

The Effect of Mortality Salience on Attention: An Example of Cultural Cues

Hua-fu He¹ and Nai-Shing Yen^{1,2}

¹Department of Psychology, National Chengchi University

²Research Center for Mind, Brain, and Learning, National Chengchi University

According to terror management theory, people can manage a threat after thinking about death. This theory proposes a dual-process model to explain how people defend death thoughts. There are two defense routes: proximal and distal. The cultural worldview serves an important function in distal defense. Studies conducted in Western countries found that people were more positive or preferred the self-culture-worldview; however, mixed findings have been reported in the studies conducted in Eastern countries. To investigate the distal defense mechanism, this study manipulated participants' thought of death and let that thought descend into their unconscious through a distracting task. This study also examined the relationship between the cultural worldview and death defense from attentional paradigms by conducting two experiments. In the first experiment, we adopted the visual search paradigm, and the dependent variables were reaction time and the rate of accuracy. We found it was more accurate when participants were asked to search the cue within their own culture after reminding themselves of death thoughts compared to those that did not remind them about death. However, no significant differences in the reaction time were found. In the second experiment, we used an eye tracker, and the dependent variables were the index of number of first fixation and the duration of fixations. We found that the fixation duration was longer for the cues within one's own culture than those for non-self-related culture when the participants were reminded about their death. However, there were no significant differences in the number of first fixations. These two experiments provide evidence supporting that cultural worldview is an important function in distal defense, as was found in the studies conducted in Western countries.

Keywords: *culture-worldview, terror management theory, eye-tracker, visual search task, distal defense*