ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT: This research examines the effects of terror management theory (TMT) and social influences on sentences given to persons convicted of a criminal act. TMT states that humans defend themselves against the awareness of their own mortality (mortality salience; MS) by investing in cultural worldviews; meaning that when reminded of their own mortality, a person will more closely identify with similar others, and in the case of this study, against those labeled as criminals. I investigated to see whether a person would be more inclined to give a more harsh sentence to someone convicted of a crime after being confronted by the idea of their own mortality, more specifically if the influence of a peer designated to a "protector" role or "nurturer" would affect the sentence given. Each participant was primed with either the mortality salience (MS) or a control salience. Participants then read through a brief story explaining the scene, what crime had been committed, and were given one of two conditions. One condition in which the "protector" role voted to give a higher sentence, and one condition in which the "nurturer" role voted to give a higher sentence. Results of the experiment and possible directions for future research will be offered.