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Of Mice and Men, and Objectified Women: A Terror Management Account of Infrahumanization

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This article offers terror management theory (TMT) as a conceptual lens through which the process of infrahumanization can be viewed. TMT suggests that people are threatened by the awareness of their mortal, animal nature, and that by emphasizing their symbolic, cultural—and hence, uniquely human—existence, they can help quell this threat. The article reviews empirical evidence demonstrating that reminders of mortality increase efforts to see the self and in-groups as more uniquely human. In addition, it is posited that, as an ironic consequence of defensive efforts to rid the self and certain others of any connection to animal nature, people are sometimes stripped of their human nature. The study presents evidence that the objectification, and self-objectification, of women can be viewed from this perspective and concludes that both emphasizing people's uniquely human qualities and viewing them as objectified symbols can be understood as serving a terror management function.

KEYWORDS creatureliness, infrahumanization, terror management theory

In the past decade or so, social psychology has witnessed an explosion of research on infrahumanization. Infrahumanization refers to the tendency to attribute more 'humanness' to one's in-group than to out-groups (Leyens et al., 2000). Humanness from this perspective is typically defined as that which distinguishes human beings from other animals. More recently,

Haslam and colleagues (Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2005) broadened the scope of

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infrahumanization with the suggestion that humanness is not just defined as that which distinguishes people from animals, but also by essential, or core, aspects of human nature (including emotion and desire), which to a large extent connect, rather than separate, humans and animals. Thus, in this case, the antithesis to being human is not to be compared to an animal, but to an object (as in the objectification, and self-objectification of women). Our contribution to this special issue entails a consideration of these two lines of research from the perspective of terror management theory (TMT; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986).

We assert that infrahumanization research and TMT are ripe for integration. To date, infrahumanization research has focused primarily on documenting the effect, but has not really addressed the motivational forces that contribute to infrahumanization. There is a substantial body of TMT research that speaks to this question. In addition, although the frameworks of Leyens and colleagues and Haslam and colleagues each concern humanness, there has been little effort to reconcile these alternative perspectives with a single motivating factor. We suggest that TMT offers a conceptual lens through which to view each of these biases in the service of another—the need to manage psychological threats associated with the awareness of mortality.

Uniquely human infrahumanization: The phenomena

Leyens and colleagues (e.g. Leyens et al., 2000) recently proposed that, in addition to explicit and extreme dehumanization wherein targets of prejudice are directly compared to animals (e.g. Adolf Hitler's declaration that Jewish people 'without any culture of their own' were analogous to a 'horde of rats' (1925, p. 302)), there exists a basic tendency for people to reserve more uniquely human characteristics for one's self and the groups with which one identifies. Thus, these researchers posited a distinction in the amount of humanness people attribute to their self and own group as compared to out-groups—this is known as the infrahumanization effect.

Intelligence, language, values, and certain emotions have been identified as characteristics that are typically human, and thus capturing the human essence (Leyens et al., 2000). Leyens and colleagues focused their research efforts on attributions of uniquely human emotions. Leyens et al. first provided evidence that people make a distinction between primary (e.g. surprise and fear) and secondary (e.g. hope and disappointment) emotions, with one of the fundamental differences being that the latter are perceived as being experienced uniquely by humans. More recent research has supported the assumption that secondary emotions are associated with (Demoulin et al., 2004), and activate, the concept of humanity (Vaes, Paladino, & Leyens, 2006). To the extent that this is the case, the researchers predicted that people should be especially likely to attribute secondary emotions to their own group compared to out-groups. This finding was first demonstrated by Leyens et al. (2001), and has been since replicated (e.g. Cortes, Demoulin, Rodríguez-Torres, Rodríguez-Pérez, & Leyens, 2005). Critically, the attribution of secondary emotions occurs regardless of the valence of those emotions (Leyens et al., 2001, Experiment 2). In addition, research has demonstrated convergent findings using implicit measures (e.g. Boccato, Cortes, Demoulin, & Leyens, 2007; Paladino et al., 2002) and has found that the expression of secondary emotions leads to more favorable reactions when exhibited by in-group as compared to out-group members (Vaes, Paladino, Castelli, Leyens, & Giovanazzi, 2003).

Recently, several studies have extended the infrahumanization effect beyond the attribution of secondary emotions, focusing on uniquely human characteristics in general (e.g. Paladino & Vaes, 2009; Viki et al., 2006). Paladino and Vaes (2009), for example, showed that any characteristic is rated as more uniquely human when it is ascribed to an in-group than to an out-group. Again, the researchers demonstrated that this bias is independent of judgments about valence. Boccato, Capozza, Falvo, and Durante (2008) also demonstrated a direct link between the in-group and humanness by showing that

priming the in-group (in contrast to the out-group) led to faster recognition of human, but not ape or chimpanzee, faces, and also that the out-group prime led to a faster recognition of animal faces in a second study.

In a recent literature search on *PSYCHInfo*, we identified 37 empirical demonstrations of this effect in a dozen different countries. While the infraculturalization effect is clearly robust, most research to date has focused on describing the phenomena and the conditions that influence its manifestation. What is less clear is why the effect exists in the first place. Given that it occurs independently from the valence of particular characteristics (e.g. Leyens et al., 2001)—why is humanness associated more so with self and in-group and less so with out-groups? The general position is that people have a general tendency to essentialize social categories, humanness being the most comprehensive, and that ethnocentric motivations result in attributing the most of this human essence to one's own group and less of it to others (Leyens et al., 2000). We suggest that another answer to this question can be found in the theory of terror management.

TMT as an explanatory framework

Social psychologists Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon adapted ideas from existential philosophy, psychodynamic psychology, and cultural anthropology (e.g. Søren Kierkegaard, Otto Rank, Ernest Becker) to develop TMT. The theory starts with the premise that humans' evolved capacities for self-awareness and temporal thought are clearly adaptive in many ways. However, to be aware of one's own existence renders humans necessarily cognizant of the inevitability of one's own eventual non-existence. Thus, humans are forced to recognize, on some level, that no matter what they do to deny death, or what they devote their life to, life could end at any moment, and will end, sooner or later. Given that humans have many systems geared toward keeping them alive, this knowledge is a continual potential source of anxiety or terror (see Becker, 1973). Rather than experience terror, however, TMT suggests that people manage the threat with a

system of defense, which has at its crux human culture.

It is via culture that people are able to construe the self as a valuable contributor to a meaningful existence rather than a mere material animal fated only to obliteration upon death. Specifically, the cultural system offers a prescription for obtaining immortality symbolically by suggesting how to be a valuable contributor to something more meaningful and enduring than one's own existence, or literally, in the case of religious or spiritual belief systems that offer hope of life after death. Adhering to the tenets of specific belief systems permits humans to feel that they are valued members of their respective cultures, granting them a sense of self-esteem. Together, the complementary psychological structures of worldview belief and self-esteem allow individuals to sustain a state of relative psychological equanimity in the face of the awareness that they will eventually die.

Research designed to test these ideas typically manipulates the salience of the awareness of death (mortality salience) and subsequently examines people's defensive reactions. Mortality salience is commonly manipulated with experimental primes asking people to contemplate their own mortality in contrast to one of a number of aversive control topics (e.g. experiencing pain, social isolation, uncertainty, meaninglessness, and failure), and this is followed by a delay so that thoughts about death are not directly conscious at the time when people defend. Alternatively, subliminal manipulations of death (e.g. Arndt, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1997) and more naturalistic death reminders (e.g. proximity to a funeral home: Pyszczynski et al., 1996; cancer screening behavior: Goldenberg, Arndt, Hart, & Routledge, 2008) have been used to prime an awareness of mortality. Subsequent to such manipulations, hundreds of studies reveal that people respond with efforts to defend their worldview and bolster their self-esteem.

For example, in an early empirical test of TMT's hypotheses, Greenberg et al. (1990) found that Christians who were reminded of death had more positive evaluations of Christians, but more negative evaluations of people who

were purportedly Jewish. Research since then has demonstrated that thoughts of death lead to increased tolerance for racism (Greenberg, Schimel, Martens, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 2001) and to aggression directed toward people who disparage one's worldview (McGregor et al., 1998). More recently, researchers showed that people will go to even more extreme lengths to defend the validity of their cultural beliefs when mortality is salient, such as condoning the use of suicide terrorism and extreme military tactics even at the expense of thousands of civilian lives (Hirschberger & Ein-Dor, 2006; Pyszczynski, Abdollahi, et al., 2006). In addition to demonstrating the exclusivity of these effects in response to death primes and not other aversive control topics, researchers have examined the accessibility of thoughts about death with implicit measures, such as word fragment completion tasks (e.g. coff_ _ can be completed as coffee or coffin) and lexical decision tasks. In support of the TMT position, defending one's worldview reduces the accessibility of death thoughts (e.g. Schmeichel & Martens, 2005) and having one's views challenged increases death-related, and not other aversive, thoughts (e.g. Schimel, Hayes, Williams, & Jahrig, 2007), suggesting that defense of the worldview effectively functions to reduce the psychological threat of mortality, specifically.

People also take measures to bolster their self-esteem when death is salient. For example, they agree more with positive feedback (Dechesne et al., 2003), make more self-serving attributions for their success (Mikulincer & Florian, 2002), more vigorously display valued attributes (e.g. Peters, Greenberg, Williams, & Schneider, 2005), and overestimate the future success of their group (Dechesne, Greenberg, Arndt, & Schimel, 2000). In addition, as with worldview threats, threatening people's self-esteem increases death thoughts (Hayes, Schimel, Faucher, & Williams, 2008). Further, people also seek to bolster their personal values even if doing so puts their health at risk (e.g. *tan more*: Routledge, Arndt, & Goldenberg, 2004; support prayer over medical treatment: Vess, Arndt, Cox, Routledge, & Goldenberg, in press) and life (e.g. *drive recklessly*: Taubman Ben-Ari, 2000).

Thus, it appears that these symbolic modes of meaning and value are so paramount to death denial that they even take priority over the physical realities of death.

The threat of creatureliness and humanization of the *self*

Terror management theory and research depict how people manage the potential for existential anxiety associated with mortality by broadly identifying with and immersing themselves in a framework of meaning and through which they can derive value. Yet people are confronted on a regular basis with the fact that they are physical creatures. Cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker (1973) described culture as a means to deny human beings' creatureliness and to stave off anxiety resulting from the human paradox 'that man is an animal who is conscious of his animal limitation' (p. 87). Becker suggested that because physical creatures die, humans will always be entrenched in an existential battle in which they must deny their creatureliness so as to deny their mortality. If humans do not psychologically distance themselves from non-human animals, then they cannot symbolically elevate themselves above that which dies (the body).

It follows that when mortality concerns are salient, people are particularly threatened by comparisons of humans to animals and that, under such conditions, they should exhibit a greater preference for information suggesting that humans are unique. Supporting this assertion, Goldenberg et al. (2001) demonstrated that in comparison to thinking about dental pain, mortality salience led to greater preference for an essay describing human uniqueness (i.e. 'Humans have language and culture. We create works of art, music, and literature that enable us to live in an abstract world of the imagination—something no other animal is capable of'); and within the mortality salience condition but not the control condition, the essay emphasizing differences from other animals was preferred to the essay emphasizing similarities (i.e. 'Our bodies work in pretty much the same way as the bodies of all other animals. Whether you're

talking about lizards, cows, horses, insects, or humans, we're all made up of the same basic biological products').

Extending these insights to the behaviors that humans and animals both necessarily engage in, Goldenberg and her colleagues have examined the relationship between mortality concerns and attitudes toward the physical aspects of sex (Goldenberg, Cox, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2002; Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, McCoy, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999). For example, in one series of experiments (Goldenberg *et al.*, 2002), when participants were primed with the essay (from Goldenberg *et al.*, 2001) that described the similarity between humans and animals, mortality salience decreased the appeal of the physical, but not romantic (and hence uniquely human), aspects of sex. Reading the essay emphasizing culture as distinguishing humans from animals, in contrast, decreased, and even showed a trend toward reversing, this response to mortality reminders. In addition, a second study revealed that thoughts of death became more accessible when people were primed with human–animal similarity and then thought about the physical (but again, not the romantic) aspects of sex. Additional research also demonstrated that when the physical aspects of sex were couched in symbolic meaning (i.e. love—by thinking about love prior to contemplating the physical aspects of sex), people no longer exhibited a response of heightened death thought accessibility (Goldenberg *et al.*, 1999). Thus, these studies reveal that, not only do concerns about human creatureliness underlie threats associated with physical behaviors, but symbolic and cultural values that are uniquely human function to diffuse the threat.

Work since then has supported the generalizability of these findings to other physical activities, showing that people restrict certain types of bodily movements (Goldenberg, Heflick, & Cooper, 2008) and physical sensations, even those that are pleasurable (Goldenberg *et al.*, 2006), when existential concerns are primed. Indeed, people even avoid bodily behaviors with important health benefits (e.g. breast self-exams: Goldenberg, Arndt *et al.*, 2008; and report

more discomfort when getting a mammogram: Goldenberg, Routledge, & Arndt, 2009), when human creatureliness is primed in the context of mortality awareness. Further, people report stronger reactions of disgust in response to bodily products (e.g. feces: Goldenberg *et al.*, 2001) when death is primed, and being presented with images of such stimuli increases the accessibility of death thoughts (Cox, Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, & Weise, 2006), suggesting, once again, that physical aspects that humans share with animals exacerbate mortality concerns.

Our position also suggests that the reproductive aspects of women's bodies should pose an existential threat. As evolutionary theorists have pointed out, women bear a great deal more of the burden associated with the reproduction of our species than men (e.g. Trivers, 1972). Women menstruate, carry the fetus in their own body, they give birth, and their body provides for the child with lactation. Supporting this hypothesis, reminders of death and/or creatureliness have been found to lead people to evaluate a woman more negatively when she is pregnant compared to not pregnant (Goldenberg, Cox, Arndt, & Goplen, 2007) or breast feeding as compared to bottle feeding a child (Cox, Goldenberg, Arndt, & Pyszczynski, 2007). In addition, under conditions of mortality salience, thoughts of human creatureliness become more accessible when individuals are primed with breast feeding (but again, not in response to the uniquely human alternative—bottle feeding).

In addition, another means by which humans manage death anxiety via distancing themselves from animals is by endorsing beliefs about literal immortality. Indeed, experimentally priming these beliefs as scientifically valid prior to mortality salience reduces psychological defenses in response to mortality (e.g. greed, self-enhancement, ageism; Dechesne *et al.*, 2003; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009b). Although beliefs about literal immortality may buffer the threat because they undermine the potential for anxiety associated with non-existence, such beliefs can also be construed as uniquely human. Further, such beliefs necessitate the endorsement of radical dualism: the idea that some aspect of

the self is separable from the physical, animal body (e.g. the soul; see Bering, 2006). Heflick, Goldenberg, and Hart (2008) recently provided empirical support for the critical role of dualism in afterlife belief when mortality is salient. They found, for example, that individuals high, but not low, in spirituality distanced more from the physical body when death was salient; and that emphasizing the non-physical aspects of the self (e.g. personality) promoted beliefs in an afterlife. In contrast, focusing on the physical aspects of the self, or completing the study with one's feet on a foot massager, decreased such beliefs in response to mortality salience. Thus, literal immortality beliefs not only function to protect people from fear of death, but in addition, distancing from the physical, animal parts of the self appear to play a functional role in the process.

These findings, we believe, provide a strong basis for arguing that the awareness of mortality underlies a need to distinguish humanity from its associations with animal nature. In addition to general efforts to defend the integrity of one's cultural worldview, people bolster their own self-worth in ways that prioritize symbolic value over the physical self. Not only are people willing to forego their health and physical safety in efforts to conform to particular cultural standards, but people avoid and are threatened by activities that highlight the physical nature of the self or others (i.e. women) and reminders of the physicality of the self function as a barrier to psychological defenses against death concerns (e.g. afterlife beliefs). In these ways, TMT research has established the terror management value of the more symbolic, non-creaturely, aspects of human existence—and has provided direct evidence that reminders of mortality increase efforts to humanize the self by distancing from one's animal nature.

Mortality salience and humanization of the in-group

Given that mortality concerns exacerbate individuals' defensive efforts to distance themselves from animals and to emphasize their uniquely human attributes, mortality concerns may

also underlie the motivation to construe one's cultural in-group, given its critical role in terror management (Castano & Deschesne, 2005), as uniquely human. Vaes, Heflick, and Goldenberg (2008) recently tested this hypothesis in three experiments utilizing both Italian and American in-groups.

Drawing on methodology used in prior infra-humanization research (e.g. Vaes & Paladino, *in press*), for each study, pilot testing was first done to create a list of traits that the in-group believed to be typical and atypical of themselves and a specific out-group (e.g. Italians listed traits for themselves and for the Japanese). Then, as in past research, participants rated the extent to which each trait was typical of the given group and the extent to which each of these traits were unique to humans (and not experienced by animals). Lastly, they rated the desirability of each trait. The ratings of trait typicality and the uniquely human nature of each trait were correlated for each participant, controlling for desirability, to depict perceptions of humanness for each group.

The results supported the hypotheses. In Studies 1 and 2, Italian participants rated their in-group (Italians) and Japanese (Study 1) or Slavic (Study 2) out-groups. In each study, mortality salience, compared to an aversive control topic, increased attributions of humanness to the in-group but did not affect ratings of the out-group. A third study utilized a between-subjects design in which American students rated either their American in-group or a British out-group. Again, mortality salience increased humanization of the in-group and did not affect out-group attributions of humanness. Importantly, all of these effects were found controlling for the desirability of traits, suggesting that the effects of death salience on infrahumanization are independent of a more general need for self-enhancement.

These studies also provided some additional evidence supporting the hypothesized terror management mechanism for these effects. In Study 2, individual differences in trait self-esteem were assessed, and consistent with the previous TMT research demonstrating that both dispositional and induced self-esteem buffer

mortality salience effects (e.g. Harmon-Jones *et al.*, 1997), the infrahumanization effect in response to mortality salience was found to be greater among individuals low in self-esteem. Study 3 directly tested if humanizing the in-group in response to mortality salience protected people from death thoughts. The results supported this, revealing that within the mortality salience condition, humanization of the in-group (Americans) was associated with decreased death accessibility, whereas humanization of the out-group (British) was unrelated to the accessibility of death thoughts. These results provide direct evidence for the association between in-group humanization and the management of mortality concerns.

These experiments are the first to demonstrate that priming mortality awareness increases humanization of the in-group. Interestingly, the effects were driven entirely by humanization of the in-group; the out-group across three studies was not deprived of any humanness, only relatively so. However, this could be due to the fact that Vaes *et al.*'s (2008) studies did not include out-groups that are typically disparaged by their Italian and American participants (e.g. indeed the Japanese and British out-groups were actually construed as possessing more desirable traits than the in-group) or that are significant threats to their belief systems. Indeed, many prior findings indicating that mortality salience increases the degree that worldview-threatening others are derogated (Greenberg *et al.*, 1990), and even aggressed against (McGregor *et al.*, 1998), suggests that mortality awareness could also promote a withholding of humanity to out-group members when they are perceived as threatening.

Human nature: An alternative definition of humanness

Haslam and colleagues have argued that humanness refers not only to that which distinguishes people from animals, but in addition, 'human nature may be understood to include characteristics that link us to the broader natural realm and reveal our continuity with other

creatures' (Haslam *et al.*, 2005, p. 938). These characteristics, involving emotion and desire, for example, can be understood as representing that which is most essential or 'core' to being human. Consistent with this idea, traits that are perceived as high in 'human nature' are perceived to be determined early in children's development and to be relatively immutable in response to cultural influences (Haslam, 2006). But given that traits that are indicative of human nature are also those that connect people to animals (Loughnan & Haslam, 2007), what kind of insights does TMT offer here?

As we suggested at the outset, we suspect that dehumanization, defined as stripping people of their human nature, may also result from the threat of human creatureliness. That is, since mortality concerns increased efforts to bolster one's uniqueness from animals, it may also result, somewhat ironically, in stripping oneself or certain others of their human nature. Evidence that uniquely human and human nature ratings are inversely, when at all, related (e.g. Haslam *et al.*, 2005) is consistent with this position. On the one hand, viewing oneself and one's group as uniquely human and different from animals serves a terror management function. On the other hand, viewing people as symbolic beings rather than representatives of human nature, with its attendant connection to animals, should do so as well. Evidence pertinent to this latter idea has been garnered in the context of linking the need for terror management to objectification, and the self-objectification, of women.

Objectification and self-objectification of women

Objectification refers to construing an individual as an object; by virtue of this, targets of objectification may be dehumanized (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004; Haslam, Loughnan, Reynolds, & Wilson, 2007; Nussbaum, 1999). Although objectification can occur in many ways, research has focused on objectification of women, primarily by focusing on their physical appearance rather than their personhood. While explanations for the objectification of women typically

center around power inequities between men and women (Dworkin, 1987), TMT offers an alternative to this position. Specifically, Goldenberg and Roberts (2004; in press) argue that objectification of women functions as a means to distance them from the aspects of their bodies that are obviously tied to reproduction (i.e. menstruation, lactation, and pregnancy), and therefore human creatureliness.

they deny aspects of their self that reflect their physical, animal nature.

We suspect that this perspective is not only relevant to the objectification of women, but may also occur in the context of other individual differences that are indicative of people especially threatened by their own connection with the animal world (e.g. people high in neuroticism; see e.g. Goldenberg *et al.*, 2006). In addition, we by no means wish to diminish the relevance of other relevant sociological factors in the objectification of women. Nevertheless, the objectification and self-objectification of women provide a relevant application of how existentially induced motivations to embolden one's uniquely human nature may induce an alternative kind of dehumanization that strips individuals of their human nature.

Terror management and other motives for infrahumanization and objectification

We believe the existing evidence makes a strong empirical case for the role of terror management in infrahumanization and objectification. Although some authors have suggested that mortality salience may have its effects because it arouses concerns with uncertainty, meaninglessness, or control (e.g. McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001; Proulx & Heine, 2006), a much larger literature of over 100 studies has shown mortality salience to have different effects than the salience of other thoughts that should arouse these other concerns (for an overview, see Greenberg, Solomon, & Arndt, 2008). For example, many studies have shown that mortality salience has different effects than thoughts of dental pain, intense, unpredictable bouts of pain, uncertainty, meaninglessness, worrisome future events, surprising events, failure, being paralyzed, and being socially excluded. In addition to this discriminant validity, the mortality salience induction used in the studies described in this article has demonstrated convergent validity with other ways to heighten death thought accessibility, including writing one sentence about death, conducting a breast

exam, proximity to funeral homes and cemeteries, and subliminal death primes.

Furthermore, explanations based on these other threats cannot account for the evidence regarding death thought accessibility, the differences between the effects of conscious and thoughts of death that are accessible but not in focal awareness (see e.g. Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999), or the obviously potent historical and current role of the specific threat of death in terrorism, intergroup conflict, religion, politics, medicine, environmentalism, and so forth. From a TMT perspective, reminders of death have unique effects because death is a unique psychological threat: it is what many if not most of our biological systems are directed toward forestalling; we all carry the knowledge that it is the only inevitable future event; and it threatens to eliminate the fulfillment of all human motives whether for pleasure, control, achievement, power, competence, growth, identity, meaning, affiliation, belonging, attachment, and so on (for in-depth discussion of the death vs. other threats and the inadequacies of alternative explanations of TMT research, see Pyszczynski, Greenberg *et al.*, 2006).

None of this implies that there are not other psychological threats or concerns which also can motivate infrahumanization. But as far as we know, no one has proposed a clear theoretical framework for positing a role for such other threats in both uniquely human infrahumanization and the objectification, and self-objectification, of women; nor has anyone reported empirical evidence for a role of other threats in these phenomena.

Conclusion

In this article we put forward terror management theory as a conceptual framework to explain both the tendency to imbue one's self and in-groups with uniquely human attributes as well as a seemingly conflicting tendency to deny human nature in the context of objectification. Our conceptualization is built on the idea that humans, cognizant that all physical creatures are fated to death, psychologically distance themselves from this predicament by

immersing themselves in cultural systems of meaning that are largely unique to humans. In so doing, people's management of mortality hinges on the symbolic aspects of their existence. A large body of research attests to the role of mortality concerns in people's efforts to deny their more physical aspects, their associations with animals, and their need to imbue the body and bodily activities with symbolic, cultural significance; indeed, doing so helps reduce death thoughts and increase afterlife beliefs. More directly in line with traditional infrahumanization research, some recent research has demonstrated that reminders of mortality increase the attributions of uniquely human qualities to one's cultural group, and that doing so reduces death-related cognitions. Thus, the TMT perspective goes far in explaining why people are biased toward distancing their selves and cultural groups from animals.

But can such a theoretical position be reconciled with the alternative definition of humanness put forth by Haslam and colleagues? At first glance, TMT seems to have less to say about humanization defined as imbuing oneself with human nature, than with uniquely human attributes. However, we posit that dehumanization, defined as stripping people of their human nature, may result from the threat of mortality associated with human creatureliness. That is, mortality concerns may not only increase the efforts to bolster one's uniqueness from animals, but consequently, it may result in the objectification of oneself and/or certain others—women in particular—in an effort to remove the taint of even the trace of animality inherent in being fully human. Research was reported depicting how reminders of mortality and creatureliness lead to increased objectification of women, and also that objectifying women reduces associations between objectified women and human nature. This is ironic in that efforts not to be dehumanized by being like an animal may render one dehumanized (by stripping them of their human nature) just the same. But yet, this seemingly paradoxical response makes sense when considered in the service of a basic psychological need to manage the threat associated with mortality. Thus, both the

tendency to humanize the self and in-groups with uniquely human attributes and the denial of human nature in the context of objectification can be understood from the singular conceptual framework of terror management.

In conclusion, we suggest that research on infrahumanization can be broadened by offering TMT a seat at the infrahumanization table. As is hopefully evident from this review, empirical support is building, and theoretical ideas brewing, to merit such a merger. It is our belief that such an integrative perspective will promote theoretical advancement and new directions for research, along with prescriptions for more amiable relations between groups and toward women.

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