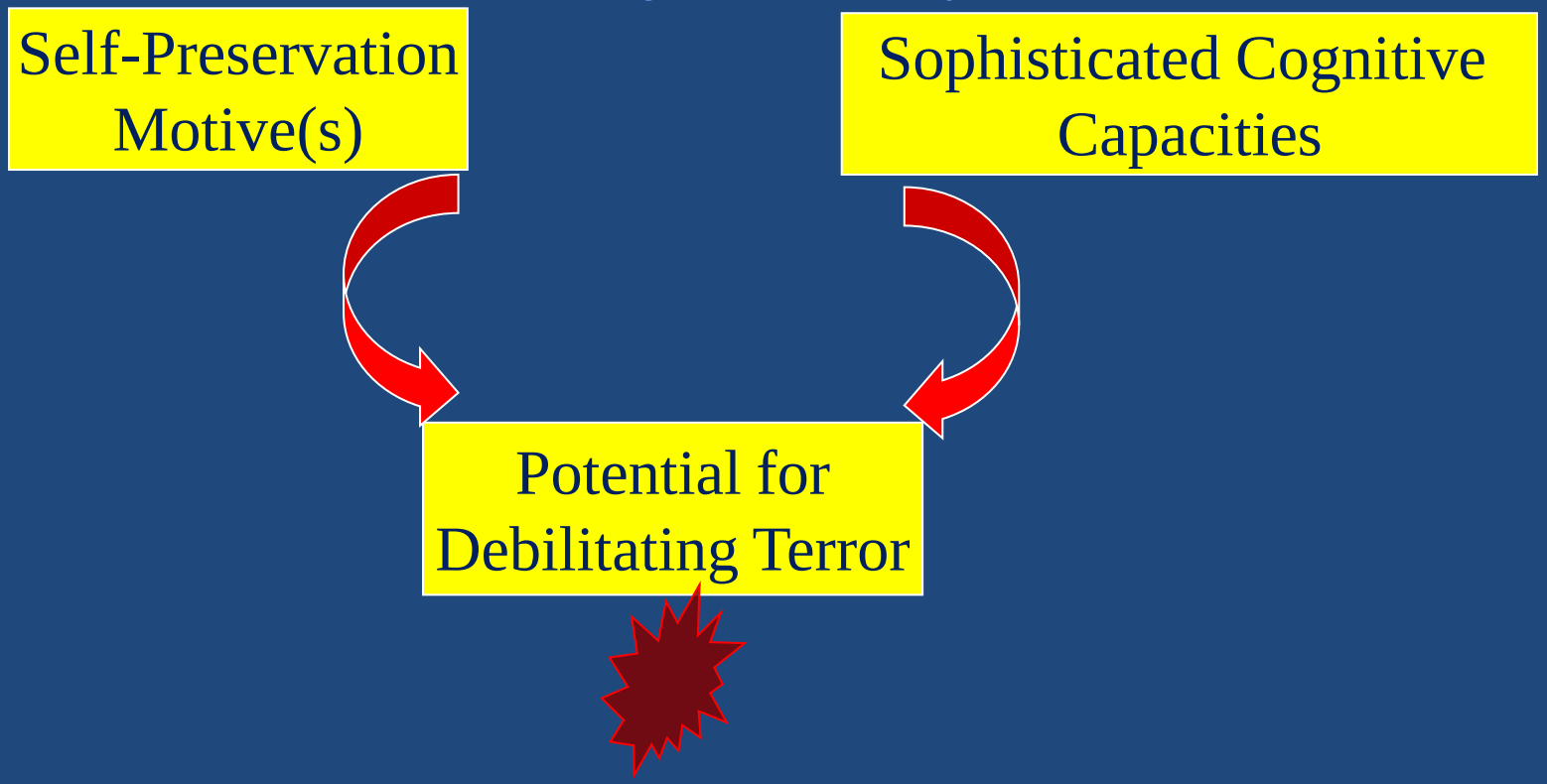
Terror Management Theory



How Does the Anxiety Buffer Develop in Children

- Not aware of death early in life
- But torn with innate aversion to things that threaten life – but children don't know why
- Cry, scream, wail when needs not met
- Parents comfort child, reduce distress
- Beginnings of attachment: Parent's are basis for safety
- In first year: Develop internal image of parents

Development of Anxiety Buffer

- Attachment: Parents reduce distress
- Become source of security, safe harbour
- Love and affection from parents = safey
- As child matures, parents show more affection when child does “right thing”
- Being good = safe
- Being bad = unsafe
- Parent’s APPROVAL becomes source of security

Development of Anxiety Buffer

- Beginnings of self-awareness, language, future orient thought >>> Internal representation of self (SELF-ESTEEM) becomes source of security
- Parents explain how to be safe, “I’ll protect you,” “Nothing will hurt you” >> Ideas become source of safety
- Parents teach the Cultural Worldview

Development of Anxiety Buffer

- Children become aware of things from which parents cannot protect them
- Children become aware that parents dies, and that someday they will die too
- Transfer protection to the Culture
- Teachers, priests, adults, other children
- Learn culture's view of life and death
- Transition to more mature Terror Management

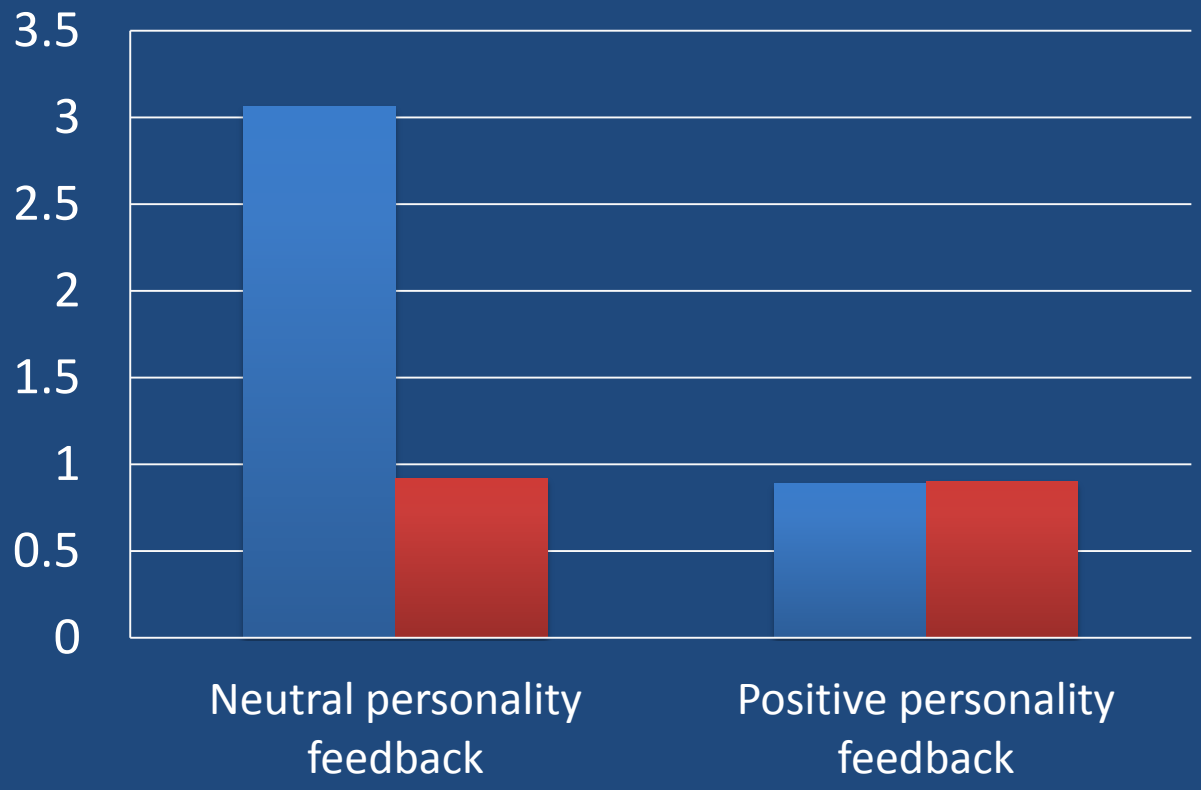
Major Evidence for Terror Management Theory

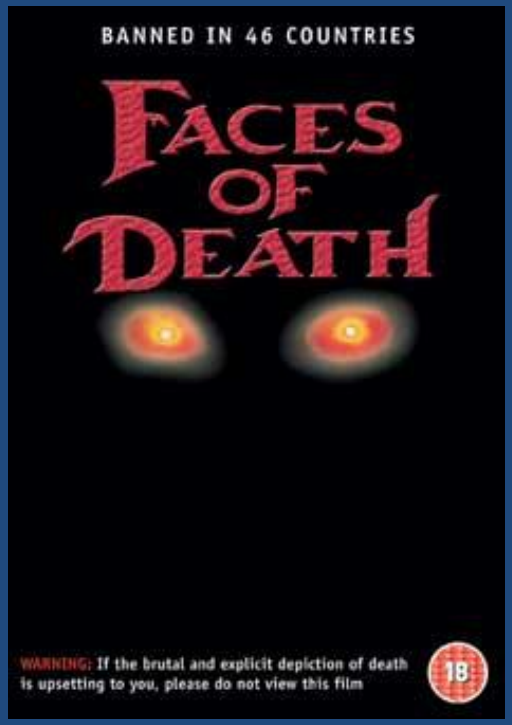
- Increasing self-esteem, faith in one's cultural worldview or attachment security makes people less prone to anxiety and anxiety-related behavior, and reduces accessibility of death-related thought

Raising self-esteem reduces anxiety in response to images of death

(Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, Rosenblatt, Burling, Lyon, Simon, & Pinel, 1992)

Anxiety scores as a function of mortality salience and self-esteem





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- Reminders of death increase striving to maintain faith in one's cultural worldview, self-esteem, and attachment security

Manipulating Mortality Salience

"Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you"

_____

_____

_____

_____

"What do you think happens to <u>you</u> as you physically die and once you are physically dead?"

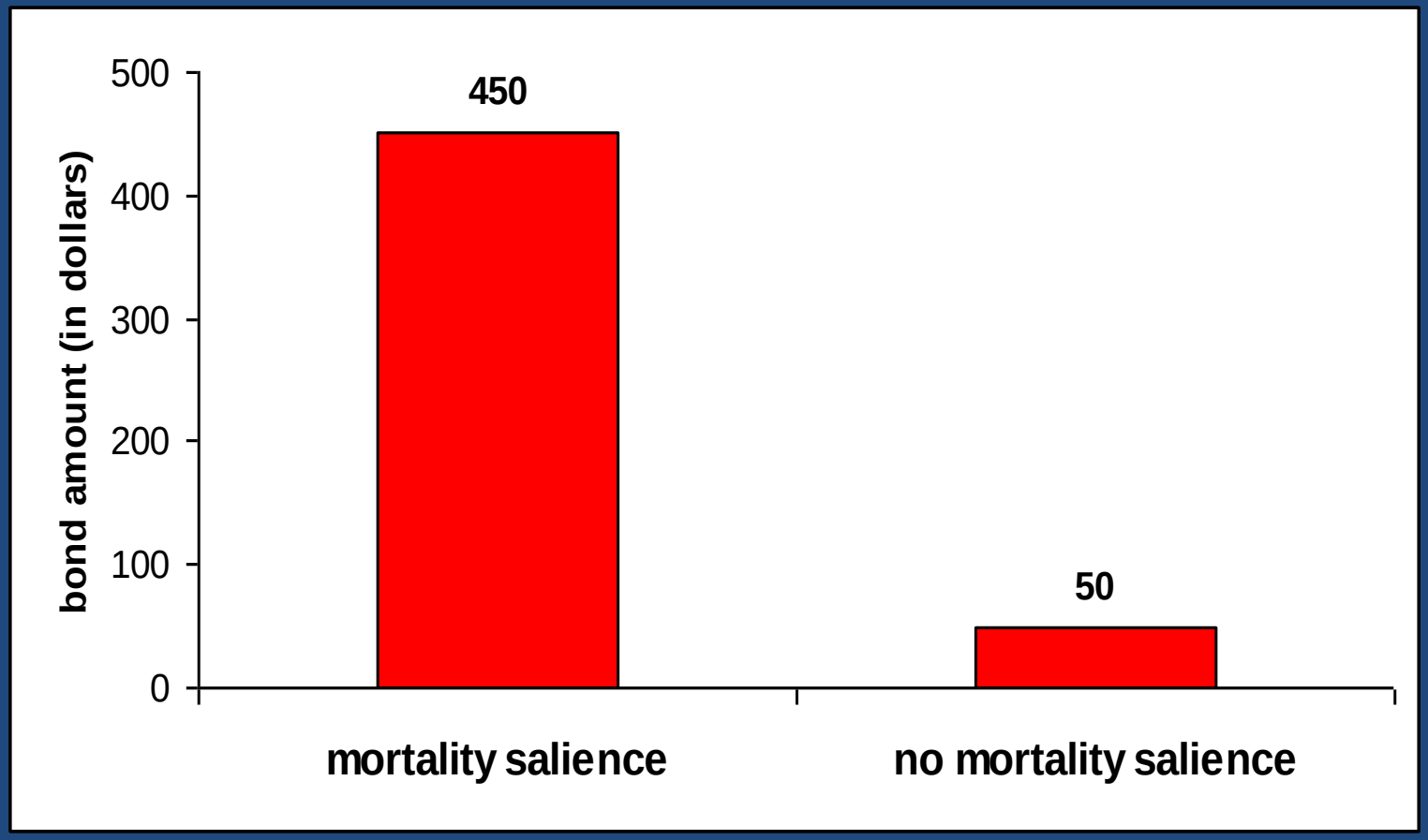
_____

_____

_____

_____

Bond amounts for alleged prostitute as a function of mortality salience



Rosenblatt et al., 1989 JPSP- Study 1

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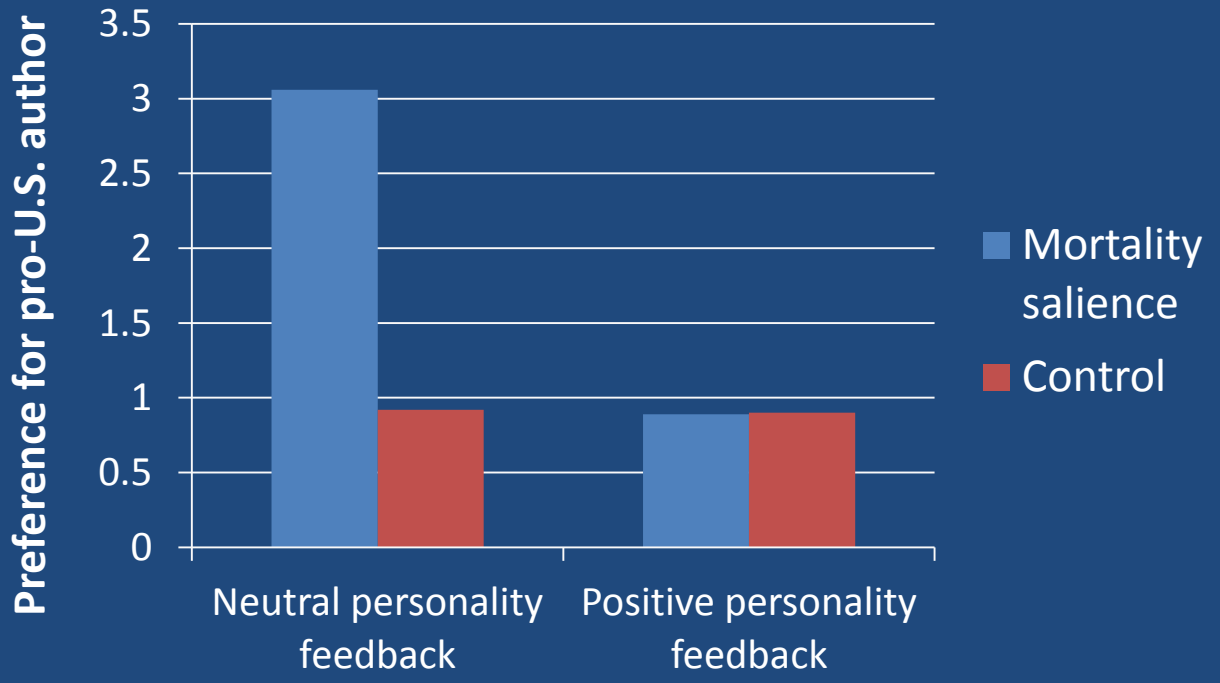
- Increasing self-esteem, faith in one's cultural worldview, or attachment security eliminates the effects of reminders of death on self-esteem striving and worldview defense

Increasing self-esteem reduces mortality salience effects on worldview defense

Harmon-Jones, Simon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & McGregor, 1997

Preference for a pro-U.S. author as a function of mortality salience and self-esteem manipulation



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- Increasing self-esteem, faith in one's cultural worldview, or attachment security eliminates the effects of reminders of death on self-esteem striving and worldview defense
- Threats to self-esteem, worldview, or attachment security increase the accessibility of death-related thoughts

Worldview threat increases accessibility of death thoughts

Schimel, Hayes, Williams, Jahrig, 2007

❖ Canadian participants were exposed to a webpage that either derogated fundamental Canadian values or a webpage that derogated Australian values.

❖ Then, the accessibility of their death-related thoughts was measured using a word-fragment completion task.

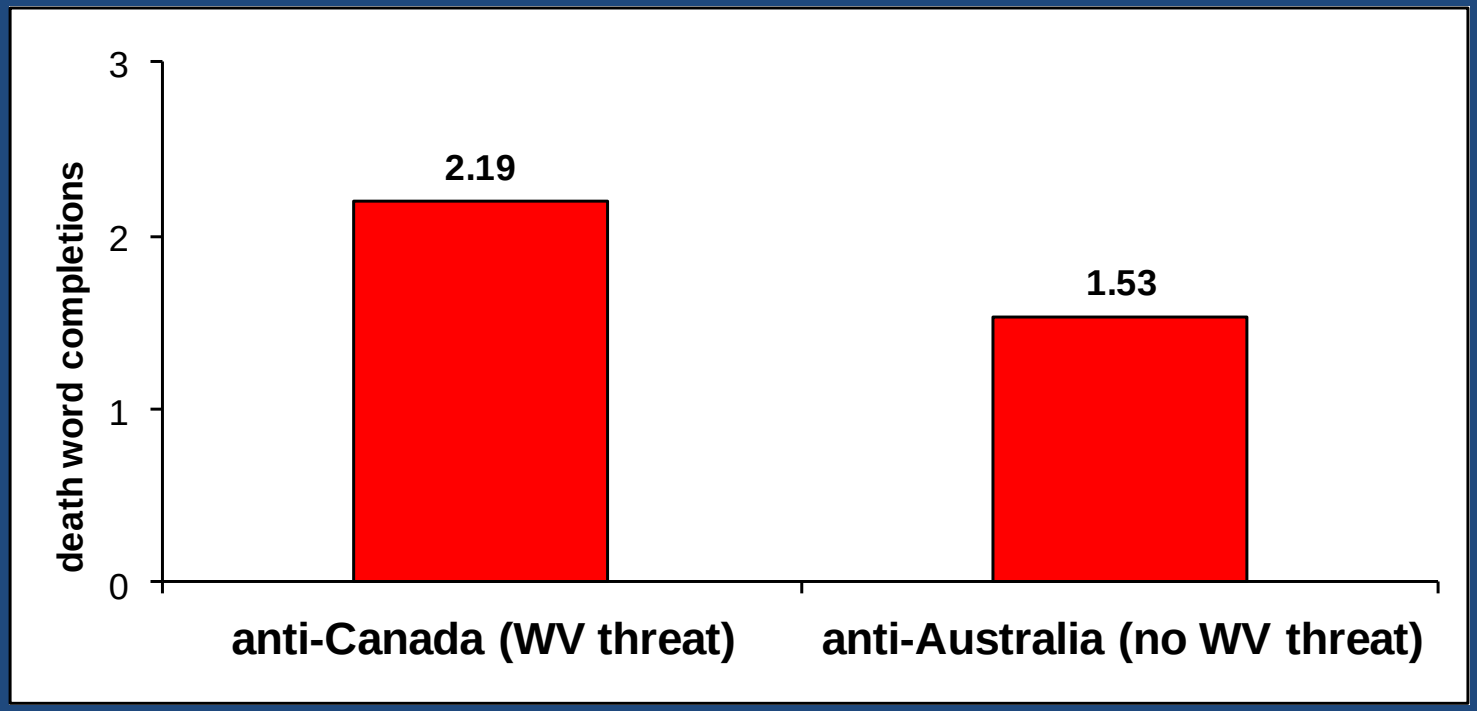
Measuring Death Thought Accessibility

SAMPLE WORD COMPLETION TASK

We are simply pre-testing this questionnaire for future studies. Please complete the following by filling letters in the blanks to create words. Please fill in the blanks with the first word that comes to mind. Write one letter per blank. Some words may be plural. Thank you.

1. BUR _ _ D
2. PLA _ _
3. _ _ OK
4. WAT _ _
5. DE _ _
6. MU _ _
7. _ _ NG
8. B _ T _ LE
9. M_ J _ R
10. P _ _ TURE
11. FL _ W _ R
12. GRA _ _
13. K _ _GS
14. CHA _ _
15. KI _ _ ED
16. CL _ _ K
17. TAB _ _
18. W _ _ DOW
19. SK _ _ L
20. TR _ _
21. P _ P _ R
22. COFF _ _
23. _ O _ SE
24. POST _ _
25. R _ DI _

Death thought accessibility as a function of exposure to worldview threatening information



TMHM

Conscious death thought activation

↓

Proximal Health Defenses: *decisions motivated by effort to minimize perceived vulnerability*

→ **Proximal Defenses: *increased interest in sun protection (products)***

↓

Non-conscious death thought activation

↓

Distal Self Defenses: *decisions motivated by maintaining self-esteem and symbolic sense of self*

→ **Distal Defenses: *decreased interest in sun protection (products)***

SUN-TAN INTENTION APPLICATION

An illustrative study: A time to tan

(Routledge , Arndt, & Goldenberg 2004 PSPB Study 1)

Procedure:

- recruited female ps for whom being tan was relevant to self-esteem
- mortality salience or control (dental pain) manipulation

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Procedure:

- recruited female ps for whom being tan was relevant to self-esteem
- mortality salience or control (dental pain) manipulation
- delay task manipulation (word search puzzle)
- interest in buying sun-screen lotions with varying SPFs.

Coppertone

Sunblock Lotion, SPF 45

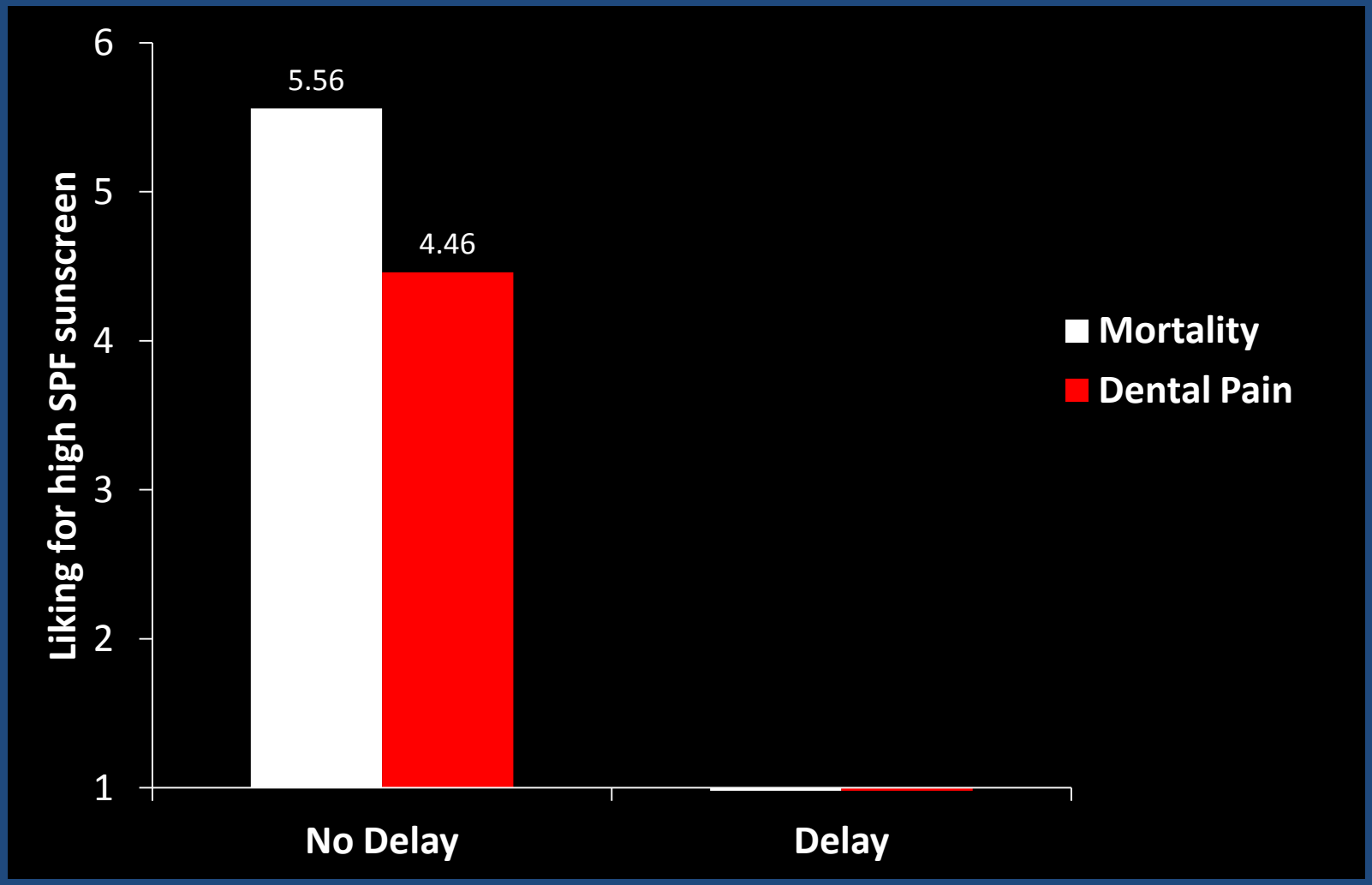
8 fl oz (237 ml)

Would you buy this?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
no				maybe				yes

Routledge, Arndt, & Goldenberg, 2004, PSPB Study 1

Interest in buying high SPF sunscreen as a function of mortality salience and delay



Note. High Scores indicate more interest in high SPF sunscreen

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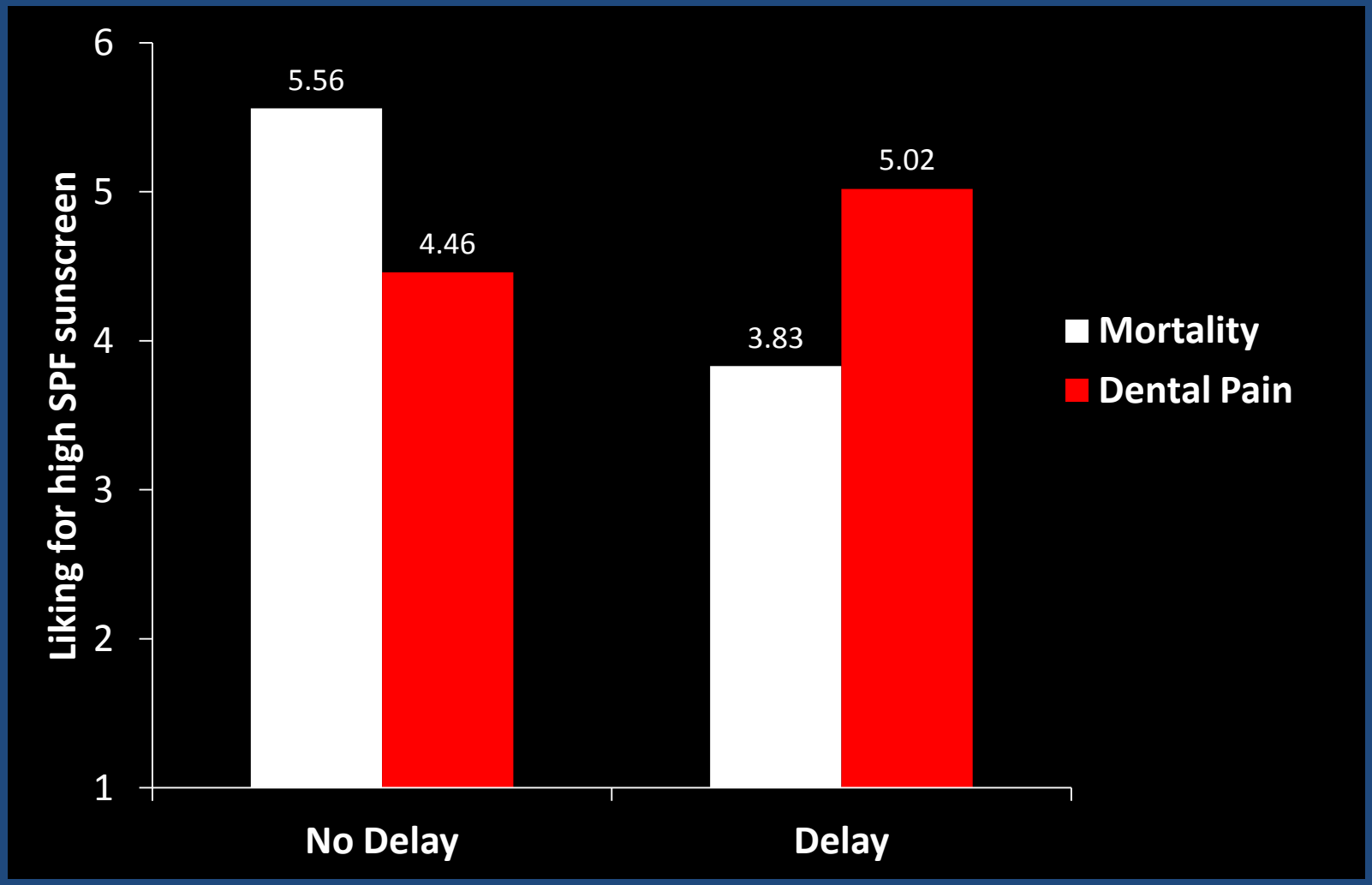

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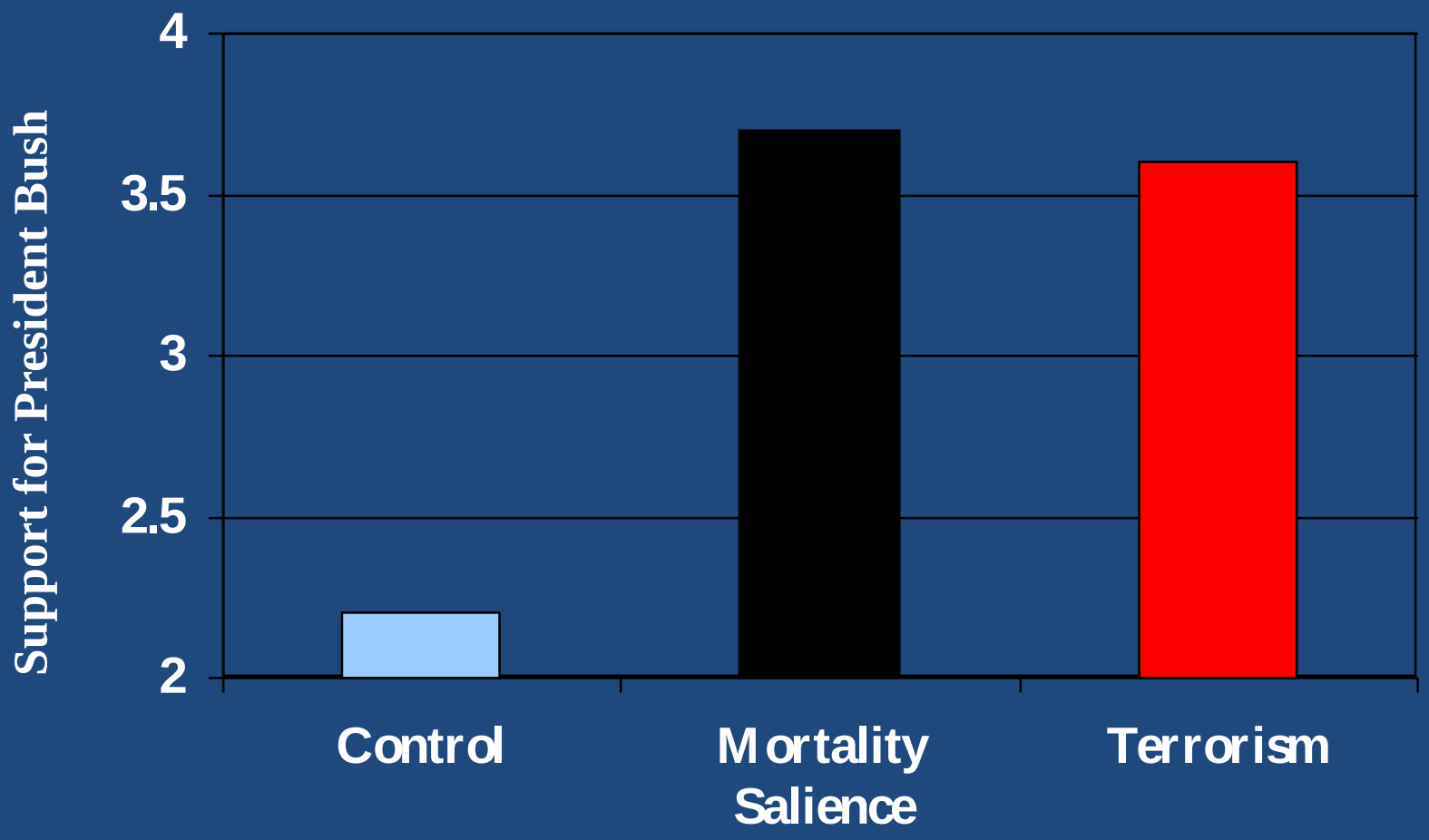
What can Terror Management Theory tell us about the problems of today's world?

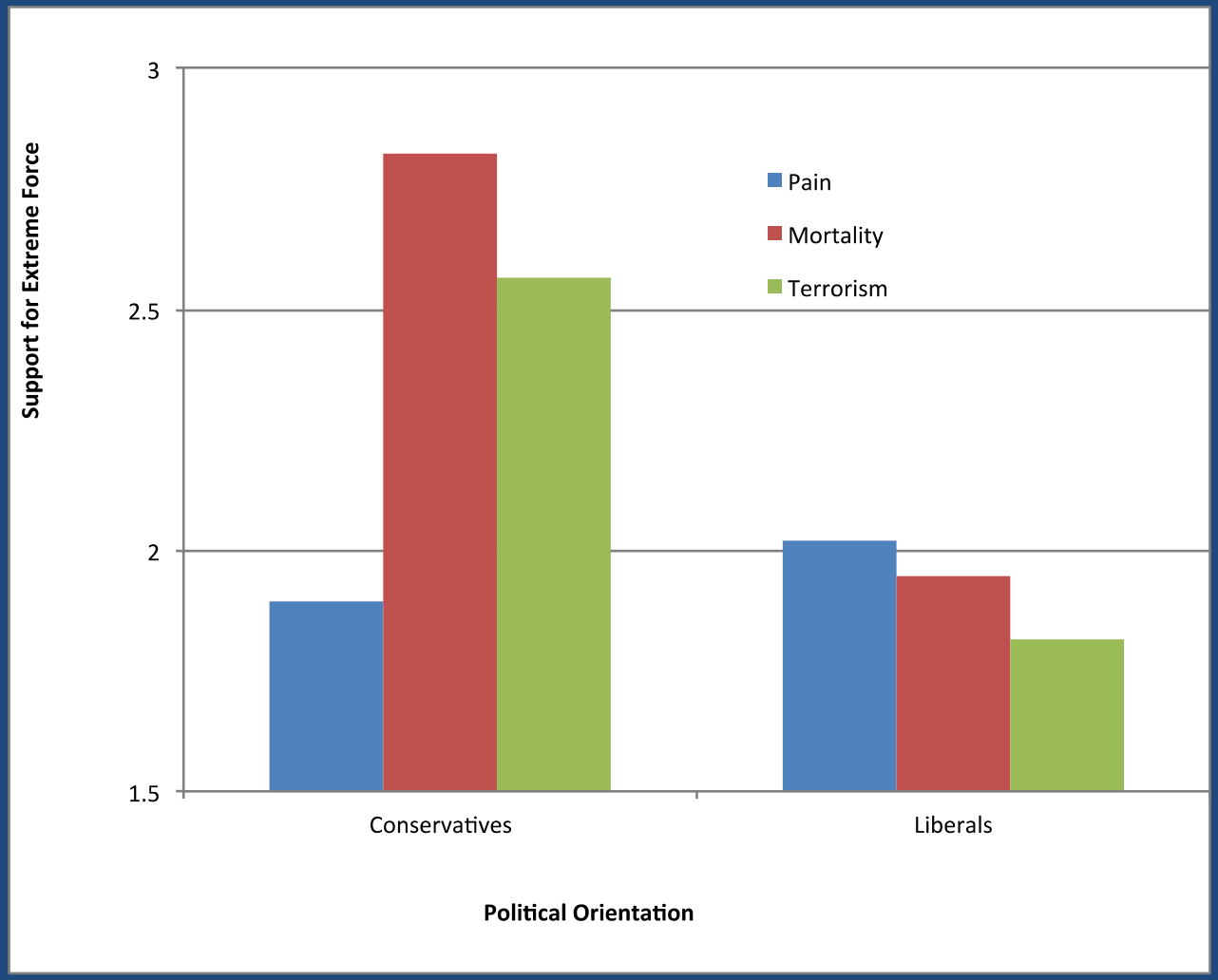
- War, prejudice, terrorism, and conflict …
- Why is it so hard for people to get along with those who are different from themselves?
- Why has human history consisted of an unending series of wars between different ethnic, religious, racial, national, and cultural groups?

Terror Management Perspective on Ethnic, Political, Religious, & International Conflict

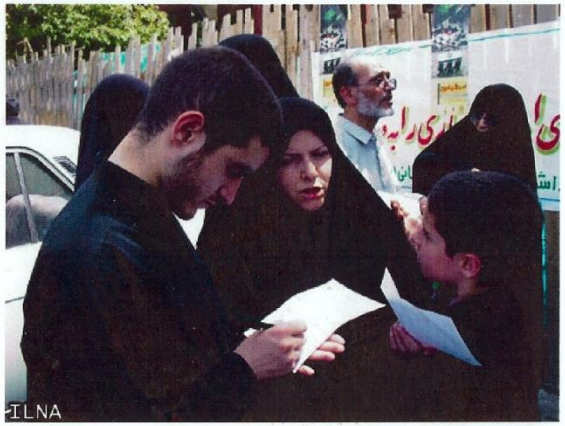
- People with worldviews different from our own undermine consensual validation and implicitly threaten faith in our own worldviews
- This threat is defused by converting them to our worldview, derogating them, or annihilating them
- Putting others down increases our own self-esteem
- Thoughts of death increase the need for faith in our worldview and thus leads us to cling to it more tightly and view those who are different with disdain

Support for George W. Bush as a function of priming condition.





Support for Extreme Military Tactics Among Americans as a Function of Mortality Salience and Political Orientation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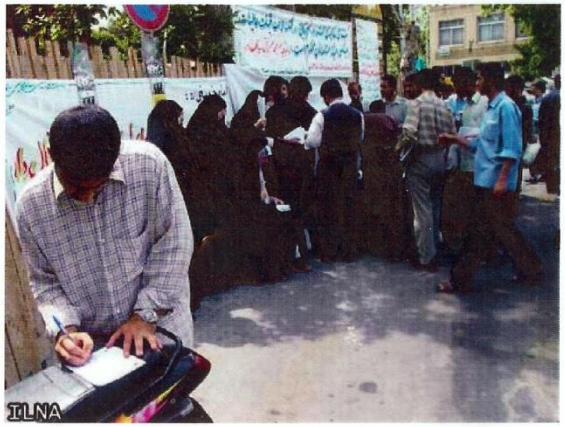
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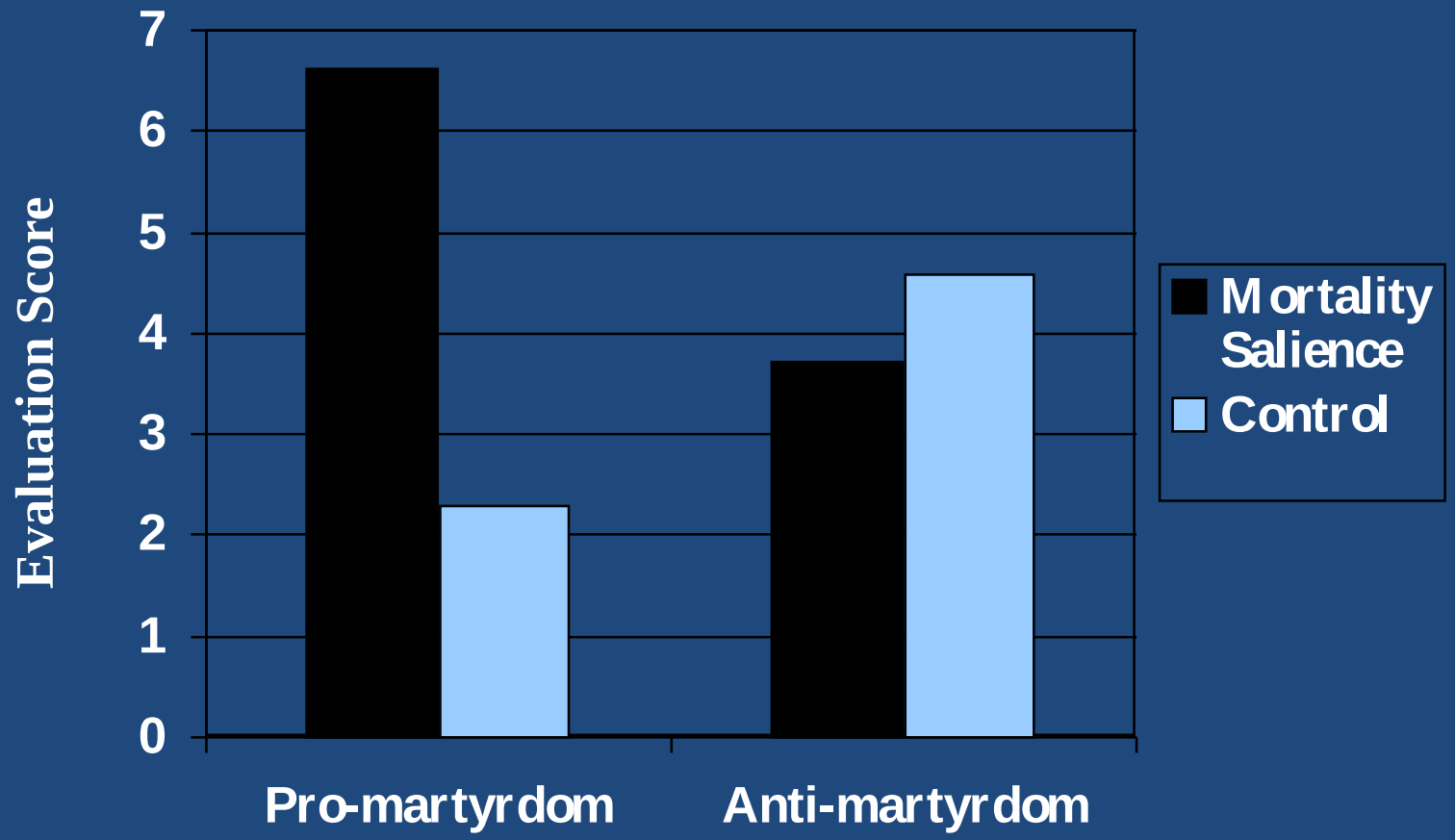
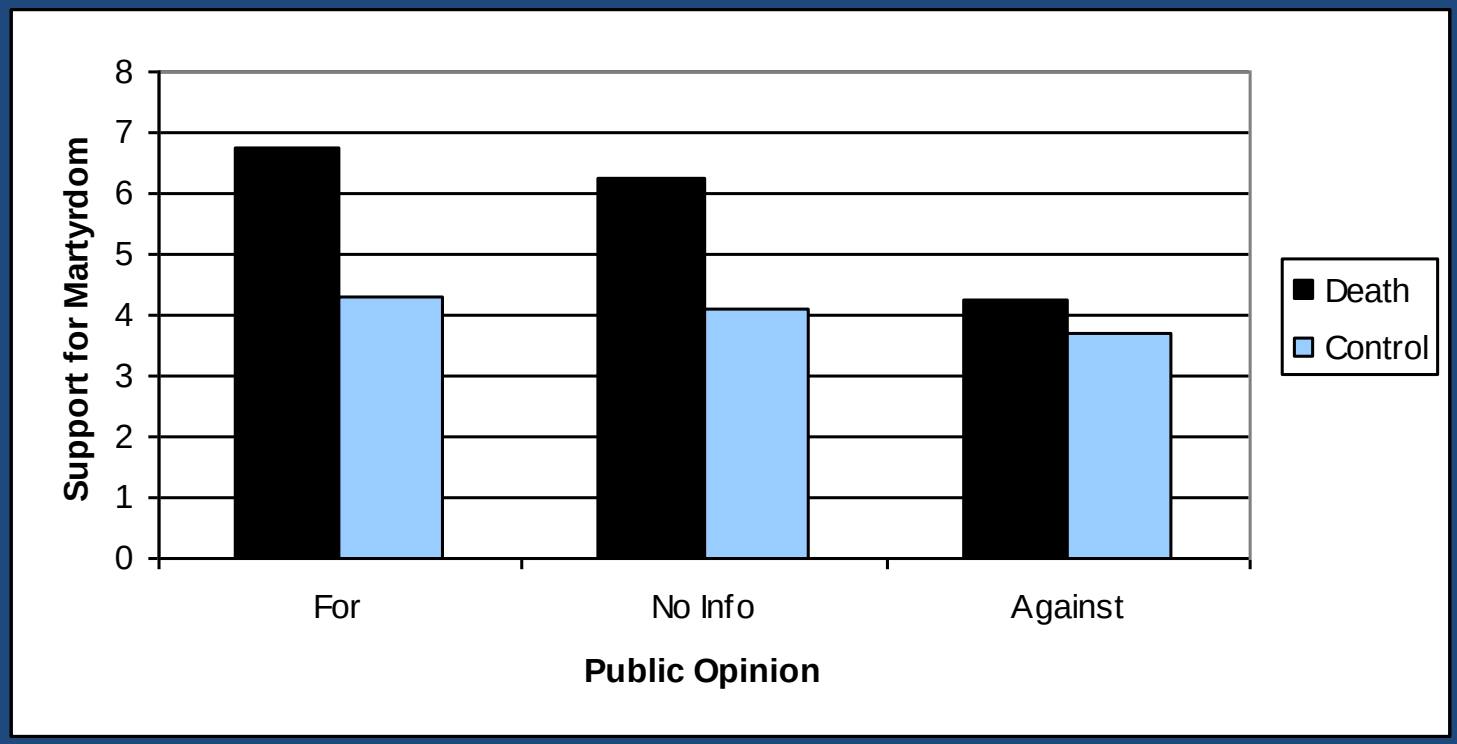
Iranians Evaluations of Persons Supporting and Opposing Martyrdom Attacks and Bombings as a Function of MS



Note. **Higher scores indicate increased preference for that person.**

The Effect of Death Reminders on Support for Violence is Affected by Social Support

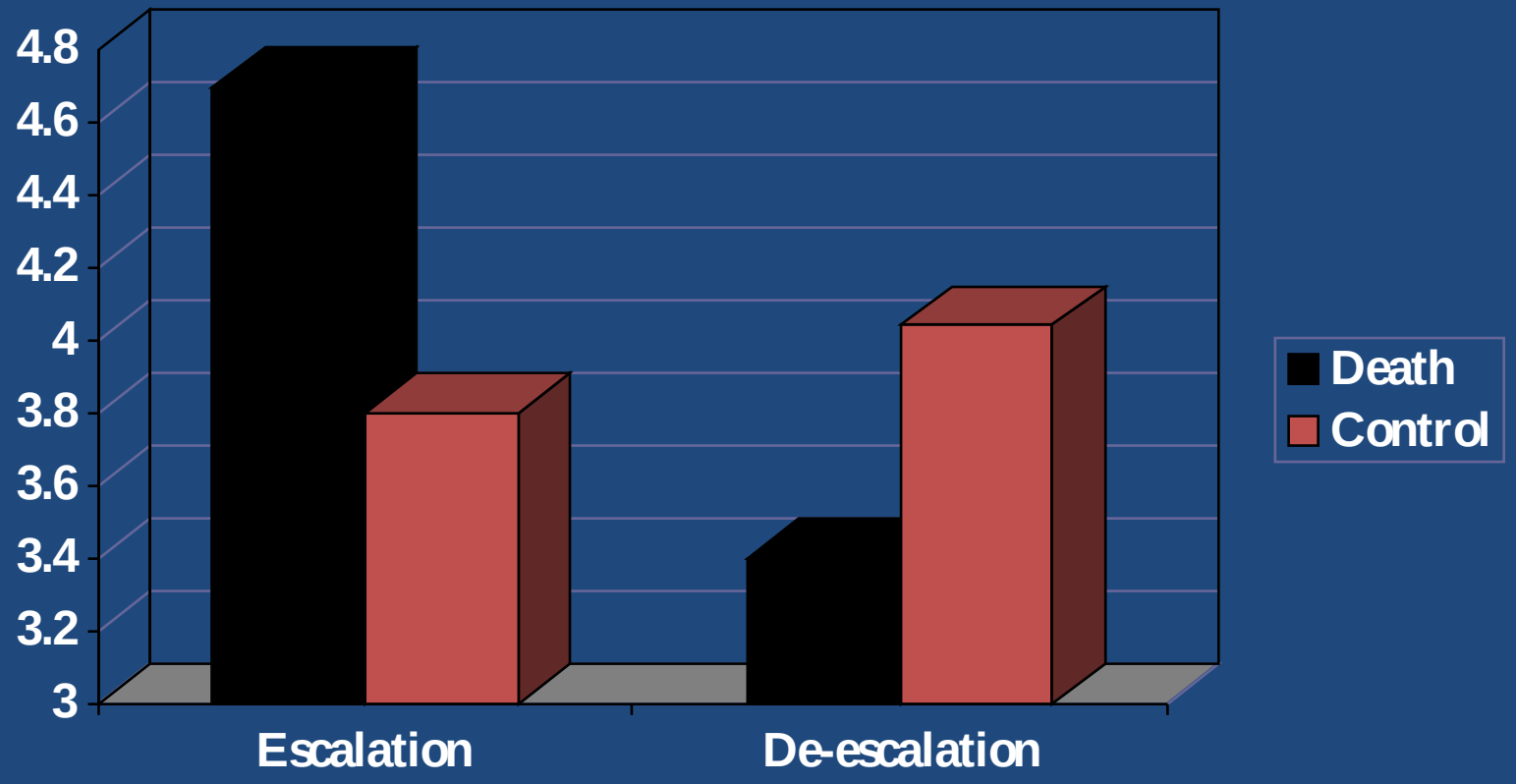
- Need other people to validate our beliefs and behavior
- We typically respond to fear by doing things we *assume* other people agree with and support
- A lack of social support for our attitude prevents us from using it for protection



Effect of Perceived Public Opinion and Mortality Salience on Support for Martyrdom Attacks among Iranians

Rhetoric from trusted leaders can provide direction for people’s attempts to cope with fear.

Support for Pre-emptive Nuclear Strike on Iran among Israelis as a Function of MS and Leader Rhetoric



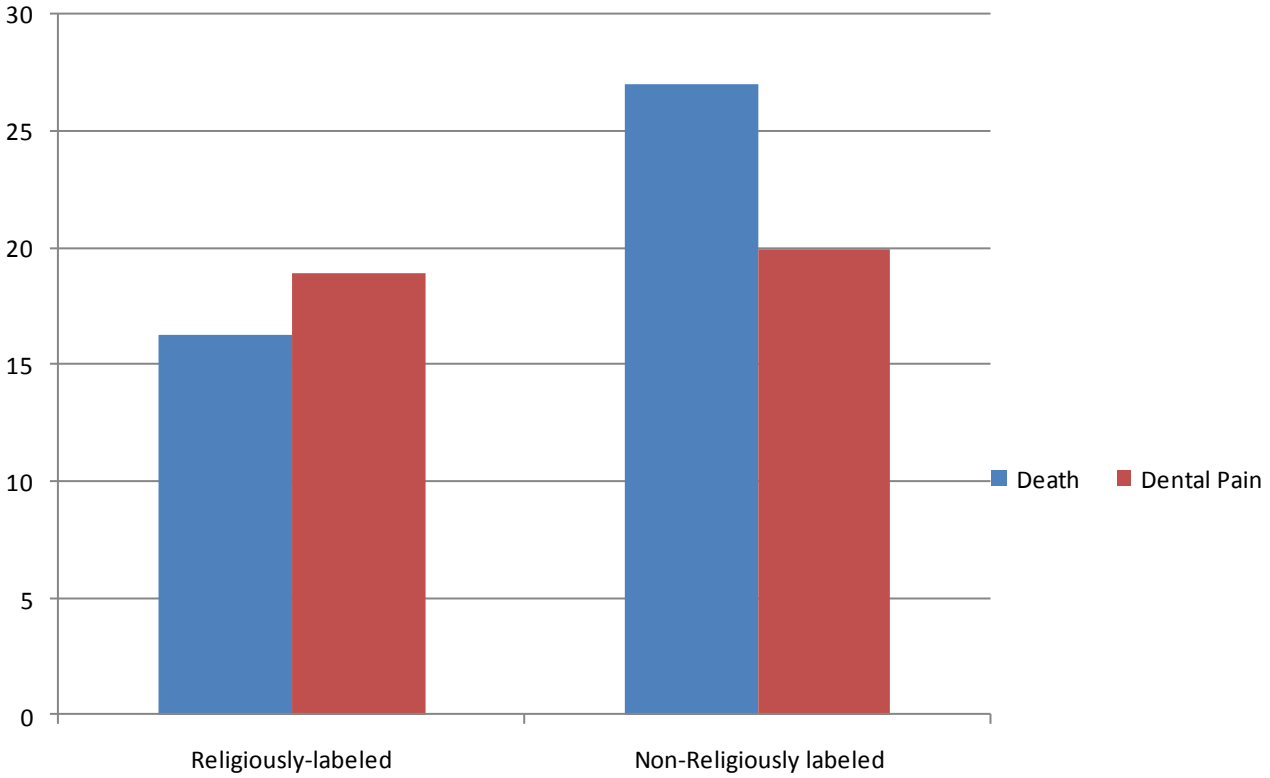
The same thing that makes them want to kill us makes us want to kill them …

What can be done to reduce this hostility?

Ways of Redirecting Responses to Existential Fear

- Compassionate Religious Values

The Effect of MS and Compassionate Muslim Values on Anti-Western Attitudes among Iranians



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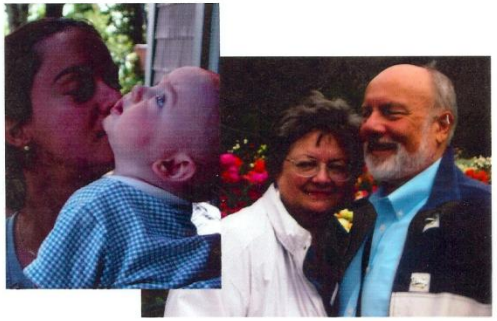
- Compassionate Religious Values
- Shared Humanity: The Human Family

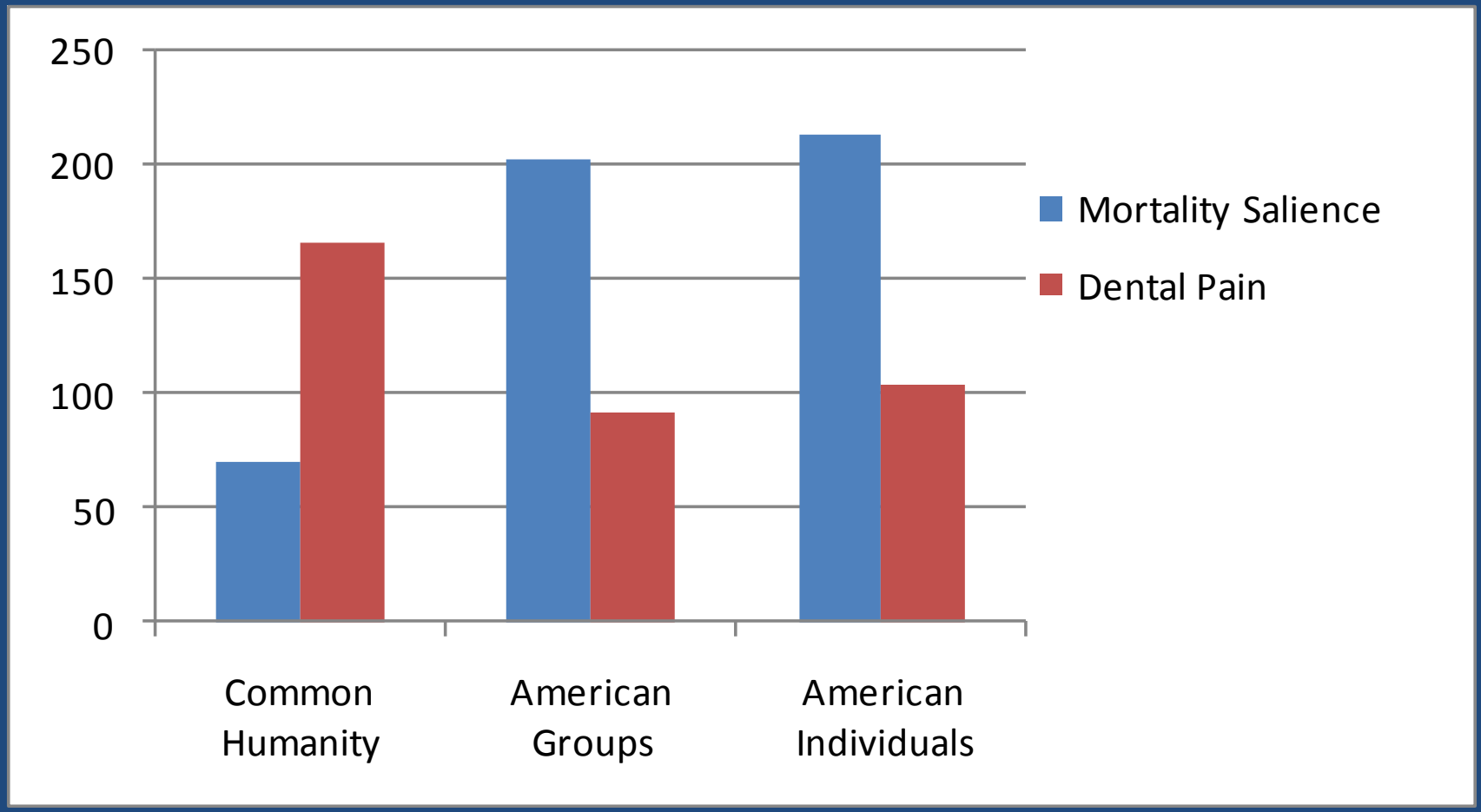
Common Humanity

American Family

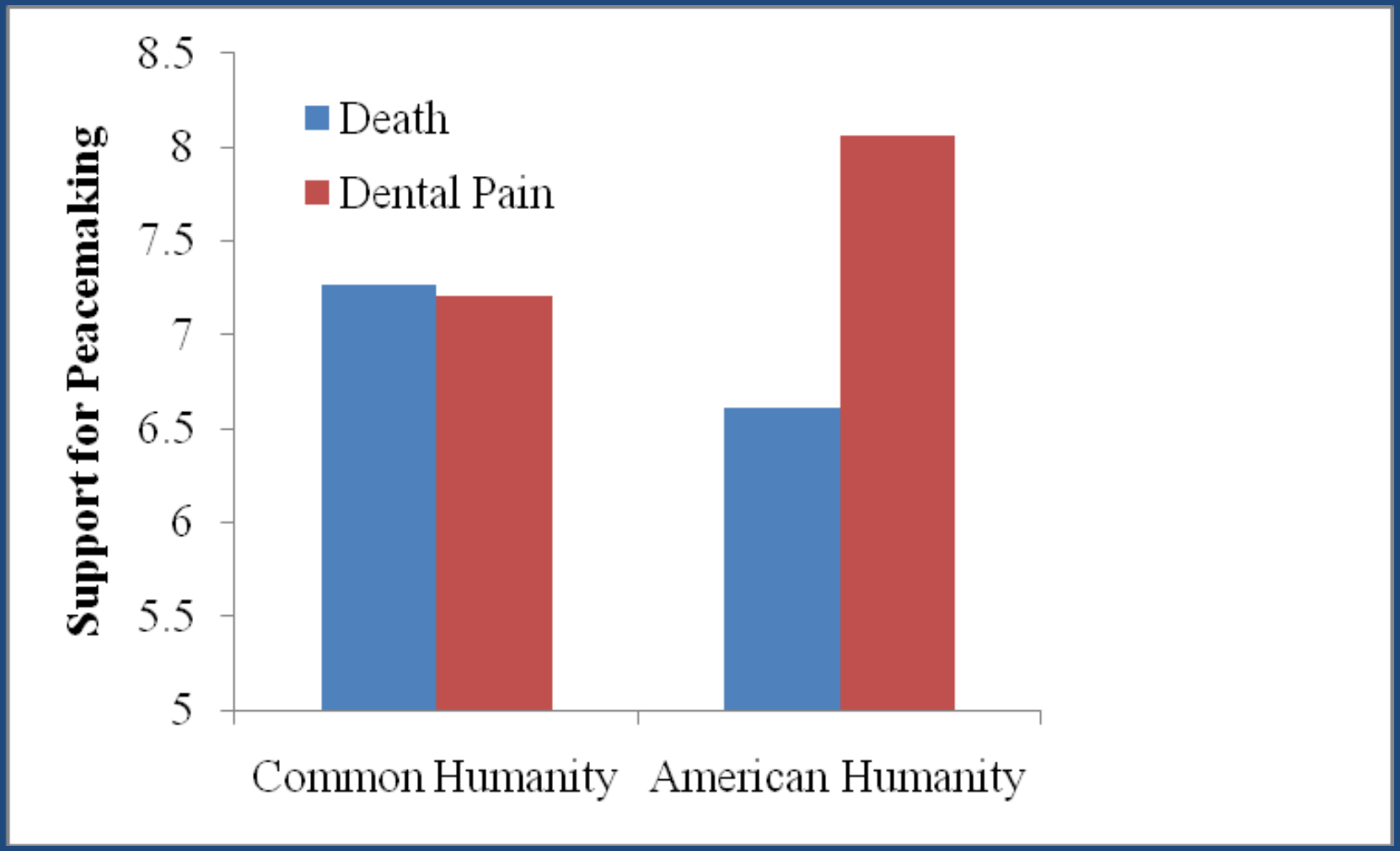


Neutral

IAT Anti-Arab Prejudice scores as a function of MS & common humanity primes



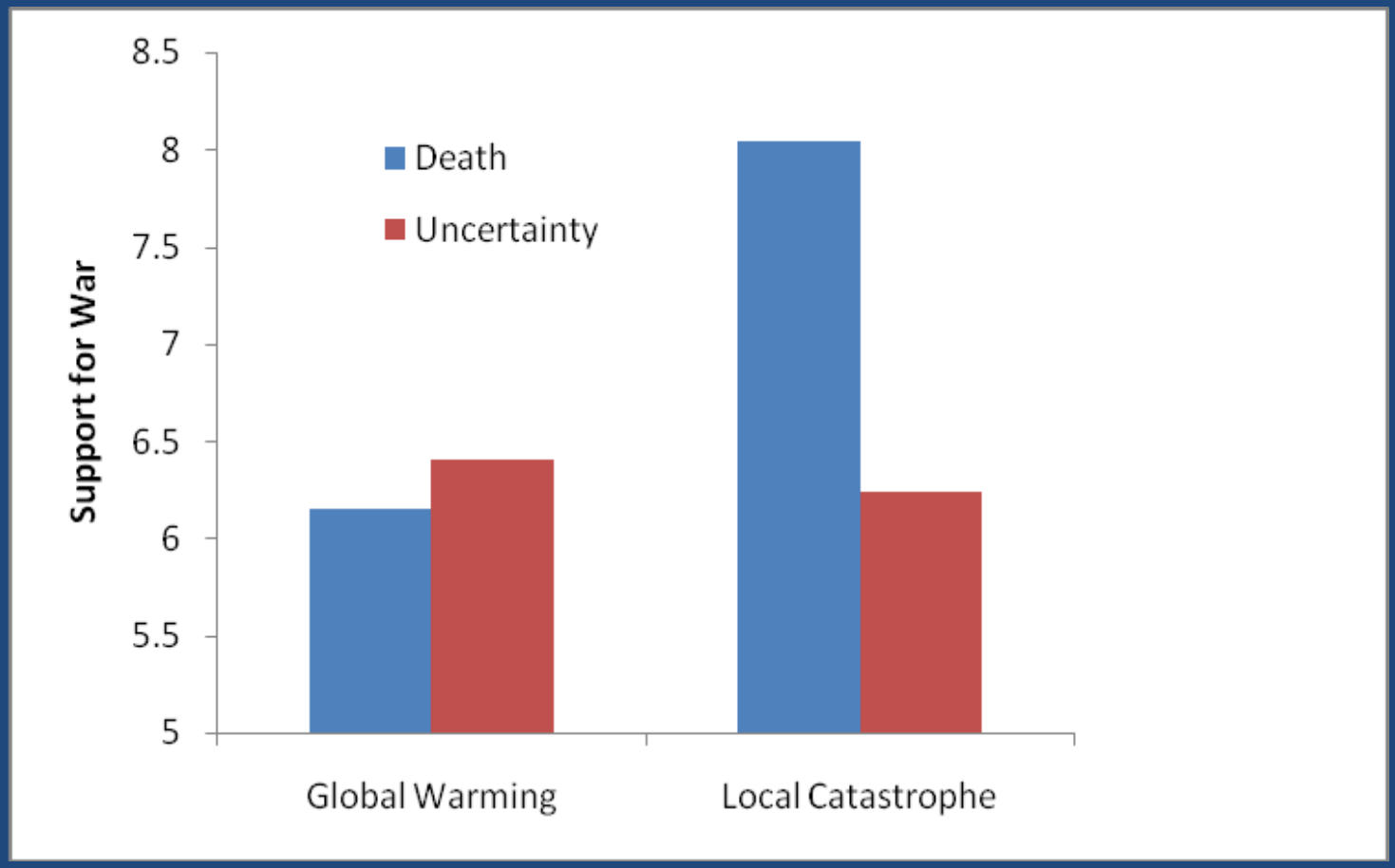
Support for Peacemaking as a Function of Mortality Salience and Common Humanity



Ways of Redirecting Responses to Existential Fear

- Religious Values Supporting Compassion
- Attachment Security
- A Sense of Common Humanity: The Human Family
- Shared Fate: Global Climate Change
  - The Sunny Side of Global Warming?

Americans' Support for War with Iran as a Function of Mortality Salience and Global Warming



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- Shared Fate: Global Climate Change
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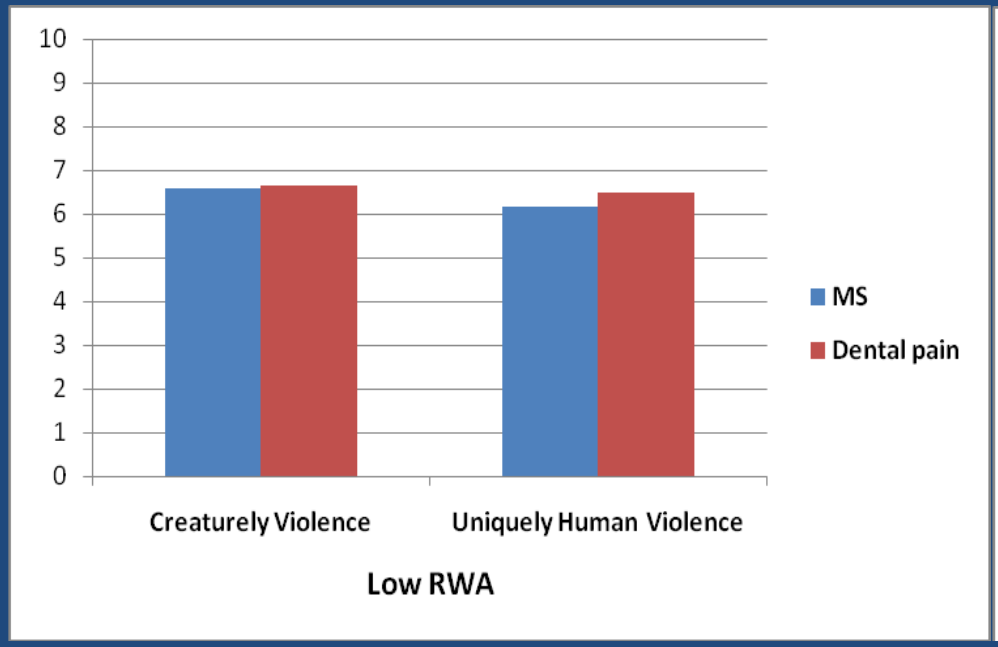
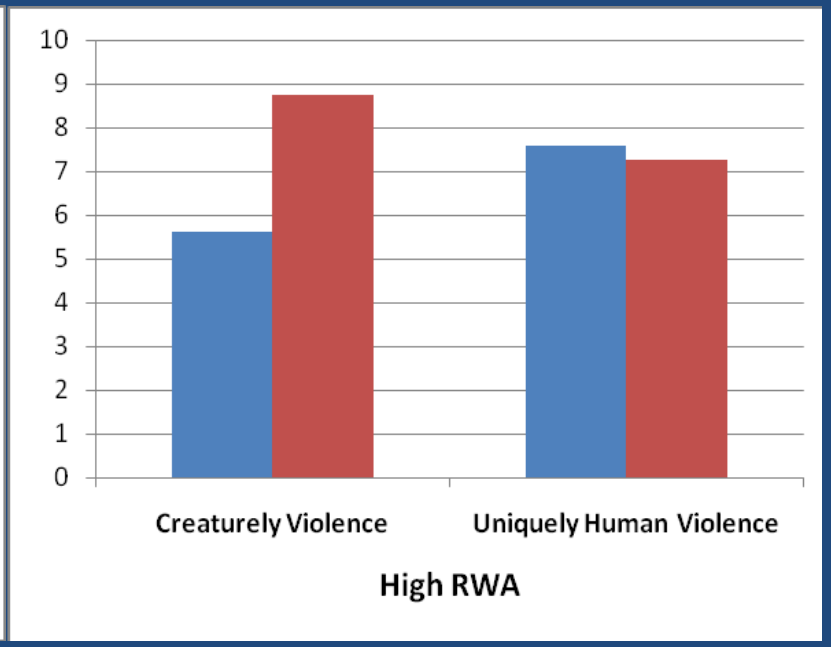
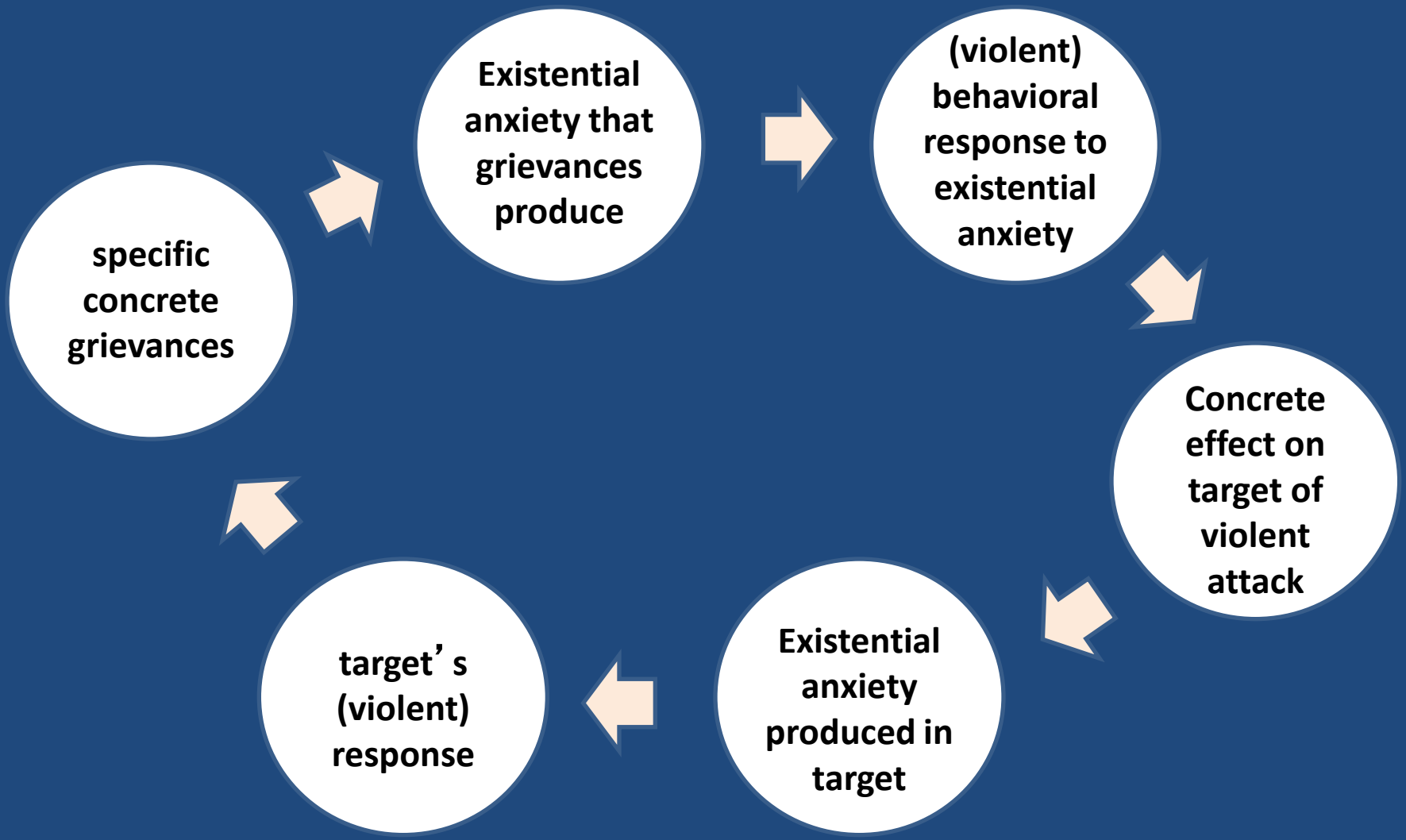
- Infra-humanization of Violence: Removing the Honor or War

Support for military action as a function of MS, violence prime, and RWA





Cycle of Intergroup Violence



Break the Cycle of Violence and Redirect Responses to Existential Fear by:

- Promoting Compassionate Values
- Promoting a Sense of Common Humanity
- Encourage Awareness of the Common Interest Fate Shared by all Human Beings – Ubuntu
- Remove the honor and nobility from war and violence
- Reduce exposure to violence and killing

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