ABSTRACT

TITLE:	The Effect of Mortality Salience on Political Attitudes: The Influence of Positive Psychology
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ABSTRACT: Terror management theory (TMT) suggests that death is a unique human fear unlike any other pain or distress. After death reminders, people are more inclined to be culturally invested to find meaning in their life as a way to buffer the anxiety stemming from the idea of their own death. Political orientation is affected by TMT such that the default response to death reminder is a conservative shift—an increase in conservatism and associated political attitudes. However, self-esteem boosts (such as those generated by positive psychology activities) have been shown to buffer defensive reactions to death reminders. We thus set out to determine whether positive psychology practice could buffer the conservative shift typically caused by death reminders. We predicted that a positive psychology self-esteem boost would eliminate the conservative shift following a death reminder. Results showed that the death prime alone did not affect liberalism; however, participants who also received positive psychology practice ("write about a good memory") showed a liberal shift. Bonferonni post-hoc tests showed that the "death + memory" group scored significantly HIGHER on liberalism compared to the no-death control group ($p = .021$). Overall, elderly adults had significantly higher self-esteem on the Rosenberg scale than college students ($p = .01$). However, there were no differences between college students and aging adults on their defensiveness following a death reminder. Implications of these results will be discussed