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Terror Management and the News: An Exploration into the Effects of Framing on Mortality

Salience

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The present study explores the link between Terror Management Theory and the use of its principles within news media. Political news media in the digital age undergoes a variety of framing effects, more specifically episodic and thematic frames of stories. To induce mortality salience, college-aged participants were presented with stories framed from the perspective of an individual's experience or a general theme of experiences regarding the controversial pro-life topic and a non-controversial hiking topic. These stories are presented in the style of Instagram posts to mirror how college-aged people consume news media. The stories also contain wording designed to induce mortality salience, creating avenues for worldview defense. Following the presentation of the news stories and a short delay, participants then completed a death thought accessibility measure and a questionnaire about their level of agreement or opposition to the news stories presented, displaying either worldview defense or greater worldview adherence. The results from this experiment show increased worldview defense for participants that viewed the controversial post and no significant differences in the amount of death thoughts present in the conscious, although the non-controversial image had a slightly higher average of death thoughts than the controversial post. The implications of these results are discussed below.

Terror Management Theory, framing, mortality salience, episodic frame, thematic frame, social media, Instagram

Chapter 1

Introduction

As a research topic, the news provides a number of interesting outlets in understanding how it impacts general culture. One reason it is an important medium to study is its ability to cause harm and mental anguish to readers. In the US, more than 80% of Americans reported getting news and information from a smartphone, computer, or tablet, instead of the traditional news industry of print, radio, and television (Shearer, 2021). In fact, younger individuals ranging from 18-49 years old reported utilizing a smartphone, computer, or tablet as their main news source, compared to older age groups above 50, who listed television as their primary source of news (Shearer, 2021). How the public gets their news is changing. In 2021, over 50% of people who use news from a digital device reported relying upon social media for their news consumption, while younger people rely on social media to be their primary news provider (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). This shift to online sources provides more access to news that may cause harmful effects on the reader. One study found that as participants looked for information during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the more news media observed lead to an associated increase of reported negative affect (Hwang et al., 2021). Another study found an association with social media consumption during COVID-19 and an increase in depression and PTSD symptoms (Price et al., 2022). While news media has harmful effects, the exposure to these effects varies due to the increase in polarization of news media.

Partisan politics have also created differences in the consumption and perceived trustworthiness of media outlets, leading to a potential increase in political polarization of news media. According to Pew Research Center (2021), news media has undergone increased

polarization between both Democrats and Republicans. More left-leaning audiences will prefer

media choices such as CNN or NBC while right-leaning audiences mainly consume outlets like

Fox News (Jurkowitz et al., 2020). This could be due to selective exposure theory or

confirmation bias, where people tend to expose themselves to media that confirms or echoes

their own beliefs and avoid media that does not (Festinger, 1957). This can exist in social media,

with sites like Facebook showing signs of selective exposure among the users (Cinelli et al.,

2020). Party lines determined the level of trust given to different news sources, with left-leaning

audiences trusting leftist/liberal media, and right-leaning audiences trusting more conservative

media (Jurkowitz et al., 2020). The varying trust between media outlets, such as social media,

can be explained by through framing via the inclusion of certain hashtags or trends to emphasize

different issues (Hemphill et al., 2013). A good example of the presence of polarization due to

framing is demonstrated by the news company, Ground News.

 Ground News takes different issues and compares the different frames or presentations of

the issue from various parts of the political spectrum. The company displays how a common

story is interpreted differently across a left-leaning, center, and right-leaning perspective, thanks

to framing (Appendix A). Another service provided by Ground News is a depiction of

worldviews within the news. This is shown through blind spots, where Ground News shows how

certain stories may not be reported by left-leaning and right-leaning sources (Appendix A).

Ground News and the statistics from Pew Research Center provide evidence for a polarized

media environment, potentially indicating the existence of worldviews in news media.

Worldviews in the news provide an opportunity to study the news through Terror Management

Theory. For example, a social media post about death could impact how the message is

perceived, as this can potentially result in the same effects seen in experimental manipulations of

death awareness. The potential for social media to serve as a death reminder may be explained

through Terror Management Theory and framing theory as to being the reason behind the

increase of polarization in both traditional and social media.

Terror Management Theory

Terror Management Theory (TMT), states that humans have the unique capability to be

aware of the inevitability of death, which when combined with natural survival instincts, has a

potential to cause great anxiety (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986). A dual-component

anxiety buffer (Greenberg, Solomon, & Arndt, 2008) is used to alleviate this anxiety through two

structures: cultural worldviews (CWV) and self-esteem. The first component of the anxiety

buffer, CWVs, is defined as the socially shared beliefs about reality that provide the standards of

conduct to pursue personal value (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997). The second component, self-

esteem, is the perceived ability of an individual to personally meet the standards of value placed

on them by the CWV (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997, Hubley, Hayes, Harvey & Musto, 2020). Most

TMT research to date has explored the effects of the mortality salience (MS) hypothesis, which

states that being reminded of one's own death will lead to intensified efforts in maintaining the

anxiety buffer (Burke, Kosloff, & Landau, 2013). This has been shown to cause participants to

ardently defend or uphold aspects of their own CWV while attacking those who oppose those

beliefs (e.g., Burke, et al., 2013; McGregor et. al, 1998). This can be translated to media

consumption. For instance, MS has been shown to affect worldviews following news reports of

terrorism (Das et. al, 2009), immigration (Pan, Zhou, & Hayes, 2018), and additionally showing

that presentation of death-related articles can increase death-thought accessibility (DTA; the

accessibility of death related thoughts), but not significantly more than non-death-related articles (Viceconte, 2020).

Terror Management Theory was originally designed to provide an explanation as to why people need and utilize self-esteem (Greenberg et al., 1986). The writings of Ernest Becker were used to provide evidence for the compatibility of ideas seen in a collection of philosophers, researchers, and anthropologists on the impact of self-esteem on social behavior (Greenberg et al., 1986). The argument presented by Greenberg et al., (1986), based on Becker's work, is that the uniqueness of humans comes from being cultural animals, sharing common symbolic conceptions within the world. Humans rely upon culture to provide representations of reality, as well as providing meaning, and the basis of how to value oneself (Greenberg et al., 1986). Therefore, self-esteem in Terror Management Theory is feeling value through the adherence or satisfaction of personally important cultural criteria, which can vary from person to person (Greenberg et al., 1986). The cultural criteria used to develop self-esteem are also known as cultural worldviews.

Cultural worldviews are a core tenant of Terror Management Theory, which examines how people defend and attack personal and opposing worldviews, especially when reminded of their own mortality (Greenberg et al., 1992; Rosenblatt et al., 1989). At the time of writing this, no research has been conducted on the impact of viewing death in the news and the subsequent effects on an individual's worldview, as mediated by framing. These effects are problematic because audiences may choose to watch worldview-affirming news, creating echo chambers that prevent exposure to other perspectives. Terror Management Theory argues that when mortality is made salient, people will create a stronger adherence to their worldview (Greenberg et al., 1992), which could potentially result in the selection of worldview-affirming media choices.

Worldview-specific channels (i.e., partisan specific) give the viewer the option to select media outlets that adhere to their personal views of reality (Jurkowitz et al., 2020). This involves all forms of news media, such as print, television and internet outlets. For instance, the internet allows the customizability of social media and allows for people to curate a "feed" with worldview-affirming information (Bode, 2016). Algorithms create echo chambers that provide solely worldview-affirming news, protecting readers from contrasting views (Cinelli et. al., 2020). The creation of worldview-specific channels is further nuanced with framing.

Framing

Framing involves defining a problem through a common cultural value, identifying the cause of the problem, making moral judgements about the issue, and suggesting solutions to the now-salient problem (Entman, 1993). For the current research, framing is described in terms of episodic and thematic presentations of news stories. *Episodic frames* portray event-focused language, often heavily focusing on personal stories (Iyengar, 1990). Alternatively, th*ematic frames* offer more holistic language by focusing on multifaceted aspects related to a news story, rather than on one personal case study (Iyengar, 1996). The effectiveness of these frames can be impacted by the intensity of the emotions triggered when viewing/reading the story (Aarøe, 2011). The persuasive power of episodic and thematic frames is quite strong, as emotional-based arguments are typically more persuasive, especially when sharing the same worldview (Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In the current polarized media climate, this can lead to more persuasion of framed issues while impacting the effectiveness of framing particularly due to the selectivity of media use (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). For instance, conservatives and Republicans have been found to prefer reading news attributed to Fox News while avoiding news from CNN,

while Liberals and Democrats prefer news attributed to CNN while avoiding news from Fox

News (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). This ideological (and polarized) selection of media based on

worldview agreement has conscious and unconscious behavioral impacts as suggested by Terror

Management Theory.

Preview of Chapters

Chapter 1 has introduced the backdrop for the present experiment, introducing the

groundwork for the study: polarization in the news and utilizing framing in testing the mortality

salience (MS) and worldview defense hypotheses of TMT. Traditionally, MS has been

operationalized via text and questions explicitly referring to death-related words, open-ended

questions about mortality, and exposure to violent footage (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg,

2015). In fact, research containing violent footage of terrorism has been shown to potentially

play a role in the induction of MS, providing evidence of news media's potential impact (Das et

al., 2009). Media scholars have argued that extreme polarization in the media can be attributed to

the ideological selectivity of people choosing to engage with news that matches their viewpoints

(Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). With framing, the media is potentially able to present a variety of

stories adhering to the same or similar viewpoints, creating inoculating environments for

audience members. Because of the polarization of these types of frames, these environments

should induce different levels of mortality salience with readers through episodic and thematic

frames, consequently creating variations in levels of worldview defense. As media becomes

more violent and polarized, it is of grave importance to better understand how individuals

respond to these types of death-related framing while contributing to TMT and framing

literature. Because this has yet to be examined, the goal of this exploratory thesis is to explore

the effectiveness of episodic and thematic frames by which they induce mortality salience

through measuring DTA, and CWVs.

      Chapter 2 will discuss the literature surrounding TMT and framing as well as generate

several hypotheses. Chapter 3 will introduce the method, experimental design, and procedure for

the experiment. Chapter 4 will provide the results of the study. Chapter 5 will contain the

conclusion to the thesis, providing a discussion of the results found, the theoretical implications

for TMT and framing theory, the limitations experienced in the study and directions for future

research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter explores the literature related to Terror Management Theory (TMT) and framing, especially the specific forms of framing known as episodic and thematic framing. This section will lay out the theoretical background surrounding TMT, including the anxiety-buffer hypothesis, the mortality salience hypothesis, death thought accessibility (DTA), and framing, concluding with a series of predictions.

The Influence of Ernest Becker and Existential Philosophy

Ernest Becker was the key influencer to TMT. Becker was an interdisciplinary, cultural anthropologist who wrote *The Denial of Death*, among other books, which provided the basis for Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1986). In Becker's work, human nature is seen as the eternal justification of existing as an object of value, through comparison and conflict with others (Becker, 1973). Becker believed creating value is done through striving for feelings of heroism based upon the innate need for self-esteem. Societal systems, in turn, define what "heroism" is, providing the set of values that lead to significance in life and achievement of self-esteem (Becker, 1973). Ultimately, Becker stated that this reaction of heroism based upon self-esteem came as a response to the terror of death, where society celebrates those that risk or face death (Becker, 1973). Becker (1973) emphasizes the presence of heroes against death, especially in religion, where heroes were beings who could go to the afterlife and return to the land of the living. Since self-esteem is seen to create potential heroes within society in response to death, Becker provides arguments for as to when in development does the fear of death begin to influence the self-esteem and heroic behavior towards society. Becker, however, was not the first to posit these existential ideas, as he built upon the philosophies of Sören Kierkagaard, helping to

describe how humans worked to strive for heroism and a sense of meaning. These will be

discussed, prior to focusing on Becker's argument for the existence of meaning and striving.

Kierkegaard's View of Meaning

Sören Kierkagaard based his view of the human condition that anxiety felt from death

comes from ambiguity experienced by humans, since humans have more awareness than

animals, but aside from an eventual death, there is not much control one can have over their fate,

unlike omnipotent beings within various religious beliefs (Becker, 1973, Kierkegaard, 1957).

Thus, Kierkegaard concludes that the ultimate form of anxiety within humans comes from death

(Becker, 1973). Kierkegaard's belief was that the terror of death is avoided through a man's

character, meaning defense mechanisms against this terror are derived from what is used to

create different perceptions of reality (Becker, 1973, Kierkegaard, 1957). The development of

character traits can happen unconsciously, which may cause the traits developed to be based

upon the cultures of a person's upbringing rather than through their own experiences (Becker,

1973). The trappings of society provide protection against the terror of death, but Kierkegaard

remarks that this protection comes at the expense of less personal freedom, making it necessary

to observe societal rules while also working to be one's own person (Kierkegaard, 1957).

At the heart of these arguments, Kierkegaard recognizes that the development of one's

reality through society or internal reflection is to deny one's creatureliness (Kierkegaard, 1957).

Creatureliness is the recognition that one is simply an animal with primal desires that can never

be satisfied. Kierkegaard's view was that development of cognitive defenses were for the terror

of death and creatureliness, since terror and creatureliness to Kierkegaard were equivalent

(Becker, 1973, Kierkegaard, 1957). When reminding oneself that they are limited by their

animalistic functions and not solely part of society, these bring about the same defenses as

experienced when considering one's own death (Becker, 1973). The "self-conscious animal" is aware that they will one day die yet controls this terror through the attempt to find meaning in life (Kierkegaard, 1957). Kierkegaard believed that the search of significance in life provides the support necessary to overcome any terror from creatureliness and in turn, death (Becker, 1973, Kierkegaard, 1957). These ideas of Kierkegaard helped Becker develop his arguments, which were later used as the basis for developing the psychological theory behind the protection and reactions towards death and creatureliness.

Becker's View of Meaning

Becker argues the fear of death is not a natural occurrence and is not something that people are born with, referred to as the "Healthy-Minded" argument (Becker, 1973). In the "nature vs. nurture" debate, the "Healthy-Minded" argument places the fear of death within the nurture aspect of development. This argument presents death as cultural mechanism, used to keep folks in line within society, threatening the security developed in childhood from the relationship with one's mother. Initially, death is not known to be inevitable, but over time, it becomes a part of a child's anxiety, due to the shortcomings of the mother-child relationship (Becker, 1973).

Another important argument Becker makes is the "Morbidly-Minded" argument, which inversely states that the fear of death is natural and present in everyone. This argument pulls from evolutionary and biological theories, stating that the fear of death is what incentivizes us and other living creatures to strive for self-preservation (Becker, 1973). Becker (1973) stated that over time, early men who passed along their genes also passed along the survival instinct, as the fear of death incentivized survival then, and now can be deemed responsible for some anxieties today. The anxieties of today come from the ways in which humans perceive the world, rather

than in-born survival needs, like other animals (Becker, 1973). However, these anxieties are not present consistently throughout life. As people age, the fears of death seem to subside, partially due to belief in some sort of foundation. For young children, parents serve as the foundation, fulfilling needs and desires and creating a feeling of omnipotence. But as a child grows up, the omnipotence fades and other defenses are built to provide control and meaning to life, through relying upon a system of support that offers ideas and powers to find meaning, typically through societal structure (Becker, 1973). These ideas were later expanded upon and used to inform the creation of Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1986).

Terror Management Theory

Terror Management Theory (TMT) states that like all life, humans will inevitably die, but unlike other creatures, humans have a unique ability to be aware of the fragility of life, which can potentially cause severe harm to a person's psychology (Greenberg et al., 1986). As a result of this awareness, human beings have developed sophisticated defenses based on self-esteem to protect themselves. These defenses are known as the cultural anxiety buffer, a dual-process model that uses self-esteem to help mitigate any anxiety developed from being death aware. Self-esteem is an individual's subjective evaluation of their worth as a person (Orth & Robins, 2014), and in TMT literature, indicates how well a person is living according to their defense systems (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Terror Management Theory builds upon evolutionary theory, stating that through the development of these cognitive abilities, it has facilitated the ability of humans to survive and reproduce (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2015). These abilities, such as the cultural anxiety buffer helped ancestors adjust to rapidly changing environments, created new systems of behavior regulation and lead to a diverse set of ideas that helped manage the terror of death awareness and assist in the development of cultures and ways of life (Becker, 1973;

Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2015), leading to several defense systems involved in protecting from the awareness of death.

Cultural-Anxiety Buffer

Self-Esteem. Becker stated that self-esteem is contingent upon the need for heroism, which in terms of society, provides the set of values that leads to feelings of significance and meaning (Becker, 1973). In TMT, self-esteem is a feeling of personal significance that varies from person to person in the ways it is attained and maintained (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997). This is what shields from fears of death and enables the belief of enduring long after death, especially when the realization hits that we are all destined to die (Solomon et al., 2016). Self-esteem can be assessed through the dual-component or cultural anxiety buffer, living up to the standards presented by this buffer results in greater self-esteem (Greenberg et al., 1986, Harmon-Jones et al., 1997). Therefore, an accurate assessment of a person's self-esteem can be conducted through examining the two tenants of the cultural anxiety buffer: cultural worldviews and interpersonal relationships.

Cultural Worldviews. This component of the cultural anxiety buffer works to enhance self-esteem by finding value in life through living according to the standards presented by the cultural worldview (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). To provide protection from the terror of death, TMT states that cultural worldviews must give life meaning and significance, be perceived as permanent and enduring over time, provide standards of value for individuals within a culture and provide hope of some form of immortality (Darrell & Pyszczynski, 2016).

Cultural worldviews provide two forms of immortality: literal and symbolic. *Literal immortality* is life after death, typically portrayed in most religions as a form of heaven (Darrell & Pyszczynski, 2016, Dechesne et al., 2003). *Symbolic immortality* involves making meaning

and contributions to a person's culture that last long after physical death, typically resulting in

lasting memories through cultural items, such as statues or monuments (Darrell & Pyszczynski,

2016, Florian & Mikulincer, 1998, Greenberg et al., 2010). Cultural worldviews are shared

realities, but within these shared experiences, people also create individualized worldviews,

based upon experiences and ideas they may have previously experienced, which continually

evolves throughout life (Darrell & Pyszczynski, 2016).

   Interpersonal Relationships. The next facet of the cultural anxiety buffer, interpersonal

relationships, is seen to be a crucial part of development for cultural worldviews and self-esteem.

As newborns, security comes from parental figures, and throughout development, these figures

are all-powerful (Greenberg et al., 1986). As cultural behaviors are reinforced, children begin to

view themselves and others as individuals and become aware of their parent's limitations

(Pyszczynski et al., 1997). This realization pushes children to become more involved within their

own culture, finding a wider base of support, gradually shifting the basis of security from the

parents to their overall culture (Greenberg et al., 1986). This shift displays the way social

behavior evolves from eliciting positive reactions from parental figures to finding validation

from social relationships with others (Greenberg et al., 1986). Committed interpersonal

relationships that result in agreement and favorable opinions from others help validate cultural

worldviews and boost self-esteem, assisting in keeping the anxiety of death at bay (Florian,

Mikulincer, & Hirschberger, 2002; Schimel, Arndt, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2001).

Additionally, interpersonal relationships with like-minded individuals that validate one's cultural

worldview further assists in buffering anxiety (Greenberg et al., 1986). Sharing worldviews with

others can help bolster these defenses while, concurrently, opposing worldviews can negatively

impact one's defenses (Pyszczynski et al., 2015). These relationships create both in- and out-

groups, serving as a form to validate similar worldviews while disparaging opposing worldviews (Pyszczynski et al., 2015).

Two Modes of Defenses: Proximal and Distal

To defend from reminders of death, the mind employs two forms of defenses: proximal and distal (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999). *Proximal defenses* take place when death thoughts are consciously present. In response to these thoughts, the first action taken is to attempt to push those thoughts away from the forefront of the mind to the unconscious (Kosloff, Anderson, Nottbohm & Hoshiko, 2019). These are threat-focused cognitive maneuvers that push the thoughts out of consciousness, usually by distraction (Pyszczynski et al., 1999). Once the conscious thought of death seeps into the unconscious, this is when distal defenses may appear.

Distal defenses are the theorized, original view of defense mechanisms when TMT was first developed, laying the foundations of the anxiety-buffer system (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon 2000). These defenses occur when the thought of death is unconsciously present. Instead of distracting oneself from conscious death thoughts, this involves the pursuit of self-esteem within one's worldviews and following the structures set by a person's anxiety buffer system (Pyszczynksi et al., 1999). Distal defenses are experiential in nature, meaning when these defenses are activated, they typically occur as a natural reaction rather than via logical decision-making (Simon et al., 1997). Increases to distal defenses have been found to occur at greater rates following a distraction, emphasizing its presence in the unconscious (Greenberg et.al., 1994). Distal defenses further impact the cultural anxiety buffer in reducing any anxiety felt from thinking about one's own death.

Due to the symbolic nature of cultural worldviews and the ever-present nature of death, the anxiety buffer is unstable (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997; Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Challenges

and threats to worldviews usually result in direct challenges to self-esteem, especially when presented in the context of death (Schmeichel & Martens, 2005). Empirical research to date has mostly focused on the mortality salience hypothesis and death thought accessibility hypothesis, detailing how the salience of death can be present in the mind and subsequently, impact the cultural anxiety buffer.

Mortality Salience

Some of the first empirical evidence of TMT was discovered by attempting to impact the cultural anxiety buffer through mortality salience. It was thought that since reminders of death serve to invoke anxiety, the buffer would provide protection through increased adherence to worldviews and relationships, inoculating a person's self-esteem. Since the anxiety and terror felt from thinking of death is reduced through the buffer, it is logical to assume that somehow inducing mortality salience (MS), or having someone think about their own death, may serve to challenge the cultural anxiety buffer and increase the need for protection (Solomon et al., 2004, Darrell & Pyszczynski, 2016) Traditionally, MS is induced via two open ended questions:

"Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouse in you; Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to *you* as you physically die." (Solomon et al., 2004)

When a participant is not within the group being manipulated to think of their own death, they will be asked similarly phrased questions, but instead about something not regarding death (Solomon et al., 2004). This can include topics such as getting ready in the morning or dental pain. Following the MS induction, participants are typically measured on levels of "worldview defense," which indicates levels of agreement with a presented vignette (Solomon et al., 2004).

Participants can also be measured on levels of attachment, depending on the variables of interest (Darrell & Pyszczynski, 2016). One of the very first experiments testing the mortality salience hypothesis provided the first empirical evidence for TMT.

The initial test of the MS hypothesis involved using municipal court judges to review a case of a woman accused of prostitution and to assign a bond amount for the woman (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Prostitution was used as the moral transgressor due to the nature of the crime, making worldview defense more likely (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). To make mortality salient, the open-ended questions listed above were presented prior to receiving information about the case. The researchers found that judges would enforce higher amounts of bail for prostitution, especially when induced with mortality salience. This was in accordance with the tenants of TMT, that when reminded of one's mortality, there is a greater adherence to the moral principles guiding one's life. These principles make up part of the cultural anxiety buffer, which when threatened, leads to negative reactions towards the threat, build greater desires for faith in one's moral values, and an increased desire to punish the threat (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). This initial experiment was expanded to test the effects of mortality salience on the anxiety buffer, specifically its effects on self-esteem, cultural worldviews, and interpersonal relationships.

Mortality Salience and Self-esteem. TMT attempts to answer the question of why self-esteem is necessary by stating that to protect from the terror of death, self-esteem is used as a shield from the unique human awareness of an eventual demise. Self-esteem can manifest itself through cultural worldviews that involve viewing oneself as living up to the values assigned by the worldview (Pyszczynski et al., 2004). Reminders of death cause greater adherence to one's worldview, especially towards specific aspects of that worldview, when primed before the mortality salience induction. When others share a worldview and agree with one's conception of

reality, these interpersonal relationships provide another buffer from anxiety produced by reminders of death (Pyszczynski et al., 2004). If one's sense of value is based off adherence to a romantic relationship, this can also provide the protection necessary to quell any anxiety from reminders of death (Florian et al., 2002).

As mentioned earlier, self-esteem serves an anxiety-buffer function by helping people cope through adherence to worldviews or interpersonal relationships. Simply put, self-esteem is the viewing oneself as valuable and important within their own worldview (Pyszczynski et al., 2004). Greenberg et al., (1992) showed that providing participants with positive feedback on a personality test, thus boosting self-esteem, resulted in lower feelings of anxiety, following a mortality salience induction. This was replicated in a study by Harmon-Jones et al., (1997) where experimentally enhancing self-esteem through positive feedback on a personality test led to decreased worldview defense, following a mortality salience induction. In the same experiment, subjects who did not have their self-esteem enhanced and were reminded of their own death did engage in increased worldview defense (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997). While these effects were seen after artificially enhancing self-esteem, the same results were not present for those who naturally had high self-esteem (Pyszczynski et al., 2004). Manipulations of self-esteem seemed to lead to a reduction in MS effects, but it did not indicate how self-esteem interacted with certain aspects of cultural worldviews.

As mentioned, according to TMT, self-esteem is based on living up to values set by cultural worldviews. One such study focused on whether MS increased risky behaviors, specifically risky driving (Taubman Ben-Ari et al., 1999). The researchers primed individuals to consider reckless driving as a part of their self-esteem prior to reminding them of their own death. Following the MS induction, reckless driving was measured by having participants report

how likely they would overtake another car by driving in the oncoming lane. The findings of this study showed that when induced with MS, participants who perceived reckless driving as relevant to their self-esteem would engage more often in the behavior than those who were not induced with MS (Taubman Ben-Ari et al., 1999). In follow-up experiments, it was confirmed that the participants who believed reckless driving was a major component to their self-esteem reacted to MS inductions by engaging in reckless driving to validate their self-esteem (Taubman Ben-Ari et al., 1999). Self-esteem striving also occurred for health-related behavior, as Arndt et al., (2003) found that for those who found fitness to be valuable to their self-esteem, would have greater intentions of engaging in fitness, following a MS induction.

        Mortality Salience and Cultural Worldviews. Cultural worldviews within TMT are the conception of reality shared by all within a culture, albeit everyone has their own perception of the culture (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Following the initial experiment described above, which provided empirical evidence for the effect of mortality salience, Rosenblatt et al. (1989) conducted a series of experiments to further understand the impacts of mortality salience on cultural worldviews. The researchers found that those that share worldviews with a transgressor (e.g., a prostitute) tend to provide less harsh punishments than those that do not share their worldviews. The mortality salience condition was also found to have increases in both the severity of punishment and the level of reward for those that uphold a cultural worldview. There were no measurable physiological arousal effects found due to mortality salience, such as increased heart rate. Finally, the effects of mortality salience were consistent regardless of levels of negative affect and self-awareness, showing that it is an individual construct that has potential to be studied (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Because worldviews are so expansive, they can be affected in many different ways by inductions of mortality salience.

Terror Management Theory does not only affect reactions to moral issues, such as prostitution, as researchers expanded upon these initial findings to see what parts of cultural worldviews could be affected by mortality salience. Follow-up studies were conducted to see if inducing mortality salience could trigger defense systems within other aspects of cultural worldviews. When manipulated to think about their own death, researchers found that Christian subjects would make positive evaluations of fellow Christians, and negative evaluations for Jewish people (Greenberg, et al., 1990). Not only were religious beliefs impacted by induction of mortality salience, but also personality traits such as authoritarianism, where those with high authoritarianism were more rejecting of those with low authoritarianism only when mortality was made salient (Greenberg, et al., 1990). These effects can be perceived as indirect, due to a lack of similarities between groups or the creation of in- and out-groups, which lead to the researchers testing a direct effect of criticism towards a culture. After inducing mortality salience and asking American participants to read articles either in support, indifferent, or against American culture, positive reactions were observed towards the supportive article and negative reactions were observed to the critical article (Greenberg et al., 1990). These findings provided further evidence for the effects of mortality salience, as well as providing initial evidence of the diverse nature of worldviews.

To this point, researchers were aware of the effects of mortality salience on cultural worldviews, specifically how opposing a worldview or presenting criticisms tends to cause prejudice or defenses against the opposing viewpoints. Interest piqued in how different personality traits impacted mortality salient reactions, especially since in previous experiments, participants with low authoritarianism exhibited fewer negative reactions following mortality inductions, when compared to others (Greenberg, et al., 1990). To evaluate this, researchers

focused on the personality trait of tolerance, to see if higher levels would impact levels of disagreement with an author of an anti-American essay following a mortality salience induction (Greenberg, et al., 1992). It was found that if tolerance was considered a central part of a worldview, such as within the liberal political ideology, or primed via statements advocating for tolerance, then the mortality salience effect was mitigated. Participants primed with tolerance had no difference in negative attitudes towards the anti-American essay, regardless of if they were induced with mortality salience or part of the control group. Through this initial finding, researchers found that priming aspects of worldviews affected reactions following a mortality salience condition, emphasizing the importance of the factors that make up a worldview, and the contextual differences that exist between commonly shared worldviews.

So far, experimenters have used broad examples of cultural worldviews of politics, religion, and morality, each with its own contextual and historical basis for why there may be negative reactions from one group to another. The present experiment asked if the same effects would be present within the minimal group paradigm, or within groups created through trivial means, such as preference of artist paintings (Tjafel, et al., 1971). Using the minimal group paradigm, researchers assigned participants to group A or B, based off preference for different artist's paintings prior to mortality salience induction (Harmon-Jones, et al., 1996). Results displayed negative attitudes from those in group A towards the outgroup of group B, and vice versa, demonstrating the same functions of TMT with an inconsequential grouping as the long-term, real-world groups that already exist (Harmon-Jones et al., 1996). However, this effect was not present when the groups were randomly assigned, meaning that identification with the minimal groups was necessary for mortality salience effects to take effect, building on previous literature of the need to prime specific aspects of worldviews to observe any effects.

Mortality Salience and Interpersonal Relationships. Within the same vein of cultural worldviews, interpersonal relationships may be involved in regulating reactions to a mortality salience induction. For example, those with secure attachments were discovered to have a greater desire or need to connect with a romantic partner, following a mortality salience induction (Mikulincer & Florian, 2000). This was seen to buffer mortality salience, leading to more research conducted on whether close relationships have any bearing on reducing the terror of death (Florian et al., 2002). For the time, this idea was novel, but had basis from the original works of Ernest Becker, as Becker remarked that romantic relationships were one of the main domains of protection from the fear of death (Becker, 1973; Florian et al., 2002).

These researchers assessed the effects of mortality salience through measurement of commitment of romantic relationships, and interpersonal relationships' impact on specific cultural defenses. It was found that those who were reminded of their own death reported higher levels of commitment to a romantic partner than other conditions (Florian et al., 2002). This result showed the similarity of effects with the traditionally used cultural worldviews, displaying how interpersonal relationships can work in the same way as worldviews, especially following a mortality salience induction. To test the impact on specific cultural defenses, Florian et al. (2002) recreated Rosenblatt et al. (1989) judgement of social transgression, to see if interpersonal relationships would mediate judgements towards social transgressions such as traffic offenses, burglary, and fraud (Florian et al., 2002). Typical mortality salience effects were seen among those who were presented only the social transgressions, significantly providing harsher punishments. When participants were primed to think about romantic commitments, the effects of mortality salience induction were no longer significant (Florian et al., 2002). Thoughts about interpersonal relationships worked as the buffer system to protect from thoughts of death, leading

to a reduced need to rely on the cultural worldview defense, and instead, working as the other

part of the cultural anxiety buffer to protect from the terror of death. These results also provided

further evidence of the ability of TMT researchers to prime aspects of a worldview to produce a

worldview-specific buffer in response to a reminder of death. As TMT research continued,

gender differences began to emerge.

        Mortality Salience and Gender. The use of gender in TMT studies is quite common.

When investigating the relationship between gender and mortality salience, a common

conclusion is that defenses against death tend to involve gender stereotypes and traditional

beliefs about gender (Passalacqua, 2016). Gender is a common grouping used to investigate the

differences between male and female defense systems, following a mortality salience induction.

Some research has found that gender does impact death defense strategies, but it achieves this

effect only for some scenarios (Burke et al., 2010). For example, inducing mortality in

participants led to women providing more favorable ratings for courses that support gender

equity and female leadership, as compared to men, engaging in gender norms instead of cultural

norms after an induction, and even engaging in cultural beliefs about women's bodies following

a mortality salience induction, such as objectification of the body (Passalacqua, 2016). Mortality

salience has also motivated group identification, especially among gender (Arndt et al., 2002).

When inducing mortality salience in women, researchers found that the induction increased

women's perceived similarity with other women, except when presented a gender-based

stereotype, displaying how mortality salience identification did not work for negative groupings

(Arndt et al., 2002)

        Gender has also been shown to impact individual behaviors, such as risk-taking. One

study measured risk-taking behavior following a mortality salience induction for both males and

females (Hirschberger et al., 2002). It was found that men generally preferred to engage in risk-

taking behaviors after being primed with thoughts of their own death, as compared to women

(Hirschberger et al., 2002). This was true for general risky behaviors such as driving fast, rock

climbing, hang gliding, as well as for risky behaviors that involve substance use, such as

psychedelics (Hirschberger et al., 2002). Risk-taking is not the only behavior affected by

mortality salience, as other research showed how between both genders, mortality salience led to

an increase in strength output (Peters et al., 2005). This increase was dependent upon whether

strength training was a part of a person's self-esteem. There was no visible increase for men or

women when strength training was not as important for the participant's self-esteem (Peters et

al., 2005). While gender may have resulted in different strength results, the dependency on self-

esteem lead to an increase in strength output between both men and women. These studies show

how gender provides complexities in TMT research as it provides cultural worldviews that may

not be specific to any societal construct, yet still extremely powerful in changing behavior.

Death Thought Accessibility

    Empirical support has been shown for the mortality salience hypothesis and the cultural

anxiety buffer, displaying how cultural worldviews, interpersonal relationships and self-esteem

can mitigate any anxiety or terror experienced by thinking about one's own death. The ability of

the cultural anxiety buffer to lessen fears of death is thought to be caused by the accessibility of

death thoughts. Therefore, researchers wanted to test the death thought accessibility (DTA)

hypothesis to see if the results seen are indeed resulted from the accessibility of death thoughts.

The DTA hypothesis was first tested via a word completion task, where participants would be

given a series of ambiguous word stems, for example COFF__. This could be completed with

either a neutral word such as "COFFEE" or a death-related word such as "COFFIN" (Greenberg

et al., 1994). The more word stems completed with a death-related word indicates a higher presence of death-related words, and greater levels of mortality salience. It was found after a short delay and distraction task, death-related thoughts were higher than immediately after the MS induction (Greenberg et al., 1994). These initial DTA results imply that death thoughts are actively suppressed when initially brought up, prior to the activation of the buffer structures. These structures seem to work at their strongest following a distraction from the immediate problem of death and short delay, potentially indicating their effect occurs within the unconscious (Greenberg et al., 1994). However, the buffer could be threatened directly without a death reminder, such as talking to someone with different political views or experiencing a break-up in a relationship. If these structures are used to protect from the awareness of death, then potentially threatening these structures should result in an increase in accessibility to death-related thoughts, leading to more research in DTA.

The initial DTA hypothesis focused on if MS inductions produce death-related thoughts, which in turn would be reduced after a short delay by the cultural anxiety buffer. An extension to the hypothesis postulated that if the cultural anxiety buffer protects from awareness of death, then threatening these structures should result in an increase in DTA (Arndt, Cook, & Routledge, 2004; Darrell & Pyszczynski, 2016). This was demonstrated when after American students read an anti-American essay and were not given the opportunity to defend their worldview, they were measured to have higher levels of DTA (Ardnt et al., 1997). This was replicated for Canadian students using anti-Canada articles, which when not defended against, resulted in the higher levels of DTA as previously found (Schimel et al., 2007). Schimel et al (2007) also conceptually recreated this effect by instead threatening a creationist worldview, which resulted in increased DTA for those who adopted a creationist worldview.

DTA is also affected by threats to interpersonal relationships. When tasked to think about relationship issues, similarly to how mortality salience is induced, participants recorded higher levels of DTA compared to participants who were asked about academic problems or a TV program (Florian, Hirschberger, & Mikulincer, 2002). The results of the studies mentioned also each occurred without a mortality salience induction, providing evidence that threatening the individual structures of one's cultural anxiety buffer that caused the presence of death thoughts.

The cultural-anxiety buffer may cause different reactions to reminders of death, but each reaction is dependent upon self-esteem. Self-esteem is the root of the buffer, as the different worldviews and relationships individuals find value in are what protects from the terror of death. Therefore, DTA may be impacted by direct threats to someone's self-esteem. Hayes et al. (2008) threatened participants' self-esteem by providing negative evaluations of a participant's personality after an IQ test. Self-esteem was also threatened by bringing up concerns with the participants' potential to succeed within their desired career field. This manipulation was more likely to fit a college students' worldview of a potential career path, leading to a more realistic threat to a student's self-esteem. Using these procedures, it was found across all the studies conducted that threatening the self-esteem of the participants resulted in a significant increase in DTA (Hayes et al., 2008). These results, combined with the earlier mentioned findings, show that threatening one's self-esteem directly, or by challenging their worldviews or relationships, there is an increase in the amount of death thoughts present in the unconscious.

Cultural Worldviews, Self-Esteem, and News Media

When examining how news media works in the context of TMT, it is important to keep in mind how self-esteem and cultural worldviews work. Self-esteem serves as the base for Terror Management Theory, as the theory attempts to explain why people need self-esteem (Greenberg

et al., 1986; Solomon et al., 1991). The need for self-esteem comes from a need for protection

from the innate fear of death. High levels of self-esteem help people to protect themselves from

thoughts of mortality, usually through cultural worldviews. Cultural worldviews are conceptions

of reality that standards and values to follow, which also provide meaning and a promise of

either symbolic or literal immortality. *Literal immortality* tends to be present in religious

worldviews, in the concept of the afterlife, and *symbolic immortality* involves lasting monuments

that create a legacy after death, such as a statue in a park.

Reminders of death have been shown to experimentally impact cultural worldviews,

typically resulting in harsher judgement or defense against opposing worldviews. Aspects of

these worldviews can be primed for defense against mortality salience, triggering a specific type

of worldview defense. When these defenses are primed by questions or discussion, inducing

mortality salience causes the psychological need to defend worldviews (Greenberg & Kosloff,

2008). This need when involving politically charged identities tends to result in an increase of

prejudice, stereotyping and general dislike for an outgroup (Greenberg & Kosloff, 2008). In the

news and political news sphere, these groups are formed between different ideologies, depending

upon one's identity (Mason, 2018).

For instance, using the mortality reminders surrounding 9/11, Landau and colleagues

(2004) attempted to research the MS effect on support for President George W. Bush. The first

study utilized a classic MS manipulation of having participants describe their reactions and

thoughts to their death and what will happen if they were to die. Participants then read an essay

expressing a favorable opinion towards former President Bush regarding 9/11 and the Iraqi

conflict (Landau et. al., 2004). The following study utilized subliminal primes of stimuli

associated with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, such as the text "9/11" and "WTC" (Landau et al.,

2004). The researchers found increased agreement with President Bush, following the MS induction, especially among those identified as conservative. This was also true when using the 9/11 terrorist attacks as a reminder, displaying that significant events have the potential to produce mortality salient effects. When comparing effects of MS and the 9/11 reminder on levels of agreement, there was no difference, as both methods resulted in higher levels of support for President Bush (Landau et al., 2004). If major events can have the type of effect as explicit mortality reminders, this potentially means the reporting of major events on the news could cause mortality salient worldview defenses.

The results of Landau et al., (2004) indicate how some events can be naturally occurring mortality salience inductors (Pyszczynski et al., 2003). For example, terrorism has been shown to be one of these events. In another study, the death of a Dutch news reporter by a terrorist organization served as a naturally occurring death reminder, allowing researchers to expose participants to realistic news stories about terrorism committed by Islamic groups (Das et al., 2009). The MS induction was the newscast, which allowed the researchers to use an actual broadcast and see how televised news works as a MS induction method. The results found the MS condition had an increase in death related thoughts and greater amounts of prejudice towards Islamic people, the out-group of the study (Das et al., 2009). This study and Landau's (2004) study display how news media may induce mortality salience and result in greater prejudice of an outgroup as the worldview defense. However, these studies had the news form a common outgroup for terrorist organizations, particularly those of Islamic descent. This may be primed due to events occurring in the world, or by what the news media may choose to focus on. A question may arise as to how news media changes what is salient in the cognitions of the

audience, and who is the outgroup to defend against. This phenomenon can potentially be better

understood by scholars, using the theory of framing.

Framing

Framing as a theory tends to have a variety of interpretations that offer a unique

understanding of what framing is in the media, detailing the diverse ways that news media can

present information to an audience. Framing can be considered like a picture frame. Consumers

of the media look through a frame that the author packages the story in and views the

information in the way the author presents it to the consumer, much like a consumer of art views

a painting. In most, if not all cases, framing is commonly involved with selection of topics of

interest. Entman (1993) describes this as a selection of perceived reality made to be more salient

to promote a particular problem, interpretation, evaluation, and treatment recommendation for

the problem presented. For instance, a sentence may perform all these functions, while many

sentences may perform none of these; it depends upon the author of the story. When frames

promote or define problems, this determines what action is being taken and whether it is in

accordance with the reporter's cultural values (Entman, 1993). The frame then attempts to

highlight crucial information regarding a problem or issue that needs to be salient within the

mind of the audience. For example, if discussing the issue of abortion, one frame may emphasize

the right of bodily autonomy, while another may emphasize that life starts at conception. The

interpretation of the problem identifies what is causing the action or problem, which then leads to

an evaluation of the problem, where moral judgements are made about the problem and its

effects (Entman, 1993). Finally, the frame will suggest a treatment recommendation for the

problem, and what effects enforcing the treatment will result in (Entman, 1993), leading to an aspect of a frame, the schema the frame represents.

A schema is how human beings categorize information, informing the content of frames by how the schema organizes one's belief system (Daly, 2011; Entman, 1993). Schema can organize knowledge for different topics which inform the schema for ideas. Two people may have the same knowledge about a certain topic, but a different understanding of an issue regarding the topic, because the schema can differ significantly (Daly, 2011). When schemas differ, the goal is to either alter the schema provided to change the issue needed to be solved, or to redefine or reframe the issue entirely (Daly, 2011). Creating new schemas for an issue provides new perspectives of an issue, and in turn, new solutions, while reframing an issue may result in an entirely new problem that wasn't initially the focus (Daly, 2011). Schema, as defined, can potentially be equated with cultural worldviews in Terror Management Theory, providing a potential connection between framing and Terror Management Theory.

As mentioned, framing can be described in a variety of ways, and Entman's (1993) description is built off a collection of common framing descriptions from a variety of framing studies. For this reason, Entman's (1993) definition is what informs the general description of framing for the current study. As mentioned above, descriptions of schema in framing match the description of cultural worldviews in Terror Management Theory, mainly in that both concepts potentially involve an individual's conception of their reality, which inform their decisions and actions. Furthermore, Entman's (1993) description of the process of a frame matches the description of a cultural worldview in that the focal issue and subsequent interpretation, moral evaluation and solution of that issue are all based upon what is the author's core cultural values or worldview. Without someone's conception of reality, which informs the values to live by and

the morals to guide one's life (Rosenblatt et al., 1989), then there potentially cannot exist any frames to find problem that exist in opposition of a cultural worldview. The connection between framing and cultural worldviews can be discussed further as the next sections will discuss media choice, selective exposure, the political news framing, and social media as news media, all in connection to the potential presence of cultural worldviews and Terror Management Theory within the news.

The Impact of Media Choice

Media choice are the factors that determine whether someone is exposed or avoids a certain type of content, attempting to explain why a person may have been exposed to a type of media, like selective exposure (Hartmann, 2009). Since the dawn of the initial news organizations, media choice has exploded over time. In the 1960s, television had just begun to overtake newspaper as the most popular news media, and in the 1990s, television was reported as most Americans sole source of news (Forgette, 2019). In this initial period of the news, media choice was limited to three news networks, drawing concerns over the different ideas presented. This was because the three networks were able to utilize their large audience and have greater control over what issues were salient within the public (Forgette, 2019). As technology innovated, so did the television with the introduction of cable news and other cable channels, each with their own specified topics. This included 24/7 news cycle channels such as CNN and entertainment channels, such as the Home Box Office (Forgette, 2019). The continued development of entertainment from television to the internet increased media choice, allowing for more freedom to watch when the audience wanted or to engage in commercial avoidance. Forgette (2019) states commercial avoidance empowers individuals to narrow and identify their media interests, forcing advertisers to generate adverts specifically tailored towards a brand of

media. Media choice following the 2020 election became divided along party lines, as levels of

trust between which outlets could be considered trustworthy differed based on political ideology

(Jurkowitz et al., 2020). This divide between political views and media choice are indicative of

the social sorting trends seen in American political worldviews.

In recent history, the division of political parties has become much more intense, linked

to the cultural, religious, and ideological divide between the different political views present in

America (Mason, 2018). This social sorting into the parties is initially mitigated by the presence

of cross-pressures or potentially conflicting worldviews. Those who may identify with one party

could also share identities or traits with the "opposing" party that allow them to feel a sense of

belonging (Mason, 2018). As time has progressed however, these parties have become much

more homogeneous, with those that identify with one party tending to believe or support all the

policies the party supports (Mason, 2018). Mason (2018) states that sorting can occur based off

ideologies, social pressures, or identities, which can be any aspects of cultural worldviews and

the cultural anxiety buffer.

Ideological selectivity is not limited to how people choose to vote. Given the increase in

media choice, there is empirical evidence that the demand for news varies between news

organizations, depending on a consumer's political preferences (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). The

researchers presented participants with the option to select a story from one of four outlets: Fox,

NPR, BBC, or CNN. Iyengar & Hahn (2009) found that conservatives would choose Fox News

as their main news source and avoid the other sources, while liberals would avoid Fox, but select

more freely between the remaining three. The overwhelming preference for Fox News by

conservatives may have been due to the matching ideology between the frames presented by Fox

News and the schema held by conservatives (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). This preference of media

choice may be due to selective exposure, where audiences can choose to watch news that

matches with their ideologies and avoid coverage of news they may dislike (Forgette, 2019,

Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Selective exposure corresponds with the perceived increase in sorting

and increased polarization, displaying how different issues are framed based off the worldviews

held by political parties and news companies (Forgette, 2019, Jurkowitz et al., 2020, Mason,

2018).

     Media choice may not only represent traditional media but also new-form media through

the internet and social media. Thus, many of the theories prominent in traditional media such as

selective exposure and sorting can also occur on social media, through framing. Politicians can

use social media to bring attention to different issues using hashtags and consistent posts about

the issues (Hemphill et al., 2013). General social media users also engage in framing in similar

ways as politicians, such as including keywords, hashtags and links in posts that are shared with

likeminded users (Aruguete & Calvo, 2018). Cascading activation describes this act of framing

on social media, by users selecting to share posts with worldview affirming information or

choosing to discard non-affirming news (Aruguete & Calvo, 2018, Entman, 2003). In

combination with selective exposure, these two theories help detail why and how framing occurs

on social media through the selection of worldview-affirming news (Aruguete & Calvo, 2018).

Typically, however, commentary on social media tends to not fall neatly into a conservative or

liberal viewpoint, as commentary is made depending upon how important an issue is to the

commentator's worldview (Highfield, 2016). Cross-pressures may be more present in social

media since it can provide users the freedom to learn about and provide input on a wide array of

issues. Although social media may still create echo chambers, potentially when receiving framed

news from other like-minded users, there arises the question of whether this results in further

polarization.

Initially, social media and the internet provided many with the opportunity to create a

democratizing area that allows for a conversation of ideas but may have resulted in an increase in

echo chambers and self-isolation (Highfield, 2016). Users may have access to a variety of beliefs

to expose themselves, but instead, many selectively expose themselves to the same views they

share, reinforcing pre-existing attitudes rather than entertaining conflicting ideas (Highfield,

2016). Banks et al., (2021) displayed increased levels of perception of polarization when

exposing respondents to tweets from political candidates, as well as partisan media. Negative

tweets towards the other political party increased negative assessments of the other party,

increasing conflict between the two sides (Banks et al., 2021). This is potentially like a

worldview defense, where opposing worldviews are disparaged, and matching worldviews are

supported on social media. Framing has been seen to exist and potentially create worldview

specific channels within traditional media and new-age social media, but there are different types

of frames that alter the ability of the frame to persuade and can further affect the reactions of the

audience reading.

Episodic and Thematic Framing

Framing as described by Entman (1993), works to make a problem salient via definition

of the problem, diagnosis of that problem, evaluation of the problem, and suggestion of

solutions. However, the presentation of the frame can potentially alter the impact the frame has

on the presence of the problem, specifically through episodic and thematic frames (Iyengar,

1990). Episodic and thematic frames are major frames within political media due to their

aptitude of influencing public decisions and inducing emotional reactions (Gross, 2008; Iyengar,

1991). Episodic frames refer to issues reported in terms of a personal experience, while thematic frames report the general trends of an issue (Iyengar, 1990). For example, a news story about the overall effect of COVID-19 would be an example of a thematic frame. Thematic frames typically adhere to the model of definition, diagnosis, evaluation, and suggestion of solutions, as proposed by Entman (1993). For instance, a news story about a family's experience with COVID-19 would be an episodic frame, presenting the issue using a personal story, rather than a general overview of the people impacted. Thematic and episodic frames respectively can create senses of responsibility in the audience (Iyengar, 1990). In the initial study of how these frames affect the audience, participants were brought into a lab setting to watch stories about poverty in the US, a hot topic for the electorate and one that was reported frequently at the time of the study (Iyengar, 1990). Participants were randomly assigned to watch episodic or thematic stories about poverty and afterwards, asked to assign a level of responsibility to the homeless for their situation. It was found that when poverty was framed thematically, then participants were less likely to rank homeless individuals as responsible for their position and assign the blame of responsibility towards society itself (Iyengar, 1990). A similar result was found with race and gender, with poor black people perceived as responsible for their outcomes as well as single mothers, following the presentation of an episodic frame (Iyengar, 1990).

Research suggests that audiences interpret information from episodic and thematic frames differently, leading to individualistic and societal attributions of poverty respectively (Iyengar, 1990). These attributions indicate the types of policies people would support, with those who viewed the episodic story and attributed individual responsibility being less likely to support social programs for the needy (Gross, 2008). There is no exploration into how emotions play a part in these attributions, so a follow-up study was conducted to see if presenting an episodic

story about a woman sentenced to a long prison sentence for her abusive, drug-dealing boyfriend

would generate feelings of sympathy and pity (Gross, 2008). The thematic frame discussed the

case against mandatory minimum sentences by providing details on the prison system (Gross,

2008). The persuasiveness between the episodic and thematic frames were also examined as it

was seen in Iyengar (1990) that following thematic frame presentations of poverty, participants

were more willing to support governmental programs to fight poverty. Feelings felt from the

frame may serve as the basis of judgment and ultimately determine if the persuasive appeal is

effective (Gross, 2008). Gross (2008) found that episodic framing influences emotional

responses and can also increase persuasion of support if the individual story is compelling. There

may also be the possibility that over the short-term, thematic frames are more effective in

persuading for a change in behavior, while the emotional engagement of the episodic frame may

cause longer-term changes (Gross, 2008). This finding may inform how these frames can result

in lesser or greater worldview defense, where more worldview defense may be present directly

after presenting the thematic frame and more worldview defense may be present in the episodic

frame following a delay.

Gross (2008) found that episodic frames tend to trigger more emotional reactions than

thematic frames, which was in turn replicated by Aarøe (2011). In this study, Aarøe (2011)

demonstrated that the strength of episodic and thematic frames depended upon the intensity of

the emotional reactions, which in turn moderated the capacity of persuasiveness between frames

(Aarøe, 2011). To conduct the experiment, Aarøe (2011) made certain to include human details,

providing the specifics for the episodic frame, as well as abstract information for the thematic

frame. The results supported previous findings that the episodic frame generated stronger

emotions than the thematic frame or baseline condition. The episodic frame also showed a

greater rate of persuasive power, as participants supported the issue presented more when it was in an episodic frame compared to a thematic frame (Aarøe, 2011). These stories focused on the 24-year rule, which states non-resident spouses in Denmark can cohabit with their spouse only if they are both 24, which may have assisted the episodic frame in generating more emotion, since the story is so personal (McElroy & Stolovitskaya, 2006). In conclusion, it was found that more emotion results in more persuasive power of episodic frames, while less emotion results in more persuasive power for a thematic frame, indicating that the intensity of emotions are a significant moderator for the persuasiveness of the frames (Aarøe, 2011).

Terror Management Theory and Framing

Terror Management Theory attempts to explain the need for self-esteem, which is ultimately threatened by the knowledge that eventually one will experience death. To protect from the terror of this knowledge, people use the cultural-anxiety buffer, which utilizes interpersonal relationships and cultural worldviews, or perceptions of reality that help to offer meaning in life. These cultural worldviews can be based upon a variety of topics, such as gender, political beliefs, or religion, as these offer values and morals that can be followed. Following the morals or values set out can lead to a greater amount of self-esteem, thus further protecting from any anxiety related to death. When threatening a worldview, either directly or implicitly by reminders of eventual death, this leads to different reactions, depending upon what is consciously present. This can be either greater adherence towards the tenants of the worldview, which helps mitigate the threat felt, or greater prejudice against those who share an opposing worldview. An example of this would be those with a conservative worldview agreeing with more conservative views and disparaging liberal views, following a negative story about conservatives and a

subsequent reminder that the policies of conservativism may lead to more death and destruction. This example attempts to also illustrate how framing can impact worldviews and the defenses against any threats. Framing is what helps to create worldview specific news media, by emphasizing certain points of the story to cater to one side versus another. The increasing amount of media choice for viewers from cable television to the internet allows people to select news that has been framed to best represent their values and beliefs. Viewers can inoculate themselves from opposing worldviews, thus leading to greater protection of their cultural worldviews, and when these are threatened, quickly engage in affirmation of the worldview by consuming concurring media. These frames can also be presented either episodically or thematically, altering how the story is presented to the audience. Prior research has shown that episodic frames result in greater emotional response and personal attributions of blame for the situation. This may interact with mortality salience, leading to greater amounts of worldview defense and death thought accessibility, as increased emotional responses combined with death reminders could lead to larger, overall reactions.

Thus, the first set of hypotheses focuses on the impact of Terror Management principles on reactions to a framed political news story. Episodic frames can generate more emotional affect, leading to greater levels of persuasion. If this is the case, then there may be even lower levels of defense for those that share the worldview of the article author and higher levels of defense for those that do not, since there should be a stronger, emotional reaction. Thus, it is predicted:

H1: There will be a main effect of mortality salience such that those who view the controversial mortality salience condition message will experience greater worldview defense than the noncontroversial mortality salience group.

H2: There will be a main effect of the episodic frame such that those who view the episodically framed message will experience greater worldview defense than those who view the thematically framed message.

H3: There will be an interaction between the mortality salience group and episodically framed message such that those who view the episodically framed mortality salience condition message will experience greater worldview defense than those who view the thematically framed mortality salience condition message.

The next set of hypotheses will investigate similar findings to the first set, but instead will focus on the level of DTA. Death thought accessibility attempts to measure the prominence of death thoughts following a mortality salience induction. This has been seen to increase even when worldviews are threatened without the induction of mortality salience. If the vignette triggers mortality salience, there should be an increase of death thought accessibility, especially if the story challenges any worldviews already present in the participants. Like the first set of hypotheses, the greater emotional power of the episodic frames could result in higher levels of DTA, especially for the controversial condition, since more emotion may potentially lead to a larger reaction. Thus, it is predicted:

H4: There will be a main effect of mortality salience such that those who view the controversial mortality salience condition message will experience greater death thought accessibility than the noncontroversial mortality salience group.

H5: There will be a main effect of the episodic frame such that those who view the episodically framed message will experience greater death thought accessibility than those who view the thematically framed message.

H6: There will be an interaction between the mortality salience group and episodically framed message such that those who view the episodically framed mortality salience condition message will experience greater death thought accessibility than those who view the thematically framed mortality salience condition message.

The final set of hypotheses will attempt to find the reaction that collected demographics have on the levels of worldview defense and death thought accessibility in response to the presented posts. From this induction of mortality salience, levels of worldview defense will be examined, both generally and based off gender and political affiliation. The collection of gender will inform the defense of the worldview, as men and women may have different beliefs on the issue presented since gender can inform political decisions. Political affiliation will also inform the defenses used, since opposing sides of a political spectrum tend to differ in beliefs towards different issues. Thus, it is predicted:

H7: There will be an main effect between the mortality salience group and gender such that women who view the controversial mortality salience condition message will experience greater death thought accessibility than those who viewed the noncontroversial framed mortality salience condition message.

H8: There will be a main effect between the mortality salience group and gender such that women who view the framed mortality salience condition message will experience greater worldview defense than those who viewed the control framed mortality salience condition message.

H9: There will be a main effect between the mortality salience group and political affiliation such that liberals who view the framed mortality salience condition message

will experience greater death thought accessibility than those who viewed the control

framed mortality salience condition message.

H10: There will be a main effect between the mortality salience group and political

affiliation such that liberals who view the framed mortality salience condition message

will experience greater worldview defense than those who viewed the control framed

mortality salience condition message.

Chapter 3

Method

The main objective of this thesis is to examine the effectiveness of an Instagram post in inducing mortality salience and to subsequently observe the effects of mortality salience as moderated by framing utilizing a 2 (MS: Yes, No) x 2 (Framing: Episodic, Thematic) between-subjects experimental design. There was a total of four conditions (see Table 1).

A	**B**	**C**	**D**
Controversial MS	Controversial MS	Non-controversial MS	Non-controversial MS
Episodic Frame	Thematic Frame	Episodic Frame	Thematic Frame

Table 1: Experimental Conditions

Participants

According to a meta-analysis conducted on DTA (Steinmann & Updegraff, 2015), effect size estimates for death-related threat types was found to be a medium to large effect (Hedge's g = .6). Hedges's g was used to help account for any studies with small sample sizes. This value was converted to Cohen's f and found to be $f = 0.3$. Another meta-analysis for MS studies (Burke, Martens, & Faucher, 2010) suggests that college samples had larger effect sizes (r (235) = .36, $p < .001$), when compared to non-college samples (r (25) = .25, $p < .001$). These values were converted to Cohen's f and found to be $f = 0.386$ and $f = 0.258$, respectively. The difference in effect size may be due to the large amount of MS studies being conducted with college students. Therefore, in conducting the power analysis for the present study, the effect size for college students will be used.

Based off the effect sizes from Steinmann & Updegraff (2015), an a priori power analysis conducted with G*Power version 3.1.9.7 software (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) for

the DTA group recommended a minimum sample size of 90 participants to reach 80% power for

an ANOVA (ANOVA: Fixed effects, special, main effects and interactions) at the .05

significance level given an effect size of 0.3 and two predictors. A separate power analysis was

conducted for the MS group with the G*Power version 3.1.9.7 software and recommended a

minimum sample size of 30 participants to reach 80% power for an ANOVA (ANOVA: Fixed

effects, special, main effects and interactions) at the .05 significance level given an effect size of

0.386 and four predictors. Between both analyses, a total number of approximately 200

participants will be needed to potentially find a significant effect, if there exists a statistical

significance between the groups.

        For the current study, there was a sufficient number of participants ($N = 488$) where an

additional number was removed from the dataset for containing missing data ($n = 17$). The

majority of the sample identified as female ($n = 290$) and made up 59.4% of the sample, which is

representative of the university to which they were gathered. Participants who identified as male

made up the other part of the sample ($n = 193$) and made up 39.5%. The remaining participants

identified as a non-binary gender or preferred not to say. The age range of this sample was from

18 – 26, with most of the participants reporting their age as either 18 ($n = 294$), making up 60.4%

of the sample, and 19 ($n = 142$), making up 29.2% of the sample. The sample had a more normal

distribution of self-reported political affiliation, with Democrats making up 37.4% of the sample

($n = 189$), followed by Independents making up 28.3% of the sample ($n = 138$), and finally

Republicans, who made up 27.3% of the sample ($n = 133$) (See Appendix B for a visual of the

distribution).

Stimulus

Instagram Posts

According to Pew Research, college-aged students reported utilizing Instagram and Twitter most frequently in receiving news (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). Other social media sites such as TikTok have been used through the sudden rise in popularity since 2020 and the presence of news corporations such as *The Washington Post* in delivering news to the public (Geyser, 2021). Based on this information, the experimental stories are presented in the style of an Instagram post, to efficiently and best present news media as consumed by the college-aged participants.

The controversial image was operationally defined as a description of a pro-life supporting story, and the non-controversial image was operationally defined as a description of the "dangers of hiking" story. Both sets of posts were designed to induce mortality salience. The individual group sizes were A. $N = 113$, B. $N = 125$, C. $N = 128$, D. $N = 121$. Groups C and D served as the control groups, to examine the differences between controversial and non-controversial images and framing effects.

Prior to the current study, alternative controversial messages were pilot tested to assess if there would be an adequate induction of mortality salience. These were developed from a list of Americans' biggest concerns facing the country. In a poll from the Pew Research Center, Americans listed the biggest problems facing the country as inflation, affordability of health care, violent crime, gun violence, and climate change (Doherty & Gomez, 2022). However, at the time of writing, news media was focused upon the recent Supreme Court ruling overturning Roe v. Wade. Therefore, four different conditions of social media posts that present a pro-life perspective, an anti-nuclear perspective, an anti-gun violence perspective, and a climate change

perspective, each including language that potentially produces a mortality salience effect were created to be pilot tested and compared. Each post had an episodic and thematic condition, which were analyzed together to determine a difference in Death Thought Accessibility (DTA).

A one-way ANOVA was used to compare the effect of the four scenarios on the amount of DTA produced in both the episodic and thematic conditions. In conclusion, there were no significant differences between the means of the four conditions on DTA at the $p < .05$ level [F (4, 199) = .763, $p = .550$]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the pro-life condition was higher ($M = 2.46$, $SD = .950$), but not at significantly higher than the nuclear condition ($M = 2.20$, $SD = .901$), gun control condition ($M = 2.10$, $SD = .944$), and climate change condition ($M = 2.23$, $SD = .985$). Despite the lack of significance between conditions, due to the pro-life condition responding to higher amounts of DTA, the decision was to utilize the pro-life scenario as the controversial story in the current study.

In addition to the above pilot test, the pro-life scenario is used because research shows that many Americans are in favor of allowing women the right to have an abortion (Blasi, 2022). Additionally, Pew Research Center found that of college-aged adults, 74% are in favor of legal abortion compared to 25% that are not (Mohamed & Hartig, 2022). The text of the story was shown to induce DTA at a higher rate than the other scenarios and subsequently, may also have a similar effect in challenging the worldviews of pro-choice supporters. The text was based on real-life Instagram posts potentially increasing the external validity by using rhetoric that can be found in someone's daily browsing of social media. In addition, the episodic and thematic forms of the post will be analyzed to see if there are any differences between the two scenarios in the amount of DTA and worldview defense they may potentially generate.

The Instagram post was generated using GenerateStatus's Instagram post generator. The post contains a pro-life stock image as the profile picture and includes an image of the March for Life, an annual march in Washington D.C. of pro-life advocates protesting abortion. The name of the account will be "prolifecampus" and the picture will be labeled as being liked by "studentsforlife and 34,274 others." There is listed 1,013 comments. The image is also marked as liked and the account will be marked as already being followed, to emphasize the support for the worldview presented. Given that both the episodic and thematic frames are in support of the pro-life stance, the photos of the post will remain the same between both manipulations. The only difference is in the story presented. The episodically framed text focuses on a pro-life case of a mother's child being incompatible for life and her requiring an abortion and the thematically framed text focuses on a pro-life argument for why abortion is morally wrong. In the pilot test and current study, these conditions remained constant between controversial and non-controversial posts, aside from the text presented, the image posted, and the name of the accounts listed.

The non-controversial stimulus will also be presented in the style of an Instagram post but instead will contain episodically and thematically framed stories about the dangers of hiking. The episodic post focused on the story of two hikers being attacked by a bear, based on a true news story of two college wrestlers and their encounter with a bear. The thematic post focused on the general statistics related to the dangers of hiking, taken from an analysis of deaths in the National Park System. This post was also generated using GenerateStatus's Instagram post generator. The number of likes, comments, marking the post as liked and marking the account as followed will be the same as in the controversial condition. Differences will lie in the profile photo for the account, the picture presented, and the account names listed. The profile photo will

be an image of a pair of hiking boots and the post image will be a photo of a sign reading

"Danger" in front of a hiking trail. The account name this will be posted under will be

"hikersafetyexpress" and the picture will be labeled as being liked by "nationalparkservice and

34,274 others." This will be the same across both episodic and thematic conditions.

Measures
Political ideology

      Political ideology was collected to assess where people rated themselves on a continuum

of liberalism and conservatism, based off the scale presented by Nail, Harton & Decker (2003).

Participants were asked to mark the level of views they had regarding their political ideology on

a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating "very liberal" and 7 indicating "very conservative". On this

scale, most participants reported falling in the middle on the level of their ideological views ($M =$

3.72, $SD = 1.17$), suggesting a moderate-leaning sample of participants.

Death Thought Accessibility (DTA)

      Death thought accessibility (DTA) was measured between the experimental and control

conditions. The measure uses Greenberg et. al.'s (1994) 25-word fragment completion task. The

measure uses word stems such as SK_ _ _, allowing participants to fill in the word however they

believe is suitable. Theoretically, if affected by the MS induction, participants will fill this out as

SKULL or an alternative word, like SKILL. Of these 25 words, 6 can be completed as either

neutral or death-related words. The possible death fragments are #1(buried), #5(dead),

#12(grave), #15(killed), #19(skull), & #22(coffin). To score this questionnaire, the total number

of death-related word completions were calculated, and the total is used as the dependent

variable.

Worldview Defense

Worldview defense is measured by Greenberg, et. al.'s (1992) pro- and anti-American essays and followed with questions about attitudes regarding the author on a 9-point Likert scale. For this study, instead of responding to essays, participants will be reporting their attitudes towards the Instagram post presented. They will respond to a 7-point Likert scale their personal feelings towards the post, the perceived intelligence of the account posting, their agreement with the post's opinion, and how true they believed the post's opinion to be. The questions are adjusted from the original questions to better measure the reactions to a social media post. The Likert scale is changed to a 7-point scale to match the demographic questionnaire scales as well as adopt the Likert-response anchors presented by Vaigas (2006). An extra question was also added to assess how people would respond to the presentation of a social media post (see Table 3).

Original	**Updated**

How much do you like this person?
 	
 1   2   3   4   5   6
 7   8   9
 not at all
        totally
	How much did you like this post?
	
	 1 2 3 4 5 6
	 7
	 not at all
	        totally

2. How intelligent did you think this person was?	2. How informed did you think this post was?
3. How knowledgeable did you think this person was?	3. How knowledgeable did you think the post was?
4. How much did you agree with this person's opinion of America?	4. How much did you agree with the post's opinion?
5. From your perspective, how true do you think this person's opinion of America is?	5. From your perspective, how true do you think the post's opinion is?

	6. After seeing the post, how willing would you be to follow this account?

Table 3: Differences between original Worldview Defense and modified for present study

The updated measure with the six items showed excellent reliability ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 22.61$, $SD = 8.34$).

Procedure

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of James Madison University, and participants were recruited through the participant pools in the Department of Psychology and the School of Communication Studies. The experiment was completed via an anonymous online survey website, Qualtrics. Participants ($N = 487$) were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (A: a mortality-salient-episodically-framed controversial Instagram post, B: a mortality-salient-thematically-framed controversial Instagram post, C: a mortality-salient-episodically-framed non-controversial Instagram post, and D: a mortality-salient-thematically-framed non-controversial Instagram post), following the completion of the demographic portion of the survey.

Once consenting to participate, participants were guided to the first section of the survey, asking them to provide demographic information including age, identified gender, preferred political ideology, level of political affiliation, preferred election vote choice, media use for news, and specific social media use for news (Appendix C). Of the sample, there were more identified women ($n = 290$) than men ($n = 193$). There was a more even distribution of political affiliation, with more participants identifying as Democrats ($n = 189$) than Republicans ($n = 133$) or Independents ($n = 138$). No demographics were asked about gender differences in political

affiliation, so information was not found on the number of women who identified as Republican,

Democrat and Independent, or men who identified as Republican, Democrat and Independent.

This section also contained priming questions, to make salient in people's minds their personal

beliefs of the pro-life movement or dangers of hiking (Appendix D). The priming questions were

included per the request of Arndt, Greenberg & Cook's (2002) discovery that priming certain

aspects of worldview prior to the mortality salience induction increases subsequent worldview

defense or adherence to that worldview. Additionally, including the political affiliation will also

prime political beliefs that may inform worldview defenses prior to viewing the scenario,

something that has been seen as successful in previous research. This included a set of three

questions about both topics prior to presenting the crafted Instagram post. These questions were

coded to randomly appear with the corresponding controversial or non-controversial post. The

controversial and non-controversial questions asked, on a 7-point scale, the level of agreement

and disagreement with statements (see Table 2).

Non-controversial	By law, hiking trails should always be marked with threats of danger	The law should permit hiking trails only where any danger can be accurately accounted for	You were pleased with the improvement of hiking trails in multiple National Parks
Controversial	By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.	The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the women's life is in danger.	You were pleased with the overturning of Roe v. Wade

Table 2: Priming questions for MS controversial and non-controversial conditions

After completing the demographic and priming questions, participants were directed to

one of the four Instagram posts (Appendix E). Following the presentation of the posts, the

participants then were given a passage to read and questions to answer pertaining to the passage.

Afterwards, the participants also completed a word search, serving to further delay between the

mortality salience induction and completing the first measure. The first measure was DTA,

which supposed to be high after a mortality salience induction following around a 10-minute

delay (Greenberg et al., 1994) (Appendix F). To measure DTA, participants completed the

Sample Word Completion Task (Appendix G). Afterwards, participants were directed to the final

measure, the Worldview Defense Questionnaire (Appendix H). This was given to potentially

show if the participants are affected by the mortality salience induction and are engaging in distal

defenses, by either reporting agreement or disagreement with the author of the post. Once this

measure was completed, the survey ended and the participant received a thank you message for

completing the study and were redirected to the SONA participation management system for

completion of credit.

Chapter 4
Results

From the hypotheses listed above, between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted to find

any mean differences between groups. Specifically, the type of post presented (MS Controversial

vs. MS Non-controversial), type of framing used (episodic vs. thematic), gender and political

affiliation group differences were examined for any differences between groups on the amount of

death thought accessibility (DTA) induced and the level of cultural worldview (CWV) defense.

Differences between MS Groups and Frames on Level of CWV Defense

The first set of hypotheses theorized about the amount of worldview defense generated

between the controversial and non-controversial posts, the episodic and thematic frames, and the

amount of defense generated through an interaction between the type of post and frame. The first

hypothesis stated that worldview defense would be higher for the group reading the controversial

post, rather than the non-controversial post. The second hypothesis built on this by stating

worldview defense would be higher not based on the post seen, but rather the type of framing,

with episodic framing predicted to have higher levels of defense than the thematic frame. Finally,

the third hypothesis stated that the interaction between type of post and type of frame,

specifically the controversial episodic frame will generate the greatest amount of worldview

defense compared to the non-controversial posts and especially, the controversial thematic post.

A between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to observe any mean differences between

groups. For the first hypothesis, it was found that there was a significant mean difference

between the controversial and non-controversial groups on amount of worldview defense, F (1,

479) = 113.504, $p < .001$. Based on the reported means and standard deviation, it was found that

the controversial post group ($M = 18.88$, $SD = 8.70$) had greater rates of worldview defense

compared to the non-controversial groups ($M = 26.22$, $SD = 6.21$), indicated by the lower means.

The lower standard deviations also indicate that when participants looked at the controversial

post, there was not a uniform rating for the author, suggesting participants were divided on their

rating of the author. The non-controversial group had lower standard deviations, indicating that

there was a more uniform rating and greater agreement between participants on the author.

Therefore, hypothesis one is supported.

To examine the second hypothesis, a between-subjects ANOVA was used to observe any

potential mean differences between the episodic and thematic frame in generating worldview

defense. It was found that there was not a statistically significant mean difference between

episodic and thematic frames on generating worldview defense, $F (1, 479) = .169$, $p = 681$.

When looking at the means of the groups, the non-controversial episodic group ($M = 26.18$, $SD =$

6.33) had almost no difference from the non-controversial thematic group ($M = 26.27$, $SD =$

6.10). The same can be said when comparing the means of the controversial group, with the

episodic condition ($M = 19.22$, $SD = 8.89$) being slightly higher than the thematic group ($M =$

18.88, $SD = 8.70$), but not enough to be significant. When looking at the means and standard

deviations of the episodic ($M = 22.85$, $SD = 8.36$) and thematic conditions ($M = 22.37$, $SD =$

8.34) combined across groups, there remains no significant difference between the means.

Therefore, hypothesis two is not supported.

To examine the third hypothesis, a between-subjects ANOVA was used to observe any

potential mean differences between the interaction of the controversial and non-controversial

post as well as the episodically and thematically framed text on generating worldview defense.

When conducting the ANOVA, it was found that there was no significant mean difference of the

interaction between the controversial and non-controversial groups and type of frame on

generating worldview defense, $F(1, 479) = .288$, $p = .592$. When examining the means of the

different groups, there were lower means of worldview defense observed for the controversial

group, as stated above, but when interacting with the type of frame, there was no perceived

difference between groups. This may be due to the worldview defense occurring for only the

groups reading the controversial post and the frame having no effect. Therefore, hypothesis three

is not supported.

Differences between MS Groups and Frames on Levels of DTA

The second set of hypotheses theorized about the amount of death thoughts present in the

different experimental groups. Hypothesis four argues that the participants who viewed the

controversial post will experience greater death thought accessibility (DTA) than the non-

controversial post group. Hypothesis five argues that the participants who received an

episodically framed post would experience greater DTA compared to the thematically framed

post condition, regardless of the post topic. Hypothesis six argues that there will be an interaction

between post topic and type of frame such that participants that view the controversial post with

the episodically framed story would experience greater DTA compared to all other conditions.

These hypotheses were tested using a between-subjects ANOVA and results show that

there were no significant differences between any of the conditions or interactions on the amount

of DTA generated. For the fourth hypothesis, the mean difference between controversial and

non-controversial posts on generating DTA was approaching significance but ultimately, had no

significant differences, $F(1, 419) = 3.20$, $p = .074$. The means between both the controversial (M

$= 2.06$, $SD = .91$) and non-controversial group ($M = 2.22$, $SD = .89$) indicate this relationship of

approaching significance. Therefore, hypothesis four is not supported, indicating that the type of

post presented does not change the amount of DTA induced.

For the fifth hypothesis, the mean difference between episodic and thematic frames was

not statistically significant, $F (1, 419) = .003$, $p = .957$. When examining the differences between

the means, it can be seen for the controversial group, that the episodic frame ($M = 2.03$, $SD =$

.92) was slightly smaller than the thematic frame ($M = 2.09$, $SD = .90$). Alternatively, for the

noncontroversial group, the episodic frame ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .83$) was instead larger than the

thematic frame ($M = 2.18$, $SD = .95$), but still was not significantly different. Therefore,

Hypothesis five was not supported, displaying that there were no differences between the frames

on the amount of DTA induced.

For the sixth hypothesis, there was no observed interaction between the post topic and

type of frame, $F (1, 419) = .605$, $p = .437$. Therefore, hypothesis six was not supported, as the

topic of the post and type of frame do not interact to increase DTA.

Differences between Gender and Political Affiliation on Levels of CWV and DTA

For the last set of hypotheses (H7-H10), DTA and worldview defense were analyzed

using a between-subjects ANOVA, but this time by examining the differences between gender

and political affiliation. Hypotheses seven and eight posited that the controversial group would

induce a greater amount of DTA and worldview defense among women, when compared to men.

Hypotheses nine and ten posited that the controversial group would induce a greater amount of

DTA and worldview defense among Democrats, when compared to other political affiliations.

For Hypothesis Seven, it was found that the mean differences in gender on the amount of

DTA experienced was approaching significance, $F (1, 414) = 3.376$, p $= .067$. However, when

examining the means for both the controversial and non-controversial groups, males (*M* = 2.25, *SD* = .93) seemed to have higher levels of DTA than females (*M* = 2.08, *SD* = .88), thus failing to support the hypothesis. For the eighth hypothesis, it was found that there was a significant difference between genders on amount of worldview defense experienced, *F* (1, 473) = 11.797, *p* < .001. When examining the means for the post topics, males (*M* = 26.13, *SD* = 5.52) and females (*M* = 26.22, *SD* = 6.64) had similar levels for the non-controversial group. For the controversial group, there was an extremely significant difference between males (*M* = 21.72, *SD* = 8.60) and females (*M* = 16.91, *SD* = 8.17) on the amount of worldview defense, indicating where the significant effect of gender on worldview defense may have occurred.

For the ninth hypothesis, it was found that there were no statistically significant differences between affiliations on the amount of DTA experienced, *F* (3, 415) = .230, *p* = .875. When examining the means across both groups, the total DTA experienced did not vary greatly between Republicans (*M* = 2.15, *SD* = .90), Democrats (*M* = 2.14, *SD* = .93) and Independents (*M* = 2.17, *SD* = .86), thus failing to support the hypothesis.

For the tenth hypothesis, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between political affiliation and the amount of worldview defense felt, *F* (3, 474) = 4.266, *p* = .005. When examining the means of the groups, the non-controversial post had similar amounts of worldview defense between Republicans (*M* = 26.31, *SD* = 6.01), Democrats (*M* = 26.73, *SD* = 6.01) and Independents (*M* = 25.74, *SD* = 6.38). However, when examining the means of the controversial post, Democrats have much less worldview defense (*M* = 15.76, *SD* = 9.13) than Republicans (*M* = 22.05, *SD* = 7.06) or Independents (*M* = 20.12, *SD* = 8.38), indicating there was greater dislike of the author from participants who identified as Democrats. The statistical evidence supported this hypothesis.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The goal of this thesis was to assess the capabilities of inducing mortality salience (MS) through the presentation of episodically and thematically framed posts. These posts detailed stories about a controversial topic (pro-life) and non-controversial topic (hiking danger). Following presentation of the posts, levels of death thought accessibility (DTA) and cultural worldview (CWV) defense were measured following a short delay to assess the MS induction. The results of the study displayed effects inconsistent with many of the hypotheses, especially regarding any differences between the types of framing used in individual posts. This may have occurred due to the topic chosen for the posts as well as the text used in the post. This chapter will discuss the results of each set of hypotheses, the perceived impact of the text chosen and any limitations and plans for future research.

Worldview Defense

The worldview defense hypotheses predicted an increase in worldview defense for the following conditions: groups that viewed the MS controversial post, women that viewed the MS controversial post, and liberals that viewed the MS controversial post. Since the sample used was a college-aged sample, who are more likely to be supporters of the pro-choice movement (Mohamed & Hartig, 2022), would be more likely to defend against a pro-life viewpoint. When the college-aged sample viewed the post, it was attempted to mirror how college students would typically receive news stories. Media consumption behavior for the younger generation involves the new age of websites and social media posts, using similar tactics to traditional media outlets (Coleman & Wu, 2015). Research has also shown that the type of media coverage tends to

influence the opinions of younger people, such as more positive portrayals of political candidates

leading to more positive assessments of those candidates by the younger generation (Coleman &

Wu, 2015). Despite this, the sample generally had greater amounts of worldview defense for the

controversial image, indicating that despite the positive portrayal of the pro-life scenario, the

sample still perceived it as negative. This could have been because of the presentation of the

Instagram post, as it could have caused participants to judge the information based off their

experiences (Bennet, 2015). In addition, there may have been the impact of previous biases

regarding the issue of abortion, such as someone who may have themselves or have another close

relationship experience an abortion. The schema or opinion of college students may have been a

pro-choice viewpoint, leading to disagreement with the post itself and greater worldview defense

against the author.

The hypotheses based on identity were predicted as such due to other surveys by Gallup,

which indicated both women and those that identified as Democrats would support the pro-

choice movement (Saad, 2022). These groups may have pro-choice beliefs as a part of their

worldview suggesting that there will be increased worldview defense. Terror Management

Theory states that introducing opposing worldviews may be enough to ignite a worldview

defense, which occurs in the experimental setting through negative ratings towards the opposing

worldview (McGregor et al., 1998; Rosenblatt et al., 1989). The results from the hypotheses

confirms this finding, with greater amounts of worldview defense from women and liberals,

when viewing the MS controversial condition. Prior research has shown that gender is a

moderator for TMT effects, resulting in a clash between worldviews due to gender and other

worldviews due to cultural background (Burke et al., 2010; Passalacqua, 2016). For the present

experiment, participants who identified as women had low levels of worldview defense such as

participants who identified as liberal. One explanation is that most liberals and women tend to have similar beliefs about the pro-life movement, in that there exists a preference for the pro-choice movement. Comparing these results to the levels of worldview defense for men, conservatives and independents, the levels of worldview defense for these three groups were much higher, indicating that there was potentially an ideological difference between the two sets of groups. However, this may not be the case, as polls from Gallup (2023) indicate similar levels pro-choice beliefs between both men and women. Due to these polls, it is more likely to conclude that the differences in worldview defense may have been due to post itself. Men and independents may have attributed personal blame to the episodic pro-life story, and not have felt much connection to the thematic pro-life story, leading to a reduced amount of worldview defense (Gross, 2008, Iyengar, 1990). Conservatives may have agreed with the post based on their ideological values, leading to the lower levels of worldview defense (Mason, 2018). There may even be an effect of worldview agreement, as the inherent dangers of hiking might be more cognitively accessible, given how chaotic nature can be. Additionally, the increased effect of worldview defense for the controversial post and lack of an effect of the non-controversial post may be due to the MS induction.

According to TMT, when people are reminded of their mortality, this should lead to an increase of distal defenses, which includes greater worldview defense and greater worldview adherence (Pyszczynski, 2015). The goal of the study was to create Instagram posts that induced mortality salience, while simultaneously challenging the worldview of the participant. Traditionally, TMT studies include the MS induction separately from the worldview defense manipulation (Greenberg et al., 1992). Combining the two was an attempt to increase external validity, by mimicking how the processes may occur concurrently when scrolling through a

social media feed. The results from the worldview defense, indicated that the increased levels of

worldview defense for the MS controversial condition may have been a result from the MS

induction, as participants were reminded of their own death and responded in such. Additionally,

for the MS non-controversial condition, the lower worldview defense scores may be indicative

that reminding participants of their mortality in the context of national parks could have fit with

the worldview that nature is inherently dangerous, leading to more worldview agreement.

Death Thought Accessibility (DTA)

The death thought accessibility (DTA) hypotheses predicted an increase in DTA for the

following conditions: subjects that viewed the MS controversial post, females that viewed the

MS controversial post, and liberals that viewed the MS controversial post. The results, however,

did not confirm our hypotheses. Death thought accessibility was not significantly different

between any of the groups, especially when comparing the MS controversial post to the MS non-

controversial post. When examining the means, the MS non-controversial post resulted in a

higher mean DTA than the MS controversial post. One reason behind this difference could be

that reading a scenario regarding death in the national parks could have inadvertently induced

creatureliness. Creatureliness is the reminder of the similarities that humans and animals share,

in terms of the physical body functions, development and decay (Goldenberg et al., 1999, 2000).

Previous studies have shown increased DTA following reminders of one's physical nature,

especially when in regard to sex (Goldenberg et al., 1999). Cox et al. (2007) found that priming

the human-animal connection led to higher DTA levels, following disgust elicitors. For the

present study, the MS non-controversial post may have triggered reminders of that same

connection. When participants read about two hikers being attacked by a bear or the many ways

that people die in parks, it could have reminded them not only of their own death, but also the human-animal connection, that anything and everything has the potential to die in nature.

Another explanation for the lack of a difference seen in the DTA measures could be due to the order the measures were displayed. Most studies, to find an effect of DTA, induce mortality salience and present the measure after a 10-minute delay, to allow for the thoughts to enter the unconscious (Greenberg et al., 1994). In the present experiment, this may have been too long to see an effect. Since MS was induced through a social media post, concurrently while presenting the potential worldview defense, there may have been immediate effects that were missed via the presentation of the measures. In the literature, DTA increases after threatening aspects of the anxiety buffer, such as threatening one's self-esteem and cultural worldview (Arndt et al., 1997; Hayes et al., 2008). There may have been an impact of threatening an aspect of the participant's worldview with the mortality salience induction that made DTA much more salient immediately after the manipulation, followed by a decrease when the delay occurred. However, it is unclear whether this was the effect seen.

Episodic and Thematic Frames

The episodic and thematic frame hypotheses predicted an impact of the type of frame on the amount of worldview defense and DTA induced. Specifically, the episodic frame condition was predicted to result in greater worldview defense for the MS controversial condition compared to all other conditions, greater worldview defense compared with the thematic frame regardless of condition, greater DTA for the MS controversial condition compared to all other conditions, and greater DTA compared with the thematic frame regardless of condition. However, our results did not show any differences between the frames on any of these

conditions. There was a difference seen between the MS controversial and non-controversial posts, but within the conditions, there is a lack of difference in DTA and worldview defense scores. Within the conditions, there was no observed difference between the episodic and thematic frame within both the MS controversial and MS non-controversial conditions. This indicates that the differences seen between the conditions were likely due to the topic of the post, rather than how the post was framed. The high worldview defense triggered by the MS controversial post did not vary if the story was presented through the lens of one woman or the overall pro-life movement.

These results may be caused by a variety of reasons. First, since the presentation of the story was through an Instagram post, the visual aspect of the manipulation may have altered exactly how the frames work. Visuals tend to excel at creating drama and garnering emotional responses when used within news media, as the old adage is "a picture is worth a thousand words" (Coleman & Wu, 2015). The controversial post used the same image for both framing conditions. Potentially, altering the image for the episodic post could have resulted in greater emotional responses, as a general image of a crowd may have mitigated the personal story in the post. Participants possibly had any emotional response dulled after reading the caption, since the image in the post was of a general gathering, rather than a personal image of a woman. In Iyengar (1990), the episodic story displayed an individual experiencing poverty, and Gross (2008) displayed an individual experiencing violence. These individual image presentations may have been the cause for the increase in emotional affect, which could potentially result in the increase in worldview defense and DTA.

The lack of effects seen between the frames brought up a major concern with the design of the study. The most serious limitation of this study was the lack of a true control condition. In

this study, there were four assigned conditions, and each of those conditions were designed to induce mortality salience. While there was a difference seen between the controversial and non-controversial conditions, there is no way of telling if this was due to the MS induction or if the topic of pro-life is just naturally polarizing. Including a true control that simply states the facts without the use of death words may allow for any differences between worldview defense and DTA be accurately assessed. If there is less worldview defense reported for the theorized control condition, it can be assumed that the increased amount in the MS condition was due to the death words, providing more evidence that it was the phrasing of the words, rather than the topic itself. A control condition will also further test any differences between episodic and thematic frames, to see if without a MS induction, will there still be similar levels of worldview defense and DTA as was previously seen. Additionally, the inclusion of a control condition could utilize traditional forms of MS induction, to see if the posts sufficiently caused an induction of MS or if the traditional induction plus control conditions results in varying results.

Another limitation of the findings was the lack of knowing how long participants spent on the post itself. Information was not collected regarding the time spent on the survey or the time spent on the post page of the survey, meaning participants may have not spent as much time necessary to process the information. This was also limited since there were no follow-up questions assessing comprehension of the post itself, which would have filtered out participants who may not have spent the necessary time reading the post. This can be changed for future experiments by either including follow-up comprehension questions, reducing the text of the post itself, or using a new induction method by instead presenting a video that provides information, rather than a static image.

Implications and Conclusions

The next step for this research is to include the control condition and understand if the results seen are due to the post itself or if there are other factors present. The results of the current study are exciting, as social media posts are shown to potentially cause a significant increase in worldview defense depending upon the topic. This research helps confirm that while browsing social media, seeing posts that may not align with your worldview can cause you to engage in worldview defense. This may result in a removal of the opposing worldview from your feed, via unfollowing or blocking, leading to a feed that is heavily curated and protective of a worldview. The increase in these worldview specific feeds could inoculate viewers from opposing information, potentially leading to the increase in polarization that is ever-present in today's culture.

For future TMT research, investigators should consider the different ways social media posts and other online news formats can trigger mortality salience. While this research utilized a single Instagram post with a large caption and single image, typically, individuals are exposed to much more complex messages. These may include multiple images, segments of videos and shorter captions. Additionally, although the presentation of the Instagram post resulted in mortality salience effects, more can be done to ensure that these effects are the result of the post. This could include presenting multiple controversial topics, rather than one controversial and one noncontroversial post. The use of abortion as the sole issue could have resulted in complex findings, as people may not have viewed abortion as mortality salient, since abortion can also be perceived as a simple medical procedure, rather than ending a life. For framing research, this research provides preliminary insight into how the framing of an event may not result in differing TMT effects, as the event itself is potentially what causes the extreme reactions.

Furthermore, if using framed Instagram posts, there is more to consider than just the text of the post. Individuals can be exposed to an image or series of images as well as account posting, the number of interactions, and the community engagement with the comments on the post. While this research attempted to use thematic and episodic framing, more can be done to emphasize the frames being used, especially by varying the images presented. Images have powerful uses within news media (Bennett, 2015; Coleman & Wu, 2015). Therefore, Instagram should be researched further to see how images can really be framed and manipulated into creating different emotional reactions among viewers.

In conducting research into this field of study, understanding how messages regarding death and the framing of those messages play a role in the comprehension of social media posts can further the understanding of how social media is used in political context. Social media and politics have become intertwined in everyday life, as social media has become a ground for politicians to easily reach millions of their constituents daily, and a prominent social media presence is considered commonplace in today's world (Highland, 2016). Social movements gain popularity on social media and activists on both sides of the spectrum gain notoriety through viral posts, leading to recruitment of more people towards certain causes (Highland, 2016). The major difference in the ideological differences between traditional media like television and new media like the internet is that engagement is much more likely for individuals on social media (Forgette, 2019; Highfield, 2016). More programs are using social media polls to receive input from the audience, but this does not match the level of engagement present on social media. Social media provides multiple platforms for individuals to speak freely, but the ideology presented may not always match with a user's personal beliefs. Terror Management Theory would state that for the presentation of news that is conflicting with one's worldview, individuals

may attempt to remove the news from their feed, inoculating themselves from any news that is

against their worldview. This is like in media choice, individuals being able to select news

programs that match their beliefs, rather than being forced to observe stories that may challenge

preconceived notions (Forgette, 2019). This research displays through Terror Management

Theory, how this phenomenon may occur through mortality salience, yet more is needed to see

how these effects are present and if framing can impact the levels of DTA and worldview

defense without the presence of death reminders.

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Appendix A

News Articles

| All | Left | Center | **Right** | More Filters ⚏ |

T Tennessee Star | Right | Mixed Factuality

Sarah Sanders Signs Bill to Ban Parole for Rapists and Human Traffickers - Tennessee Star

Republican Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders signed a bill Tuesday to stop criminals in prison for rape, first-degree murder, human trafficking and some other felony offenses committed after 2024 from being released early. The Protect Arkansas Act will make those who commit any of 24 felonies including rape, aggravated robbery and child pornography possession ineligible for parole and require people incarcerated for a variety of other felony crimes li…

2 hours ago   Read Full Article

News Articles

| All | Left | **Center** | Right | More Filters ⚏ |

NWAHOMEPAGE | Center | High Factuality | Media Conglomerate: Nexstar Media Group

Arkansas Gov. Huckabee Sanders signs parole changes into law

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders approved an overhaul of the state's sentencing laws Tuesday that will eliminate parole eligibility for certain violent offenses. The Republican governor signed into law legislation that will require anyone convicted of any of 18 violent offenses, including capital murder and rape, to serve 100% of their sentences. That section takes effect next year, so it doesn't impact people senten…

1 day ago   Read Full Article

News Articles

| All | **Left** | Center | Right | More Filters ⚏ |

AP Associated Press News | Lean Left | High Factuality | Independent: Independent Media

Arkansas Gov. Huckabee Sanders signs parole changes into law

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders approved an overhaul of the state's sentencing laws Tuesday that will eliminate parole eligibility for certain violent offenses.

1 day ago · United States   Read Full Article

For the Left

News stories that had little to no reporting on the Left.

Blindspot: **0% Left** — 7 sources

Anheuser-Busch sheds nearly $5 billion in value since Bud Light's Dylan...

Left	0%
Center	0%
Right	100%

Blindspot: **Only 16% Left** — 20 sources

House Judiciary Committee subpoenas FTC for Twitter investigation documents

Left	16%
Center	31%
Right	53%

For the Right

News stories that had little to no reporting on the Right.

Blindspot: **Only 7% Right** — 24 sources

Feinstein asks for Judiciary replacement after calls for resignation

Left	64%
Center	29%
Right	7%

Blindspot: **Only 11% Right** — 39 sources

Arizona House Expels GOP Lawmaker

Left	61%
Center	28%
Right	11%

Appendix B
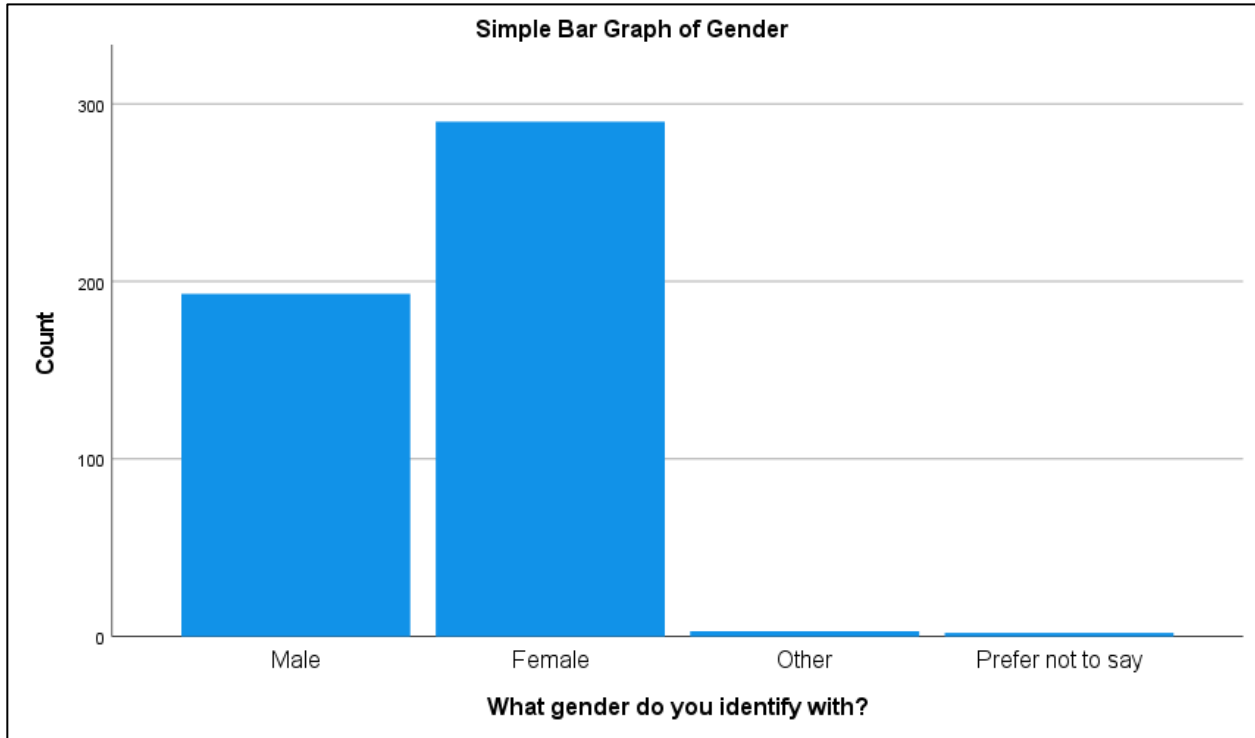
Figure 1: Bar graph representing the distribution of gender for the sample
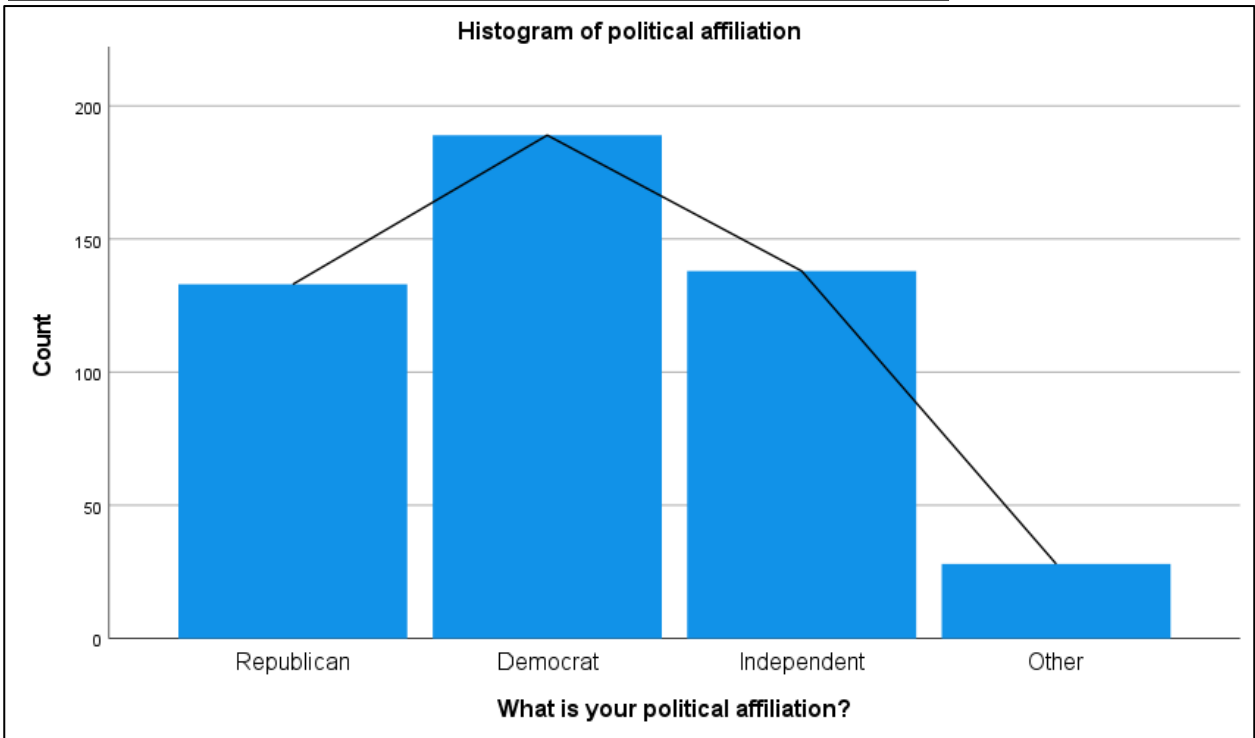
Figure 2: Histogram representing the distribution of political affiliation for the sample
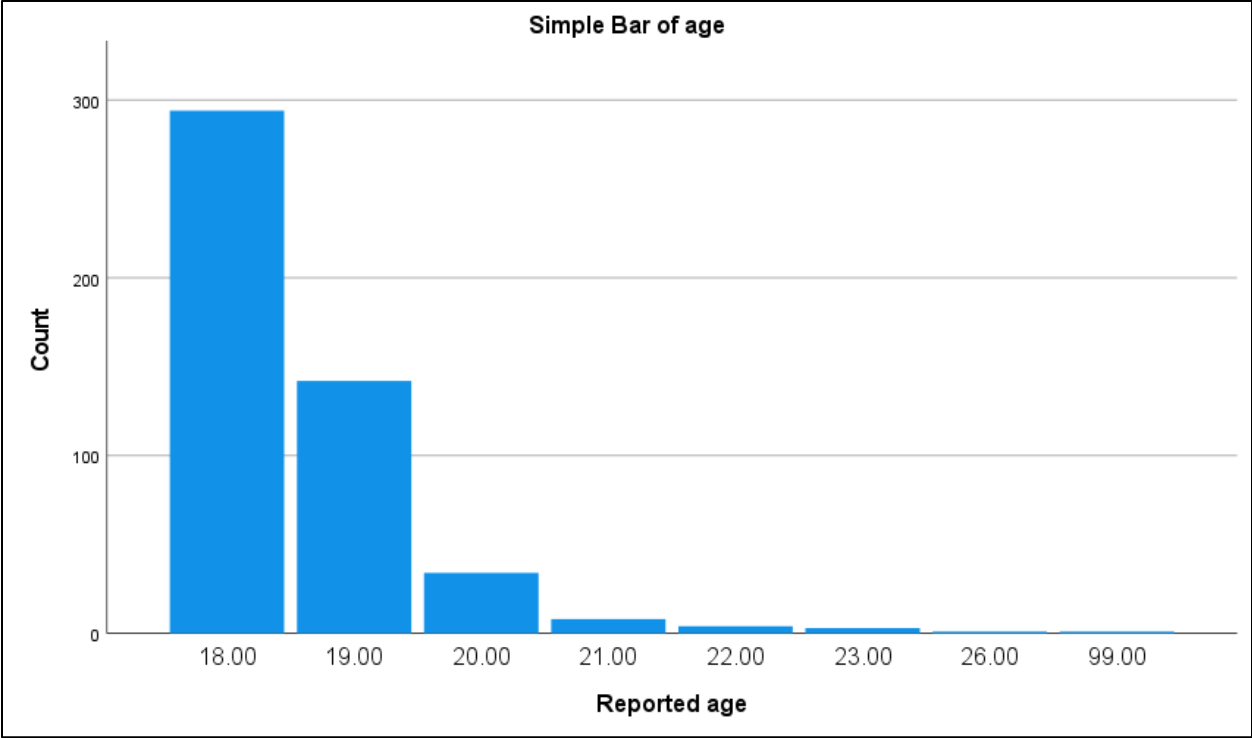
Figure 3: Bar chart representing the distribution of age for the sample.

Appendix C

Demographic

The following questions contain basic demographic information. Please answer as honestly as possible.

Q1 What gender do you identify with?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Other (3) _____

○ Prefer not to say (4)

Q2 What is your age?

_____

Q3 What is your political affiliation?

○ Republican (1)

○ Democrat (2)

○ Independent (3)

○ Other (4) _____

Q4 Drag the slider to the right to indicate the level of views you hold regarding your political ideology.

1 = Extremely Liberal   7 = Extremely Conservative

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Do you have more conservative or liberal views? ()

Q5 If you had to choose, who would you have voted for in the 2020 election?

○ Joe Biden (1)

○ Donald Trump (2)

○ Independent (3)

○ Other (4) _____

Q6 What medium do you usually use to check the news?

	Never (1)	Several times a month (2)	1-2 times a week (3)	3-4 times a week (4)	5-6 times a week (5)	Daily (6)	Hourly (7)
Newspaper (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Television (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Online websites (3) ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Social media (4) ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Other (5) ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Q7 How often do you use each of the following social media platforms to check the news?

	Never (1)	Several times a month (2)	1-2 times a week (3)	3-4 times a week (4)	5-6 times a week (5)	Daily (6)	Hourly (7)
Twitter (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Facebook (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Instagram (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Snapchat (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Reddit (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
TikTok (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix D

Priming Questions

Hiking demographics Please answer as honestly as possible

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
By law, hiking trails should always be marked with threats of danger (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The law should permit hiking trails only where any danger can be accurately accounted for (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
You were pleased with the improvement of hiking trails in multiple National Parks (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Abortion demographic Please answer as honestly as possible

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the women's life is in danger. (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
You were pleased with the overturning of Roe v. Wade (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix E

prolifecampus • Following

MS Controversial – Episodic

Liked by **studentsforlife** and **34,274 others**

prolifecampus What if you were aborted? This is the first question to ask every mother considering an abortion... to think about the fate of their own child sitting in the womb. I once met this 25-week pregnant woman who was considering an abortion. The doctors said her baby would die when it would emerge from the womb, leaving her with the option of completing her pregnancy or terminating the child right then and there. Before I met her, she had been seriously considering ending the child's life. It wasn't until we talked that her mind was changed. The conversation lasted hours, with her repeatedly telling me her decision was to abort the baby. But I wouldn't take no for an answer. It is not her choice whether a human being gets to die. Every human has a right to life. Killing that baby would only set forth more evil and hate in this world. So I pleaded with her, begged her to give her baby a chance to survive. She looked at me with disdain, as I've become so used to. I knew what she was thinking: I'm not her doctor; I don't know the pain or hurt she was feeling. But I stared her in the eyes and asked that question. What if your mother killed you? You wouldn't be able to experience anything... no joy, no excitement, no fear, no anxiety. I told the expectant mother that if her mother decided to do to her as she was planning to do to her unborn child, she would be robbing the world of a gift. The mother stared back, slowly nodding her head. Three months later, I was there in the delivery room with her, staring at her baby, dead in the doctor's arms. We cried and said prayers for the repose of the baby's soul, and, while I felt deep sadness for the loss of her child, I could not help but feel immense love for this woman. Her bravery gave this child a chance, and while in the end, the child still died, it showed that there is still hope for a world without abortion.

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JULY 16

prolifecampus • Following

MS Controversial - Thematic

Liked by **studentsforlife** and **34,274 others**

prolifecampus What if you were aborted? When discussing the morally and totally wrong practice of abortion, it is important to keep that question in mind. For those that argue for the right to kill babies, here are some reasons as to why arguments for abortion make no sense. First, the baby is a human that is being killed. Everyone will die, but everyone should get the chance to live. Killing a baby because it is "your body, your choice" is wrong and immoral because it is not your body, it is a baby's body too. Abortion is the act of killing another human being and everyone agrees that killing another person is wrong. Next, the idea that killing a baby to protect it from living with a disability or foster home is simply cruel. Despite suffering, this does not diminish the value of the unborn child's life. No one's life is less valuable despite the hardships they can endure. Suffering is just a part of life. Third, there is no such thing as a safe abortion. Abortion involves killing an innocent human being. This person has done nothing to deserve death yet there remain people who want to see women have access to abortions wherever they please. When abortion was previously illegal, very few women died from the procedure and former director of the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), Dr. Bernard Nathanson, admitted to lying about the total number of women dying from abortions. Finally, in the case of rape and incest, these are abhorrent and vile acts that one human can do to another. Justice must be served and the victim must be cared for and treated with utmost love and compassion. Despite this, the human life developed is still valuable. Many can agree that rape or any form of sexual abuse is wrong because it infringes upon the rights of another human being. However, abortion is infringing upon the rights of the child within the womb a right to life! One violent and violating act does not justify another. To conclude, I'd like to remind you to think of all the life and experiences you would miss if your mother had aborted you. I pray these arguments serve as a resource in navigating pro-abortion arguments and we will live in a future without abortion.

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JULY 16

hikersafetyexpress • Following

MS Noncontroversial – Episodic

Liked by **nationalparkservice** and **34,274 others**

hikersafetyexpress Hiking can be a leisure activity, but it can also cause a careless death. This is especially true when hiking in bear country. When you start walking around a bear's territory, you lose your place as the top of the food chain, risking becoming a tasty lunch for a large grizzly bear. Two college wrestlers, Brady Cummings and Kendell Lowry nearly suffered this fate while hiking in Wyoming. The two mentioned that they had ventured to get a higher vantage point and found some fresh bear feces. Soon after, a bear came rushing out of the woods before them, attacking them with its razor sharp claws and teeth. One wrestler, Lowry, had to carry his friend down the mountain, drenched in blood, yelling for other nearby hikers to call 911. Cummings was air-lifted via helicopter to a local hospital due to the severity of his injuries. Luckily, he was able to pull through and avoid the grasp of death. This story seems to show how abrupt and sudden nature cn act upon a hiker. These wrestlers came equipped with bear spray, but were unable to even use it, due to the speed of the bear. If it wasn't for Lowry getting loud and attacking the bear that was attacking Cummings, there's a possibility that both of these men could be dead. This wasn't the only bear in the area either. Around 6-10 bears still roam that hiking area, showing how lucky that the wrestlers only had to deal with one. Whenever you go hiking, this is a factor to always pay attention to, as bears can kill quicker than you can run. The best preventative measure is to stay on the trail and keep free-roaming exploration to a minimum. This helps preserve the natural beauty of the forest while also reducing the chance of an encounter with a man-killing bear. Always treat nature with respect and nature will let you avoid the casket for a few years longer.

View all 1,013 comments

JULY 16

hikersafetyexpress • Following

MS Noncontroversial – Episodic

Liked by **nationalparkservice** and **34,274 others**

hikersafetyexpress Hiking can be a leisure activity, but it can also cause a careless death. Each year, there are an estimated 1,000 deaths in U.S. national parks, In recent years, the death rate has continued to rise by about 21%, showing how dangerous hiking can be. The leading cause of death is drowning, which accounts for 33% of all fatalities. It's important to stay vigilant anytime you are in the wilderness, as these are accidental deaths. Most death in the forest is preventable, but there are some unavoidable cases. Sadly, many people tend to utilize the peace of forests as areas to commit suicide. These make up the majority of intentional deaths in the forests, with other intentional deaths coming from homicides. This is a difficult problem to solve, as due to the remoteness of the forest, it can be difficult to determine and stop these intentional deaths. This only makes up a small part of the death population, but is still a sad, horrifying fact about the beauty that is our wilderness. Finally, when choosing where to hike, it is important for you to know what locations offer the most threat. This isn't to say these are the most dangerous locations for a hike, but given the large amount of fatalities, it should be noted where you choose to hike. First, if you go to the Grand Canyon National Park of Arizona, be careful when marveling at the naturally-developed structures. One false step could lead you tumbling down the Canyon, so be careful! Second, Yosemite National Park of California is beautiful enough to be considered a wonder of the world. However, the vast array of wildlife and terrain forces hikers to keep watch their step. One wrong path and all of a sudden, there's a geyser shooting molten hot water up your legs. Finally, the deadliest state for hiking is Arizona, and more specifically, the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. These parks each offer a beautiful and unique hiking experience, but hiking can lead to an untimely death, if not careful. Always treat nature with respect and nature will let you avoid the casket for a few years longer.

View all 1,013 comments

JULY 16

Appendix F

The personality portion of the survey is over. Now, we would like you to complete a few different tasks. As was stated earlier, research suggests that attitudes and perceptions about even very common everyday items may be related to basic personality characteristics. To further examine this idea, we would like you to complete the opinion questionnaires on the following pages with your most natural response. Please follow the instructions provided and complete the questionnaires in the order they are presented.

Opinion Questionnaire 1: Literature

Please read the following short passage from a novel and answer the questions below it.

The automobile swung clumsily around the curve in the red sandstone trail, now a mass of mud. The headlights suddenly picked out in the night—first on one side of the road, then on the other—two wooden huts with sheet metal roofs. On the right near the second one, a tower of course beams could be made out in the light fog. From the top of the tower a metal cable, invisible at its starting-point, shone as it sloped down into the light from the car before disappearing behind the embankment that blocked the road. The car slowed down and stopped a few yards from the huts.

The man who emerged from the seat to the right of the driver labored to extricate himself from the car. As he stood up, his huge, broad frame lurched a little. In the shadow beside the car, solidly planted on the ground and weighed down by fatigue, he seemed to be listening to the idling motor. Then he walked in the direction of the embankment and entered the cone of light from the headlights. He stopped at the top of the slope, his broad back outlined against the darkness. After a moment he turned around. In the light from the dashboard he could see the chauffeur's black face, smiling. The man signaled and the chauffeur turned of the motor. At once a vast cool silence fell over the trail and the forest. Then the sound of the water could be heard.

The man looked at the river below him, visible soley as a broad dark motion flecked with occasional shimmers. A denser motionless darkness, far beyond, must be the other bank. By looking fixedly, however, one could see on that still bank a yellowish light like an oil lamp in the distance. The big man turned back toward the car and nodded. The chauffeur switched off the lights, turned them on again, then blinked them regularly. On the embankment the man appeared and disappeared, taller and more massive each time he came back to life. Suddenly, on the other bank of the river, a lantern held up by an invisible arm back and forth several times. At a final signal from the lookout, the man disappeared into the night. With the lights out, the river was shining intermittently. On each side of the road, the dark masses of forest foliage stood out against the sky and seemed very near. The fine rain that had soaked the trail an hour earlier was still hovering in the warm air, intensifying the silence and immobility of this broad clearing in the virgin forest. In the black sky misty stars flickered.

How do you feel about the overall descriptive qualities of the story?

         1   2   3   4   5   6   7

not at all   somewhat   very

descriptive   descriptive   descriptive

Do you think the author of this story is male or female?

_____ male   _____ female

(**Second delay task**)

Please describe as accurately as possible the Instagram post. Please include the name of the account, the picture presented and the caption provided.

Appendix G

SAMPLE WORD COMPLETION TASK

Please complete the following by filling letters in the blanks to create words. Please fill in the blanks with the first word that comes to mind. Write one letter per blank. Some words may be plural. Thank you.

1. BUR _ _ D   14. CHA _ _

2. PLA _ _   15. KI _ _ ED

3. _ _ OK   16. CL _ _ K

4. WAT _ _   17. TAB _ _

5. DE _ _   18. W _ _ DOW

6. MU _ _   19. SK _ _ L

7. _ _ NG   20. TR _ _

8. B _ T _ LE   21. P _ P _ R

9. M_ J _ R   22. COFF _ _

10. P _ _ TURE   23. _ O _ SE

11. FL _ W _ R   24. POST _ _

12. GRA _ _   25. R _ DI _

13. K _ _GS

Appendix H

WORLDVIEW DEFENSE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How much did you like this post?

  1   2   3   4   5   6   7
not at all   totally

2. How informed did you think this post was?

  1   2   3   4   5   6   7
not at all   totally

3. How knowledgeable did you think the post was?

  1   2   3   4   5   6   7
not at all   totally

4. How much did you agree with the post's opinion?

  1   2   3   4   5   6   7
not at all   totally

5. From your perspective, how true do you think the post's opinion is?

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
not at all   totally

6. After seeing the post, how willing would you be to follow this account?

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
not at all   totally