



Honours Research Abstract

The role of rationality and bias in worldview relevant decisions under mortality salience

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Aim of this Research

The aim of the present thesis was to examine the effects of a motivated state called mortality salience on bias in information processing and decision-making within the Terror Management Theory (TMT; Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986 ; Solomon, Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1998) paradigm.

Based on Jonas, Greenberg and Frey's (2003) study relating mortality salience to a heightened confirmation bias in worldview relevant decision scenarios, the present thesis enhanced their methodology with reference to the Heuristic Systematic Processing Model (HSM; Chaiken, Liberman & Eagly, 1989) to include additional aspects of the reasoning and decision-making paradigm. Particularly, the present thesis examined the contextual use of systematic and nonsystematic reasoning strategies during Mortality Salience/Worldview Relevant decisions, in addition to measuring pre- and post-decision reasoning. The 62 participants were assigned to a Mortality Salience/Non Mortality Salience and Worldview Relevant/Non Worldview Relevant treatment condition. Participants were asked to choose six arguments at a pre- and post- decision reasoning stage. Arguments were divided into supportive and conflictive arguments that utilised systematic or nonsystematic reasoning strategies. The results showed support for the HSM in that reasoning about a worldview relevant decision once mortality was made salient led to a higher uptake of systematic arguments than when a decision was not worldview relevant. Additionally, mortality salience led to a general preference for supportive systematic arguments over conflicting systematic arguments. These interactions were evident at the post-decision stage of reasoning. As well, mortality salience led to more nonsystematic argument selection for non worldview relevant decisions at the post-decision reasoning stage compared to the pre-decision reasoning stage. These results

are discussed in terms of the general effects of mortality salience on the contextual factors that influence decision-making. Limitations of the present thesis and recommendations for future research are further provided.

References

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