerner & Simmons, 1966)—which posits that disparagement of a hapless victim may result from an individual's need to believe he or she is a just person living in a just world, where misfortune only befalls those who deserve it, not "good people," such as one's self. Chaikin and Darley (1973) concluded the just-world hypothesis and defensive attribution theory spring from the same basic assumptions. In each case, attributional biases serve defensive purposes, and in the case of terrorism, where consequences are severe, the biasing should be highly contingent on the dissimilarity between self and other. It follows that if we are defensively intolerant of dissimilarity others we should be more willing to deigrate them—and they us—which can only contribute to a greater atmosphere of hostility.

Research utilizing TMT has repeatedly demonstrated that MS results in sharpened negative reactions toward those who violate cherished cultural values, or even toward those who are merely different in appearance. For example, Greenberg et al. (1990) led Christian participants to contemplate death or a control topic and then rate Christian and Jewish targets. Although the targets were evaluated equally in the control condition, those who were led to think about death expressed exaggerated hostility toward the Jewish targets. Greenberg et al. also had death or control primed participants evaluate the authors of essays either supportive or highly critical of the American way of life. As predicted, MS led to more negative reactions to the anti-US author.

have adopted a uses-and-gratifications (U&G) approach that has stimulated a considerable literature addressing the utility of various mass-mediated channels, particularly television. Following the symbolic interactionist notion of a "looking glass self," U&G emphasizes that reasoning, the self, and identity emerge from the dynamic interaction between the individual and the social environment, and it highlights the importance of the media in these developments. Specifically, the media foster growth by offering the perspective of a "generalized other" assisting individuals in perceiving and evaluating themselves and their behaviors. That is, in addition to finding out about relevant events and conditions in the world and in our immediate surroundings, we use the media to gain insights into ourselves by seeking to identify with valued others, using them as models of normative behavior, and as reinforcement for our personal values (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972). Similar to TMT, Blumler and Katz (1974) noted that these processes are motivated. Specifically, the developing self's use of media to comprehend the culture ultimately provides a sense of security through identification with larger social meaning systems.

In relation to terrorism, media such as television and the Internet play a critical role in shaping the distal defensive reactions discussed earlier, by reinforcing specific symbols, normative behavior, and other means of re-establishing a secure system of meaning and worth. The media may have an even greater impact on our proximal defenses, however, by diverting our collective attention from the reality of death. When the salience of death is heightened in the aftermath of a terrorist episode, we should expect people to rely on the media, particularly television, to distract themselves from the malevolent existential implications that follow such exceptionally ugly events. During particularly stressful times, we should expect increased channel surfing away from news programming and toward more frivolous programming content. Supporting this prediction, Americans exhibited a significant surge in their prime-time television and movie-watching behavior in the weeks following 9/11 (Brookes, 2001). From a TMT perspective, we might characterize these uses of the media as acts of "psychic numbing" or instances of "avoidant coping," for they function to insulate our collective awareness from our ever-present vulnerability to tragedy. That this distraction may at least in part serve to obscure the awareness of death is demonstrated by a series of experiments conducted by Arndt and colleagues who found MS leads subjects to avoid being in a state of objective self-awareness (Arndt, Cook, & Routledge, 2004; Arndt, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1998). By "tranquilizing oneself with the trivial," as Kierkegaard (1843/1849/1954) once put it, people attempt to circumvent the psychological impact of the reality of death.

Television may also afford us a useful method of anxiety reduction by creating grounds for both affiliation and discrimination. Other equally therapeutic uses of the media may be just as important, for instance, television has the ability to relax us with an intrinsic sense of cultural and aesthetic enjoyment, punctuating our time and activities with background noise and companionship. Yet, from a

maintained that in-group loyalty is not necessarily related to out-group hostility, although he argued hostility toward out-group members (or at least the recognition of a common enemy) can increase in-group cohesion (see the section on Transformation and Elevation).

From a TMT standpoint, when confronted with the specter of death, one's group identifications provide one with the consensual validation necessary for faith in a meaningful worldview, as well as the standards of worth necessary for valued membership. The anxiety-buffering function of group identification is supported by research showing that MS leads people to react especially strongly toward others who uphold or violate the beliefs and values of their in-group, whether it be one's country, university, political affiliation, or gender (see Arndt, Greenberg, & Cook, 2002; Arndt, Greenberg, Schimel, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 2002; Dechesne, Janssen, & van Knippenberg, 2000; Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Charel, 1992). For example, Americans primed with death-related thoughts expressed more favorable judgments of a target who praised the American way of life (Greenberg et al., 1990). More recently, Jonas and Greenberg (2004) found MS led German participants to express more positive attitudes toward the reunification of East and West Germany, and especially negative attitudes toward the Euro (poised as it was to supersede their national currency, the Deutsche Mark).

In a more direct test of the self-esteem bolstering function of group identification, Arndt, Greenberg, Schimel et al. (2002) found that when one's in-group was portrayed in a way that fostered a positive self-image, MS led female and Hispanic participants to increase identification with their respective groups (e.g., by viewing themselves as having more in common with other group members). These and other findings strongly suggest people rely on their group identifications at least in part because they bolster the sense that one is a valuable contributor to a meaningful social reality. With regard to the enculturating forces associated with the formation of our CWVs, we now turn to a consideration of how these identification and affiliative needs are reflected in the ways we use and consume information through the mass media.

In-group Solidarity and the Media

Along with achieving an accurate (or at least, functional) perception of the world, we need to be liked, to achieve the affection and respect of others, and to develop a sense of belonging to social groups. Thus, one of the primary motivational forces behind human behavior is driven by our need for affiliation. TMT shares a symbolic interactionist perspective (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934) in suggesting others in our social environment provide the context to understand meaning and negotiate our collective worldview. With regard to understanding how the mass media can be used in addressing these needs, Blumler and Katz (1974) and others

thought of as morally disgusting heavily depends on social learning processes and enculturation (Kozin & Fallon, 1987).

Insights from TMT may shed light on indignation and other visceral emotional responses. From the viewpoint of TMT, a disturbing consequence of our awareness of death and our subsequent urge to transcend it, is that our bodies become highly problematic. The paradox lies in the fact that although we perceive ourselves as unique individuals with meaningful histories and lofty life projects, we are nonetheless encased in a lumbering body that aches, bleeds, and binds us to the fate of every other living thing, namely, the ugly, disgusting, and inevitable decay of corporeal death. All of us are at some level aware that our bodies represent, in effect, an invariable contract with death—a constant reminder of our defenselessness. We go to great lengths to deny this corporeality by attempting to elevate ourselves above our mere animal existence, to something more dignified, unique, and spiritually permanent, an immortal essence independent of the body, and thus free from accident and catastrophe.

In a series of studies, Goldenberg and colleagues (Goldenberg et al., 2002; Goldenberg, McCoy, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000; Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, McCoy, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999) demonstrated the role of terror management concerns in our negative emotional reactions to the body, especially as we experience anxiety and guilt. For example, Goldenberg et al. (2001) found MS led people to respond with increased disgust sensitivity to a variety of disgust elicitors, especially those stimuli most directly related to the threat of "creaturiness" (e.g., feces). In a second study, Goldenberg et al. found MS (but not another aversive prime) resulted in a heightened preference for an essay that distinguished humans from other animals. More recently, Cox, Pyszczynski, and Goldenberg (2002) demonstrated the accessibility of death-related thoughts increase when people are asked to think about their own bodily products and functions.

The main implication of this research for understanding how Americans responded to terrorism is that a specific and potent emotional consequence of the attacks—moral indignation—is very much rooted in the terror management dynamics associated with how we relate to our bodies. The attacks caused an abrupt extinction of life: real people with rich histories and meaningful lives were instantly reduced to mere corpses. Furthermore, the meaning systems that allow us to perceive ourselves as more than mere bodies was undermined. Our negative emotional reaction to these attacks is therefore very much rooted in our fundamental uneasiness with the existential consequence of having a fragile body.

In the preceding paragraphs we have attempted to demonstrate how TMT can lend vital insights into the nature of various cognitive and socioemotional experiences felt by Americans in response to the horrors of terrorism, both in an interpersonal as well as an intrapersonal sense. In the following section, we apply the same approach to analyzing several of the key factors that are likely to contribute to a person's decision to execute a terrorist action.

MORAL EMOTIONS AND THE THREAT OF THE BODY

U&G standpoint, the most significant function of the media might be found in our social use of television as it impacts key relational issues associated with CWV maintenance. By establishing common grounds for conversation and value clarification, by modeling family solidarity as well as physical and verbal contact, a key function of media consumption may be manifest through role reinforcement, relationship modeling, and intellectual validation. A fruitful research direction might be to explore if or to what extent Americans have increased their reliance for validation on these vital media well-springs in the months and years since the 9/11 attacks.

In this section, we have discussed how the distraction and validation functions of the media can be attractive to people whose worldview has been grossly undermined. Television may also play a central role in alleviating some of the shame, guilt, nervousness, and other forms of existential anxiety associated with the body and sex and the fact that we humans are, in the end, animals, despite our own high self-regard. We now turn our attention to certain existential issues associated with these more carnal aspects of our being.

The moral emotions are complex. Although anger and disgust tend to be event-based emotions, contempt and resentment, like indignation itself, are more attribution-based emotions (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). Attribution-related emotions, according to Ortony et al. (1988), are accompanied by approval or disapproval for praise- or blameworthy behavior. In other words, they require the actions of an agent. Although the term *dis-gust* (literally *bad taste*) is defined by Kozin and Fallon (1987) as revulsion at the prospect of ingesting offensive objects or contaminants, moral disgust—a major component of the outrage directed at terrorists and their actions—is more a result of symbolic violations. Interestingly, morally offensive ideas or images, such as the destruction of a church, can evoke the same disgust response as noxious, foul, or putrid objects. Moreover, what is

tiarity, power, and what Erich Fromm termed *group narcissism*. According to

Fromm (1973), group narcissism is a feeling of group cohesion and importance that provides a sense of value to those who have few other reasons to feel worth-

while. Therefore, even the least respected member of the group can sustain the

belief that "I am a part of the most wonderful group in the world. I, who in real-

ity am a worm, become a giant through belonging to the group" (p. 230).

Alienation from the broader culture can thus increase the attractiveness of sub-

cultures that promise a grandiose vision and clearly defined routes to personal

worth. From a TMT perspective, when the psychological needs of self-esteem

and meaning are left unmet by the social order, the heightened potential for anx-

iously significant opportunity for personal self-worth. Supporting this claim is TMT

evidence showing those who have low self-esteem or who are prone to negative

affective states (e.g., depressives and neurotics) exhibit distinctly high worldview

defense (Goldenberg, McCoy, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000; Simon,

Greenberg, Harmon-Jones, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1996). Against a backdrop of

pervasive poverty and deprivation, nothing could be more comforting for a poten-

tially fanatical, fundamentalist conspirator than to feel he or she is engaged in an

apocalyptic struggle between good and evil!

Many communication factors involved in socialization contribute to the

almost divine allure surrounding these groups. Like popular music and sports stars

in America, posters and trading cards of martyrs adorn the bedroom walls of

young boys across the Middle East. Money is funneled from various disaffected

groups within these countries to the fundamentalist religious factions, which in

turn provide the primary and sometimes sole source of education to youth who

are particularly vulnerable to the ideologically explicit commands for intolerance.

Furthermore, much of the mass media in the Middle East portray terrorists as

martyrs, and martyrs as national heroes. Even when other world media outlets

depict terrorists as criminals, the exposure and notoriety galvanizes group solidar-

ity, and their infamy incites feelings of purpose and reason. Furthermore, a spir-

al of silence may encourage others of more moderate beliefs to remain mute in the

face of further indoctrination as extremist positions exert more socializing pres-

sures on a population pushed to find strength and spirit through an exceedingly

vengeful ideology.

An unmet need for self-esteem can only increase the attractiveness of an ide-

ology that offers a clearly defined route to self-worth, a guarantee of martyrdom,

and glory through inclusion in a cosmically significant battle against evil.² In short,

radical Islamic sects offer a refuge from anomie, a vehicle for meeting the psycho-

logical needs of an oppressed population, and the means for achieving high self-

esteem through heroic efforts aimed at the destruction of anything associated

with the profane values of the infidel. As long as extremists, religious fanatics is

capable of affording the prospect of a valuable, enduring, meaningful, virtuous,

and death-transcending belief system, there will continue to be those drawn to

terrorism's radical vision of destruction.

TMT AND THE PERPETRATION OF TERRORISM: WHAT MAKES A SUICIDE BOMBER TICK?

Why would anyone willingly vaporize him- or herself against the side of a build-

ing, or strap on a bomb belt and detonate it in a crowd of innocent civilians? Such

behavior appears to be jarringly anomalous from almost every perspective focus-

ing on adaptive human motivation. Furthermore, even a cursory historical analy-

sis would suggest such behaviors are unlikely to result in constructive cultural or

social change. Understanding these sorts of actions requires a conception of

human motivation focusing beyond the practical and the rational. In this section,

we complement the depth of analyses on the political and economic antecedents

of terrorism by showing how the interface of communication and TMT can illu-

minate some of the psychological dynamics that culminate in terrorist violence.

Specifically, we discuss TMT as a framework for understanding how communica-

tion behaviors related to affiliation, ideological maintenance, and social influence

might motivate a person to commit the ultimate act of annihilation in the name

of terror.

Terrorism: A Unique Brand of Heroism

What is the appeal of membership in a terrorist group? How are the young would-

be terrorists—boys as young as 7 or 8, in some cases—drawn to the radical

madrasas (Islamic seminaries) in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan? From

our perspective, the appeal of any extreme group with a clear identity and a very

straightforward and rigid value system lies in its provision of cosmic significance

for people whose psychological needs are not otherwise being met. Within the

context of certain Islamic communities, where material conditions are poor, Arab

males have very limited modes of acquiring and maintaining self-esteem.

Furthermore, in places like Saudi Arabia, where the affluence of the minority

elite makes the poverty and desolation of the masses that much more dramatic,

most common, lower class citizens lack basic civil rights and are routinely sen-

tenced to horrible disfigurement or execution for seemingly minor transgressions

(at least from a Western perspective, e.g., theft, adultery, or "fornication"). Treated

as rabble, with no opportunity to participate in local politics or exercise any form

of civic power, these people lack any real sense of freedom or self-determination,

nor do they enjoy any sense of justice or recourse to law (Huntington, 2001;

Zakaria, 2001).

For such disaffected Arab males, extremist Islamic camps, such as the Afghan

Taliban or the Wahabi religious sect (a radical Jihad-preaching faction advocating

an archaic form of Islam), are very attractive in their vilification of the West.

Discontent with life is a natural breeding ground for illusions of grandiosity, supe-

Absolutism and Security

Perhaps the most common and salient characteristic of a fanatical religious militant is the concrete, absolutist nature of his or her beliefs (see e.g., Post, 1998). Sacred texts are to be interpreted as literal and absolute versions of reality. The consequence is that an absolutist, fundamentalist worldview is an especially brittle and fragile way of attaining meaning. As we have noted, encountering people with different beliefs and values is inherently menacing, so assuming one's conception of reality is concretely true down to the finest details can only result in the perception of virtually any and all alternative views as manifestly threatening. This is not to say Islam is inherently extremist, but rather, significant pockets of radicals have, as a matter of fact, interpreted the holy texts in very rigid terms, going so far as to neatly divide the world into the realm of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) and the realm of heresy (*dar ad-Harb*). If these positions were interpreted more figuratively and flexibly, they might allow for a more peaceful co-existence with differing worldviews.

In studies examining university students and their parents in the West, Altemeyer (2003) found religious fundamentalism was highly correlated with dichotomous thinking and religious ethnocentrism (i.e., the tendency to make "us vs. them" judgments of others on the basis of religion). Altemeyer also found religious fundamentalism was associated with prejudices against homosexuals and various racial and ethnic minorities. His conclusion was that strong, early emphasis on religion may reinforce Tajfel's minimal group effect (i.e., the simple act of categorizing people into members of one's in-group vs. one's out-group is enough to trigger discrimination, stereotyping, and prejudice—regardless of how trivial the categorization method), and thus facilitate the sort of "us-them" discriminations that facilitate the later acquisition and establishment of prejudices.

We previously referred to evidence that TMT strategies include a basic requirement for avoiding ambiguity while seeking certainty and simplicity; evidence also shows those high in authoritarian tendencies react to MS with an especially strong worldview defense (Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg et al., 1992; Judges, 1999). Another interesting dynamic is the ironic tension between worldview flexibility and susceptibility to threats: As death becomes more salient, people may find a more compelling sense of security in a more rigid and absolute worldview. The gain in security, however, comes at the cost of a worldview that is more susceptible to threats. For example, as suicide bombers approach the culmination of their missions (i.e., as death becomes more of a likely prospect), they must draw heavily on the meaning systems they have in place to override the powerfully pre-programmed biological warning signals they are receiving. With an increasingly firm conviction that their acts are divinely ordained, and that what is in store for them on the other side is preferable to their current lot in life, some bombers have been known to don perfume, and at least one bomber, caught before he managed to carry out his mission, had carefully wrapped his penis to ensure virility in antici-

pation of the 72 black-eyed virgins awaiting him in paradise (Feldner, 2001). Yet, as the beliefs and values become more absolutist, the consensual support for the extremists' operative worldview becomes increasingly more constrained to the small circle of fanatics within their immediate cadre, and this lack of a broader shared consensus can only lead to more lingering doubts about the absolute truth of their worldview. However, rather than having a debilitating effect, this isolation may actually lead to an even more vigorous effort to maintain faith—magnifying the threat posed by the outgroup and further strengthening resolve to annihilate or otherwise undermine all other major competing worldviews.

But why the United States? Why do the extremists choose Americans as the object of their destruction?

AMERICA, THE TARGET

Why is the fundamentalist Islamic world so hostile toward the United States? Although political and historical analysts are undoubtedly in a better position to assess the geopolitical, historical, and chronological events contextualizing the background of hostilities, we hope to shed some light on the psychological and socio-behavioral dynamics involved. One reason why so many fervent Islamic fundamentalists hate the United States is simple: America is a close ally to their sworn enemy, Israel. However, many other countries are also friends with Israel, so why target Americans? Our main point is that the United States has become the scapegoat for a radically alien competing worldview. We assert that America is held up as an icon of evil because it fosters a worldview that is diametrically opposed to the fundamentalist Islamic worldview; and the success of America's modernized, globalized, and affluent state makes the relative deprivation of their own repressive circumstances all the more woundingly salient.

According to scapegoat theory (Allport, 1954; Berkowitz & Green, 1962; Gemmill, 1998; Weatherly, 1961), when intractable problems occur, people rarely blame themselves, instead, they will actively seek scapegoats onto whom they can displace and project their aggression. Scapegoats are generally out-group individuals or entire out-groups. Scapegoating increases when people are frustrated and seeking an outlet for their anger, and, like bullying, scapegoating often involves focusing on powerless people who cannot easily resist, hence the terrorist tactic of targeting innocents is logically predictable. A further problem for Americans is that once cast as the scapegoat, it becomes very difficult to shake off the classification (Berkowitz & Green, 1962, 1967), particularly given the fact that within several critical dimensions, the dominant Western CWV is diametrically opposed to the radical Islamic CWV. For instance, with regard to religion, sexuality, individual freedom, tolerance, materialism, secularization, women's rights, modernization, and technology, Americans are, in every way, contrary. Religious leaders,

media, and other sources of information within radical Islamic culture portray the United States as an iniquitous people of loose morals and flagrantly shameless disposition. Furthermore, a severe intolerance for diverse opinions and dissension lead fanatics to hate those who audaciously profess the ideals of liberty and toleration. Americans value women's rights, and Western culture has loudly proclaimed individual freedom to be sacrosanct, regardless of religious belief.

As Fukuyama (2001) noted, Islamic extremists are deeply imperiled by the spread of modernization and secularization. These two forces inherently threaten to undermine the radical fundamentalists' more archaic ways of understanding the world. The threat of modernization alone may be enough to destabilize the rigid fragility of their antiquated worldview, stripping it of its capacity to provide any sense of psychological protection or security. As Fukuyama pointed out, "What [the radical Islamic fundamentalist] hates is that the state in Western societies should be dedicated to religious tolerance and pluralism rather than to serving for religious truth" (p. 46). That the terrorists attacked the towers at the World Trade Center—the consummate symbol of modernity and globalization—on 9/11 is consistent with previous and subsequent attacks by other fundamentalist groups who have targeted shopping malls and fast-food outlets rather than more spiritually emblematic religious schools or synagogues. The secular, materialistic, wealthy, sexually open, American way of life flaunts more traditional values, existing in utter contrast to the highly dogmatic worldview of most fundamental Islamic sects. The antithetical nature of America's presence gravely undermines the fundamentalist Islamic worldview. America's *mere existence* may, in effect, be grimly and relentlessly driving the anxiety and hostility the extremists feel as they oppose what they perceive as America's arrogant version of reality.

In that America is perceived as prosperous and apparently happy—and, of course, as a people who view the world in a fundamentally different way than do Islamic fundamentalists—Americans are targeted because they are all the more threatening to the security of any opposing worldviews. The United States is virtually unrivaled in international power. As U.S. economic and military might expands, less advantaged others are likely to feel comparatively more marginalized. Fate must seemingly doom those who most vehemently oppose Western values—especially, American values—to a profound sense of humiliation and despair, driving a deep resentment of the outwardly unassailable power of the West. What is more, its tremendous dominance must also make the United States appear as though it is the only power capable of bringing such "wickedness" into the world.

In summary, as Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg (2002) so eloquently argued, America is a massively powerful nation held up by radical Islamic fundamentalists as the object of irrational hostility. A TMT analysis would suggest that without the resources to engage in a direct confrontation, terrorist groups can only hope to destabilize the object of their offense through the selective application of cruel and indiscriminate acts of violence. As it nurtures "the Great Satan," American culture is unfortunately a suitably expedient target for blame. The rad-

ically divergent values and the richness of American prosperity render the United States an obvious focal point for the righteous indignation of those who would attack the forces of free will, liberty, and tolerance.

In the preceding section, we covered three central aspects of terrorism from the standpoint of the perpetrator: We reflected on the opportunity for self-esteem terrorism affords the alienated; we noted the reinforcing power offered by the rigidity and fragility of such an isolating form of worldview; and we attempted to point out what an opportune target American prosperity represents. Overall, we believe both victims and perpetrators of terrorism exhibit responses that reflect the same psychological dynamics. All of us, on both "sides," are responding to the threats we feel imperiling the psychological structures that provide us with security in the face of death, and how we communicate our fears has great bearing on how these structures are transmitted. So too, our interpersonal interactions follow the weft and weave of our CWV as it guides our responses to the myriad threats we face. Through the lens of TMT, this chapter has thus far offered a description of many of the seemingly intractable problems associated with terrorism. However, we have yet to focus on any potential solutions. Although our contribution must necessarily be modest, we will attempt to at least offer some useful suggestions in the section that follows.

ALLEVIATION: AVOIDING INTERGROUP CONFLICT IN THE FACE OF DEATH

Any measures taken to alleviate terrorism and the entrenched strife that underlies it will undoubtedly demand insights from multiple perspectives (for a more thorough treatment of this topic, see Pyszczynski et al., 2002). Based on the theory and empirical work reviewed previously, we think that an objective perspective (as culturally unbiased as possible), augmented with theoretically inspired insights into human motivation as explicated by TMT, may offer several practical steps toward achieving a more peaceful state of co-existence in the world.

As we have argued, extremist terrorist groups hold great appeal for the disenfranchised youths who feel cut off from any sense of valued membership in the dominant cultural milieu. It follows that one way of reducing the likelihood of future violence is to encourage Middle Eastern cultures to provide opportunities for the largest number of people to derive a sense of personal value within a more flexible and less contentious cultural environment. It is obviously important to improve the economic climate in many Middle Eastern countries (or anywhere else on the globe where intolerance and oppression hold sway). It is also important for the media in the Middle East to enter the 21st century. We may be seeing the seeds of such an emergence even now, not just in the more open and dynamic journalism that has begun to transcend local and state boundaries, but also as a result of

various other electronic forms of communication, from cell phones and fax machines to videocassettes and the Internet (Eickelman & Anderson, 1999). Perhaps the Middle Eastern media, more than any other single factor, may offer the greatest means for reforming notions of gender, authority, and justice within modern Islamic culture. It is conceivable that outlets such as *Al Bawaba* in Jordan, *Al Jazeera* in Qatar, the *International Islamic News Agency* (IINA) in Saudi Arabia, *Islam Online* also in Qatar, and the *Ummah News* in the United Kingdom (to name only a few of the many emerging voices in the Islamic media) may be encouraged through harmonious interaction with Western interests to offer more moderate, tolerant, and peaceful viewpoints—especially as such thoughts spring from the minds of modern Islamic thinkers.

The crux of our claim, however, is that humans have more abstract needs for meaning and value that must also be satisfied to assuage the potential for the more explosive forms of extremism. This is undoubtedly a tall order, however it is not an impossibility. It seems clear that improving material conditions will also promote feelings of self-esteem while nurturing valued membership within a rich cultural milieu. In support of this notion, TMT research has produced evidence that high self-esteem, dispositional or experimentally induced, reduces derogation of dissimilar others (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997). If successfully enfranchised, those newly incorporated will feel integral to a meaningful cultural fabric, and thus lack the high levels of residual anxiety that often fervently get projected onto alternative cultural conceptions of reality. In short, an increase in opportunities for the achievement of a sense of personal value within a prevailing worldview will more effectively manage existential fears, while obviating the need for radical extremism and its consequent pressure toward violence as a last resort.

Transformation and Elevation: We're All in the Same Boat

Although creating social opportunities will be difficult, encouraging religious flexibility presents an even thornier problem. Major world religions might begin to meet this challenge by refocusing their efforts on realizing that one of their primary functions is to provide believers with viable ways of organizing reality in the ultimate pursuit of death-transcendent meaning. If those among us who are religiously inclined can subscribe to such a proposal, then it follows both implicitly and explicitly that others holding dissimilar beliefs are also, deep down inside, trying to do the same thing we are. That is, all religious practices seem to strive for grace while seeking to obscure the existential concerns associated with the awareness of mortality. Recategorizing our group identity, we might move from thinking of ourselves as, say, Christians or Jews or Muslims, to seekers—all searching for meaning and value in the face of death. In so doing, we may feel a sense of camaraderie, even toward those with radically differing belief systems, as all such belief systems are, in essence, functionally equivalent to one another.

Support for this notion of cultural cohesion can be found in many of the actual responses of the American public to the events of 9/11. For example, although the attacks and the ensuing chaos presented plentiful opportunities for looting and property destruction, such delinquent behaviors were seemingly infrequent. More generally, it seems clear that fractious groups, antagonistic with each other before the tragedy, banded together after it with a common cause and a singularly integrated identity. This phenomenon has also been witnessed in empirical work both in and outside the laboratory. Within a lab setting, Gaertner, Dovidio and colleagues' common in-group identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) demonstrates that activating superordinate identities, whether triggered by contact, cooperation, common fate, or interdependence, reduces intergroup hostility. Similar patterns have been observed outside the laboratory (Piliavin, Rodin, & Piliavin, 1969; Sherif, 1966). For example, Sherif's robber's cave study (Sherif, Harvey, & White et al., 1961) demonstrated how previously warring factions of summer camp attendees can agree to cooperate when faced with superordinate challenges (i.e., challenges beyond the means of any one group alone). These findings suggest that a sense of common fate or mutuality by virtue of sharing (or even anticipating; Darley & Morris, 1975) the same aversive circumstances heightens group cohesion.

Allport (1954) in his treatise on prejudice, sees ingroup preference as a psychologically fundamental aspect of human nature, and although ingroup favoritism may often lead to antagonism and aggression, such responses are by no means inevitable. To be sure, ingroup biases may be accompanied by a variety of positive feelings toward outgroup members, such as tolerance, esteem, and respect. While his theory was originally formulated to apply to a range of smaller groups, such as family, village and clan, Allport also emphasized the compatibility of national patriotism and "world-loyalty" (Allport, 1954, p. 44), and his optimistic perspective has spawned a growing literature devoted to replicating cases of ingroup and outgroup harmony (De Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003). By influencing the circumstances of interaction and cooperation, individuals can form new schemas for converting outgroup members into ingroup members (Brewer & Miller, 1984), and/or benefit from the divergent thinking that accompanies minority influence (Crano, 2001).

Along these lines, Miller (2002) distinguished between the process of differentiation (individuation) among social outgroup members (i.e., stripping them of their stereotypic identity) and personalized interaction (e.g., self-disclosure and self-other comparison processes) with outgroup members. Miller found that although the benefits of differentiation and personalization may both produce positive cognitive de-biasing effects, personalization behaviors produce complementary motivational consequences, justifying one's self-disclosure, and inducing increased trust. This finding is interesting even if only restricted to incidents where prejudices may be reduced between individuals in unique one-to-one situations. However it has much broader and potentially far more important implications with regard to how such interactions bear on attitudes and behaviors toward entire outgroups.

Miller (2002) produced evidence that following enjoyable interactions with members of an outgroup social category, personalization behaviors have been found to generalize in such a way that the benefit from contact between individual members may not be constrained to the person(s) with whom the specific contact was made. Such a "generalization benefit" clearly has important ramifications for the alleviation of intergroup hostility driving many of the negative behaviors associated with the issues discussed in the preceding pages. How might we foster this benefit, practically? Obviously, the most effective means would be through greater interactive contact and exchange on an individual basis—increasing the incidence of harmonious contact between members of each culture. Certainly, such contacts are already taking place through business and educational exchange programs. Admittedly, however, this should continue to be a slow and gradual process, and although we can expect no quick and easy solutions, it is without doubt that more positive media portrayals on both sides would, in the mean time, offer some measure of relief as well.

All of this observation and research points to the robust power of a "common fate" to flexibly re-define group boundaries and alleviate intergroup strife—at least at a local level. Of course, there are a few limitations to this approach in practice. As evidenced by our response to 9/11, effects of a common fate often amount to exchanging one set of festering conflicts with another. Second, we may not always be confident or willing to admit that others—particularly those we previously regarded as different—are experiencing the same threat, fears and/or losses, and thereby sharing a common fate. Indeed, the perception that we are facing a stressful situation alone *inhibits* group cohesion and the likelihood of pro-social behaviors (Darley & Morris, 1975). Finally, the renewed camaraderie is short-lived. This was vividly expressed by a friend of the second author, a state trooper, who was offered platters of baked goods from anonymous admirers following 9/11, only to later reflect, "I wonder how long it will be before I'm considered just an asshole again."

Notwithstanding such limitations, however, this approach may be fruitful if we recognize death as the common fate—a universal and permanent fixture of our psychology—and the management of existential concerns as the most unrelenting superordinate goal we humans can devise for ourselves. Encouraging the major religions and cultural traditions to emphasize this underlying function, without undermining the security that the worldview provides, might reduce perceptions of status and foster a sense of "we-ness" that will effect a lasting peace. However, as noted by Pyszczynski et al. (2003), this puts us between the "rock" of a secure and seemingly absolute perspective, and the "hard place" of a more tolerant, life-affirming, yet equivocal and ambiguous worldview. The tragic irony is that applications of the common identity solution to prejudice have found that it seems effective only if the more inclusive identity is successfully moving toward its goals (Worchel, Andreoli, & Folger, 1977), and "success" in terror management has traditionally been undermined by the acceptance of different others (but see Greenberg et al., 1992).

Making the Most of Our Individual Difference

Another potentially useful consideration regarding the dismantling of stereotypes and the alleviation of prejudice involves certain dispositional factors that may contribute toward some people becoming less susceptible to a fundamentalist worldview. A growing body of TMT research indicates individual differences in personal need for structure (PNS; e.g., see Neuberg & Newsom, 1993) play a critical role in certain types of defensiveness. In a series of studies, Landau et al. (2003) found that following MS, those high in PNS increase their preference for consistent, simple, stereotypic views of others, and of their social relationships. In contrast, those low in PNS did not show these tendencies after MS, and they may even become more open to the unusual and the complex.

Similarly, Schimel et al. (1999) found those disposed to structure were more likely to prefer stereotypic members of outgroups following MS. In another series of studies, Dechesne et al. (2000) found high PNS participants defensively bolstered their group identification in the face of criticism, whereas low PNS individuals responded to threats by dis-identifying with their groups. These results were interpreted as indicating those low in PNS, relative to their high PNS counterparts, have a more individually derived rather than exclusively group-centered basis of self-worth. This disposition enables them to flexibly adjust their identifications, and thus maintain higher levels of self-esteem in the face of threats. Based on this evidence, understanding the determinants of PNS may be one fruitful avenue for exploring the appeal of more and less destructive forms of religious and secular worldviews. The question arising then, is this: In a practical way, what can we do to move forward in this area? Within the limits of this chapter, we can only speculate.

In one sense, the problem is of the "chicken and egg" variety: Is it that inherently rigid thinkers are attracted to (and help create and maintain) the inflexible and unyielding worldview? Or is it that such rigid worldviews foster and maintain inflexible ways of thinking? It is tempting to speculate that some formal instruction in critical and creative thinking might provide people with the tools to expand their consciousness, and perhaps begin to place their worldview in a broader cosmic context. However, thinking can be difficult, and to a certain extent, we are all cognitive misers. It is not always so easy to *think*, let alone engage in *flexible* thinking. Thus, for many of us, rigid thinking offers a simple, straightforward, and above all—*secure* way of viewing the world. For, not only are we constrained by the natural limitations on our cognitive resources, but, as TMT suggests, we are lured by the power of finite and simple models of the world to protect us from our most deeply rooted fears.

In another sense, the problem may be of the "nature or nurture" variety. That is, it may be that there are individual differences in personality variables, such as PNS, psychological reactance, need for cognition, and authoritarianism (to name just a few such factors) stemming from natural predispositions that are primarily

operative in a genetic sense. Or, perhaps socialization processes and experiences account for why one person clings to Nazism while another chooses Buddha, or Christ, or Mohammad, or secular humanism. What is more likely is, as with any sufficiently complex psychological phenomenon, understanding and remedying the causes of defensively rigid structure will demand we go beyond these simple and ultimately fallacious dichotomies.

It may be that warding off existential anxiety with rigid beliefs would not be necessary if an individual carries along the residue of a secure attachment (Bowlby, 1969). That is, we can speculate that if a person has a secure basis of self-worth grounded in early interactions with his or her primary caregiver, he or she might be better equipped to navigate through the world with some sense (whether illusory or not) that the universe is a just and loving place. Such a secure foundation might thereby release the individual from a rigid reliance on the tyranny of a literal, dogmatic code of moral conduct. Also, as Thompson, Niciarato, Parker, and Moskowitz (2001) noted, a need for structure is in many situations quite adaptive, regulating uncertainty in the service of decisive action and control. Perhaps encouraging those who are prone to cognitive rigidity to cling to certain socially constructive illusions might offer a critical boost to our efforts at advancing human survival and well-being.

As mentioned previously, one set of exacerbating factors includes the brittle nature of a rigid worldview combined with the needs for certainty and absolute truth. With regard to these aspects of a fundamentalist's CWV, TMT has shown that people with a low need for structure do not invoke stereotypes as much, and respond to threats against their ingroup with less defensive and more flexible responses. Given a more supple mindset, less rigid ways of interpreting the sacred Islamic texts might be found to be just as protective, while at the same time less fragile. Because terrorist leaders such as bin Laden do not enjoy support from mainstream Muslim clerics (Ranstorp, 1996, 1998), one possible solution would entail the encouragement of a more positively grounded adherence to the Koran. As Pyszczynski et al. (2002) pointed out, although there are verses in the Koran that condone and even promote violence and intolerance, there are also passages that encourage a universal respect for all life and an equality of rights for all people:

Just as the radical Islamic clerics preach Jihad and intolerance, so, too, could the more moderate clerics take a more active role in promoting peace, love, and tolerance. . . . The message needs to get out that Allah is not really impressed by murder and suicide bombers and that those with different beliefs are not necessarily and inherently one's enemy, as preached by many of the fundamentalist sects. (p. 176)

Until we accept the notion that all human beings have a common vested interest in managing their existential anxiety, we are unlikely to adopt the values and attitudes useful in securing our own general safety. So how might we identify those

attitudes that are most likely to predict our behavior in times of heightened anxiety? To begin with, we know that attitude-behavior consistency is both limited and conditional. Although attitude researchers have found a host of factors influencing how predictive various attitudes are of various behaviors (for a review, see Petty & Krosnick, 1995), since the time of Allport's (1935) initial exploration of the attitude construct, a definitive theory-based answer has been elusive. However, one important predictor of attitude-behavior consistency—one perhaps more powerful than both ego involvement and attitude importance—is Crano's conception of vested interest (Crano, 1983, 1995; Sivacek & Crano, 1982).

VESTED INTEREST AND EFFECTANCE MOTIVATION

Acknowledging the potent influence of matters high in hedonic relevance, Crano (1995) identified five components forming the theoretical foundation of vested interest, all of which are central to the reliable prediction of attitude-consistent behavior: stake, salience, certainty, immediacy, and self-efficacy.

1. *Stake*. The first and most essential component of those attitudes that should be most predictive of our behavior is stake. An attitude holder's stake in a given attitude object, is represented by his or her basic subjective perception of the personal gain/loss consequence associated with that object. The more the number, magnitude, and duration of consequences, the greater the stake, the stronger the attitude, and the higher the likelihood of attitude-consistent actions. According to TMT, specific attitudes and beliefs form structural mechanisms within a broader constellation of values rooted in one's CWV. Because one's worldview provides the basis for minimizing the anxiety associated with death and personal vulnerability, we likely place the greatest stake in the attitudes most directly associated with our worldview.
2. *Salience*. The second component of vested interest, salience, involves how pronounced, noticeable, or intrusive an attitude object is. Crano's research has shown that vestedness can be increased by accessibility priming, which will enhance the salience of the hedonic consequences of an attitude object (Crano & Prislin, 1995). As we have seen in research employing TMT, MS is remarkably accurate at predicting a wide range of both proximal and distal defensive behaviors.
3. *Certainty*. The third component of vested interest is certainty, or the confidence and conviction an individual attaches to the

gain/loss consequences of an attitude object. If the hedonic consequences are uncertain, a relevant attitude is not likely to be of high vested interest. People may differ in their degree of certainty about various cataclysmic possibilities (such as the chances of perishing in a terrorist attack), however, no one is uncertain about the ultimate inevitability of their own death. In terms of both vested interest and TMT, the certainty of the gain/loss consequences of the attitude object, death, should provide little variation in attitude strength, and we should expect a robust relationship between accessibility of death-related thoughts and attitude-behavior consistency.

4. *Immediacy.* A fourth component of vested interest involves the immediacy of attitude-relevant consequences. Crano (1995) asserted the hedonic relevance of an object whose consequences are removed in time is not as substantial as one whose consequences are expected immediately. When death is not made salient, a lack of immediacy helps to explain certain self-destructive behaviors such as smoking, gluttony, and drug use. Clearly, people's attitudes toward dying of cancer or heart failure must be extreme and negative, however, if most assume such outcomes are too far in the distant future to worry about, their attitudes about smoking or high-fat diets will be neither strong nor vested, and thus not predictive of their behavior.
5. *Self-Efficacy.* The final component of vested interest, self-efficacy, involves people's perceptions of their ability to perform actions consistent with the gain/loss consequences of the attitude object. Obviously, if any actions springing from an attitude object are beyond the capability of the actor, efficacy will be perceived as low, attenuating vested interest and attitude-behavior consistency. There is a large body of research indicating a person's self-perceived ability to enact a requisite or attitude-implicated behavior has a direct and strong impact on their willingness to act—in lieu of or beyond their actual ability to act (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1994).

A TMT assessment of this component of vestedness would suggest the consequences of self-efficacy are a manifestation of effectance motivation (White, 1959), or what has more recently been termed self-expansive, or "growth-oriented" motives (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1995). Our long-term survivability in a complex, dynamic environment in large part depends on our human inclination to explore, manipulate, and integrate acquired knowledge into an accurate conception of the world. However, these aspects of our effort to survive are not necessarily urgent, nor are we explicitly inclined to worry about them. Self-expansive behavior is not seen as a pressing response to immediate threats

from the environment. Rather, such organizing and integrative behaviors have the capacity to produce pleasure through the successful engagement and mastery of the challenges found in our surroundings (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990; deCharms, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 1980, 1985).

Thus, self-efficacy plays an important role in enhancing survivability and reproductive fitness by fostering the simultaneous growth of both cognitive complexity and organizational simplicity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). If effectance motivation promotes the integrative behaviors that facilitate creative simplicity and refinement of thought, as some have argued (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Pyszczynski et al., 1995), then self-expansive motives find their advantage in both enhancing our quality of life as well as ensuring the security we feel in our ability to survive. This dual, self-reinforcing process explains why issues related to self-efficacy have such a profound impact on those things we find to be highly vested, hedonically relevant, and valuable in mollifying our existential anxieties. In summary, growth-oriented or expansive activities find their motivational force more directly through the pleasure they are capable of producing rather than any ability they may have in reducing or alleviating anxiety (for a more complete explication of expansive motivation, see Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1995).

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

One of the objectives of positive psychology is to bring about a balanced reassessment of human nature and human potential (Haidt, 2000). We may all agree people are capable of committing enormous brutalities upon one another, but we should also allow that people are gentle, considerate, and kind to one another. How can positive psychology bring about the sorts of reconsiderations that might have a constructive effect on the peaceful coexistence of differing worldviews?

Haidt (2000) offers these three suggestions: First, we should begin by studying the nature of positive emotions. Social psychologists have already conducted extensive research into the nature of such negative emotions as anger, shame, guilt, fear, and jealousy. However, with few exceptions, the positive moral emotions have yet to be carefully examined. Haidt argues we should take an especially close look at gratitude (citing the work of McCullough, Emmons, Kilpatrick, & Larson, 2001), and elevation, the opposite of disgust (Haidt, 2000), as well as awe and admiration (Keltner & Haidt, 2003).

Second, Haidt suggests we should look to other cultures for guidance, for different cultures offer unique insights into different areas of human potential. Obviously, there are many ways of flourishing, and many ways of articulating a moral system of values. Social psychologists can study other cultures for differing outlooks on virtue and integrity, and look to the world's religions for highly developed visions of moral and spiritual worth.

Finally, Haidt (2000) argues that we should examine the peak experiences and moral transformations of our own culture in more detail and with greater vigor. He notes that since Maslow (1964) studied the changes actualizing experiences can bring about in people's identities and in their moral and spiritual lives, little empirical research has been done on this subject (one notable exception being the work in optimal experience by Csikszentmihalyi; e.g., see Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Haidt's own work in these areas proposes that intense instances of elevation may offer a glimpse of the peak experiences associated with moral transformations, where "Powerful moments of elevation sometimes seem to push a mental 'reset button,' wiping out feelings of cynicism and replacing them with feelings of hope, love, and optimism, and a sense of moral inspiration" (Haidt, 2000, p. 287; see also Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004; Martin, Campbell, & Henry, 2004).

We would hope the exploration of some of these insights might potentially lead to some measure of reduction in the damage wrought by terrorist violence throughout the world, if not the incidence. At the risk of sounding trite, we suggest what is most important is not studying or appreciating the nature of positive emotions; rather, what is needed from each of us, is the earnest endeavor to cultivate the experiences that generate such emotions.

We also hope those reading this chapter keep in mind that our goal has not been to address "Arab" evil or "Islamic" terrorists per se, but to apply the best of our knowledge of human motivation (and its impact on key communication factors) to projects promoting more humane and constructive intergroup relations. Our own moral outrage over 9/11 can lure us into thinking that the heartless slaughter of humans within a U.S. government building calls for more urgent action than, say, the rampant butchery of innocents in the streets and classrooms of Rwanda or Somalia. We might also remember that the fundamentalist religious movements are not the only ones with rigid, binary ways of thinking. Notions that "You're either with us or against us" reflect America's own susceptibility to making the same types of constrictive judgments. For this reason, when contemplating the nature and desirability of our own beliefs, desires, and values—and then judging them against a dissimilar other's competing worldview—we might want to give careful consideration to Bertrand Russell's (1928) sensible notion that, "What is wanted is not the will to believe, but the wish to find out, which is the exact opposite" (p. 157).

Recently, a Dutch court convicted nine Muslims of belonging to a terrorist group based on their words and declarations. Although none of the nine were found to have carried out any actual terrorist attacks, they were nonetheless condemned as terrorists for inciting violence and spreading hatred against non-Muslims (Sterling, 2006). It was believed to be the first time Islamic fundamentalists have ever been convicted of terrorism for communicating a violent ideology rather than carrying out a specific terrorist action. The ruling set a key precedent by expanding the definition of terrorism to include certain acts of communication behavior.

ENDNOTES

1. Although terrorist leaders are often from affluent and privileged segments of society, they glowingly see themselves as fiercely fighting the good fight while benevolently acting on behalf of a larger disaffected populace (Crenshaw, 1981).
2. This may be particularly true given the intoxicating promise of a blissful afterlife where the blessed are attended to by voluptuously beautiful, young, black-eyed virgins.

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