COMMUNICATION
AND THE CAUSES AND COSTS
OF TERRORISM

A Terror Management Theory Perspective*

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

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

In this chapter, we review TMT and its analysis of intergroup conflict. We then consider several important aspects of terrorism—both from the victim’s and the perpetrator’s perspective—and attempt to show how insights provided by communication theory may be augmented by TMT in empirically substantiated ways. We conclude with a discussion of how the combined insight of communication perspectives and TMT may help us escape further acts of violence and destruction.

A TERROR MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS OF THE DARK SIDE OF HUMAN MOTIVATION

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

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

Becker went on to assert that humans manage to survive in large part because of their uniquely symbolic intelligence and temporally extended self-awareness, but he postulated these sophisticated cognitive capacities also have the unexpected consequence of rendering individuals aware of and sensitive to the certainty of their own death. That is, despite all the sublime joy that can arise from knowing we are alive, there is also the knowledge we are mortal and our lives may well end at any moment for reasons we can no more anticipate than control. According to Becker, these existential concerns conflict with our survival imperative (i.e., with our will to live) and, in the absence of certain compelling psychological protective mechanisms, this knowledge of our own mortality threatens to overwhelm us with paralyzing terror.

TMT acknowledges Becker’s proposition that humans respond to this existential dilemma by constructing or simply subscribing to a cultural worldview (CWV)—a set of consensually held beliefs about the nature of reality that imbues the world and our lives with meaning, order, and permanence. For example, CWVs provide convincing answers to universal cosmological questions about the nature of life (Where did I come from? What am I doing here? Where am I going when I’m no longer here?), and stipulate a set of appropriate social roles and associated requirements for acceptable and valued conduct. Moreover, CWVs provide the promise of immortality, either literal (e.g., Heaven, Paradise, Nirvana) or symbolic (e.g., recognition, fame, prizes, celebrity, and cultural accomplishments) to those who uphold these standards. A similar conclusion was reached by Otto Rank, who also maintained that one’s CWV develops primarily from an inner spiritual need for a sense of meaning found beyond one’s biological or social existence. Thus, the human CWV is “a continuous translation of supernatural conceptions into rational terms” conceived of as “an expression of the irrational self-seeking material immortalization in lasting achievements” (Rank, 1941, p. 84).

In short, our CWV provides us with a coherent and meaningful framework of understanding, one that is useful in organizing our experience and making sense of our existence. Our CWV is also responsible for establishing the standards of value for guiding our actions, and furthermore, for those who meet or exceed the relevant cultural prescriptions, our CWV promises the basis for both symbolic as well as literal forms of immortality.

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

T.M.F. COMMUNICATION AND TRANSMISSION

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

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

TMT, COMMUNICATION, AND REACTIONS TO TERRORISM

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

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

Love of Country

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

From a communication perspective, patriotic symbols constitute some of the central elements within the shared context of meaning Americans use to define, understand, and experience the world. From an early age, Americans are enculturated (i.e., taught at home, in school, and through the media) to associate such symbols—the American flag, Statue of Liberty, bald eagle, Liberty Bell, and the faces of their forefathers—with American strength, pride, permanence, power, and
freedom. Even the words, liberty, justice, and freedom have come to hold a special symbolism uniquely, if not exclusively, applied to American values and the American way of life. Other terms and phrases hold special—almost sacramental—power in our culture as well; for example, democracy, equality, opportunity, family values, freedom of speech, and respect for law and order. For many Americans, these and other such phrases have taken on an almost sacred quality, one with which most people closely identify; hence, they are not to be sullied or casually profaned.

From a TMT perspective, these terms and symbols are integral to the meaningfulness of a CWV capable of allaying concerns about mortality. Evidence in support of these claims derives from experiments demonstrating how subtle reminders of death (i.e., instances of MS) result in especially positive evaluations of those who praise or validate significant aspects of one’s worldview. For example, Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski (1990) had participants briefly contemplate their own death, or another aversive topic, and then, in a different context, evaluate essays that expressed either pro- or anti-American sentiments. As predicted, those given MS expressed especially positive evaluations of the pro-American essay and its author relative to those in control prime conditions. These results indicate positive evaluations for things or people who uphold our CWV are, to a measurable and significant extent, rooted in terror management needs for meaning.

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

Stereotyping

In the wake of 9/11, cultural icons were not the only entities Americans clung to with great vigor, many were especially spirited in their use and application of intercultural stereotypes as well. Although Arabic stereotypes were the most popular, in numerous cases the only requirement for denunciation and rejection was dark skin. Stereotyping in times of conflict has the well-known effect of dehumanizing those depicted and perceived as the enemy, and firm beliefs in impermeable group boundaries help to reduce uncertainty and provide a convenient way to conceptualize others (Allport, 1954). Uncertainty reduction theory (URT; Berger & Calabrese, 1975) similarly assumes people are fundamentally inclined to reduce uncertainty, and predicts how this need affects communication behaviors such as verbal output, nonverbal warmth, information seeking, self-disclosure, similarity, and liking. Heider (1958) and others have posited that stereotypes also manage other threats. According to Heider, people seek to avoid the potential for pain and suffering at the hands of others by remaining vigilant to potential threats and their likely causes. Stereotyping minimally allows the perceiver to identify potential adversaries, if not come to comprehend their intent or motivations.

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

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

Hostility

The prejudicial use of stereotypes would be less lamentable perhaps, were it not for the menacing fact that such crude ways of conceptualizing others are often accompanied by hostility, and at times even violence. In just over 2 years following the attacks on 9/11, the FBI had investigated more than 500 hate crimes
against Arab-, Muslim-, and Sikh Americans (FBI, 2003). Moreover, such antagonism often seemed to be extended to those who shared only a superficial resemblance to the supposed enemy. In the 12 months following the attacks, authorities prosecuted 80 serious hate crimes committed against people of Latin, Indian, and Native American heritage, whose appearances made them convenient targets for 9/11-related retaliatory violence. As an example, Balbir Sodhi, one of many Sikhs of Indian descent mistaken as an Islamic of Arabic descent, was shot and killed in the parking lot of his family's gas station. “My brother was innocent,” Harjit Sodhi asserted after the killing “What was he guilty of—that he looked like Osama bin Laden?” (Parewali, 2001).

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

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

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

Solidarity and In-Group Identity

Strong in-group solidarity is characteristic of many subcultures within the United States. Our close relationships give us a sense of camaraderie and belonging, and this fellowship forms the basis of a social unity that is enhanced through common history and tradition. We form in-group relationships in countless ways based on a range of relations such as sharing the same alma mater, birthplace, workplace, social club, or church. Often the fact that two people are simply from the same school or hometown is enough to connect them with an immediate and warm bond of camaraderie. These connections grow stronger as we subsequently share activities and interactions, particularly if we experience hardships together, where, in many cases, the solidarity we feel and the bonds we form may last entire lifetimes.

Durkheim theorized there are two kinds of social solidarity: mechanical solidarity, which connects people through similarities of beliefs, positions, and behaviors, and organic solidarity, which organizes social structure through differences and functional interdependencies. Primary groups are characterized by close relationships among members, where the relationships can be either positive or negative, and members are committed and connected to each other for some clear purpose. Secondary groups are larger collections made up of less personal relationships. In the wake of 9/11, Americans exhibited a renewed sense of primary group identification with fellow Americans. Relationships within the community, work, and school that were merely instrumental or even negative were, over the course of a few days, transformed into a strong superordinate group identity: “Americans.”

One basic assumption in social science is that comparison processes are central to personal identity and the ways we connect and interact with others. Festinger’s (1954) theory of social comparison and Merton’s (1968) work on reference groups offer excellent accounts of this principle. Much of the empirical research on intergroup conflict concludes that ethnocentrism, in-group bias, and prejudice are the prevailing norms on which identity-related discriminations are made. More specifically, there is strong evidence that in-group love and out-group hate are reciprocally related (Brewer, 1999). On the other hand, Allport (1954)
maintained that in-group loyalty is not necessarily related to out-group hostility, although he argued hostility toward out-group members (or at least the recognition of a common enemy) can increase in-group cohesion (see the section on Transformation and Elevation).

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

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

In-group Solidarity and the Media

Along with achieving an accurate (or at least, functional) perception of the world, we need to be liked, to achieve the affection and respect of others, and to develop a sense of belonging to social groups. Thus, one of the primary motivational forces behind human behavior is driven by our need for affiliation. TMT shares a symbolic interactionist perspective (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934) in suggesting others in our social environment provide the context to understand meaning and negotiate our collective worldview. With regard to understanding how the mass media can be used in addressing these needs, Blumler and Katz (1974) and others have adopted a uses-and-gratifications (U&G) approach that has stimulated a considerable literature addressing the utility of various mass-mediated channels, particularly television. Following the symbolic interactionist notion of a "looking glass self," U&G emphasizes that reasoning, the self, and identity emerge from the dynamic interaction between the individual and the social environment, and it highlights the importance of the media in these developments. Specifically, the media foster growth by offering the perspective of a "generalized other," assisting individuals in perceiving and evaluating themselves and their behaviors. That is, in addition to finding out about relevant events and conditions in the world and in our immediate surroundings, we use the media to gain insights into ourselves by seeking to identify with valued others, using them as models of normative behavior, and as reinforcement for our personal values (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972). Similar to TMT, Blumler and Katz (1974) noted that these processes are motivated. Specifically, the developing self’s use of media to comprehend the culture ultimately provides a sense of security through identification with larger social meaning systems.

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

Television may also afford us a useful method of anxiety reduction by creating grounds for both affiliation and discrimination. Other equally therapeutic uses of the media may be just as important, for instance, television has the ability to relax us with an intrinsic sense of cultural and aesthetic enjoyment, punctuating our time and activities with background noise and companionship. Yet, from a
thought of as morally disgusting heavily depends on social learning processes and enculturation (Rozin & Fallon, 1987).

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

In a series of studies, Goldenberg and colleagues (Goldenberg et al., 2002; Goldenberg, McCoy, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000; Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, McCoy, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999) demonstrated the role of terror management concerns in our negative emotional reactions to the body, especially as we experience anxiety and guilt. For example, Goldenberg et al. (2001) found that disgust led people to respond with increased disgust sensitivity to a variety of disgust elicitors, especially those stimuli most directly related to the threat of "creatureliness" (e.g., feces). In a second study, Goldenberg et al. found that a negative prime resulted in a heightened preference for an essay that distinguished humans from other animals. More recently, Cox, Pyszczynski, and Goldenberg (2002) demonstrated the accessibility of death-related thoughts increase when people are asked to think about their own bodily products and functions.

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

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

Why would anyone willingly vaporize him- or herself against the side of a building, or strap on a bomb belt and detonate it in a crowd of innocent civilians? Such behavior appears to be jarringly anomalous from almost every perspective focusing on adaptive human motivation. Furthermore, even a cursory historical analysis would suggest such behaviors are unlikely to result in constructive cultural or social change. Understanding these sorts of actions requires a conception of human motivation focusing beyond the practical and the rational. In this section, we complement the depth of analyses on the political and economic antecedents of terrorism by showing how the interface of communication and TMT can illuminate some of the psychological dynamics that culminate in terrorist violence. Specifically, we discuss TMT as a framework for understanding how communication behaviors related to affiliation, ideological maintenance, and social influence might motivate a person to commit the ultimate act of annihilation in the name of terror.

Terrorism: A Unique Brand of Heroism

What is the appeal of membership in a terrorist group? How are the young would-be terrorists—boys as young as 7 or 8, in some cases—drawn to the radical madrassas (Islamic seminaries) in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan? From our perspective, the appeal of any extreme group with a clear identity and a very straightforward and rigid value system lies in its provision of cosmic significance for people whose psychological needs are not otherwise being met. Within the context of certain Islamic communities, where material conditions are poor, Arab males have very limited modes of acquiring and maintaining self-esteem. Furthermore, in places like Saudi Arabia, where the affluence of the minority elite makes the poverty and desolation of the masses that much more dramatic, most common, lower class citizens lack basic civil rights and are routinely sentenced to horrible disfigurement or execution for seemingly minor transgressions (at least from a Western perspective, e.g., theft, adultery, or “fornication”). Treated as rabble, with no opportunity to participate in local politics or exercise any form of civic power, these people lack any real sense of freedom or self-determination, nor do they enjoy any sense of justice or recourse to law (Huntington, 2001; Zakaria, 2001).

For such disaffected Arab males, extremist Islamic camps, such as the Afghan Taliban or the Wahabi religious sect (a radical Jihad-preaching faction advocating an archaic form of Islam), are very attractive in their vilification of the West. Discontent with life is a natural breeding ground for illusions of grandiosity, superiority, power, and what Erich Fromm termed group narcissism. According to Fromm (1973), group narcissism is a feeling of group cohesion and importance that provides a sense of value to those who have few other reasons to feel worthwhile. Therefore, even the least respected member of the group can sustain the belief that “I am a part of the most wonderful group in the world. I, who in reality am a worm, become a giant through belonging to the group” (p. 230). Alienation from the broader culture can thus increase the attractiveness of subcultures that promise a grandiose vision and clearly defined routes to personal worth. From a TMT perspective, when the psychological needs of self-esteem and meaning are left unmet by the social order, the heightened potential for anxiety provides a powerful motivation to join what is widely perceived as a cosmically significant opportunity for personal self-worth. Supporting this claim is TMT evidence showing those who have low self-esteem or who are prone to negative affective states (e.g., depressives and neurotics) exhibit distinctly high worldview defense (Goldenberg, McCoy, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000; Simon, Greenberg, Harmon-Jones, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1996). Against a backdrop of pervasive poverty and deprivation, nothing could be more comforting for a potentially fanatical, fundamentalist conscript than to feel he or she is engaged in an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil.

Many communication factors involved in socialization contribute to the almost divine allure surrounding these groups. Like popular music and sports stars in America, posters and trading cards of martyrs adorn the bedroom walls of young boys across the Middle East. Money is funneled from various disaffected groups within these countries to the fundamentalist religious factions, which in turn provide the primary and sometimes sole source of education to youth who are particularly vulnerable to the ideologically explicit commands for intolerance. Furthermore, much of the mass media in the Middle East portray terrorists as martyrs, and martyrs as national heroes. Even when other world media outlets depict terrorists as criminals, the exposure and notoriety galvanizes group solidarity, and their infamy incites feelings of purpose and reason. Furthermore, a spiral of silence may encourage others of more moderate beliefs to remain mute in the face of further indoctrination as extremist positions exert more socializing pressures on a population pushed to find strength and spirit through an exceedingly venal ideology.

An unmet need for self-esteem can only increase the attractiveness of an ideology that offers a clearly defined route to self-worth, a guarantee of martyrdom, and glory through inclusion in a cosmically significant battle against evil. In short, radical Islamic sects offer a refuge from anomic, a vehicle for meeting the psychological needs of an oppressed population, and the means for achieving high self-esteem through heroic efforts aimed at the destruction of anything associated with the profane values of the infidel. As long as extremist, religious fanaticism is capable of affording the prospect of a valuable, enduring, meaningful, virtuous, and death-transcending belief system, there will continue to be those drawn to terrorism’s radical vision of destruction.
AMERICA, THE TARGET

Opposed to their definition...

But the larger issue here is why do the external forces...
CONFLICT IN THE FACE OF DEATH

AVERTING INTERROGATION

It is in the human being to transcend local and static boundaries, but also to respect
of the immediate and the passing. When we do not respect the boundaries of the
immediate and the passing, we may be losing the essence of the immediate and the
passing. It is in the human being to transcend local and static boundaries, but also to
respect the immediate and the passing. When we do not respect the boundaries of
the immediate and the passing, we may be losing the essence of the immediate
and the passing.

American culture is fundamentally a product of culture, a product of the Great
Calm, and it is in the human being to transcend local and static boundaries, but also to
respect the immediate and the passing. When we do not respect the boundaries of the
immediate and the passing, we may be losing the essence of the immediate and the
passing. It is in the human being to transcend local and static boundaries, but also to
respect the immediate and the passing. When we do not respect the boundaries of
the immediate and the passing, we may be losing the essence of the immediate
and the passing.

In summary, according to Johnson and Desai (2007) in the company

The world is a place of beauty. In it, the only power capable of bringing such
beauty into existence is the power of imagination. When we imagine a deep
understanding of the natural world, we are able to create something
beyond our own imagination. When we imagine a deep understanding of the
natural world, we are able to create something beyond our own imagination.

In this section, we explore the concept of trafficking 113


We're all in the same boat.

Transformation and Evolution:

We are in essence, functionally equivalent to one another. If we are to move forward, we cannot do so without understanding each other's perspectives. The process of transformation and evolution is not linear; it involves cycles of growth, renewal, and adaptation. In order to embrace this reality, we must first acknowledge our shared humanity and work towards a common understanding.

Communication and Cognition:

The world we live in is complex and interconnected. Our ability to communicate effectively is crucial to our survival and success. However, effective communication requires more than just speaking; it involves active listening, empathy, and understanding. As we navigate through this process, we must be open to new ideas and perspectives, and willing to adapt accordingly.

We must also recognize the importance of culture and its role in shaping our worldview. Our cultural backgrounds significantly influence how we perceive and interpret the world around us. It is essential to be aware of these cultural differences and to approach them with respect and curiosity.

Allying these commitments, social opportunities will be different, no two opportunities are the same.
Making the Most of Our Individual Differences

(TIP: Communication and Interaction

Miller & Landau

(1992)
AND EFFECIENCE MOTION

VESTED INTEREST

J.J. (1961) defined 'vested interest as the degree of vested control of executive compensation'. Internal control, being the degree of vested control of executive compensation, plays an important role in shaping decision making and organizational behavior. Vesting is a critical factor in determining the alignment of interests between shareholders and executives, thereby influencing executive behavior and organizational outcomes. By aligning the interests of executives with those of shareholders, vesting can help enhance organizational performance and efficiency. However, if vesting is not properly designed or implemented, it may lead to conflicts of interest and adverse consequences for the company. Therefore, understanding the role of vesting in executive compensation is crucial for effective governance and strategic decision making.
positive psychology

psychologists (Zimbardo, 1969, 1972) who believe that psychology is the study of happiness, love, and personal growth. This perspective suggests that psychologists should focus on understanding and promoting positive aspects of human behavior. The concept of positive psychology was developed by Martin Seligman, who defined it as the science of what makes life worth living.

The field of positive psychology aims to understand and promote the positive aspects of human experience, such as well-being, resilience, and flourishing. It has been influential in shaping the way psychologists approach their work and has led to the development of new interventions and therapies for promoting mental health and well-being.

One of the key contributions of positive psychology is the development of strengths-based approaches to therapy. This approach emphasizes the strengths and resources that individuals already possess, rather than focusing on their deficits. It encourages individuals to identify and build upon their strengths, leading to increased resilience and well-being.

Another important aspect of positive psychology is the promotion of positive emotions. Research has shown that positive emotions, such as joy, gratitude, and love, are associated with improved physical and mental health. Positive psychology interventions often focus on increasing positive emotions, such as through gratitude exercises, mindfulness practices, and other therapeutic techniques.

Positive psychology has also contributed to the development of new therapies, such as positive psychotherapy and positive psychology interventions. These therapies are designed to promote positive changes in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and have been shown to be effective in improving mental health and well-being.

Overall, the field of positive psychology has had a significant impact on the way psychologists approach their work and has led to the development of new interventions and therapies for promoting mental health and well-being. It has helped to shift the focus from pathology to well-being, and has contributed to a more optimistic and hopeful view of human nature and potential.
REFERENCES

ENDNOTES