

# Terror Management and Acculturation: The Effects of Mortality Salience on Acculturation Attitudes toward Culturally Close and Culturally Distant Immigrant Groups

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## Objectives

This research was designed to explore whether implicit existential concerns can influence the acculturation attitudes held by receiving society members. With hypotheses rooted in Terror Management Theory (TMT; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), this study examined whether mortality salience (MS) can affect Canadian citizens' acculturation attitudes held toward culturally close (British) and culturally distant (Arab-Muslim) immigrant groups within six specific life domains. It was predicted that MS would result in (1) higher separation and lower assimilation held toward British immigrants and higher assimilation and lower separation held toward Arab-Muslim immigrants.

## Introduction

- **TMT** maintains that, "cultural conceptions of reality serve the vital function of buffering the anxiety that results from awareness of human vulnerability and mortality" (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989, p. 681).
- Culturally derived worldviews allow for individuals to perceive themselves as valuable beings in a meaningful world. When mortality is made salient, in order to guard against the potential for anxiety associated with thoughts of death, individuals are increasingly driven to maintain the conviction with which their worldview is held.
- **Acculturation attitudes** of receiving society members involve the degree to which immigrants are expected to (1) maintain aspects of their heritage culture and (2) adopt aspects of the receiving society's culture.
- As cultures that are perceived as distant from one's own may present a threat to one's worldview, when mortality is salient there should be an increased tendency to be less welcoming of their culture and to value the group's adoption of the receiving culture. On the other hand, those individuals who are culturally close tend to provide support for one's worldview; thus, there should be a tendency to increasingly value their culture when mortality is salient. The same directional shift was expected within each acculturation domain.

### Hypotheses:

1. MS will lead to (a) higher separation and (b) lower assimilation held toward culturally close British immigrants.
2. MS will lead to (a) higher assimilation and (b) lower separation held toward culturally distant Arab-Muslim immigrants.
3. MS will not lead to significant shifts toward or away from integration or marginalization.

## Method

- 186 Canadian participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (mortality vs. control) × 2 (Arab-Muslim immigrants vs. British immigrants) between-subjects design.

- Participants were given a **MS or a control prime** embedded in a questionnaire package. The MS prime comprised two open ended questions (control questions involved failing an exam):

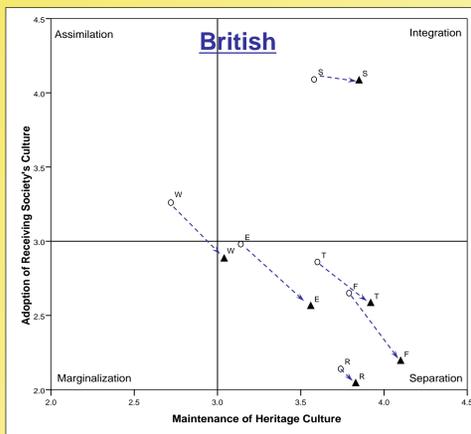
"Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you."

"Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you as you physically die and once you are physically dead."

- Participants then completed a **delay and distraction (PANAS-X & word search task)** followed by the **dependent measure**:

The Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM; Navas et al., 2005) measure for receiving society members, targeting attitudes toward either British or Arab-Muslim immigrants. The RAEM measures 4 acculturation attitudes (Integration, Assimilation, Separation, Exclusion) and 6 domains of acculturation: *labour and work, consumer habits and family economy, family, social, religious beliefs and customs, and ways of thinking (principles and values)*.

## Results



### General Effects

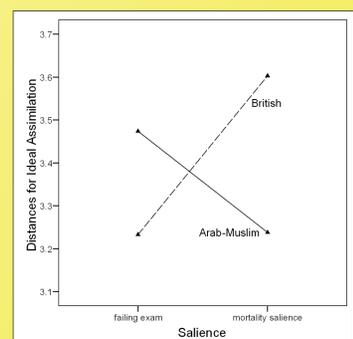
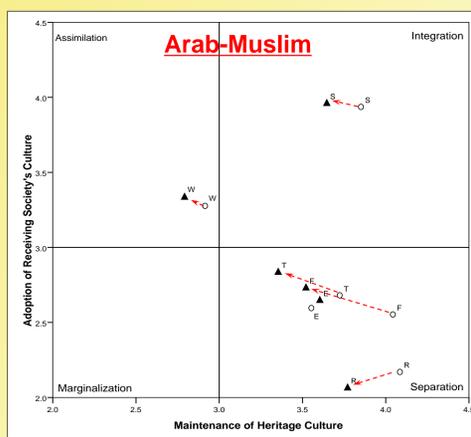
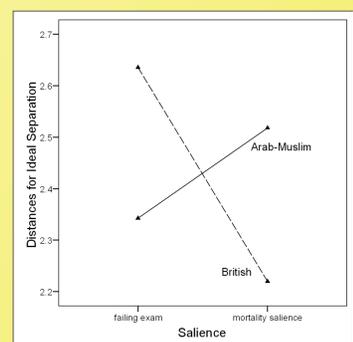
• ANOVAs on Euclidean distances revealed interactions between MS and immigrant group for assimilation  $F(1, 185) = 6.55, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , and separation,  $F(1, 185) = 6.06, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .03$ . Simple effects were significant for MS effects on separation,  $F(1, 185) = 5.93, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , and assimilation,  $F(1, 185) = 4.90, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , toward British but not Arab-Muslim immigrants (*see right*).

• The culture maintained by British immigrants may provide symbolic validation for an Anglo-Canadian worldview in the face of MS. This may especially be the case because of the potential for symbolic threat that may be perceived within a multicultural society.

• It is possible that social desirability may have mitigated the expected effects of MS on attitudes toward Arab-Muslim immigrants. This cannot be confirmed.

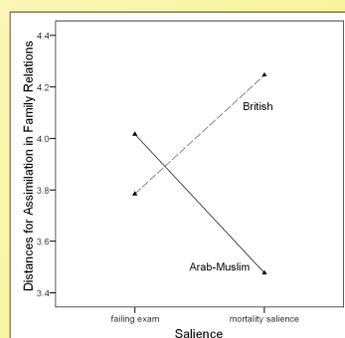
### Domain Specific Effects

- Expected interactions were significant for the family and the social relationships domains.
- **Family Relations:** ANOVAs on Euclidean distances revealed interactions between MS and immigrant group for assimilation  $F(1, 185) = 7.30, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .04$ , and separation,  $F(1, 185) = 6.86, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$ . Simple effects revealed that MS led to higher assimilation toward Arab-Muslims  $F(1, 185) = 8.96, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$  and higher separation toward the British  $F(1, 185) = 8.28, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .04$ .
- Thus, the only significant shift in attitudes toward Arab-Muslims occurred within the domain of family relations (*see below*).



W – labour/ work  
E - economic  
S - social relationships  
F - family relations  
R - religious beliefs and customs  
T - ways of thinking: principles and values

▲ - MS  
○ - Control



Rosenblatt, A., Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., Pyszczynski, T., & Lyon, D. (1989). Evidence for terror management theory: I, the effects of mortality salience on reactions to those who violate or uphold cultural values. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(4), 681-690.

Navas, M., Garcia M. C., Sanchez, J., Rojas, A. J., Pumares, P., & Fernandez, J. S. (2005). Relative acculturation extended model (RAEM): New contributions with regard to the study of acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 21-37.

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• **Social Relations:** An interaction was observed for assimilation,  $F(1, 185) = 4.44, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .02$ . Simple effects did not reveal effects of MS on either immigrant group.

## Conclusions

- This study lends support to the notion that terror management processes may lead to divergence in the degree to which immigrants are expected to maintain their heritage culture and/or adopt the receiving society's culture.
- This research differs from past TM studies as it reveals that the need to validate one's cultural worldview may lead to a desire for others in one's home country to adopt and maintain aspects of culture consistent with one's own worldview.
- This research provides empirical support for the notion that symbolic terror management processes may be one route through which divergent expectations for distinct immigrant groups can arise within specific life domains.
- Research may further examine whether enhancing the salience of a multicultural ideology can mitigate the observed effects (via enhancing the accessibility of a more inclusive or tolerant worldview).