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## Illegal immigration and worldview defense: Distaste for human migration in the context of TMT

John Matthew Bergen  
*University of Nevada Las Vegas*

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ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION AND WORLDVIEW DEFENSE:  
DISTASTE FOR HUMAN MIGRATION  
IN THE CONTEXT OF TMT

by

John Matthew Bergen

Bachelor of Science  
University of Phoenix  
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

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Joel D. Lieberman, Committee Chair

Terance D. Miethe, Committee Member

Deborah Shaffer, Committee Member

David Dickens, Graduate Faculty Representative

Ronald Smith, Ph. D., Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies  
and Dean of the Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

**Illegal Immigration and Worldview Defense:  
Distaste for Human Migration in the Context of TMT**

by

John Matthew Bergen

Dr. Joel D. Lieberman, Examination Committee Chair  
Associate Professor of Criminal Justice  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This study examines the impact of mortality salience on opinions about illegal immigrants. Participants were asked to write about their own death or a control subject and then presented with scenarios of illegal immigration to the United States. The scenarios included a defendant who was either of Latin American or European origin and had or had not learned to speak English. However, the European condition had to be dropped due to unreliable identification of the origin of the European defendant. The results indicate that mortality salience caused an increase in the preference for deportation of an illegal immigrant who was perceived to have had a high level of contribution to the economy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
LIST OF TABLES .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Illegal Immigration.....	1
Justifications for Controlling Migration.....	2
Terror Management Theory.....	6
The Threat of Immigrants .....	8
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	9
Death and Cultural Worldview .....	9
Group Interactions.....	16
The Current Study .....	20
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....	22
Sample.....	22
Experiment Website .....	22
Procedure.....	24
Measures .....	26
IRB Approval .....	29
CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS .....	30
Removal of Country of Origin Condition .....	30
English as a Measure of Assimilation .....	32
Results for Adoption of English Hypothesis .....	32
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS .....	39
Discussion .....	39
Limitations and Recommendations.....	44
Conclusion.....	45
APPENDIX I EXPERIMENT SCENARIOS.....	46
APPENDIX II DEPENDENT MEASURE INSTRUMENTATION .....	49
REFERENCES .....	52
VITA .....	64

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Independent and Dependent Variables Used in the Experiment .....	26
Table 2	Mean results for deportation variable (DV1).....	33
Table 3	Deportation (DV1) means for levels of perceived contribution .....	34
Table 4	Deportation (DV1) means showing significant pair-wise comparisons .....	35
Table 5	Mean results for strength variable (DV4) .....	36
Table 6	Mean results for strength (DV4) across levels of contribution .....	37
Table 7	Mean results for fine (DV2) and sentence (DV3) variables .....	38

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Terror Management Theory (TMT) posits that all human beings exist in a constant state of existential crisis that causes them to develop a psychological buffer against the inevitability of death. The primary component of this buffer is a cultural worldview that provides a sense of order, meaning, and permanence to people's lives. When this worldview is threatened, people engage in a defense that is intended to protect their psychological equanimity. This thesis uses Terror Management Theory in an experimental setting to explore the perceptions Americans have of illegal immigrants of different national origins and with different levels of assimilation to American culture.

#### Illegal Immigration

In March, 2005, 78% of the 11.1 million illegal immigrants estimated to be living in the United States were from Mexico and other Latin American countries (Passel, 2006). This fact has not been lost on the American consciousness. The issue of illegal immigration vaulted to the forefront of the national debate with the introduction of the “Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act” in the US Senate in May of 2005. This bill attempted to provide what has come to be known as *comprehensive immigration reform*. Then President George W. Bush addressed the country in support of immigration reform (“Bush: U.S.,” 2006), but lawmakers were unable to come to a consensus (Rogers & O'Connor, 2008). The issue has proven deeply divisive, with supporters arguing the current immigration system is ineffective at controlling migration and their opponents claiming the proposed legislation provides amnesty for lawbreakers (“Bush calls,” 2006).

The issue remains unresolved, and like his predecessor, President Obama is expected to address immigration reform during his first year in office (Preston, 2009). Meanwhile, the crime of “reentry of a deported alien” ( 8 USC § 1326) has climbed from the third to the first most frequently prosecuted charge in US District Courts (“Prosecutions,” 2009).

Although comprehensive reform would certainly affect migrants of every nationality, the current immigration debate in the United States revolves primarily around those of Latin American origin. This is evidenced by the pro-immigration demonstrations held by members the Hispanic community (“Immigration issue,” 2006; “Protesters across,” 2008) and the rhetoric of public commentators (Coulter, 2006; Dobbs, 2007). Further evidence can be found in the demographic split of public opinion regarding immigration and illegal immigrants, which largely occurs down racial lines. Hispanic Americans are far less likely to support immigration enforcement efforts than non-Hispanics (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007). Additionally, a plurality of Hispanic Americans have favorable views of illegal immigrants (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007), while the majority of Americans, overall, have negative attitudes towards illegal immigration (Negative Population Growth, 2006). For many Americans, the concern surrounding immigration is specifically directed at those considered to be illegal. People who migrate to the United States through extralegal means are considered to be criminals who have deliberately chosen to break American law (“Bush calls,” 2006; Chomsky, 2007; Coulter, 2006; Dobbs, 2007).

### Justifications for Controlling Migration

Even under the auspices of immigration reform, immigration legislation is primarily concerned with controlling who may or may not migrate into the country. Under current

US law, 8 USC § 1325, it is illegal for a person who is not a US citizen to enter the United States, except as authorized by the federal government. The words of this statute are what create the crime of illegal immigration. This abstract concept of regulating the physical space people may occupy on Earth has become so fundamental, so ingrained in US society that the violation of these provisions is considered a significant moral infraction. However, while it is not uncommon for modern societies to control the outsiders who may exist among them, it is important to remember there is little more than an arbitrary delineation between legal and illegal immigrants (Coutin, 2005).

The question then becomes why is it necessary for countries to regulate who may cross their borders. In a post-9/11 US, the fear of terrorism is a factor (Rodriguez, 2008), but this a single issue that has only recently climbed to the pinnacle of American consciousness, and countries have been controlling migration for generations. Additionally, terrorism might help explain why a fence is being built on the border between the US and Mexico, but it does not explain why no such fence is being built along the border with Canada. Taylor (2005) identifies four broad justifications commonly used for migration control. Among these are the preservation of culture, the protection of the rule of law, the protection of economic prosperity and the rights of citizens, and the defense of the theoretical foundations of democracy. In practice, however, these broad categories give way to specific concerns. Chomsky (2007) discusses 21 of what she calls *myths* about immigration. These myths represent contemporary concerns and popular notions in the US consciousness that are used in the argument against immigration, both legal and illegal. These concerns can be placed into

three categories: immigrants hurt the economy, they increase the crime rate, and they do not assimilate into American culture.

### *Economics*

Research indicates that the economic arguments against immigration are to some degree unfounded. Immigration is considered to be an economic problem because immigrants are believed to drive down wages for unskilled workers and to cause a drain on public services (Chomsky, 2007). Cooper (2007) provides an example of how illegal immigrants can become an economic underclass that is exploited for cheap labor. Despite such exploitations, both Card (2006) and Kochhar (2006) found that migrant populations do not seem to have a significant impact on the employment opportunities of low-skilled native born workers. In terms of services, Camarota (2004) concluded that the low education levels of most illegal immigrants created a net deficit in the costs of the government services they consume. However, Chomsky (2007) argues that these costs are offset over time by the offspring of immigrants, who on average achieve the same level of education as any native born. This argument is supported to some degree by Card (2005), who found the children of immigrants do not differ significantly from the children of native born citizens in their educational achievements.

### *Crime*

The available research seems to be more conclusive in the relationship between immigration and crime rates. On an international level, Preston and Perez (2006) argue that, while immigrants are overrepresented in arrest and incarceration rates, the reasons for this are due to their lower socioeconomic status rather than due to an increased tendency towards criminal activity in immigrant populations. Likewise, Butcher and

Piehl (2005) determined that immigrants are significantly less likely to engage in criminal activity, and Lee, Martinez, and Rosenfeld (2001) concluded that immigration does not increase homicide rates. Reid, Weiss, and Adelman (2005) also found that immigration does not increase crime and that it may actually cause a decrease in crime under certain circumstances. Unfortunately, these studies do not account for the crime that is committed by illegal immigrants by virtue of residing in the country without official authorization. Because it deals with the criminalization of human behavior and the responsibility of people to obey the law, this topic is largely philosophical, which makes it difficult to address through empirical research. To avoid the philosophical question, this research will only consider illegal immigrants by the totality of empirical harm they cause to society.

#### *Assimilation*

The remaining issue is that of assimilation. Immigrant populations are accused of corrupting their host nations by failing to adopt both the language and culture (Chomsky, 2007). To the contrary, Espenshade and Fu (1997) found that, while there are many factors that influence the degree to which an immigrant will eventually adopt English, fears that immigrants are not adopting English are unnecessarily exaggerated. Alba, Lutz, and Stults (2002) similarly determined that the descendants of modern immigrants typically speak only English by the third generation, which is similar to the adoption patterns of earlier immigrant groups. Card (2005) measures assimilation through the educational achievements of the first generation children of immigrant parents and finds that these people, in general, are fully assimilated.

The available evidence does not support using economics, crime, and assimilation as justification for migration control, and it calls into question the veracity of the arguments about the negative effects of immigration. While immigration certainly is not free from challenges, the perceived need to strictly control migrant populations appears to be exaggerated, as does the personification of illegal immigrants as villainous law breakers. But, if Americans' professed justifications against immigration fail to stand up to scrutiny, what are the true motivations for such sentiments? One possible explanation can be found in Terror Management Theory.

### Terror Management Theory

In his treatise *The Denial of Death*, Becker (1973) posited that human beings exist in a constant state of existential crisis that impacts the way they conduct their lives. This crisis arises out of a juxtaposition of instinct and intelligence that seems to be unique to the human condition. Human beings, like all creatures on Earth, possess a survival instinct that compels them to stay alive. This instinct comes from the biological necessity to continue life in order to propagate the species. However, human beings are also endowed with the capacity for abstract thought, which sets them apart from the animal world. Humans are self-aware, and they have the ability to think both spatially and temporally. They are aware that all living things will eventually die and that they too will some day cease to exist. Becker calls this paradox “individuality with finitude,” saying

Man has a symbolic identity that brings him sharply out of nature. He is a symbolic self, a creature with a name, a life history. He is a creator with a mind that soars out to speculate about atoms and infinity, who can place himself

imaginatively at a point in space and contemplate bemusedly his own planet. This immense expansion, this dexterity, this ethereality, this self consciousness gives to man literally the status of a small god in nature.... Yet, at the same time,... man is a worm and food for worms. This is the paradox: he is out of nature and hopelessly in it (p. 26).

Not only are humans aware they will eventually die, they also understand their deaths can come suddenly and unexpectedly. This results in what threatens to be a paralyzing terror of the meaninglessness and futility of life. Yet human beings are able to engage in productive existence because of the psychological constructs they use to create semblance of meaning and permanence in their lives (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2002). Culture is the framework humans use to organize the world and assign meaning to the behaviors and actions of individuals, and it provides metric against which an individual can measure his or her contribution to the world (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2003). By subscribing to cultural worldviews, people *know* what is important in life and what it takes to live up to those expectations. This allows for the creation of seemingly meaningful lives through the pursuit and achievement of the priorities set by each cultural worldview. It is this ability to create purpose, meaning, and permanence in existence that gives people the capacity to psychologically deny the reality of eventual death.

However, a cultural worldview must be protected for it to be effective. One must believe completely in a worldview for it to provide an effective psychological buffer against the terror of death. Any evidence indicating to a person that his or her worldview may be wrong is a reminder of the true futility of existence. Therefore, when a person

encounters people with different worldviews, the resulting conflicts threaten to undermine the person's cultural beliefs, thus weakening the ability of those beliefs to serve in a death denying capacity (Pyszczynski et al., 2001; Solomon et al. 2003). To counter these effects, people subconsciously engage in responses that are designed to restore their psychological equanimity. To state it simply, according to Terror Management Theory, the negative reactions people have to conflicting worldviews are defense mechanisms that are specifically intended to reduce or eliminate those worldview threats.

### The Threat of Immigrants

It is a logical extension of Terror Management Theory to suspect that incoming migrants might threaten the worldviews of the inhabitants of the host nation. In practice, great lengths are taken to control the perceived threat that is posed by immigrants and immigration. Nations arbitrarily categorize migrants into those who are wanted and unwanted (Chomsky, 2007; Coutin, 2005), they establish broad enforcement efforts to keep unwanted migrants outside of their borders (Taylor, 2005; Weber & Bowling, 2004), and they ensure authorized immigrants live up to certain standards by allowing for the deportation of those who stray (Chapkis, 2003; Davenport, 2006; Welch, 2003). Sometimes these efforts are conducted with unnecessary levels of force that are not matched in the treatment of the native population (Phillips, Rodriguez, & Hagan, 2003). They are also frequently targeted at specific racial minorities (Romero, 2006). As discussed above, if the standard justifications for these actions are largely unfounded, is it possible these responses can be attributed in some way to Terror Management Theory?

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Death and Cultural Worldview

At its core, Terror Management Theory posits that culture is nothing more than an abstraction of the human need to counterbalance the meaninglessness of a life based solely on physical existence. In short, culture provides a psychological protection against death by creating a reality that transcends the physical. Because of this, human consciousness exists almost exclusively in a symbolic world that provides the context for meaningful existence, including a structure for day-to-day life and the potential for both symbolic and literal immortality. However, culture is only real and meaningful to the extent that people, both collectively and individually, believe it is real and meaningful. In the absence of strong of cultural beliefs, people have no choice but to fall back to the terrifying truth of a short and meaningless physical life. In fact, people are almost constantly surrounded by reminders that threaten the stability of the cultural realities they have imagined. Death and disability are obvious examples of the true human fragility. In addition, human beings are almost unimaginably complex, and the great variety of realities they create for themselves are bound to conflict and undermine each other. This environment forces people to be constantly vigilant in protecting the cultural worldviews they have adopted. If they do not, they will be forced to face the reality of death.

A great body of research has been produced that supports the basic tenets of Terror Management Theory (Pyszczynski et al., 2002; Solomon et al. 2003). Early research into TMT tested the hypothesis that making people think about their own deaths would cause them to reinforce their psychological barrier against mortality by defending their cultural

worldview (Greenberg et al., 1990; Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989). If culture truly is the product of the human fear of death, it would seem logical to expect that reminding someone about death would cause that person to go to greater lengths to protect his or her worldview. In these experiments, participants were given personality questionnaires that asked them to think and write either about their own deaths or, in most of the control conditions, about a control subject. Writing about death was intended to induce a state of mortality salience (MS), which is simply a heightened awareness of death. The participants were then presented with situations that would either challenge or reinforce their cultural values and asked to make determinations regarding the people involved in those situations.

The results of these studies indicate that people who are mortality salient go to further lengths to protect their worldviews. In the first TMT study, judges were asked to set bail for a person accused of prostitution (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). This situation was designed with the assumption that judges would believe in law and order as part of their cultural worldview, so being faced with a law breaker would represent a challenge to their psychological defense against death. The study found that judges who were MS set significantly higher bail amounts than judges in the control group, supporting the hypothesis.

#### *Worldview Allegiance*

Research has also shown that people display greater allegiance to their cultural beliefs when in the state of mortality salience. In another of the very early TMT experiments, Greenberg et al. (1990) found that MS caused positive reactions to people who praised the participants' cultural worldviews and negative reactions to those who criticized the

participants' worldviews. Mortality salience also caused Christian participants to more positively evaluate a fellow Christian and more negatively evaluate a Jewish person. Greenberg, Simon, Porteus, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1995) tested the effects mortality salience would have on the treatment of cultural icons. After a MS or control treatment participants were asked to perform problem-solving tasks that could only be completed by sifting ink through an American flag in one case and using a crucifix to hammer a nail into a wall in the other. Those who were in the MS condition took much longer to complete the task than those in the control.

In another study, Hirschberger, Ein-Dor, and Almakais (2008) found that mortality salience would increase charitable donations to pro-worldview causes, but that donations would be significantly reduced when the charitable causes reminded people of their physical fragility. Specifically, participants in the MS condition would donate more money to support a person who was able to walk but less money to someone in a wheelchair. Mortality salience also made people less likely become an organ donor. Similarly, in Jonas, Schimel, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (2002), mortality salient participants were more supportive of charities they deemed important. In one of the two published studies, reminders of death caused Americans to donate more money to charities that supported an American cause. Willingness to give money to pro-worldview charities may be particularly significant because mortality salience also tends to increase people's desire for monetary and material wealth (Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004). In a reversal of the worldview allegiance concept, Schimel, Hayes, Williams, and Jahrig (2007) found that a meaningful threat to one's cultural worldview would increase the accessibility of death-related thoughts in participants.

### *Worldview Defense*

As explored in the first empirical studies of Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1990; Rosenblatt et al., 1989), worldview defense is a central component of TMT research. By subconsciously engaging in behavior that reinforces a personal cultural worldview in the face of a threat to those beliefs, people are able to protect their psychological equanimity and retain a buffer against the terror of death. Research indicates that these defenses can manifest themselves both attitudinally and behaviorally and that the implementation of one response can eliminate the need for engaging in others (McGregor et al., 1998; Pyszczynski et al., 2001; Solomon et al., 2003). In a general sense, worldview defenses come in five varieties, including adopting all or part of the opposing beliefs through conversion or accommodation, eliminating the presence of the threat through assimilation or annihilation, or simply denying the veracity of the threat through derogation (Pyszczynski et al, 2001).

In a study that was similar to Greenberg et al. (1990), Arndt, Greenberg, Schimel, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (2002a) again found that participants in the MS condition would defend their worldview by more favorably evaluating those who praised their cultural beliefs and more negatively evaluating those who challenged those beliefs. In another study, mortality salient participants who were forced to conform to others engaged in greater worldview defense when evaluating an anti-American essay (Routledge, Arndt and Sheldon, 2004). Participants in this experiment were required to design a t-shirt to either please others or to reflect shared values. While the act of creativity, itself, reduced the need for worldview defense, the exercise of conforming to others increased the level of worldview defense in a way that sharing values did not. In

an example of a behavioral rather than a attitudinal response to a worldview threat, mortality salient participants in McGregor et al. (1998) doled out very large doses of extremely spicy hot sauce that they believed were to be consumed by a worldview-threatening individual.

Other research into worldview defense has revealed variability in what it takes to induce mortality salience and what aspects of their worldviews people will defend. Fritsche, Jonas, and Fankhanel (2008) found that worldview defense was not increased in participants who thought about a self-inflicted death but only in those who thought about dying in a way in manner in which the participants had no control, described by the researchers as a pure-death scenario. These results seem to support the basic TMT concept that one of the things that makes death so terrible is its potential suddenness and unpredictability. In Jonas et al. (2008), the conflicting nature of cultural values were explored. In four separate experiments, the researchers discovered that priming mortality salient participants with support for a particular aspect of their cultural worldviews would cause an increased defense of the primed perspective. For example, in one of the experiments it was found that priming mortality salient participants with words such as *forbidden*, *control*, and *security* would cause them to recommend harsher bonds for an illegal prostitute. The bond amounts were significantly reduced for those participants who were primed with words that encouraged benevolence. Finally, in Landau, Greenberg, and Sullivan (2008) the findings indicated that mortality salient participants would indirectly defend their worldviews by avoiding self-enhancement when it would conflict with the values portrayed by figures who could be considered cultural authorities.

### *Mitigating the Need for Worldview Defense*

The degree to which a person is compelled to react to a worldview threat can be moderated by other factors. For instance, if worldview defense is a reaction that is specifically intended to reduce or eliminate a perceived threat, people who are reasonably secure in their cultural worldviews and relatively free from anxiety about death should be less susceptible to the threats presented by opposing cultural beliefs. Research has shown that high self-esteem is a factor that reliably mitigates the need to defend one's worldview (Greenberg, 2008; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004; Schmeichel et al., 2009). This is true not only because self-esteem is a natural buffer against anxiety but also due to the fact that, while culture is the framework humans use to organize the world and assign meaning to the behaviors and actions of individuals, self-esteem is the reflection of a person's perceived value to the cultural of which he or she is a member. Greenberg (2008) discusses that since we are all aware that physical death is factually inevitable, “our ultimate security therefore depends on being worthy of literal immortality (e.g., as good Christians) or symbolic immortality through valued roles, attributes, and enduring achievements” (p. 50).

Supporting these claims, the researchers in Harmon-Jones et al. (1997) found that high self-esteem among MS participants mitigated the need to engage in a worldview defense. This was true both in situations in which the participants had naturally high self-esteem and when the researchers manipulated the participants' self-esteem by providing them with artificially positive or negative feedback. These results seem to confirm the findings from Greenberg et al. (1992), in which a manipulated increase in self-esteem reduced the feelings of anxiety in participants who were exposed to reminders about

death. Anxiety was also tested in Greenberg et al. (2003), which found that participants who were given a placebo that purported to block anxiety did not engage in worldview defense when mortality was salient. Florian, Mikulciner, and Hirschberger (2001) concluded that MS Israeli undergraduate students with a low degree of personal hardiness engaged in a greater level of worldview defense than those who scored high on a personal hardiness scale. These results would seem to fit with the conclusion that increased anxiety also increases the need for symbolic immortality and a greater degree of worldview defense when mortality is salient.

The findings in Serna (2005) indicate that greater adherence to cultural values amongst young Hawaiian students lowered anxiety and may actually have increased self-esteem. In a cross cultural evaluation of the effects self-esteem has on worldview defense, Kashima, Halloran, Yuki, and Kashima (2004) found that MS participants with lower self-esteem from both Australia and Japan would engage in a greater defense of the particular position of their respective cultural values. Specifically, in Australia, where individualism is considered to be highly valued, the low self-esteem participants defended an individualistic worldview to a greater degree, while the results from the Japanese participants were essentially the opposite. The Japanese, who are not considered to value individualism in the same way, not only did not support individualistic ideals but also showed greater aversion to societal mortality than to individual mortality. When comparing the impact primed literal immortality had on the pursuit of symbolic immortality through self-esteem striving, Dechesne et al. (2003) concluded that increased belief in an afterlife reduced mortality salient participants desire to be positively evaluated by others. Supporting the concept that a belief in literal immortality reduces the

need for worldview defense, Jonas and Fischer (2006) found in multiple experiments that individuals with intrinsic religiousness had a reduced need to defend their worldviews.

In addition to self-esteem, personal attachments can also mitigate the need for worldview defense, although this too can be interpreted as simply another way for people to reduce anxiety and create symbolic immortality by contributing to something that will persist after their deaths. Weise et al. (2008) found that priming participants in the MS condition with a reminder of a secure relationship with another person reduced the desire of those participants to respond to international terrorism with extreme military force. These results effectively replicated the findings of Mikulincer and Florian (2000), in which individuals with secure attachments were less punitive in response to moral infractions than individuals with anxious-ambivalent and avoidant personalities.

### Group Interactions

In its broadest terms, immigration occurs when the members of one group physically move to live amongst the members of another group. In any case where those two groups have diverging cultural worldviews, Terror Management Theory would seem to apply. However, there are elements of group dynamics that can be affected by TMT concepts, independent of worldviews. Research has shown that mortality salience has a significant impact on intergroup perceptions and reactions (Arndt, Greenberg, Schimel, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 2002b; Castano, 2004; Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino, & Sacchi, 2002; Harmon-Jones, Greenberg, Solomon, & Simon, 1995).

Group membership affects the way people perceive members of both the in-group and the out-group. In See and Petty (2006), participants in the MS condition were more likely

to positively evaluate members of the in-group, whether they agreed with their positions or not. For the out-group, the evaluations were based positively or negatively on the positions that were held, indicating that group membership itself was influencing the responses. Halloran and Kashima (2004) similarly found that both Australian Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian participants would reject out-group values when mortality was salient. Gender is one of the most obvious ways that human beings can be grouped. Fritsche, Jonas, and Fankhanel (2008) found that, with mortality salient, men would more negatively, and women more positively, evaluate a psychology course that promotes women. These results were not duplicated in the control condition. Other research has shown that groups do not have to be permanent, substantial, or truly distinct for mortality salience to cause people to have an increased preference for the ingroup. Harmon-Jones et al. (1995), concluded that people who were placed in minimal groups (i.e. groups that are created arbitrarily or superficially) would defend those groups to an exaggerated degree after mortality salience. In another study, Arndt et al, (2002b) found that mortality salient Hispanics would distance themselves from their own ethnic group when primed with a negative reflection of their ethnicity.

### *Nationality*

Nationality is a particular way that human beings will group themselves, and by its very nature, immigration results in the mixing of people of different nationalities. Studies testing the impact of mortality salience on nationalistic perceptions and biases have shown people to be more supportive of their nationalities when reminded of death (Castano, Yzerbyt, & Paladino, 2004; Kazen, Baumann, & Kuhl, 2005; Nelson, Moore, Olivetti, & Scott, 1997). This supports the basic assertion of Terror Management Theory

that people use cultural identities as a defense against death. In Kazen et al., (2005), mortality salience caused a strengthening in the valuation of national pride amongst Germans who had negative evaluations of national pride. Nelson et al. (1997) conducted an experiment that was more conflict oriented and found that, when mortality was salient, American participants were more likely to blame Japanese auto manufacturers, and less likely to blame American auto manufacturers, for causing car accidents.

In an experiment involving Italian citizens, Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino, and Sacchi (2002) found that both mortality salient and control participants favored Italians over Germans. However, the effect was much stronger amongst those who were given a MS treatment. Similarly, Tam, Chiu, and Lau (2007) found that mortality salient students from Hong Kong were more likely to allocate a greater number of places on a regional ping-pong team to players from Hong Kong than from Korea or Japan. Sani, Herrera, and Bowe (2009) had Spanish participants in both the control and MS conditions respond to statements such as "Spanish people have passed on their traditions across different generations" and "major phases in Spanish history are linked to one another." The results revealed that mortality salience led to an increased perception that Spanish culture was temporally enduring. In support of other TMT research, these participants were creating an exaggerated level of perceived cultural continuity (PCC) as a worldview defense.

### *Stereotyping*

In addition to group relations, immigration also causes people who represent differing cultural worldviews to interact on a personal level. The foundation of terror management theory research involves measuring how people who are MS respond to those who threaten or bolster their worldviews at this personal level (Greenberg et al., 1990;

Pyszczynski et al., 2002; Rosenblatt et al., 1989; Solomon et al. 2003), but there are specific studies that are particularly applicable to immigration related interactions. TMT research has determined mortality salience causes stereotypical thinking about members of other groups (Castano, 2004; Lieberman, 1999; Renkema et al., 2008 Schimel et al., 1999). When studying the relationship between stereotyping and TMT, Renkema et al. (2008) found that participants would employ both positive and negative stereotyping as tools to defend their worldviews. Specifically, negative stereotyping is appropriate for the purpose of self-enhancement, while both positive and negative stereotyping can be used as a way to comprehend the world by providing meaning and context for the actions of others. In another generalized study, Lieberman (1999) found that mortality salience would result in increased illusory correlation among participants. Illusory correlation is a process closely related to stereotyping in which people overestimate the relationship between two variables, such as believing that membership in a particular minority group will cause a person to exhibit certain negative behaviors.

Less abstractly, Schimel et al. (1999) found that white, mortality salient participants expressed an increased liking for African Americans who were stereotypically portrayed and a decreased liking for those who were portrayed in a non-stereotypical manner. The findings were reversed in the control group and support the hypothesis that stereotypes are part of a person's worldview and help serve a death denying function. Similarly, in Lee (2005) mortality salient African Americans were more likely to attribute negative stereotypes to Arabs. Castano (2004) also found that Scottish participants in the MS condition were more likely exclude from the in-group people who appeared English when categorizing photos. These participants also attributed more negative and stereotypical

attributes to members of the out-group. Finally, in a more extreme example of racially motivated biases, Greenberg, Schimal, Martens, Solomon, & Pyszczynski (2001), found that MS can cause white people to sympathize with white racists.

### The Current Study

Through experimentation, the current research applies Terror Management Theory to American beliefs about illegal immigration. Specifically, it examines whether or not mortality salience reveals a bias against undocumented Hispanic immigrants and against those illegal immigrants who are not showing signs of assimilating to American culture. Hispanics are specifically targeted because, as discussed above, they are by far the most visible group of contemporary immigrants to the United States. Assimilation will be tested because it is a common complaint of those who express concern about immigration (Chomsky, 2007). Additionally, assimilation applies directly to Terror Management Theory as one of the responses used to mitigate a worldview threat (Pyszczynski et al., 2002).

This research provides an opportunity to seek additional insight into a criminal justice related issue that is currently of national importance. It also has the potential to contribute to the theoretical basis of Terror Management Theory. It extends the existing literature by synthesizing and practically applying multiple elements of previous TMT research, including group dynamics, nationalistic preferences, perceptions of out-group members, and the concept of assimilation as a compensating control. To accomplish this, mortality salient and control participants were presented with information about illegal immigrants who are of Latin American or Non-Latin American origin and who represent different

degrees of assimilation into American culture. These participants were then asked to set punishments for breaking US immigration law.

### *Hypothesis*

It was hypothesized that participants in the mortality salience condition (a) would prescribe a harsher response to the Latin American immigrant than the European immigrant and (b) would prescribe a harsher response to the immigrants who have not learned to speak English than the immigrants who have learned to speak English.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Sample

A total of 247 undergraduate students enrolled in introductory criminal justice classes at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas participated in the experiment. Participation was completed in partial fulfillment of course requirements. Four participants asked that their responses not be included in the analysis without explanation, 10 were excluded for failing to properly complete all instruments, and one was excluded for suspecting death-related thoughts were a focus of the analysis. This left a combined sample of 232 participants. The majority of the final sample was female (61%), Caucasian (61%), and Christian (62%). The participants ranged in age from 18 to 39, with a median age of 20 and an average 21. Forty-six-percent of the sample identified as Democrat, 35% Republican, and 12% independent. In addition to those who identified as Christian, another 23% of participants indicated they were atheist or agnostic, and 8% listed other religious affiliations. Finally, 12% of the participants identified as being Latino or Hispanic, and 58% of the participants indicated that they or someone close to them was a first or second generation migrant to the United States. These participants were identified for comparative analysis but were not excluded from the sample.

#### Experiment Website

All parts of the experiment were delivered using Internet web pages. The experimenter did not interact directly with any of the participants unless they requested assistance in the use of the experiment website. Participants registered for the study by

connecting to the registration website provided by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Criminal Justice Department. Upon volunteering to participate in this experiment, a random eight-digit ID was generated for each participant and an email was sent to the participant containing the address of the website and the unique participant ID. The experiment website was hosted separately from the registration website, and neither the email address nor any other identifying information was recorded by the website when a participant ID was generated. The participant IDs served the purpose of uniquely identifying each valid participant without recording any identifying information. This allowed the experiment website to ensure that only registered participants completed the study and that each participant only completed the study once.

Once the participant received the email containing the website address of the experiment website and the participant ID, he or she was free to connect to the site and complete the experiment at any time and from any Internet connected computer running a standard web browser. Upon connecting to the site, the participant was presented with general instructions for using the site, including the admonition to set aside 30 to 45 minutes to complete the study in a quiet place that was free from distractions. Once the link to start the experiment was clicked, the participant was presented with the series of questionnaires (as detailed below) that comprised the experiment. All materials had to be completed in one sitting. If a participant abandoned a session without completing all materials, the participant would be placed in the same condition when resuming the study and would have to start over from the beginning. Each attempt was recorded separately by the server. Once all materials were completed, the participant was not allowed to participate again.

## Procedure

The experiment was designed using the same basic premise that was developed in Rosenblatt et al. (1989) and used in the majority of TMT studies. As the experiment began, the participants were introduced to the experiment and told they were participating in a study that explores the relationship between personality and perceptions of justice. Specifically, they were told that the research was attempting to understand how an individual's personality affects the way he or she perceives the restorative quality of the punishments currently prescribed for various crimes. At no point was immigration or Terror Management Theory mentioned. This deception was necessary to avoid biasing the participants.

The experiment began with the administration of a personality test. Each participant was presented with a belief in a just world questionnaire (Rubin & Peplau, 1975) and then a Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). These questionnaires were used to measure the participants' just world beliefs and self-esteem, which has been determined to temper the effects of mortality salience (Greenberg, 2008; Pyszczynski et al., 2004; Schmeichel et al., 2009). Next, the participants were each given a specific questionnaire entitled "Projective Life Attitudes." This form contained two open-ended questions that the participants were expected to respond to in paragraph form. The questions presented depended on whether the participant was assigned to an experimental or a control condition. Those in the experimental/mortality salience group were asked to write about their own deaths, and those in the control condition were asked to write about dental pain. At the end of the personality test, all participants completed a Positive and Negative Affect Schedule – Expanded Form (PANAS-X) questionnaire (Watson & Clark, 1991).

This last questionnaire was placed after the death manipulation in order to give the participants time to move past the initial phase of death-thought suppression (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, & Breus, 1994) and to determine if the participants' moods were being negatively impacted by responding to the questions about death, which might impact their responses.

Upon completing the personality test, the participants were provided with a scenario to read that described a man who was caught unlawfully residing and working in the United States. The specific details of the scenario presented were dependent on the condition to which the participant was assigned. After the scenario, a description of the US law that creates the crime of illegal immigration was provided, along with information about the punishment the law allows for the defendant. The participants were then asked to describe what they considered as an appropriate punishment for this crime, how strongly they believed the defendant should be deported, and whether or not they felt the punishment proscribed by the current law was appropriate in strength. Finally, the participants were asked to provide demographic information (including age, sex, ethnicity, political and religious affiliations) and then given debriefing information that included an explanation of the true purpose of the study and the purpose of the deception. The independent and dependent variables used in this experiment are discussed below and can be found in Table 1.

## Measures

### *Independent Variables*

#### *Mortality Salience*

Participants in the experiment were randomly assigned to either the mortality salience or control condition (IV<sub>1</sub>). Those in the mortality salience condition were made to consciously think about their own deaths by responding to two open-ended questions. Specifically, the participants were asked to “briefly describe the emotions the thought of your own death arouses in you” and to “jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you as you physically die and once you are physically dead.” Control group participants were presented with the same questions, except the word “death” was replaced by “dental pain.” The responses to these questions were coded by whether or not the participants answered the question that was asked.

Table 1

#### *Independent and Dependent Variables Used in the Experiment*

Independent Variables (IV <sub>1-3</sub> )		Dependent Variables (DV <sub>1-4</sub> )	
<u>Var</u>	<u>Description (Conditions)</u>	<u>Var</u>	<u>Description (Measure)</u>
IV <sub>1</sub>	Mortality Salience (MS / Non-MS)	DV <sub>1</sub>	Deportation (Scale, 1 to 10)
IV <sub>2</sub>	Name (Latin American / Ukrainian)	DV <sub>2</sub>	Fine Imposed (US Dollars)
IV <sub>3</sub>	Assimilation (English / No English)	DV <sub>3</sub>	Length of Sentence (Months)
		DV <sub>4</sub>	Severity (Scale, -4 to 4)

#### *Origin of the Defendant*

Participants in both the mortality salience and control groups were also randomly assigned to one of two country-of-origin conditions (IV<sub>2</sub>). When reading the scenario

about the illegal immigrant, the participants were either told that the defendant's name was Alonso Enriquez, to represent Latin American countries, or Anders Eriksson, to represent European countries. Specific country names were not given. The purpose of this manipulation was to determine whether the perceived source country or region of an illegal immigrant affects a person's opinion when mortality is salient

#### *Ability to Speak English*

In addition to the country of origin, all participants were also randomly assigned to one of two conditions in which the defendant has or has not learned to speak English (IV<sub>3</sub>). This manipulation was intended to vary the extent to which the defendant has assimilated to American culture. For the purposed of this experiment, a migrant who has learned to speak English was meant to represent a greater level of assimilation to American culture. All participants assigned to a cell in which the defendant had learned to speak English were presented with a brief sentence, written only in English, wherein the defendant uses his own words to justify his actions. In those cases where the defendant had not learned English, the participants were presented with the same English sentence along with a Spanish translation (for Alonso Enriquez) or a Swedish translation (for Anders Eriksson). The specific sentence presented to the participants, along with the full text of each scenario, can be found in Appendix I.

#### *Primary Dependent Variable*

Deportation was selected as the primary dependent variable because it is presumably the most obvious response to the crime of illegal immigration. After responding to questions about additional punishment (discussed below), participants were asked to determine how confident they were that the defendant should be deported after fulfilling

any prescribed sentence ( $DV_1$ ). This question was presented as a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 marked as “allowed to stay,” 5-6 marked as “possibly deported,” and 10 marked as “definitely deported.” To answer the question, a whole number between 1 and 10 had to be selected.

### *Additional Dependent Variables*

Beyond deportation, participants were asked to respond to three additional dependent variable questions, in which they were asked to set a monetary fine, custodial sentence, and to judge the strength of the punishment allowed by current U.S. law.

#### *Monetary Fine*

In accordance with United States Federal Statute, persons found guilty of illegally entering the United States can face a monetary fine and/or a custodial sentence. Participants were asked to set what they believed was an appropriate fine for the crime that was committed ( $DV_2$ ). Participants were presented with an open-ended field in which they were asked to type an amount in whole US dollars, if they felt a fine was appropriate in this situation. Those participants who did not want to enter a fine simply left the field blank. Non-responses were coded as a fine of “0.”

#### *Custodial Sentence*

After setting a fine amount, the participants were asked to specify the length of a custodial sentence for the defendant ( $DV_3$ ). This measure was also presented as an open-ended field in which the participants were asked to enter a length of time in months. The field could be left blank if the participant did not wish to sentence the defendant to prison. Again, non-responses were coded as a length of “0.”

### *Strength of the Statute*

Finally, the participants rated whether or not they believed the punishment allowed by statute to be proper in severity (DV<sub>4</sub>). At the beginning of the dependent measures instrument, the participants were presented with the text of 8 USC § 1325 and a sentence explaining that “under current US law, [the defendant] may be imprisoned for up to 2 years and fined up to \$5,000.” On a scale from -4 to 4, the participants were asked to determine if they considered this law to be too lenient (-4), about right (0) or too severe (4). Responses were recoded on a scale of 1-9, in which 1 one was too harsh and 9 was too lenient. This recoding was performed so means would be directly comparable to the other dependent measures. A copy of the complete dependent measure instrument, including all dependent measures and filler questions, can be found in Appendix II.

### IRB Approval

The methodology described in this section, along with all associated instruments, was reviewed by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board and approved on January 20, 2009. Approval was obtained from the IRB before the research began. This study was filed with the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects under protocol number 0812-2944.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if the independent variables were producing significant effects on the dependent variables. According to the existing literature, mortality salience should cause participants to be harsher towards those individuals they perceive as worldview threats. In this research, it was hypothesized that mortality salience would result in harsher responses towards illegal immigrants of a Latin American origin and those who have not learned to speak English.

#### Removal of Country of Origin Condition

A total of 232 participants completed the survey and were included in the sample. An initial analysis of the data indicated a problem with participants correctly identifying the country of origin on the relevant manipulation check questions. In the scenarios, the specific country from which the defendant migrated was not stated. Instead, the name of the defendant was used to manipulate country of origin. To ensure that the participants properly interpreted the manipulation, they were asked to identify the origin of the defendant. Ninety-six percent of participants properly identified the origin when presented with the Latin American name, but only 41% were correct when presented with the European name. An ANOVA verified that mortality salience had no impact on whether or not the origin was misidentified ( $p > .18$ ). However, in the Europe / English conditions, in which no foreign language phrase was given, only 16 participants correctly identified the origin. This indicated that the foreign language phrase was an important factor in the correct identification of the European migrant. An ANOVA confirmed that

the English variable was a statistically significant predictor of the origin being misidentified in the European condition,  $F(1,111) = 8.02, p < .01$ . This result was not replicated in the Latin American condition, where the English variable was not a significant predictor of misidentified origin ( $p > .67$ ). The only other factor found to be significant in the misidentification of the European defendant was age,  $F(1,111) = 5.01, p < .05$ , with younger participants more likely to misidentify than older participants.

To avoid any problems that might be introduced into the data by including responses from participants who did not fully understand the scenario, participants who incorrectly identified the origin of defendant were excluded from the analysis. Only including participants who correctly identified the origin of the defendant left two significant problems with the data for the Europe condition. The first is that it severely reduced the cell sizes, leaving them small and very unequal compared to the cells in the Latin America condition. The second is that it presented a larger question of whether the participants left in the Europe condition were directly comparable to the sample as a whole. There could be some unknown factor that led these few participants to interpret the scenario correctly, while so many others made a mistake. This resulted in the decision to categorically exclude all participants in the Europe condition from the analysis and to drop the hypothesis that mortality salience would cause harsher treatment of Latin American migrants. After removing participants in the Europe condition, the revised sample contained 114 participants.

## English as a Measure of Assimilation

The remaining hypothesis stated that mortality salience would cause participants to prescribe a harsher response to a migrant that had not learned to speak English. This statement was made based on the belief that learning to speak English was an indicator of the degree to which a migrant has assimilated to American culture. Participants rated the level the defendant had assimilated to American culture on a scale of one to ten. A comparison of the means revealed that the participants interpreted the adoption of English as an indication of the level of assimilation. Defendants who spoke English were rated with a higher level of assimilation than those who did not (5.85 and 2.86, respectively). A one-way ANOVA showed this result to be statistically significant,  $F(1,112) = 73.79, p < .001$ . Another one-way ANOVA confirmed that mortality salience was not a significant predictor of assimilation ( $p > .18$ ).

## Results for Adoption of English Hypothesis

### *Deportation (DV<sub>1</sub>)*

The primary dependent variable was deportation. As seen in Table 2, there were little differences in the raw means as a function of the two independent variables. Mortality salience seemed to cause the preference for deportation to drop slightly when defendant spoke English and to rise slightly when the defendant did not speak English. These results seem to support the hypothesis that mortality salience would cause harsher treatment of the defendant that had assimilated less. However, an ANOVA confirmed that neither mortality salience,  $F(1,111) = .15, p > .70$ , nor mortality salience x language,  $F(2,110) = .37, p > .69$ , were significant predictors of the preference for deportation.

Table 2

*Mean results for deportation variable (DV<sub>1</sub>)*

Variable	Mortality Salient			Dental Pain		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Latin / English	29	5.03	2.61	28	5.64	2.64
Latin / No English	26	5.88	3.23	30	5.63	2.72

Notes: Higher mean indicates a greater preference for deportation.

A closer examination of the data indicated that the preference for deportation among participants seemed to be largely influenced by how much the participants believed the defendant had contributed to the economy while in the United States. A one-way ANOVA verified that contribution was a significant predictor of preference for deportation,  $F(1,110) = 23.61, p < .001$ . However, the means suggest that mortality salience might be mediating the effects of contribution when perceived contribution level is high (see Table 3). An ANOVA produced a main effect for contribution on deportation in the dental pain condition,  $F(2,57) = 12.94, p < .001$ , but not in the mortality salience condition,  $F(1,55) = 2.10, p > .05$ . This verified that the significant effect of perceived contribution was disappearing when mortality was salient.

A three-way (mortality salience x language x contribution) ANOVA also produced a main effect on deportation,  $F(3,108) = 7.83, p < .001$ , and revealed a mortality salience x contribution interaction,  $F(2,112) = 5.23, p < .01$  (see Table 4). Further analysis revealed that the mortality salience x contribution interaction was only significant in the no English condition,  $F(2,55) = 4.05, p < .02$ . This interaction was not significant in the English condition,  $p > .05$ . When looking only at the data in the no English condition, the

contribution variable was found to have a main effect on deportation for dental pain,  $F(2,29) = 8.39, p < .001$ , but not when mortality was salient ( $p > .05$ ). These results were replicated by the pair-wise comparisons (see Table 4), confirming that mortality salience was mediating the effect of contribution when the perceived contribution level was high.

Table 3

*Deportation (DV<sub>1</sub>) means for levels of perceived contribution*

Variable	Mortality Salient			Dental Pain		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Low Contribution	11	6.82	2.89	19	7.53	2.65
Some Contribution	37	5.14	2.88	33	5.18	1.85
High Contribution	7	4.86	2.97	5	1.40	.89

Notes: Higher mean indicates a greater preference for deportation.

Although the mortality salience x contribution interaction was not significant in the English condition, a similar main effect for contribution was present in the English / dental pain condition,  $F(2,28) = 5.00, p < .01$ , but not in the English / mortality salience condition. The pair-wise comparisons again confirm significant differences in the means in the dental pain condition but not in the mortality salient condition. Unfortunately, the small cell sizes at the high contribution level make the data difficult to interpret. No other variables were found to significantly impact deportation. Neither self-esteem nor whether or not the participant was a migrant impacted the results.

Table 4

*Deportation (DV<sub>1</sub>) means showing significant pair-wise comparisons*

Variable	Mortality Salient			Dental Pain		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
<u>English</u>						
Low Contribution	5	6.20	3.03	9	7.11 <sup>H</sup>	3.18
Some Contribution	18	5.06	2.65	17	5.41 <sup>H</sup>	1.66
High Contribution	6	4.00	2.10	2	1.00 <sup>LS</sup>	0
<u>No English</u>						
Low Contribution	6	7.33	2.94	10	7.90 <sup>SH</sup>	2.18
Some Contribution	19	5.21	3.16	16	4.94 <sup>L</sup>	2.05
High Contribution	1*	10.00	-	3	1.67 <sup>L</sup>	1.16

Notes: Higher mean indicates a greater preference for deportation.

<sup>L</sup>Mean found to be significantly different from the low contribution mean at .05

<sup>S</sup>Mean found to be significantly different from the some contribution mean at .05

<sup>H</sup>Mean found to be significantly different from the high contribution mean at .05

\* Alternate coding revealed the same results.

#### *Strength (DV<sub>4</sub>)*

The strength variable measured whether or not the participants believed that the punishment currently allowed by U.S. law was appropriate for the crime committed by the defendant. Very little difference is apparent in the means for strength across the independent variables (see Table 5). Mortality salience caused the participants to rate the law as slightly more lenient than appropriate for defendants who had learned to speak English and harsher than appropriate for defendants who did not speak English. These results are the opposite of what was predicted in the hypothesis. No main effects were

found on strength for mortality salience,  $F(1,112) = .32, p > .57$ , or mortality salience x language,  $F(2,111) = 1.21, p > .30$ .

Table 5

*Mean results for strength variable (DV<sub>4</sub>)*

Variable	Mortality Salient			Dental Pain		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Latin / English	29	4.76	1.55	28	4.57	1.85
Latin / No English	27	3.85	1.88	30	4.47	2.03

Notes: Higher mean indicates a greater preference for making the law harsher.

Similar to the deportation variable, opinion about the strength of the law among participants seemed to be influenced by how much the defendant was believed to have contributed to the economy. Contribution was found to have a main effect on strength,  $F(1,111) = 11.49, p < .001$ , and an interaction was found between mortality salience and English,  $F(1,113) = 4.50, p < .05$ , when a three-way ANOVA was run including the mortality salience, English, and contribution variables. Looking at the means in Table 6 shows that this interaction may be caused by the reversing of the means at the high contribution level for both English and mortality salience. However, no significant main effects were not found for mortality salience x English at the high contribution level ( $p > .05$ ) or at any other level of contribution. The small cell sizes in the high-contribution condition make the data difficult to interpret.

Table 6

*Mean results for strength (DV<sub>4</sub>) across levels of contribution*

Variable	Mortality Salient			Dental Pain		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
<u>English</u>						
Low Contribution	5	4.80	1.10	9	5.556	2.46
Some Contribution	18	5.06	1.70	17	4.471	.80
High Contribution	6	3.83	1.17	2	1.000	0
<u>No English</u>						
Low Contribution	7	4.29	2.36	10	5.30	1.83
Some Contribution	19	3.84	1.64	16	4.31	2.09
High Contribution	1	1.00	-	3	3.00	2.00

Notes: Higher mean indicates a greater preference for making the law harsher.

#### *Remaining Dependent Variables*

No significant effects were found for either the fine (DV<sub>2</sub>) or the sentence (DV<sub>3</sub>) variables. As seen in Table 7, the raw means for the fine variable suggest that mortality salience caused the participants increase the fine for the defendants who spoke English and to decrease the fine for defendants who did not speak English, which is the opposite of what was predicted in the hypothesis. However, ANOVA showed that these results were not significant for either or mortality salience ( $p > .48$ ), or mortality salience x language ( $p > .43$ ). Likewise, mortality salience ( $p > .85$ ) and mortality salience x language ( $p > .65$ ) were found to have no significant effects on the sentence variable. This is despite the fact that mortality salience seemed to result in a slightly higher sentence for defendants that both did and did not speak English.

Table 7

*Mean results for fine (DV<sub>2</sub>) and sentence (DV<sub>3</sub>) variables*

Variable	Mortality Salient			Dental Pain		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
<u>Fine*</u>						
Latin / English	29	3241.38	4111.44	28	1896.61	2794.11
Latin / No English	27	1648.15	1753.10	30	2250.00	2418.31
<u>Sentence**</u>						
Latin / English	29	2.79	5.78	27	2.33	4.10
Latin / No English	27	3.63	5.26	29	3.59	8.29

Notes: Higher mean indicates a greater fine amount or sentence length.

\* One response was dropped from the fine variable for being more than four standard deviations away from the mean.

\*\* Two responses were dropped from the sentence variable for being more than four standard deviations away from the mean.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Discussion

Terror Management Theory maintains that human behavior is heavily influenced by the need to create a sense of order, meaning, and permanence in life that can serve as psychological protection from the terror of death (Pyszczynski et al., 2002). As discussed extensively in the literature review, simply reminding a person of his or her own mortality can be enough to cause that person to engage in a worldview defense (Solomon et al., 2003). The research conducted in this study was based on the idea that participants would perceive an illegal immigrant to the United States as a worldview threat and would defend their worldviews based on mediating characteristics of immigrant.

#### *Mortality Salience and Assimilation*

The overall results for all dependent variables are inconsistent and inconclusive. The findings for the deportation variable were the most consistent with the hypothesis that mortality salience would cause harsher treatment of the defendant who did not speak English. For deportation, the raw means indicated that mortality salience was causing a harsher response toward this defendant, whose failure to adopt the language indicated less assimilation to American culture. In addition, mortality salience was found to have a statistically significant mediating affect on the preference for deportation when the perceived contribution level of the defendant was rated as high. This indicates that participants who were mortality salient responded to the worldview threat without regard to how much the defendant had contributed to the economy. This finding is consistent with the theoretical basis of TMT (Pyszczynski et al., 2002; Solomon et al., 2003).

Unfortunately, from the data collected it is impossible to discern if this response was due to the fact that the defendant was an immigrant or simply because he had broken the law.

The sentence variable was the only other variable that produced statistically significant results. Like the deportation variable, the perceived level of contribution significantly impacted opinion about the law, but neither mortality salience nor language was found to be significant. These inconsistencies might be explainable by a flaw in the instrumentation for this dependent measure. As seen in Appendix II, question 5 asks the participants to determine if the punishment allowed by law for “this crime” is too lenient, about right, or too severe on a scale of -4 to 4. The question does not specify if the participants are supposed to be rating the appropriateness of the law for the presented defendant specifically or the crime of illegal immigration in general. Different interpretations of the questions might produce different responses among the participants, and those participants who interpreted the question to be about illegal immigration in general might not have considered the assimilation level of the defendant at all.

For the remaining variables, the fine and the length of custodial sentence imposed upon the defendant, no statistically significant results were found. The raw means for the sentence variable were consistent with the expected results. When mortality was salient, participants were found to be slightly harsher, with the longest average sentences being given to the defendant who did not speak English. Less consistent were the results for the fine variable, which is discussed below.

#### *Mentioning the Family*

A problem with the materials that may have impacted the results is the emphasis the scenarios place on family. The word “family” was used three times in each of the

scenarios (see Appendix I), in which it was repeatedly mentioned that the defendant came to the United States for the purpose of supporting his family. The scenarios confirm that the defendant was actually able to assist his family by earning enough to send a little bit of money home each month, and they even suggest that sending the money away forced the defendant to live in a “poor neighborhood.” This may have seeded the participants with thoughts of the importance of family and contributed to the inconsistent results when mortality was salient. The purpose of the scenarios was to present participants with an illegal immigrant that was intended to represent varying degrees of worldview threat. But, because the scenarios were so family centric, they could have inadvertently changed the part of their worldviews the participants were trying to protect. Instead of keeping their country and culture safe from the invasion of undocumented migrants who refuse to assimilate, at least some participants may have been reminded that people who are willing to sacrifice and risk themselves for their families are generally respected in American culture. Recent terror management research has found that family can temper the affect of mortality salience (Cox et al., 2008; Zhou, Liu, Chen, & Yu, 2008).

Although it was not found to be statistically significant, one of the most glaring inconsistencies in the data were the results for the fine variable. Contrary to what was predicted by the hypothesis, mortality salient participants fined the English speaking defendant almost \$1600 less than the defendant who did not speak English, which was a reversal of what was seen in the dental pain condition. However, in the context that the participants may have been protecting a family-centric worldview, these results make more sense. Any fine amount would presumably be taking money directly from the family the defendant was trying to support. It is possible that the participants believed the

English speaking defendant had more earning potential and, therefore, might be better able to pay the fine without causing the family to suffer.

### *Web-Only Study*

One of the unknown and uncontrollable factors in this research is the fact that the study was conducted entirely online. Participants had the ability to connect to and complete the study from any Internet connected computer anywhere in the world. While protections were put in place to ensure that only registered participants were able to complete the study and multiple submissions were not allowed, there was no way to control the participants' environments while they were reading and responding to the materials. Though the instructions requested that the participants complete the materials from a quiet place that was free from distractions, nothing prevented them from working with any number of distractions. Although participants who clearly misinterpreted the materials were removed from the analysis, the environmental conditions could have produced unknown results that would have not been seen in a laboratory setting. However, the literature indicates that the use Internet based surveys and questionnaires in psychological research does not produce significantly different results from traditional paper-based research (Riva, Teruzzi, & Anolli, 2003; Yu & Yu, 2007).

### *Impact of Economic Contribution*

The degree to which the participants perceived the defendant had contributed to the economy was found to be the best predictor of both the deportation and strength variables. When the participants believed the defendant had contributed a lot, they were more lenient than when they believed he had contributed little or some. What is not apparent from the data are the factors that led to the participants deciding the contribution

level of the defendant. This decision may have been impacted by the national debate surrounding illegal immigration. As discussed in the literature review, a key argument in this debate is over the true economic impacts of immigration (Camarota, 2004, Card, 2006; Chomsky, 2007; Cooper, 2007; Kochhar, 2006). It is possible that participants interpreted the contribution level of the defendant based solely on their views of immigration. Unfortunately, participants were not asked specific questions about their personal views of immigration and illegal immigration in general.

#### *Assumption of Latin American Origin*

An unintended outcome of this study was the discovery that the majority of the sample population did not correctly identify origin of the European immigrant, which led to the dropping of the origin hypothesis and the exclusion of all participants in the Europe condition. Seventy two percent of participants misidentified the origin of the European defendant when no foreign language phrase was given, and 47% misidentified when a Swedish language phrase was included in the scenario. On the surface, this might suggest that the popular consciousness within the sample population was such that illegal immigrants were assumed to be of a Latin American origin unless strong evidence to the contrary was available. Such a conclusion seems to be supported by the fact that 88% of the participants who misidentified selected Latin America as the origin of the European defendant.

Beyond the language phrase, age was the only factor found to be a significant predictor of the misidentification of the European defendant. Younger participants were the most likely to make the mistake, and the phenomenon disappears completely among participants over the age of 27. These results might be the product of the recent public

debate regarding undocumented migrants of Latin American origin. As discussed in the introduction and literature review, the majority of so-called illegal immigrants currently living in the United States are Latin American by birth, and this group has been the subject of a highly-publicized national debate over the last couple of years (“Immigration issue,” 2006; Passel, 2006; Pew Hispanic Center, 2007; “Protesters across,” 2008). It seems plausible that younger people might be more susceptible to being caught up in sensational media coverage and less able to filter out inaccurate information based on their own knowledge and experiences. At the same time, the older participants have had longer to learn about the world, which may have made them better able to detect the relatively subtle differences that set apart the European defendant.

#### Limitations and Recommendations

Although this study did not produce clear results, the effect of mortality salience has been demonstrated by more than 300 published studies (Greenberg, 2008; Greenberg et al., 1990; Pyszczynski et al., 2001; Pyszczynski et al., 2002; Pyszczynski et al., 2004; Schmeichel et al., 2009; Solomon et al., 2003; Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Major limitations to this study include the use of a non-random convenience sample, and the lack of environmental controls associated with employing web-based delivery of the materials. Future research into this subject should use a random sample population that is more representative of the U.S. population and should balance the use of web-based research with a forum that is easier to control. In addition, any replication of this research should use a stronger origin manipulation to ensure it is easier for the participants to determine the origin of the migrant. Replication should also reword the scenarios to either eliminate

or control for the potential influence of the family variable in the materials presented to the participants.

### Conclusion

The results of this study are inconclusive. Some support was found for the language hypothesis and for Terror Management Theory in general, but the results were not consistent across the dependent variables. Overall, the findings do suggest that illegal immigrants are perceived by some as a worldview threat, but it is clear that people's perceptions of immigrants and immigration are complex and potentially influenced by a number of factors. The adoption of English was certainly interpreted as a step toward assimilation into American culture, but there was only modest indication that this increased level of assimilation was moderating the effect of mortality salience. The only conclusive finding is that the sample population's treatment of the defendant was significantly influenced by how much they believed the defendant had contributed to the economy. This should be the subject of future research that considers why people have the opinions they do about illegal immigrants and how those opinions impact the treatment of that population.

APPENDIX I  
EXPERIMENT SCENARIOS

The following sections contain the exact text that was presented to the participants based on the condition to which they were assigned. The four possible scenarios were Latin America / No English, Latin America / English, Europe / No English, and Europe / English.

*Latin America / No English*

After being deported once before, Alonso Enriquez again entered the United States without authorization approximately five years ago. His intention was to work in the US for a few years, while saving money and sending money home to help support his family. Afterward, Mr. Enriquez planned to return to his home country.

While in the United States, Mr. Enriquez worked fulltime for a handful of employers performing primarily unskilled and physical labor. Mr. Enriquez was able to earn enough to send a little bit to his family every month.

Aside from those activities related to his immigration status, Alonso Enriquez did not engage in any criminal activity while living in the United States. When he was not at work, Mr. Enriquez spent most of his time living a quiet life in a poor neighborhood. He did not come in contact with law enforcement at any time until he was caught by the INS a few months ago and charged with entering the United States illegally.

During his time in the country, Mr. Enriquez never learned to speak more than a small amount of English. He could only communicate with his attorney and with the trial court through a translator. In defense of his actions, Alonso Enriquez only said,

*“He tratado de encontrar mejor vida para mí y mi familia.”*

“I was trying to find a better life for me and my family.” (translated)

Alonso Enriquez was found guilty in a US District Court of improperly entering the United States.

*Latin America / English*

After being deported once before, Alonso Enriquez again entered the United States without authorization approximately five years ago. His intention was to work in the US for a few years, while saving money and sending money home to help support his family. Afterward, Mr. Enriquez planned to return to his home country.

While in the United States, Mr. Enriquez worked fulltime for a handful of employers performing primarily unskilled and physical labor. Mr. Enriquez was able to earn enough to send a little bit to his family every month.

Aside from those activities related to his immigration status, Alonso Enriquez did not engage in any criminal activity while living in the United States. When he was not at work, Mr. Enriquez spent most of his time living a quiet life in a poor neighborhood. He did not come in contact with law enforcement at any time until he was caught by the INS a few months ago and charged with entering the United States illegally.

During his time in the country, Mr. Enriquez learned to speak English. He was able to make it through his court proceedings without the assistance of a translator. In defense of his actions, Alonso Enriquez only said,

“I was trying to find a better life for me and my family.”

Alonso Enriquez was found guilty in a US District Court of improperly entering the United States.

#### *Europe / No English*

After being deported once before, Anders Eriksson again entered the United States without authorization approximately five years ago. His intention was to work in the US for a few years, while saving money and sending money home to help support his family. Afterwards, Mr. Eriksson planned to return to his home country.

While in the United States, Mr. Eriksson worked fulltime for a handful of employers performing primarily unskilled and physical labor. Mr. Eriksson was able to earn enough to send a little bit to his family every month.

Aside from those activities related to his immigration status, Anders Eriksson did not engage in any criminal activity while living in the United States. When he was not at work, Mr. Eriksson spent most of his time living a quiet life in a poor neighborhood. He did not come in contact with law enforcement at any time until he was caught by the INS a few months ago and charged with entering the United States illegally.

During his time in the country, Mr. Eriksson never learned to speak more than a small amount of English. He could only communicate with his attorney and with the trial court through a translator. In defense of his actions, Anders Eriksson only said,

“*Jag försökte hitta ett bättre liv för mig själv och min familj.*”

“I was trying to find a better life for me and my family.” (translated)

Anders Eriksson was found guilty in a US District Court of improperly entering the United States.

*Europe / English*

After being deported once before, Anders Eriksson again entered the United States without authorization approximately five years ago. His intention was to work in the US for a few years, while saving money and sending money home to help support his family. Afterwards, Mr. Eriksson planned to return to his home country.

While in the United States, Mr. Eriksson worked fulltime for a handful of employers performing primarily unskilled and physical labor. Mr. Eriksson was able to earn enough to send a little bit to his family every month.

Aside from those activities related to his immigration status, Anders Eriksson did not engage in any criminal activity while living in the United States. When he was not at work, Mr. Eriksson spent most of his time living a quiet life in a poor neighborhood. He did not come in contact with law enforcement at any time until he was caught by the INS a few months ago and charged with entering the United States illegally.

During his time in the country, Mr. Eriksson learned to speak English. He was able to make it through his court proceedings without the assistance of a translator. In defense of his actions, Anders Eremanko only said,

“I was trying to find a better life for me and my family.”

Anders Eriksson was found guilty in a US District Court of improperly entering the United States.

APPENDIX II

DEPENDENT MEASURE INSTRUMENTATION

United States Code, Title 8 Section 1325 states:

Any alien who (1) enters or attempts to enter the United States at any time or place other than as designated by immigration officers, or (2) eludes examination or inspection by immigration officers, or (3) attempts to enter or obtains entry to the United States by a willfully false or misleading representation or the willful concealment of a material fact, shall, for the first commission of any such offense, be fined under title 18 or imprisoned not more than 6 months, or both, and, for a subsequent commission of any such offense, be fined under title 18, or imprisoned not more than 2 years, or both.

Under current US law, this person may be imprisoned for up to 2 years and fined up to \$5,000.

1.) Excluding deportation, please select the punishment you feel most appropriately restores justice in this situation?  
(circle one)

- A. No punishment
- B. Fine
- C. Imprisonment
- D. Both fine and imprisonment

2.) IF you believe a fine is appropriate, how much should this person be fined (in US dollars)?

\$\_\_\_\_\_ USD

3.) IF you believe a prison sentence is appropriate, how long of a sentence should this person face (in months)?

\_\_\_\_\_ months

4.) After meeting the terms of his penalty (if any), this person should be:  
(circle one)

- |                 |   |   |                   |   |   |   |                     |   |    |
|-----------------|---|---|-------------------|---|---|---|---------------------|---|----|
| 1               | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8                   | 9 | 10 |
| Allowed to Stay |   |   | Possibly Deported |   |   |   | Definitely Deported |   |    |



10.) In your opinion, how integrated into US culture was the defendant?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not assimilated at all			Somewhat assimilated				Totally Assimilated		

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VITA

Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

John Matthew Bergen

Degrees:

Bachelor's of Science, Criminal Justice Administration, 2006  
University of Phoenix

Thesis Title: Illegal Immigration and Worldview Defense: Distaste for Human Migration  
in the Context of TMT

Thesis Committee:

Chairperson, Dr. Joel D. Lieberman, Ph. D.  
Committee Member, Dr. Terance D. Miethe, Ph. D.  
Committee Member, Dr. Deborah Shaffer, Ph. D.  
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. David Dickens, Ph. D.