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## An Experimental Test of Whether Mortality Salience can Motivate Open-Mindedness among Individuals with Intrinsic Goal Orientations

Mark Blades

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AN EXPERIMENTAL TEST OF WHETHER MORTALITY SALIENCE CAN MOTIVATE  
OPEN-MINDEDNESS AMONG INDIVIDUALS WITH INTRINSIC GOAL ORIENTATIONS

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MASTERS OF ARTS IN PSYCHOLOGY

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Cleveland State University

May, 2016

We hereby approve this thesis for

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**ABSTRACT**

Terror management theory posits that when people are primed with thoughts of death, they will seek to abide by their cultural worldview beliefs. For example, mortality reminders motivate those with an extrinsic goal orientation to strive to accomplish culturally valued goals (e.g., wealth) and defend familiar cultural worldviews. But, as of yet, no research has investigated the possibility that MS might motivate those with an intrinsic goal orientation to strive instead to explore culturally, socially, or intellectually novel experiences and information. The present research hypothesized that MS would lead individuals with stronger extrinsic goal orientations to defensively prefer their familiar cultural views, yet motivate people oriented toward intrinsic goals to engage those growth-oriented goals by becoming more open-minded toward exploring novel cultural information. Goal orientations were assessed (via the Aspirations Index, Kasser & Ryan, 1996), the awareness of mortality (vs. control condition) was manipulated, and then participants indicated interest in being exposed to foreign (vs. domestic) films. However, results indicated that goal orientations did not interact with mortality salience to predict interest in the films. Possible explanations are discussed.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

"Whether one calls oneself conservative or revolutionary, whether one composes in a conventional or progressive manner, whether one tries to imitate old styles or is destined to express new ideas -- one must be convinced of the infallibility of your own fantasy and believe in your own inspiration."

- Arnold Schoenberg

The great composer, Arnold Schoenberg, like most people, was likely quite aware of the tenuous and impermanent nature of his existence on earth. Beyond that basic awareness, however, he was born into an impoverished Jewish ghetto in Vienna, endured consistent anti-Semitism, and survived two world wars. Despite that, or perhaps because of it, Schoenberg strove to become a true master of his craft. As the opening quote suggests, his work straddled conservative and revolutionary orientations; but in all cases, he pursued his work with passion and conviction. Indeed, in one rather conservative domain of his work (Stuckenschmidt, 1977) he and similar Germanic cultural vanguard, such as Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler, dedicated themselves to fortifying and expanding the glory of the great German musical traditions, staying true to Romantic styles developed by the likes of Wagner and Brahms.

In other domains, however, Schoenberg believed in creativity and revolution, free expression, and the exploration and discovery of novel artistic ideas (Stuckenschmidt, 1977). He pioneered new musical techniques, developed new theory, styles of motifs, and methods of variation. His innovative style eventually broke from all prior tradition and his name became synonymous with atonal expression and the avant-garde. He impressed upon his students (including Lou Harrison and John Cage) the value of radical deviation from tradition, and the value of expansive and novel musical expressions. On top of his explorations in music he also became an accomplished painter, making innovative contributions to the abstract expressionist “Blue Rider” movement, exhibiting his works alongside those of Marc and Kandinsky.

In light of his varied efforts, Schoenberg’s story raises some interesting questions about human motivation. In all cases, he was of course typical in that he possessed the cognitive abilities to recognize his fundamental impermanence. However, in some cases, his goals were to affirm, protect, and defend his German cultural musical traditions, whereas in other cases his goals were to abandon tradition, explore novel ideas and mediums, and grow as an artist and as an individual. The present thesis will propose that the awareness of one’s impermanence (i.e., the awareness of death) can be a powerful motivating force, and that there are individual differences in goal orientations that can determine whether one’s existential motivational trajectory will bend toward the defense and affirmation of familiar cultural values, on the one hand, or toward open-minded cultural exploration and personal growth, on the other hand.

## **Terror Management Theory and Research**

Based on the writings of Ernest Becker (1962, 1973), terror management theory (TMT; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986) suggests that much of human activity is geared toward managing the awareness of mortality.

According to the theory, as a result of the strong evolutionary pressures to survive and reproduce, humans have developed sophisticated cognitive abilities to think in self-reflective, symbolic, and temporal ways, allowing them to do things like make long-term plans and anticipate future outcomes. However, these abilities also allowed them to recognize their own future state, and thus to recognize the problem of their own mortality. TMT holds that a dual-component system emerged to help people manage that awareness of mortality by a) striving for a sense of personal value (i.e., self-esteem) within b) a symbolically permanent cultural worldview. Cultural worldviews are socially-validated systems of beliefs and attitudes that help give the world meaning and order, and offer adherents the opportunity to participate in something larger and longer lasting than themselves (i.e., the opportunity to become part of something seemingly permanent). Such cultural belief systems can offer that permanence via secular means (e.g., legacy via progeny, teaching, technological or business innovation, etc.) or through explicitly religious means (e.g., promises of literal permanence, via heaven, paradise, reincarnation, etc). From this perspective, self-esteem then serves to indicate how well a person is doing at living up to his or her cultural worldview's beliefs, standards, and values. Thus, TMT argues that

people can manage the awareness of mortality by maintaining the perception that one is an object of value in a seemingly permanent system of meaning.

One of the most common methods of testing TMT stems from the *mortality salience hypothesis* (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989), which posits that if cultural beliefs and self-esteem help manage death concerns, then making mortality salient should motivate people to defend and uphold their cultural values and strive for self-esteem. Indeed, a large body of research shows that, compared to control topics (e.g., dental pain, uncertainty, failure, public speaking), priming mortality salience (MS; e.g., prompts to write about death, in-situ inductions such as passing a funeral home, or death-related imagery or word primes) can motivate a variety of efforts to bolster one's own way of life, protect it from threat, and strive for a sense of self-esteem.

**Defense and closed-mindedness.** Much research has demonstrated how fundamental existential motivation can lead to defensive responding and closed-mindedness. For example, MS has been shown to cause people to: more harshly judge moral transgressors (Florian & Mikulincer, 1997); be more attracted to those who explicitly praise aspects of their cultural worldview (Greenberg et al., 1990); feel discomfort when performing behaviors that violate cultural standards (Greenberg, Simon, Porteus, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1995); and be more aggressive toward people who challenge one's beliefs (McGregor et al., 1998). Thus, MS can motivate people to defend their worldview from threatening or dissimilar others.

Additionally, MS can also make people more closed-minded about their worldviews. For example, Vail, Arndt, Motyl, and Pyszczynski (2012) showed that, compared to images of intact buildings, presenting participants with images of destroyed buildings (buildings that had been damaged by natural disasters, war, or terrorism) elicited more death-related thoughts and led to increased ideological dogmatism among participants—participants became more certain that their worldview was the one true way and that alternative ways of viewing the world were false and morally wrong. Other studies reveal similar results: MS has been found to increase need for certainty (McGregor, 2006) and need for structure (Routledge, Juhl, & Vess, 2012). Taken together, this research shows that MS can lead to efforts to defend and affirm one’s cultural worldview, and result in more closed-minded and ideologically rigid thinking.

**The potential for exploration and growth.** Based on the research highlighted above, it seems that, at least under certain circumstances, MS can motivate people to seek cultural familiarity and become more ideologically rigid and closed-minded. However, recent theoretical work highlights that TMT is not limited to such defensiveness, but rather is a broad motivational theory that can explain how the awareness of mortality can lead to both defensive and growth-oriented behaviors (Vail, Juhl, Arndt, Vess, Routledge, & Rutkens, 2012). In other words, as may have been the case with Arnold Schoenberg, TMT processes not only can lead people to defend and uphold their cultural values, but can also potentially motivate people to explore the world, think outside of the box, and grow socially, culturally, and intellectually.

Indeed, reminders of death can increase creativity when directed toward the benefit of one's social community (Routledge, Arndt, Vess, & Sheldon, 2008). Additionally, individual differences can bend the existential motivational trajectory such that MS can motivate certain people to seek cultural, social, and intellectual exploration. Vess, Landau, Routledge, and Arndt (2009) showed that MS can induce individuals low in personal need for structure (PNS) to seek culturally unfamiliar perspectives, and that doing so can restore perceived meaning in life. More recently, Zhang, Schimel, and Faucher (2014) conducted a set of studies to examine the effects of MS among bicultural students in a Canadian population. Their results showed that, following MS, priming students' awareness of their bi-cultural identity reduced need for structure (suggesting a more open-minded style of thinking) and increased their exploration intentions.

Together, these results show that experimentally primed or chronic individual differences can adjust the existential motivational trajectory such that MS subsequently reduces structural rigidity and promotes exploration. As such, these findings raise some interesting issues regarding the orientation toward cultural exploration and personal growth. For one, if certain experimental manipulations can cause terror management processes to lead to cultural exploration, then it seems likely that we could also identify an individual difference that could similarly, and perhaps more directly, distinguish when individuals reminded of death will subsequently prefer culturally familiar experiences and when they would prefer exploring culturally novel experiences. Indeed, self-determination theory and research is able to offer some useful

insights about people's orientations toward cultural values, on the one hand, and toward community connections and cultural and personal growth, on the other hand.

### **SDT and Goal Orientations**

Building largely on the works of White (1959), DeCharms (1968), and Bowlby (1979), SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2012) posits that optimal social functioning and personal well-being depends on whether or not individuals are able to effectively (competently) act on their internalized (autonomous) values while maintaining positive social relationships with others (relatedness). From the SDT perspective, autonomy is the perception that one is the originator of one's own behavior (not pressured by some external source), and perceived competence means that one feels a sense of mastery or efficacy about one's actions. Relatedness means that one perceives having positive social relationships with others. Need satisfaction can also facilitate growth orientation, such that a higher need satisfaction can orient people towards intrinsic, growth-oriented goals. Research on people's aspirations has shown that when people have satisfied the three basic needs, they are oriented more towards growth-oriented behaviors (Romero, Gomez-Frague, & Villar, 2012; Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009; Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004).

SDT also points out that different goal orientations impact people's level of need satisfaction. Specifically, intrinsic goals are more oriented toward personal growth and development. For example, intrinsic goals are things such as developing strong personal relationships, giving back to the community, or

the desire to learn just to better oneself. Extrinsic goals are more associated with status and one's place in life. Extrinsic goals are things such as gaining wealth or fame, or working on one's physical appearance (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). SDT suggests that intrinsic goals are more in tune with psychological well being because they focus on individual needs, and they focus on more long-lasting and stable goals. Extrinsic goals are more superficial and although they may lead to a fleeting sense of happiness, money and fame will not bring about psychological well being because they are external goals rather than internal, personal goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT research has revealed that intrinsic versus extrinsic goal orientation can alter one's level of need satisfaction. For example, Niemiec, Ryan, and Deci (2008) conducted a study on post-college graduates to examine their intrinsic versus extrinsic aspirations and the relationship between those and overall well being. These researchers examined intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations at two points in time over a 1-year period (1 year after graduation and 2 years after graduation). Their results indicate that attainment of intrinsic aspirations related positively to well-being, and attainment of intrinsic aspirations was associated with psychological health because those goals were related to satisfying the three basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (a mediation model). Similarly, Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, and Kasser (2004; also Kasser & Ryan, 1996) showed that when people are oriented toward more autonomous, intrinsic goals, they experience a greater sense of well being than compared to extrinsic goals (e.g. money, wealth, fame) Furthermore, Bauer and McAdams



(2004) conducted a study to examine goals, well-being, and exploration, and found that participants whose major life goals focused on conceptual exploration experienced greater well being and a greater sense of maturity. This research helps to link growth-oriented goals (specifically, exploration) to well being.

Together, this work points to the importance of differences in goal orientations. In some cases, individuals may be more oriented toward culturally dictated values (e.g., wealth, fame, appearance), and in other cases more oriented toward internal self-relevant needs (e.g., personal growth, positive relationships, community involvement). Moreover, research shows that people with stronger intrinsic goal orientations tend to experience more need-satisfaction, better well-being, and are more oriented toward open-minded exploration and growth experiences.

### **Goal orientations and terror management trajectories**

Building on the above analysis, one's degree of intrinsic (versus extrinsic) goal orientations might determine whether increased death awareness motivates defensive (closed-minded preference for the familiar) or growth oriented (open-minded exploration of novelty) responses.

Indeed, there is some precedent for that expectation. For example, Cozzolino, Staples, Meyers, and Samboceti (2004) conducted a series of studies to evaluate the role of goal orientation in moderating the effects of MS on the motivation to get money (by taking raffle tickets from an open basket). Participants more strongly oriented toward extrinsic goals took more raffle tickets after MS, whereas participants who were more strongly oriented toward

intrinsic goals did not. This study suggests that MS motivates those with an extrinsic goal orientation to strive to accomplish culturally valued goals (e.g., wealth) and defend familiar cultural worldviews. But, as of yet, no research has investigated the possibility that MS could motivate those with an intrinsic goal orientation to strive instead to explore culturally, socially, or intellectually novel experiences and information.

Based on the present analysis, in the present research, it is hypothesized that MS would lead individuals with stronger extrinsic goal orientations to defensively prefer their familiar cultural views, and thus become closed-minded against exploring novel cultural information. In contrast, however, it is hypothesized that MS would motivate people oriented toward intrinsic goals to engage those growth-oriented goals by becoming more open-minded toward exploring novel cultural information.

### **The proposed research**

To test the present hypothesis, in the proposed study, I first measured goal orientation via the Aspirations Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), manipulated MS (versus control condition), and then measured a direct indicator of open-minded cultural exploration.

Some prior work, for example, has assessed motivation for cultural exploration using Green and Campbell's (2000) exploration index (Routledge, Ostafin, Juhl, Sedikides, Cathey, Liao, 2010; Vess, Routledge, Landau, & Arndt, 2009). Other research, however, has used more involved and perhaps more revealing methods. For example, Routledge et al. assessed cultural exploration

by asking participants to review a list of film synopses for a (fictitious) upcoming film series, and to indicate the extent to which they were interested in the particular films and the extent to which they would be willing to attend them. The synopses were diverse, and included some potentially challenging documentary topics (e.g., declining American dominance, the folly of religion, etc.) The present research would use a similar method, in which cultural exploration can be measured as interest in and willingness to attend culturally domestic films, compared to foreign films that are culturally novel or that present new/different ideas. Indeed, Cleveland is an apt location for developing such a cover story, as the city already hosts an annual international film festival that draws culturally diverse films.

Thus, the proposed study entails a Goal Orientation (continuous) x 2 (MS vs. control) design, assessing cultural exploration in the context of an international film festival event. A significant two-way interaction was expected. Among those with an extrinsic goal orientation, MS was expected to motivate people to become more culturally closed-minded and reduce their interest and willingness to see the foreign (vs domestic) films at the ostensible festival. However, and more importantly, MS was expected to motivate people with an intrinsic goal orientation to seek out new experiences, explore new ideas, and strive for personal growth—to thus be culturally open-minded and increase their interest and willingness to see the foreign (vs domestic) films at the ostensible festival. That is, goal orientation is expected to determine whether MS

will increase defensive avoidance of the unfamiliar or growth-oriented exploration of novel cultural information.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### Participants

**Estimation of minimum sample size.** Meta-analyses of mortality salience effect sizes were consulted to estimate the sample sizes necessary to achieve a sufficient level of power to detect MS effects within each category, should such effects be present. Burke, Martens, and Faucher (2010) found an overall MS effect size of  $r = .35$  ( $d = .75$ ) on a broad range of studies using a wide variety of outcomes (defense of national identity, attitudes toward animals, health risk evaluations, sports team affiliations, physical aggression, attitudes toward women, self-complexity, academic test scores, etc). Assuming  $r = .35$  ( $d = .75$ ), an a-priori power analysis (G\*Power; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) prescribed a minimum of 29 participants per each of “four” conditions, for a minimum total sample size of 116 participants.

**Participants.** A sample of 205 undergraduate students participated in exchange for course credit. Descriptive and frequency statistics for each groups’ demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant descriptive and frequency statistics.

Demographic	Total sample
Age	19.38 (2.52)
Did not report	5
Sex	
Male	64
Female	140
Did not report	1
Ethnicity	
Hispanic or Latino	9
Non-Hispanic or Latino	193
Did not report	1
Race	
Caucasian	123
African American	38
Native American/Native	1
Asian	12
Asian/Pacific Islander	2
Other	25
Did not report	4
Years of education	13.04 (1.46)
Did not report	2

Note. Sums and means are presented, with standard deviations following means in parentheses.

## **Materials and procedure**

In all cases, the study recruitment link was distributed using a neutral title and description (e.g., “Social attitudes survey”) to conceal its true purpose and associated hypotheses. Participants signed up online and attended a laboratory session. Upon obtaining informed consent, participants completed the materials in the following order:

**Goal Orientations.** Following prior research, goal orientation was measured using the aspirations index (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), which entails 35 possible aspirations rated on a 10-point Likert-type scale representing the importance of that aspiration. The aspirations index includes seven categories of aspirations, representing different life domains, with five items per category. The seven categories include: the intrinsic aspirations of meaningful relationships, personal growth, and community contributions; the extrinsic aspirations of wealth, fame, and image; and the aspiration of physical health, which is neither a psychologically intrinsic nor extrinsic goal (and thus, was not examined). An example of an intrinsic aspiration item is, “To have good friends that I can count on.” An extrinsic aspiration would be, “To successfully hide the signs of aging.” A composite score was computed by subtracting the mean of the extrinsic goal orientation items ( $\alpha = .93$ ) from the mean of the intrinsic items ( $\alpha = .87$ ), such that positive scores indicate greater relative intrinsic orientation whereas negative scores indicated greater relative extrinsic orientation. The Aspirations Index can be found in Appendix A.

**Mortality salience.** Following previous research (Rosenblatt et al., 1989), participants were randomly assigned to respond to either MS or a negative event topic prompt. In the MS condition, two prompts asked participants to, “Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you,” and “Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think happens to you as you physically die.” The negative event topic prompt asked participants to, “Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of dental pain arouses in you,” and “Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think happens to you as you physically experience dental pain.” This comparison topic was chosen because the dental pain prompt evokes a negative/anxiety-provoking event, and thus allowed us to determine whether MS causes effects beyond simply being reminded of a negative event.

**Delay and distraction.** Next, the 60-item positive ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and negative ( $\alpha = .87$ ) affect schedule (PANAS-X, Watson & Clark, 1992) and a brief 3-5 minute reading task (an excerpt taken from Albert Camus’ *The Growing Stone*) provided the delay and task-switching distraction needed to observe distal terror management effects (see Pyszczynski, et al., 1999).

**Cultural exploration.** The cultural exploration task was based on similar tasks used in prior work (Routledge et al., 2009). The adapted task asked participants to indicate their interest in viewing films based on descriptive film synopses adapted from actual film festival listings. Thus, the measure assessed participants’ interest in learning about new and potentially challenging information. The film synopses were presented as films available to see in an



upcoming film festival taking place in Cleveland, and potentially available to see on campus in collaboration with a local film theatre. Participants were asked to gauge their interest in each movie and the likelihood that they would attend each movie. Interest was rated on a 6-point Likert scale where 1 is not interested at all and 6 is very interested. The likelihood to see each movie will be similarly measured on a 6-point scale ranging from *Not at All* to *Very Likely*. A set of 6 domestic and 6 foreign film synopses was presented; domestic and foreign films were presented in counterbalanced order. An overall score was computed by subtracting the mean of the domestic film items ( $\alpha = .85$ ) from the mean of the foreign film items ( $\alpha = .91$ ), such that positive scores indicate greater relative interest in foreign films whereas negative scores indicated greater relative interest in domestic films. Appendix A presents the film synopses and relevant measures.

**Demographic questionnaire.** At the end of the survey, participants completed a demographic questionnaire collecting age, sex, ethnicity, race, and education level.

Upon completion, all participants were thanked and debriefed.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

**Goal orientations.** Methods prescribed by Aiken and West (1991) were followed to regress cultural exploration scores on the goal orientations x MS interaction. Goal orientation was centered about the mean, MS was dummy coded, and the interaction term was computed. The main effects were entered first, the two-way interaction second.

There was no main effect of MS ( $\beta = .06, t[203] = .94, p = .35$ ), though there was a main effect of relative intrinsic goal orientation ( $\beta = .21, t[203] = 3.11, p = .002$ ) such that intrinsic goal orientation was positively associated with increased interest in foreign films. However, there was no two-way Goal Orientation x MS interaction ( $F[1, 201] = 2.21, R^2 = .01, p = .14$ ), and a three-way Goal Orientation x MS x Order analysis showed that the order of presentation of domestic and foreign films did not influence that null 2-way interaction ( $F[1, 197] = .007, R^2 < .001, p = .93$ ). To further probe the hypothesized (but null) 2-way interaction, pairwise comparisons were conducted (*Figure 1*). Pairwise comparisons revealed that, among those with lower intrinsic goal orientation (-1SD), relative preference for foreign films tended to be higher in the MS

condition ( $M = -.57$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) than in the control condition ( $M = -.84$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $t[201] = 1.73$ ,  $p = .09$ ). But among those with higher intrinsic goal orientation (+1SD), preference for familiar films did not differ between the MS condition ( $M = -.39$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) and the control condition ( $M = -.34$ ,  $SE = .11$ ) ( $\beta = -.04$ ,  $t[201] = -.37$ ,  $p = .71$ ).

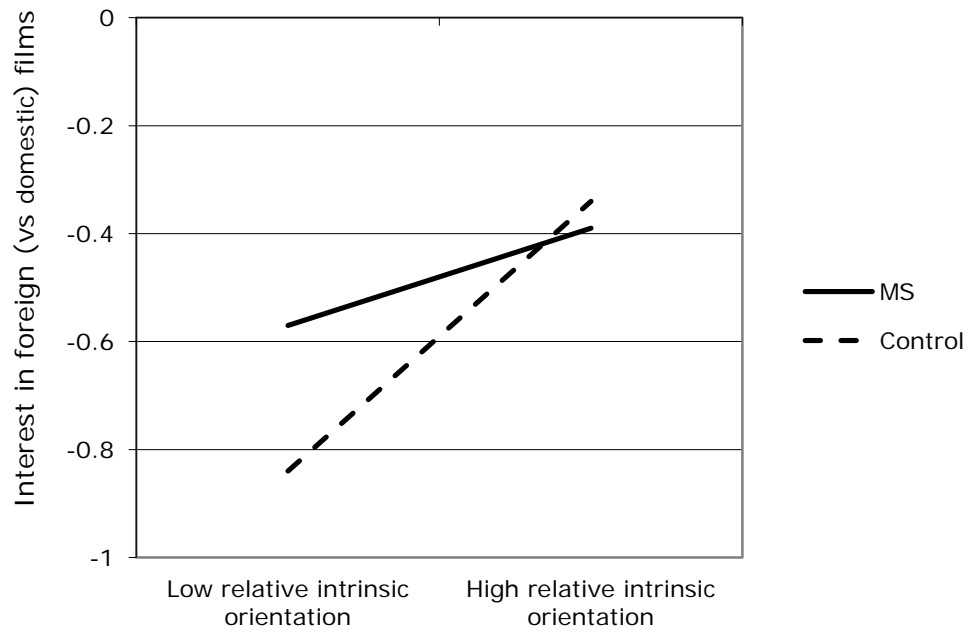


Figure 1. The null two-way Goal Orientation x MS interaction.

*Ancillary analyses: affect.* Multiple regression methods prescribed by Aiken and West (1991) were again followed to regress positive and negative affect onto the Goal Orientation (continuous) x 2 (MS vs. control) interaction.

There were no main effects or interactions on positive affect (all  $F$ s < 2.37,  $R^2 < .01$ ,  $p$ s > .13). On negative affect, there was a main effect of MS ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $t[202] = 2.25$ ,  $p = .03$ ) such that MS increased negative affect, and there was a main effect of relative intrinsic goal orientation ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $t[202] = -2.64$ ,  $p = .009$ ) such that intrinsic goal orientation was negatively associated with negative affect; however, there was no Goal Orientation x MS interaction ( $F[1, 200] = .04$ ,  $R^2 < .001$ ,  $p = .84$ ). With no interactions on either positive or negative affect, these dimensions were not considered further.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

Most of the research surrounding TMT has focused on defensive reactions to reminders of mortality. But these defensive reactions are likely not the only or the inevitable reactions to mortality reminders. The current research sought to explore another possible reaction to the mortality salience condition, examining an individual difference that might help to illuminate an existentially-motivated effort to explore novel cultural, social, and intellectual material.

**Null findings and failure to conceptually replicate.** Based on the findings reported here, however, there is reason to pause before accepting that idea. The data reported here do not support the hypothesis that intrinsically oriented (relative to extrinsically oriented) individuals respond to MS by seeking exploration and growth. In fact, the data even defy the previous literature about defensive responding among those with low intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) goal orientations, not-significantly suggesting that extrinsically oriented people (relative to intrinsically oriented people) are more inclined to seek exploration following MS.

**Null findings... why?** As with nearly all null results, there are many possible reasons for the null results found here. Broadly, however, there are three categories of reasons. The first is that the theory is right but the data are wrong; the second is that the theory is wrong and the data are right; and the third is a possible combination of the two. It is impossible to know for sure.

The first possibility is that the theory is right, but the data are wrong. That is, the theory could accurately describe the general psychological processes involved, but perhaps the data failed to reveal those processes because of a failure in study design and execution. For example, goal orientations might not be a good individual difference in determining the alternative terror management trajectories, or the sample recruited may not be a good representation of individuals with adequately variegated goal orientations, or the domestic vs foreign films survey may not have properly or exactly measured defensive or acquisitive motivational orientations—indeed, note that the mean scores of relative interest in the films were always in favor of the domestic films and away from the foreign films, suggesting perhaps that the foreign films were simply not appealing enough to garner interest; the list of possible reasons the data might not capture true effects can go on and on.

The second possibility is that the theory is wrong, and the data are right. That is, it is possible that the study was designed and executed appropriately, samples were recruited appropriately, with sufficient power, and the data simply reveal that the theoretical ideas and hypotheses are without merit.

The third possibility is a combination of the first two possibilities:

perhaps the theory is right *and* the data are right. That is, perhaps the theory and hypotheses do indeed hold, but only under certain conditions not accounted for in the present study design. There may be other “third-variable” conditions that future research could explore that might be relevant to whether or when goal orientations matter in determining existentially-motivated defensive vs exploratory reactions. Maybe our measures were not sensitive enough to detect a true relationship, or maybe the sample we used doesn’t care about independent films and regardless of the genre or familiarity of the film people in our study were not going to show any interest in the films. Therefore future work could try to collect a sample of individuals who show genuine interest in independent films, which would add strength to the film survey, or could use a different measure of exploration intentions that might be more applicable to the sample. Future research should examine the measures in detail and maybe run pilot studies to validate the measures they employ, potentially increasing the focus of the study on the intended processes. Ultimately, a very distinct possibility to explain the results found here is that accounting for certain third-variables could reveal the predicted effects more clearly, along with the applicable boundary conditions.

Each of the above three possibilities might be valid, and it is difficult to determine which interpretation is the correct one. Nevertheless, I will relate the present findings back to the literature assuming that these data are correct, and that goal orientation does not influence defensive or explorative existential-motivational trajectories.



**Connecting back to the prior literature.** It was suggested that there might be individual differences that lead to different reactions to mortality salience. Here we took a closer look at goal orientations, hypothesizing that individuals with an intrinsic goal orientation (focusing on things such as personal growth or giving back to one's community) would react to MS by seeking growth and exploration. This was suggested because individuals who are intrinsically oriented have a greater level of need satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000), they are more committed to personal, fulfilling goals (Sheldon et al., 2004), and they are more oriented towards growth and exploration (Bauer & McAdams, 2004). So following MS, individuals with an intrinsic goal orientation were expected to respond by seeking exploration, possibly by learning about different cultures (the film survey used here).

However, the results show that intrinsically oriented individuals, relative to extrinsically oriented individuals, did not seek exploration. This was shown through the film survey: more intrinsically oriented participants did not show a preference for the foreign films, which would have suggested a desire to explore. It is possible that intrinsically oriented individuals do not seek exploration following MS, which means the current hypothesis and theoretical orientation needs to be rethought. Maybe it is not just being oriented towards more intrinsic goals; it is being intrinsically oriented while still maintaining some extrinsic goals. This would suggest that reactions to MS are not uniform for people who value intrinsic goals, but instead there are subgroups of intrinsically oriented people that share similar reactions to MS. It also could be the case that

individuals oriented toward more extrinsic goals (e.g., wealth, fame, personal appearance) will respond to MS by seeking exploration, although this is thought to be unlikely, the data here trend in that direction, similarly deviating from the prior literature on the topic (e.g., Cozzolino et al., 2004).

However, future research should of course focus on narrowing the scope of study to focus specifically on the relationship between goal orientations and mortality salience in alternative domains in the service of either refining, revising, or discarding the present theoretical perspective.

**Conclusion.** Prior research has shown that defensive reactions are not the only response to mortality salience, and there are potential new layers to the terror management literature that have yet to be found. Finding these new relationships and new interactions between constructs can paint a better picture of terror management theory, and a better picture of human motivation. However, the present research tested a possible individual difference, potentially determining defensive vs growth-oriented reactions, yet failed to reveal a systematic relationship.

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## Appendix A

### Aspirations Index

The following are things that some individuals hope to accomplish over the course of their lives. In this section, you will find a number of life goals, presented one at a time, and we ask you, "How important is this goal to you?" Please use the following scale in answering each of the three questions about each life goal.

#### How important is this to you...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10									
	Not at all					Moderately			
	Very								

- \_\_\_ 1. To be a very wealthy person.
- \_\_\_ 2. To grow and learn new things.
- \_\_\_ 3. To have my name known by many people.
- \_\_\_ 4. To have good friends that I can count on.
- \_\_\_ 5. To successfully hide the signs of aging.
- \_\_\_ 6. To work for the betterment of society.
- \_\_\_ 7. To be physically healthy.
- \_\_\_ 8. To have many expensive possessions.
- \_\_\_ 9. At the end of my life, to be able to look back on my life as meaningful and complete.
- \_\_\_ 10. To be admired by many people.
- \_\_\_ 11. To share my life with someone I love.
- \_\_\_ 12. To have people comment often about how attractive I look.
- \_\_\_ 13. To assist people who need it, asking nothing in return.
- \_\_\_ 14. To feel good about my level of physical fitness.

- \_\_\_ 15. To be financially successful.
- \_\_\_ 16. To choose what I do, instead of being pushed along by life.
- \_\_\_ 17. To be famous.
- \_\_\_ 18. To have committed, intimate relationships.
- \_\_\_ 19. To keep up with fashions in hair and clothing.
- \_\_\_ 20. To work to make the world a better place.
- \_\_\_ 21. To keep myself healthy and well.
- \_\_\_ 22. To be rich.
- \_\_\_ 23. To know and accept who I really am.
- \_\_\_ 24. To have my name appear frequently in the media.
- \_\_\_ 25. To feel that there are people who really love me, and whom I love.
- \_\_\_ 26. To achieve the "look" I've been after.
- \_\_\_ 27. To help others improve their lives.
- \_\_\_ 28. To be relatively free from sickness.
- \_\_\_ 29. To have enough money to buy everything I want.
- \_\_\_ 30. To gain increasing insight into why I do the things I do.
- \_\_\_ 31. To be admired by lots of different people.
- \_\_\_ 32. To have deep enduring relationships.
- \_\_\_ 33. To have an image that others find appealing.
- \_\_\_ 34. To help people in need.
- \_\_\_ 35. To have a physically healthy life style.

## **DOMESTIC FILMS**

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### **“Move on!”**

USA, 2015

Running time: 88 minutes

“It smells like sawdust and sweat and teenagers,” says Sara, an actor from Near West Theatre. While that may sound like an unpleasant combinations, she means it lovingly. Since 1978, Near West has operated out of the third floor in the Club Building at St. Patrick’s Church in Cleveland’s Ohio City neighborhood. In that time, over 15,000 children, teens, and adults have been part of its productions. They are now opening their own building, a \$7.3 million space in the newly transformed Gordon Square Arts District. Before the move, director Ted Sikora chronicled their last days in the old space, filming during rehearsals for their final show. What’s revealed in MOVE ON! is just how much the original location means to them. Beyond performances, these talented people have shared personal experiences within its walls. They’ve loved and fought like family, overcome tragedies, and given each other the confidence needed to survive in the outside world. This touching documentary offers a final tribute to their timeworn home as they prepare for fancier digs. Sara hopes the new place will still have that same smell, though. – B.B.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						
interested	Not at all interested					Very

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						
likely	Not at all likely					Very

---

### **“Kilbanetown Comeback”**

USA, 2015

Running time: 94 minutes

In 2013 Dan Kilbane chronicled the life of legendary Cleveland boxer and politician Johnny Kilbane in “A Fighting Heart.” Continuing his efforts to highlight his distant cousin’s legacy, Kilbane returns with another tribute, KILBANETOWN COMEBACK. This time around, he focuses on the city’s efforts to honor Johnny with a commissioned statue in the Battery Park area, now a popular arts district, and Johnny’s old neighborhood. He also reveals Cleveland’s rich history with statues, architecture, and

art pieces, including the Free Stamp, the Fountain of Eternal Life, the Guardians of Traffic, and many more. The symbolism behind them tells a story about Cleveland and the great people who embody its resilient spirit. The job of creating a piece to commemorate Johnny’s great influence was fittingly given to artist Rowan Gillespie. This documentary is an inspiring look at a city that has transformed itself, but without ever forgetting its roots. – B.B.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						
Not at all interested						Very interested

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						
Not at all likely						Very likely

---

**“Forced Perspective”**

USA, 2015

Running time: 96 minutes

Since he was a young boy, Clevelander Derek Hess has had a “knack” for drawing. As the son of a WWII veteran and professor at the Cleveland Institute of Art, Hess also has had a deep appreciation for discipline and training. Nick Cavalier’s FORCED PERSPECTIVE evokes Hess’s favored artistic technique of manipulating an object’s size in order to create the illusion of distance. It also traces how these values transformed Hess from an unknown concert poster illustrator at Euclid Tavern into an internationally renowned t-shirt designer, post-hardcore concert organizer, and fine artist. In extensive interviews, Hess opens up about his artistic process as well as his ongoing trials with alcoholism and bipolar disorder. Through his intensely expressive mixed media art, Hess not only works through his demons, but also inspires his fans from around the world to do the same. An impressive tribute to Hess’s work, Cavalier’s documentary highlights the unique perspective this Clevelander brings to the art world. – B.B.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						
Not at all interested						Very interested

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

	1	2	3	4	5
6 Not at all likely					Very likely

---

**“Long Way to the Top”**

USA, 2014

Running time: 66 minutes

To fans, the life of a musician seems glamorous; sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. While that may be true of the world's biggest rockstars, many artists struggle to make ends meet. As LONG WAY TO THE TOP reveals, life on the road isn't easy. It's comprised of long months away from friends and family, nights sleeping in cold vans, and hopes that merch sales will allow for the occasional grungy hotel, or at the very least, pay for gas. But not every musician is doing it to become a celebrity. Their love for music and its tool as a universal language is what keeps them so focused on their dream. LONG WAY TO THE TOP chronicles the journeys of three musical acts – indie rock group Grizfolk, singer-songwriter David Ramirez, and heavy metal band The Sword. It also features interviews with such bands as Def Leppard, Weezer, Limp Bizkit, and Nine Inch Nails, who offer advice and stories from their early days. This terrific documentary will resonate loudly with musicians, while also giving fans a more honest view of the lives of their idols. – E.F.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5
6 Not at all interested					Very interested

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

	1	2	3	4	5
6 Not at all likely					Very likely

---

**“I am Big Bird: The Carroll Spinney Story”**

USA, 2014

Running time: 90 minutes

Listen up, everybody! I AM BIG BIRD is the story of a really nice man who always plays pretend. Once upon a time -- at the 1969 Puppeteers of America conference -- an animator and Bozo show worker named Carroll Spinney met Muppet meister Jim

Henson. Soon thereafter the Children’s Television Workshop launched Sesame Street, and Big Bird was hatched. Carroll, the man behind the feathers (and Oscar the Grouch), is now 81 and still filling children with joy. Home videos show Carroll and other Muppeteers clowning around behind the scenes at Sesame Street. He appears as Big Bird at live shows, “mini-Woodstocks” where the audience pours out its love. Frank Oz and Cheryl Henson describe how Carroll parlayed Big Bird into an American phenomenon, and thanks to that nice man, we will carry Big Bird in our hearts forever. – B.B.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5
6					Very
interested					interested
Not at all interested					

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

	1	2	3	4	5
6					Very
likely					likely
Not at all likely					

---

**“Batkid Begins: The Wish Heard Around the World”**

USA, 2015

Running time: 81 minutes

Miles Scott, like many five-year-olds, dreams of being a superhero – Batman, in particular. But Miles may share more with the Caped Crusader than the average kid. At 18 months old, Miles was diagnosed with leukemia, and he has been fearlessly fighting the disease ever since. When the Make-a-Wish Foundation asked Miles what would make him happiest, he naturally requested one thing: to be a real Batman. While Miles’s parents had doubts about being able to grant his wish, Patricia Wilson, an Executive Director at Make-a-Wish, did not shy away from the task. With the generous help of an acrobat, television newscasters, the chief of police, the mayor, and even composer Hans Zimmer, among numerous others, Patricia successfully transformed San Francisco into Gotham City and Miles into crime-fighting “Batkid” on November 15, 2013. Dana Nachman’s BATKID BEGINS: THE WISH HEARD AROUND THE WORLD documents the incredible story of how thousands of people worked together to make one kid’s wish come true and created a social media phenomenon in the process. – E.B.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5
6					

Not at all interested  
interested

Very

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

1

2

3

4

5

6

Not at all likely

Very

likely

---

## **FOREIGN FILMS**

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### **“La Salada”**

Argentina, 2013

Running time: 90 minutes

Juan Martin Hsu’s LA SALADA mixes together a diverse group of immigrants in the titular street market of Buenos Aires. While economic opportunity has drawn these immigrants thousands of miles away from home, life in an around the market has its fair share of challenges. Korean shop-owner Mr. Kim must rely on his teenage daughter Yunjin’s ability to learn Spanish to make his business deals. But he is more than pleased when he sees Yunjin is using her fluency to make new friends with the Argentinian locals. Meanwhile, Taiwanese DVD hawker, Huang, is finding success and living the life with his new friends in the neighborhood. And Bruno—an awkward 17-year-old immigrant from Bolivia—is a native Spanish speaker, which has helped him get along in his current position as a waiter in the street’s Korean restaurant. In this intimate ensemble drama, Hsu unites an eclectic cast of characters and immigrants as they build their lives in their new home. (In Spanish, Korean, Mandarin, and Quechan with subtitles) – B.B.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						Very
Not at all interested						
interested						

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						Very
Not at all likely						
likely						

---

### **“Memories on Stone”**

Kurdistan, Germany. 2014

Running time: 97 minutes

“In Kurdistan, filmmaking is not a job for sane men,” a character explains to the crew of “Anfal,” a film-within-the-film depicting the Kurdish people of the 1980s. “Anfal” is the passion project of director Hussein Hassan, whose father, a film projectionist, was a Kurd in the region at the time. But numerous glitches keep disrupting the production schedule. Against his better judgment, Hussein casts the Kurdish pop star Roj Azad as the male lead. While the flamboyant singer will surely secure an audience for the film, he has little talent or respect for Hussein’s artistic aspirations. Hussein also can’t seem to find an actress willing or able to play the female lead. And then Hussein and his crew



discover they will need to smuggle their film equipment to the set. Yet, Hussein is determined to depict this era for his family and for the Kurdish people. Both touching and endearing, Shawkat Amin Korki's MEMORIES ON STONE portrays the cathartic capacity of film. (In Kurdish with subtitles) – B.B.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						Very
	Not at all interested					
interested						

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						Very
	Not at all likely					
likely						

**“Macondo”**

Austria. 2014

Running time: 98 minutes

Eleven-year-old Ramasan has a lot of responsibility. In traditional Chechen society, he would be the man of the house. Yet he now lives in Macondo, a multicultural neighborhood in gritty industrial Vienna. Ramasan speaks German better than his mother Aminat, and he interprets between her and their neighbors. The family left Chechnya with Ramasan's father, and they're trying to make do in this foreign society. But Ramasan's world is brightened when Isa, his father's buddy, moves into their housing complex too. Isa pays his respects to the family and Ramasan's father's gives him his watch. While his interest in Macondo is revived, Ramasan becomes aware of its positive influence on his family and he befriends a local group of older boys. A passionate film that rests on the slight shoulders of its protagonist, MACONDO shows us life through the eyes of a young Chechen boy. (In German and Chechnyan with subtitles) – B.B.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						Very
	Not at all interested					
interested						

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

	1	2	3	4	5	
6						



commemorates when heavy rains miraculously camouflaged villagers from Japanese assailants during the 1940s. Today, Julia, her teenage son Tonio, and her younger son Etok are among the many townspeople who continue to give thanks to St. John. Still, Tonio is not immune to the typical urges of teenage boys. Smitten with his friend Lani, Tonio is convinced his tattered clothes and lack of money will hardly sweep her off her feet. So when local crime boss Carias offers Tonio a seemingly simple job, the teen can't resist the hefty payoff or the opportunity to demonstrate his worth. But juggling a new love life, his family commitments, and the community's demands, prove to be more than Tonio can handle and he is soon wishing for yet another miracle in Bibiclat. (In Tagalog with subtitles) – B.B.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5
6					
Not at all interested					Very interested

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

	1	2	3	4	5
6					
Not at all likely					Very likely

**“A Borrowed Identity (aka Dancing Arabs)”**

Israel. 2014

Running time: 95 minutes

“Sometimes I forget you’re an Arab,” says Yonatan, a Jewish Israeli teen, to his best friend Eyad. “Yeah, me too,” Eyad responds. For the past two years, Eyad has been the sole Arab student at a highly competitive boarding school in Jerusalem. Having grown up in a predominantly Arab village in Israel, Eyad had a difficult time acclimating to the school. But thanks to Yonatan, whom Eyad met through a service program, and Naomi, Eyad’s Jewish girlfriend, Eyad’s experiences in Jerusalem have been turning out well. Still, he cannot escape the stigma associated with his ethnicity among the majority of Jewish Israelis. Naomi’s parents, for instance, plainly tell her that they would rather she not date an Arab. Not yet ready to reject his past entirely, Eyad can’t help but fantasize about having A BORROWED IDENTITY. Eran Riklis’s coming-of-age drama – based on Sayed Kashua’s semi-autobiographical book *Dancing Arabs* – powerfully depicts how a tumultuous biculturalism impacts an individual’s sense of self. (In Arabic and Hebrew with subtitles) – B.B.

How interested are you in viewing this film?

	1	2	3	4	5
6					

Not at all interested  
interested

Very

If CSU presented this film on campus, how likely is it that you would try to go see it?

1

2

3

4

5

6

Not at all likely

Very

likely