Panelists

Dylan E. Horner

Data-bitz Summary: Transgender people experience various forms of discrimination and harassment that negatively affect their psychological well-being and make them vulnerable to experiencing existential concerns. This data-bitz presentation covers research finding that transgender people report higher levels of death-related thought, greater post-traumatic stress, lower meaning in life, and greater existential isolation compared to cisgender people. Importantly, results also show that feeling supported by others is autonomous and volitional in one’s gender expression predicts greater meaning in life and lower existential isolation among transgender people.

Bio: Dylan E. Horner, M.A., is a Ph.D. candidate in Social Psychology at the University of Arizona. He earned his B.A. in Psychology at Minot State University and his M.A. in Experimental Research Psychology at Cleveland State University. His research investigates how feelings of autonomy and self-authorship in life can help people manage existential concerns and promote well-being. Much of his work has focused on autonomy’s role in helping people manage death-related anxiety and concerns. His ongoing work is aimed at applying these understandings to identify ways to support people especially vulnerable to experiencing psychological distress.

Katie Angle

Data-bitz Summary: This present study uses Terror Management Theory (TMT) as a guide to examine the impact of sleep time and quality on participants’ levels of death thought accessibility (DTA). College-aged individuals participated in the two-phase study and recorded their sleep time over the two-week period. Results from the study indicated a possible link between worse sleep and higher death anxiety.

Bio: Katie Angle is an undergraduate psychology student at James Madison University (JMU). She is a member of the Terror Management Lab at JMU and is graduating this spring. Currently, Katie is working on her Honors thesis using Terror Management Theory as a guide for the experience of cult survivors. In her free time Katie enjoys hiking, reading, and cooking.

Peter Meentwaite

Data-bitz Summary: The present research explores a Terror Management Theory perspective of news media. Specifically, the research intends to discover if death reminders, via the presentation of social media news stories, contribute to increased news media polarization.

Bio: Peter Meentwaite is a 2nd year graduate student in the Psychological Sciences program at James Madison University. He is interested in political and communication research through the lens of Terror Management Theory, and is currently working on his Master’s Thesis, focused on how framing and media salience interact with each other. In his free time, Peter enjoys to cook, eat what he cooked, and go on evening walks.

Marcus Chao

Data-bitz Summary: This study investigated how awareness of one’s death (mortality salience; MS) influences how a person’s authenticity is perceived, others are regarded, and how motivated they are to live more authentically. We also investigated how traits like agreeableness and conscientiousness play a part in these relationships.

Bio: Marcus Chao is a graduate student in the Clinical Psychology master’s program at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. He received his B.A. in Psychology with a minor in Business from Texas A&M University. Currently, he is working towards his M.A. in Clinical Psychology, with an interest in trauma and existential isolation research, under Dr. Tom Pyrzynski.

Jon Sundby

Data-bitz Summary: The emotion of awe has often been touted as the basis for a more tolerant and open philosophy that can engage with our death, while not inducing defensive reactions. In this study, we examine whether exposing people to awe-inspiring videos could mitigate some of the defensive reactions typically seen when exposing people to death reminders.

Bio: Jon Sundby, B.A., is a second-year student in the Clinical Psychology MA program at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. After studying political science at Gannon College, Jon found himself drawn to the field of psychology. Working under Dr. Tom Pyrzynski, he was introduced to Existential Psychology, which fit well with his interests in philosophy, politics, and clinical practice. Jon’s research interests include awe, death anxiety, aging, and humanness.

Emily Courtyard

Data-bitz Summary: Dr. Courtyard will discuss a terror-management-informed approach to encouraging women’s intentions to engage in behaviors to reduce risk and prevent breast cancer, especially for women who have a family history of breast cancer. In this research, we examine how factors of awareness and understanding their own mortality and how to change can help reduce psychosocial symptoms. Dr. Courtyard is a social psychologist and assistant professor at the University of South Florida. Her research program employs an existential perspective on contributors to health and well-being, with considerations for individual, cultural, and gender-based differences.

Bio: Dr. Emily P. Courtyard is a social psychologist and assistant professor at the University of South Florida. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of California, Colorado Springs. After studying political science at Gannon College, Jon found himself drawn to the field of psychology. Working under Dr. Tom Pyrzynski, he was introduced to Existential Psychology, which fit well with his interests in philosophy, politics, and clinical practice. Jon’s research interests include awe, death anxiety, aging, and humanness.

Alex Strollo

Data-bitz Summary: In his data-bitz, Alex will give a summative overview of the Anxiety Buffer Reparation Model (ABRM). The ABRM primarily employs Terror Management Theory to outline how psychodrama-sanctioned psychotherapy is changing people’s relationship with their own mortality and why such a change can help reduce psychosocial symptoms. Bio: Alex Strollo is a Social Psychology Ph.D. student at the University of Arizona. Before attending university, Alex served nine years active duty in the U.S. Air Force. As his military contract ended, he became curious about scientific research and saw it as his next place of service. During undergrad at UO Colorado Springs, Alex learned people often become less afraid of death after taking psychodrama and began to wonder “how” and “why?”

Moderator

Peter J. Helin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Montana State University and on the Board of Trustees at the Ernest Becker Foundation. He obtained his undergraduate degree from the University of Vermont in 2001 before obtaining his Ph.D. at the University of Arizona in 2007 studying under the mentorship of Jeff Greenberg. Peter conducted a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Missouri-Columbia before joining the faculty at Montana State University in 2012. Dr. Helin’s research focuses on understanding the underlying antecedents and consequences of subjective social disconnection (e.g., emotional isolation, alienation, loneliness) and studying existential motivation more broadly (e.g., consequences of death awareness, meaninglessness, and identity). These interests have led to studies on how interpersonal relationships (e.g., attachment, love and trust), social identity (e.g., gender expression and social identity), and chronic stress issues (e.g., prejudice, bias, racism, conspiracy theories) can influence human behavior, well-being, and health.

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