ABSTRACT

TITLE:	Terror Management in the Courtroom: Capital Crimes, Death Accessibility, & Interrogation Camera Angle May Alter Conviction Rates
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ABSTRACT: This research examines the effects of terror management theory (TMT) and camera angle perspective on jury members. TMT states that humans defend themselves against the anxiety stemming from death awareness (mortality salience; MS) by investing in cultural worldviews, which often results in identification with similar others as well as harsh denigration of criminals. I sought to investigate whether participants' rating of a suspect's guilt would be influenced not only by MS but also by whether they watched a video of the suspect or the interrogator, which presumably altered their identification with the suspect. Each participant was either primed with mortality salience (MS) or a control before reading a description of a mock crime and then viewing an 80-second video clip of the beginning of an interrogation with the suspect, with the camera either focused on the suspect or the interrogator for the duration of the clip. Results of two experiments showed that, under MS, participants who watched the suspect-centered video were significantly less certain of the suspect's guilt—and less likely to reach a unanimous guilty verdict during deliberation—than those who watched the interrogator- focused video, whereas the converse was true for the control participants. Gender also played a role in the verdicts with females finding the suspect guilty significantly more often than males. Results are discussed and directions for future research are offered.