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Impact of Religiosity and Level of Acculturation on Cultural Alignment: An Exploration of Terror Management Mechanisms among Muslim American Women

Farah T. Goheer

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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**IMPACT OF RELIGIOSITY AND LEVEL OF ACCULTURATION ON CULTURAL
ALIGNMENT: AN EXPLORATION OF TERROR MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS
AMONG MUSLIM AMERICAN WOMEN**

by

FARAH TAHA GOHEER, M.A.

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2019

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Terror Management Mechanisms among Muslim American Women

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Farah Taha Goheer, M.A.

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology to satisfy the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date

Joel Sneed, Ph.D.

Chair of Examining Committee

Date

Richard Bodnar, Ph.D.

Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee:

Markus Bidell, Ph.D.

Claudia Brumbaugh, Ph.D.

Yvette Caro, Ph.D.

Michelle Fine, Ph.D.

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

Impact of Religiosity and Level of Acculturation on Cultural Alignment: An Exploration of Terror Management Mechanisms among Muslim American Women

by

Farah Taha Goheer, M.A.

Advisor: Joel Sneed, Ph.D.

Background: Terror management theory (TMT) is based upon the notion that human beings require ongoing psychological protection from the unyielding, existential threat of death. A large body of evidence has shown that human beings manage death-related terror by aligning with and endorsing the dominant views of their cultural worldviews. Notably, as immigrants experience a new culture, worldviews become rearticulated to incorporate elements of host and heritage cultures. However, it is unclear how individuals with prolonged bicultural exposure effectively buffer death-related fears. Few studies in the vast TMT literature have been conducted with immigrant populations and the terror management defenses of Muslim American women, in particular, have yet to be investigated. As such, the purpose of this dissertation was to extend TMT research by examining the ways in which Muslim American women negotiate diverse aspects of their cultural worldviews to secure terror management benefits.

Objectives: The current investigation examined the terror management defenses employed by Muslim American women in the context of elevated death anxiety and tested the potential moderating effects of acculturation and religiosity. In accordance with the mortality salience (MS) hypothesis of TMT, heightened death awareness was predicted to intensify support of the

cultural worldview, such that participants would produce more positive evaluations of a worldview-supporting essay and more negative evaluations of a worldview-threatening essay. The association between increased death salience and worldview defense was also predicted to vary as a function of level of acculturation to U.S. society and religious commitment to Islam.

Participants and Methods: The sample included 53 Muslim American female undergraduate students. Following random assignment to the MS prime condition or control group, participants read and evaluated two essays that were ostensibly written by Muslim American women in response to an image of a Muslim woman wearing an American flag hijab. The essays were designed to activate either secular or religious defensive responses to messages that challenged American and Islamic values, respectively. Measures of affect, death-thought accessibility, religiosity, acculturation, discrimination-related stress, and collective and personal self-esteem were also included.

Results: Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to test the main effect of MS and the moderating effects of acculturation and religiosity on worldview defense (i.e., composite essay score). Contrary to expectations, the study's predictor hypotheses were not supported. Heightened death anxiety did not result in the typical increase in worldview defense. Furthermore, the relationship between MS and worldview defense was not moderated by acculturation or religiosity.

Conclusions: Taken together, the results of the present study did not support our hypotheses. In light of strong empirical support for the effects of heightened death awareness on worldview

defense in prior studies, our findings were interpreted with caution. Alternative explanations for our results, limitations of our study design and sample, and avenues for future research with Muslim American women were discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Terror Management Theory (TMT) asserts that the awareness of the inevitability of death is a biologically rooted and universally shared experience, unique to human beings.¹ According to TMT, the knowledge of death has the capacity to evoke an overwhelming sense of terror, given that human beings are programmed to survive and that death is an inescapable certainty. As such, TMT posits that as humans evolved, sophisticated psychological systems were created to defend against the existential fear of death. Specifically, the formation of *culture* is thought to effectively buffer against this death anxiety. Cultures are omnipresent and provide a meaningful and orderly framework within which human beings can exist. Importantly, cultures also prescribe values which humans strive to uphold in order to maintain good standing as a member of that culture. Positive membership in one's culture is thought to confer high *self-esteem*, which purportedly functions to assuage death-related concerns as well.²⁻⁴ Taken together, the fundamental premise of TMT is that an unwavering belief in one's cultural worldview and a positive self-esteem make up one's defense system against the threat of mortality.

Empirical investigations of TMT have been conducted primarily by increasing reminders of death and evaluating subsequent reactions in response to such heightened death awareness.⁵ Across studies, the most commonly observed reactions to reminders of death include an enhanced defense of one's cultural worldview and pursuit of a higher self-esteem. Collectively, these findings have been applied to explain ubiquitous patterns of human behavior, including social conformity, obedience, self-serving biases, aggression, and prejudice.^{5,6} While significant gains have undoubtedly been made over the past three decades of TMT research, several critical questions remain. Chief among them concerns the ways in which the immigrant experience—which involves sustained bicultural or even multicultural contact—affects an individual's

cultural worldview and resultant defense systems. As the rate of immigration has reached unprecedented levels in the United States,⁷ there is a burgeoning interest in the field of TMT to launch investigations into the ways in which shifts and changes to one's cultural worldview impacts terror management defenses in the context of death awareness.

An evaluation of how terror management defenses are impacted by immersion in an environment in which there is more than one prevalent cultural worldview is of particular interest. To execute such a study, we turn to the Muslim American immigrant community, which we believe can offer substantial insights given the unique contrasts of 'Muslim' and 'American' cultural identities, particularly among women. The Muslim American identity combines a religious heritage (i.e., Islam) with a secularized Western culture. Despite apparent differences between these cultures, such sustained intercultural contact results in cultural and psychological changes. Of interest to our scope of study are the alterations that take place in one's cultural worldview. As religiosity and level of acculturation figure prominently in the immigrant experience of Muslim Americans,⁸⁻¹⁵ they were predicted to drive variations in cultural worldview. Therefore, the current study considered the ways in which Muslim American women's responses to reminders of death (i.e., worldview defenses) were influenced by religious adherence and level of acculturation. To examine these questions, we directly tested Muslim American women's defensive reactions towards both religious (i.e., Islamic) and secular (i.e., American) worldview-threatening messages following increased death awareness. In the context of heightened mortality concerns, it was expected that highly religious and highly acculturated Muslim American women would react by defending pro-Islamic and pro-American worldviews, respectively.

The following background is separated into three parts. Part I provides a comprehensive review of TMT with regard to its development, key theoretical propositions, and empirical study. Part II delves into the experience of Muslims in the U.S., explicating acculturation processes and the ways in which the Islamic faith impacts the formation of a new cultural identity for Muslim Americans. Finally, Part III describes a pilot study from which the aims, predictions, and methodology for the current study are in large part derived.

PART I: TERROR MANAGEMENT THEORY- BACKGROUND

Development & Key People

Terror management theory (TMT), first introduced in 1986,¹ was developed in an effort to better understand the influence of existential fears on diverse aspects of human behavior. One of the most fundamental existential concerns that a human will contend with is that of death.^{3,16-18} Death is the only certain future event that all human beings will face. While people typically avoid direct confrontation with the idea of death,^{16,19} life and death are two veritable aspects of the same reality. Although every human is inevitably involved in learning about life, the process of learning about death and dying is one that only few are explicitly engaged.^{16,20} However, the influencing aspect of death is active throughout one's life; it is not restricted to those who may be directly confronted, such as soldiers or the terminally ill.²¹ Thus, the recognition that human mortality exerts significant influence upon human behavior irrespective of its deliberate or conscious exploration fueled the development of TMT.

In large part, the theoretical underpinnings of TMT stem from the work of Ernest Becker.^{1,3,17,22-30} Becker was invested in understanding the factors that drive human motivation and behavior. While Becker himself was trained in cultural anthropology, his research was not bound to a specific field of study; rather, his investigative approach was interdisciplinary. He

drew upon perspectives from sociology, psychology, religion, and philosophy to gain insight into the interplay between the unconscious and human behavior. Notably, Becker's work was influenced by some of the most illustrious scholars in Western civilization, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Søren Kierkegaard, and Otto Rank. Becker argued that unlike all other animals, the uniquely human capacity for self-awareness and abstraction also gives rise to the cognizance of the inevitability of death. Becker contended that the knowledge of death, which is in diametric opposition to the primitive instinct for self-preservation, yields a near-paralyzing fear within every human being. However, he contended that the fear of certain death "is a mainspring of human activity."²⁵

Basic Tenets of Terror Management Theory

Anxiety-Buffer Hypothesis

Alongside the evolution of human cognitive abilities, from which the acknowledgement of death manifested, was the emergence of elaborately constructed cultural worldviews. In accordance with Becker's conceptualizations, TMT posits that the psychological threat of death and concomitant terror drove the formations of cultural worldviews to include a means of managing this death anxiety. As such, the conception of reality created by any given cultural worldview provides protection and security for individuals that can effectively buffer against death anxiety. Indeed, TMT research has relied heavily on this *anxiety-buffer hypothesis*.^{1-3,31,32} The dual-component hypothesis states that: 1) *cultural worldviews* were created, in part, as symbolic defense mechanisms against death anxiety and 2) the primary function of *self-esteem*, derived from adhering to the standards of value that are prescribed by the cultural worldview, is to buffer anxiety engendered by the awareness of death. TMT does not maintain that the only functions of a cultural worldview and self-esteem are to protect individuals from potentially

overwhelming death anxiety; nevertheless, evidence has shown that they are able to uniquely shield individuals from death-related terror. Even in the absence of explicit thoughts of death, the motivation to enhance one's self-esteem and faith in the cultural worldview is an ongoing endeavor to keep oneself distanced from the terror of mortality.^{1,22}

Cultural Worldview

Through the lens of TMT, cultural worldviews are fabrications of reality that attempt to cloak the truth of the human condition and rewrite the fate of man.^{3,17} Mechanistically, a cultural worldview provides an elaborate framework for how one lives in the world: it offers an account of the origins of the universe, confers order and structure to an otherwise chaotic world, prescribes rules and values for how one should live, and for those who follow its dictates, it provides a means for some form of continual existence beyond physical death. Arguably, the most powerful feature of a cultural worldview is its ability to minimize the concern that physical death is the ultimate destiny of man. Indeed, virtually every cultural worldview proffers some means of immortality.³² While specific versions of immortality differ radically across extant cultural worldviews, two superordinate categories have been identified: literal and symbolic immortality.^{32,33} Cross-cultural iterations of literal immortality typically exist in some form of an afterlife—an alternate state of being that refutes the idea that death is merely a transition into nothingness (e.g., soul, heaven, reincarnation, rebirth, Nirvana).³⁴ Alternatively, symbolic immortality is procured through the survival of some valued aspect of oneself after physical death. This can be achieved in a myriad of ways (e.g., via one's children, accomplishments, or legacy), but is ultimately derived from the sense that an individual is a critical part of a significant, meaningful, and eternal universe—one that surpasses the value of any individual existence. Both literal and symbolic immortality reinforce the need to maintain an unwavering

faith in the cultural worldview, as erosion in its faith is tantamount to incapacitating terror resulting from the awareness of ultimate annihilation.

Notably, the terms ‘culture’ and ‘worldview’ are used more broadly in the TMT literature to refer to “a shared psychological construction that gives life meaning, order, and a sense of permanence, and offers the hope that our existence is in some way not temporary, that death can be transcended.”²³ Extant TMT literature suggests that these internalized belief systems can be secular (e.g., nationalistic, spiritual) and/or religious in nature. The Western civilizational culture, for example, embodies secular features that have proven capable of transcending parochial cultural and ethnic identities and uniting diverse individuals in a core set of secular values, practices, and beliefs that make up individuals’ defensive coping mechanisms.³⁵ As is the case with secular cultural worldviews, religion also provides a system of shared meaning and social practices.^{27,36,37} As a major culture-based individual difference variable, religion is likely to moderate how people respond to death awareness. Given the centrality of death transcendence beliefs in most religions, the chief function of religion may be to buffer death-related terror by denying the finality of death and providing belief in an afterlife.^{25,34} In fact, there is evidence to suggest that a belief in literal immortality is the most potent form of terror management.³⁸ As such, in contrast to a secular worldview, a strong religious belief may provide especially powerful protection against the existential fear of death by offering the possibility of literal, and not just symbolic, immortality. Moreover, religious belief systems have a nonmaterial advantage as compared to secular worldviews. Concepts such as eternal life and spiritual realms serve their anxiety-buffering function and enhance social unification, in part, because they do not operate in the realm of rational argument and empirical evidence. In contrast, secular worldviews are somewhat grounded in physical reality and thus are

vulnerable to rebuttals based on logic and evidence. Religious worldviews are more impervious to challenges simply because they are not subject to such rules.³⁹

The import of preserving and perpetuating the cosmologies of an individual's cultural worldview cannot be diminished. According to TMT, given that a cultural worldview is manmade, it can never be unequivocally confirmed and thus is always tentative and susceptible to refutation. In that regard, the validity of a cultural worldview is unquestionably dependent upon social consensus. As Becker himself noted, the cultural worldview "is more than merely an outlook on life: it is an immortality formula."²⁵

Self-Esteem

In order to maintain the anxiety-buffering properties provided by self-esteem, an unyielding faith in the reality that is constructed by one's cultural worldview is critical. Thus, to function with minimal anxiety, individuals must continuously reaffirm their value and faith in the reality of the worldview.^{1,3,4,17,22} Although the specific standards that an individual must meet to feel valuable and thus achieve self-esteem vary considerably across cultures and individuals, according to TMT, the fundamental need for self-esteem is universal.^{1,4,22} In fact, two cultures may prescribe entirely opposite standards of value insofar as the same behavior that confers high self-esteem in one culture may be grounds for derision or even punishment in another. Although self-esteem is conceptualized as resulting primarily from one's own assessment of personal adherence to cultural standards of value, consensual validation plays an important role in self-esteem maintenance. External validation in one's evaluation of self solidifies self-esteem appraisal, thereby bolstering its anxiety-buffering properties. In contrast, when one's self-esteem is challenged by external agencies, it undermines confidence in its ability to effectively provide

protection against death-related threat. Thus, from the perspective of TMT, social validation is critical in preserving one's self-esteem.^{3,4,22}

The anxiety-buffering capacity of self-esteem can be traced back to early child-parent relations. Viewed through a developmental lens, TMT posits that infants are born with an inherent tendency to experience and express emotional distress in reaction to circumstances that threaten their survival, without conscious awareness of the inevitability of death.^{1,3,4,17,22} Given the limited capacity of newborns to thrive on their own, they are heavily dependent on parents for the attainment of basic needs and security from threats to continued existence. Through various socialization processes, which continually impact children during development, a child learns that their sense of security becomes increasingly contingent on meeting parental standards of value. Failing to meet parental expectations may result in a withholding of love and protection. Parental standards are themselves ultimately reflections of the internalized versions of the predominant cultural worldview. It is through this critical developmental process that self-esteem acquires its anxiety-buffering properties and a subsequent linkage is forged between self-esteem and protection by a higher power. As the cognitive faculties of a child mature, the awareness of the core threat of mortality develops, as does the coincidental realization of the inadequacy of parental protection from this inevitable threat. Thus, the basis of security shifts from the parents to a meaningful and orderly cultural worldview, which can proffer a form of continued existence.^{3,4,22}

Death-Thought Accessibility

The awareness of one's mortality is ever-present at the unconscious level, according to TMT; thus, belief in one's cultural worldview and positive self-esteem serve constant terror management functions. However, reminders of death (e.g., loss of a loved one, illness, natural

disaster, war) result in a concomitant increase in the accessibility of death-related thoughts at the conscious level. TMT argues that in the event of such heightened death awareness, there are specific internal processes that occur to alleviate mortality concerns and shift the conscious awareness of death to the unconscious level. This is referred to as the *dual-process theory of proximal and distal defenses*.^{3,40,41} As an extension of TMT, the dual-process theory asserts that the conscious awareness of death is guarded against by *proximal defense* systems, which undermine threatening information in a logical and sensible fashion. Proximal defenses are employed immediately after reminders of death and are thus considered the first line of defense against mortality concerns. Such defense maneuvers include active thought suppression or cognitive reframing to deny or challenge the idea of personal death in the near future or to replace death-related thoughts with more positive ones.⁴¹⁻⁴³ Proximal defenses are applied to quickly suppress the accessibility of heightened death-related cognitions in an effort to evade potentially overwhelming terror/anxiety. However, proximal defenses are only effective when mortality concerns are at the level of conscious awareness. TMT asserts that when death-associated cognitions are successfully pushed outside of focal attention by proximal defenses, an alternative defense mechanism is needed to further defend against the unconscious, yet still highly accessible, thoughts of death.^{43,41,44} Namely, *distal defenses* are engaged. Existing outside of consciousness, the threat of death need not be buffered against by logical defense mechanisms; defenses in this context are not bound by the cognitive rigidity of rationale and logic as they are when threats are consciously acknowledged.⁴⁵ Thus, distal defenses (i.e., worldview defenses) are seemingly irrelevant to the problem of death, yet they enable an individual to consider him/herself as a valuable member and contributor to an enduring, meaningful cultural reality. In this manner, individuals are able to successfully quell death-

related anxiety by maintaining a resolute belief in his/her own immortality. Indeed, convergent evidence suggests that death anxiety impacts behavior most prominently when it is accessible but no longer in current, *active* memory; that is, after proximal defenses have dwindled and distal defenses are employed (i.e., delay period).^{40,41,44} This robust finding provides compelling support for the notion that there are distinct internal processes that occur following death-related thoughts.

The dual-process theory also accounts for situations in which threats do not evoke explicit processing of death-related information, such as subliminal death primes.^{42,46-49} Empirical investigations on this topic have typically used iterations of a computer-administered word-relation task in which participants are asked to determine the presence or absence of an association between word-pairs (unrelated to death). Amid presentations of the stimuli, the words *death* or *dead* are briefly (i.e., milliseconds) flashed on the display, too quickly for participants to report seeing them. These studies have shown that in the event of subliminal death-related exposure, death-thought accessibility is heightened and distal defenses are subsequently triggered.⁵⁰ These findings further support the conjecture that mortality concerns exert their effects most prominently when they are outside of focal attention, but remain highly accessible. Additionally, proximal defenses were not engaged in the context of subliminal reminders of death, as death priming stimuli were presented below the threshold of consciousness.⁵⁰

As the threat of death is out of current focal attention, it is likely to trigger an even broader network of thoughts related to mortality, such as pain, decay, fear of the unknown, loss of loved ones, and unfulfilled goals,^{18,51-53} than when maintained at the conscious level. This ripple effect creates the potential for a more cataclysmic conception and reaction to the threat of death. Accordingly, the need for a broader distal defense mechanism, one that can offer a literal

or symbolic existence after the unavoidable event of biological death, becomes apparent.^{40,41} Therein lies the basis for the theoretical supposition that *cultural worldviews* and *self-esteem* serve as powerful distal defense mechanisms. Cultural worldviews imbue the universe with order and stability, offsetting its fundamentally uncontrollable nature in which the only true certainty is death.^{3,17,54} Cultural worldviews are also intricately constructed and as such, entail various customs, rituals, and regular practices that necessarily occupy one's time and thoughts, thus leaving little time to contemplate personal death.⁵⁵ Most importantly, cultural worldviews provide a way for individuals to obviate the problem of death by promising a literal or symbolic continuation that transcends corporeal death, but only to those who uphold its values and prescriptions for living.^{1,3,17,22,55} Delineating a set of standards for how life should be lived provides a metric that can be applied to evaluate adherence to cultural norms and, as such, a basis for an individual to value him or herself.^{1,22} Thus, an individual's self-esteem is contingent upon whether or not he or she is deemed valuable within the cultural context. Whereas a positive self-esteem is associated with feelings of warmth and security, conferred by the assurance of continued existence by a higher power, a poor self-esteem is accompanied by terror and anxiety,^{24,25} as there is no promise of protection from annihilation if one fails to adhere to cultural dictates.¹ Thus, individuals can attain high self-esteem by maintaining an unequivocal belief in a culturally derived conception of reality (i.e., cultural worldview) and by upholding the standards set forth by that worldview.^{3,4,22}

Mortality Salience

Hypothesis and Experimental Paradigm

Principally, the aim of an empirical investigation in TMT research is to explore the impact of increased death awareness on subsequent human behavior. Accordingly, over 80% of

TMT studies have tested different aspects of the theory via the *mortality salience (MS) hypothesis*.⁵ The MS hypothesis propounds the idea that if distal defenses are activated in the presence of death-related thoughts, albeit outside of consciousness, then increasing the accessibility of such thoughts should result in a concomitant motivation to safeguard the very psychological structures that underlie these defenses—namely, an individual’s cultural worldview and self-esteem.^{2,31} Indeed, a large body of literature on TMT has found that anxiety associated with increased death awareness is assuaged by bolstering one’s defenses of cultural worldviews,^{2,31,50} which may manifest as aligning with and endorsing the dominant views of one’s culture.^{5,40} Notably, because a cultural worldview is always vulnerable to incoming information that may contradict or destabilize its infrastructure, research has shown that when mortality is made salient, individuals respond positively to those who reinforce their cultural anxiety-buffers (e.g., liking for charismatic leaders who proclaim the superiority of one’s culture, in-group favoritism) and negatively to those who threaten them (e.g., recommending harsher punishment toward those who violate cultural norms, harsher evaluations of dissimilar others).^{2,31,56} These reactions are often referred to as *worldview defenses*.³ This robust pattern of worldview defense has been replicated across the U.S.,^{2,57-60} as well as internationally, including in Japan,⁶¹ Hong Kong,⁶² Israel,⁵² Germany,^{31,49,63} and the Netherlands.⁶⁴ These findings have tremendous implications for why people are so intensely concerned with their self-esteem, why people cling so tenaciously to their own cultural beliefs,^{2,31,32} why differences among civilizations have generated the most prolonged and the most violent conflicts over the centuries,⁶⁵ and how peace processes may be thwarted by universally experienced death-related terror.⁶⁶

Increased accessibility of death-related thoughts has been predominantly accomplished via MS induction. Experimentally, the induction of MS has been achieved in various ways, given the expansiveness of TMT research.⁵ However, the prototypical manipulation involves essay questions about death—the Mortality Attitudes Personality Survey.^{5,31,67} Specifically, participants are asked to write about the following: (a) what will happen to them when they physically die, and (b) the emotions that the thought of their own death arouses in them. A subset of TMT studies have successfully manipulated MS through other means, including via subliminal presentations of death-related themes,⁵⁰ fear-of-death scales,⁶⁸⁻⁷¹ exposure to a video, story, or slide show with death-related themes (e.g., holocaust, car crash, war), or being interviewed in close proximity to a funeral home or cemetery.^{5,56}

Research has shown that introducing a delay or distraction between the MS induction and the dependent measure(s) provokes the subsequent activation of distal, as opposed to proximal, defense systems.^{3,5,40} In fact, empirical evidence has revealed that the administration of dependent measures directly after MS induction effectively eliminates increased striving for the protection provided by one's cultural worldview and self-esteem (i.e., distal defenses); rather, thought suppression or cognitive distortions (i.e., proximal defenses) are initially engaged to push death-related thoughts out of current focal attention and decrease death-thought accessibility.^{40,43} However, once death-related thoughts have more time to recede from consciousness, following neutral delay tasks for example, death-thought accessibility resurges and proximal defenses subside. Alongside higher death-thought accessibility, distal defenses emerge, wherein efforts are made to defend and affirm cultural worldviews and enhance self-esteem.^{40,43,44} Over 90% of experiments have introduced a delay or distraction task between the MS manipulation and the administration of the DV. The majority of these studies have relied on

administering only a single task, the most common of which has been the Positive and Negative Affective Schedule (i.e., PANAS) or its expanded form (i.e., PANAS-X).^{5,72-74}

In order to measure distal defense activation, the majority of TMT studies have employed a vignette design that exposes participants to an essay that disagrees with their worldview. Participants' attitude toward the author of said essay serves as the main outcome measure.⁵ Based on TMT's supposition that consensual validation is critical for maintaining faith in the cultural worldview, MS is likely to incite particularly strong reactions toward those who directly threaten, or bolster, one's worldview. Studies have also assessed other person-related attitudes including attraction or commitment to one's partner or another target person, support for a particular politician, and predicting how many others agree with one's position on a given issue. Other experiments have used a behavioral dependent variable, such as donation to charity, solving a problem, driving speed in a video game simulator, or immersing one's hand in cold water. Dependent variable measures of cognition and affect in response to a worldview threat have been less frequently used in the literature.⁵

Validity of Mortality Salience Effects

Evidence has shown that unconscious, implicit death-related cognitions are uniquely capable of activating distal defense systems. As compared to MS, a variety of other potentially threatening cognitions—including thoughts of intense pain, social rejection, anxiety, uncertainty, meaninglessness, failure, and paralysis—fail to prompt distal worldview and self-esteem defenses.^{3,75,76} Consistent with these findings, subliminally presented threatening themes—including pain—did not result in an increased defense of cultural worldviews.⁵⁰ Collectively, these findings provide evidence of the discriminant validity of MS on triggering distal defense systems.⁵

Given that an experimental investigation is limited by its inability to confirm a theory, the onus falls on the researcher to test for and eliminate alternative explanations for findings predicted from a given theory. As such, alternative explanations for the effects of MS on distal defenses have been tested empirically. In particular, negative affect or emotional distress created by an MS induction has been hypothesized to account for distal defense activation (i.e., worldview defense). However, research has reliably found that the MS manipulation does not alter mood.^{31,60,75} In a related vein, arousal produced by MS could conceivably account for distal defense reactions. Nevertheless, studies have shown that MS manipulations fail to produce any measurable increases in physiological arousal, as assessed by pulse rate, pulse volume, and skin conductance.^{31,75} These findings are in alignment with the notion that the effects of MS on the activation of distal defenses occur largely outside of consciousness, in an effort to obviate the conscious experience of emotional distress that may be produced by reminders of one's personal death.⁷⁵

Terror Management Theory: Cultural Identity Formation

Explorations of individual differences on MS reactions have already begun. These include studies on authoritarianism,² political conservatism,⁷⁷ attachment style,⁷⁸ trait empathy,⁷⁹ personal need for structure,^{80,81} intrinsic religiosity,⁸² and religious fundamentalism.^{83,84} From these studies, it is clear that there are a number of individual differences that impact the structure of worldviews, the centrality of specific aspects of worldviews, and the use of particular defenses to assuage mortality concerns.^{67,85} Particularly useful in the study of individual difference variables is the concept of *identity formation*, which recognizes contributing factors and processes that make up one's sense of self.⁸⁶⁻⁸⁸ The self, according to social identity theory, is the product of society. Thus, the interpersonal relationships and the social roles that accompany

these relationships are the most significant sources of relevant variation in the self. Moreover, current theory proposes that the self is composed of multiple identities that are arranged hierarchically according to salience. As individuals become more committed to a given aspect of their identity (e.g., student, parent, spouse, devout Muslim), that identity will assume higher identity salience and will likely be enacted in any given situation.⁸⁶⁻⁸⁸ From the perspective of TMT, identity formation can be described as a dynamic process of exploring cultural worldviews, adopting a cultural worldview, and then finding one's place within that worldview.⁸⁹

Immigration

Although one's identity tends to be stable, it can evolve alongside new environmental circumstances, such as in the case of immigration. *Immigration* is an important social change that triggers the need for individuals to revise their value systems and adhere to new cultural norms and conventions.^{90,91} Thus, it follows that the identity (i.e., self) of individuals who immigrate to another country undergoes changes as a result of ongoing exposure to a new cultural worldview. In the case of immigrants in culturally plural societies—in which more than one cultural or ethnic group is represented in the population—such as in the U.S., individuals are likely to sometimes alter or take on new identities, shed old ones, or rearrange the order of various facets of their identity to reflect their altered level of importance or value. Arguably, the resultant changes in identity are reflected in parallel alterations in self-protective beliefs (i.e., prevailing cultural worldview and conditions for self-esteem). Thus, in the context of an ever-expanding and fast-paced globalization pattern in the U.S., it is critical to investigate how changes in identity and the concomitant reorganization of identity salience affects TMT processes among immigrants in American society.¹³ The development of a new cultural identity may require

compromise and even conflict, in cases in which the worldviews of heritage and host cultures differ significantly. Thus, for the vast number of individuals who are immigrants, the explication of a single, unified worldview and conception of self-worth may be difficult to attain.

A very limited body of research on immigrant experiences in relation to TMT exists. Moreover, in contrast to investigating changes in identity as a result of immigration, studies have focused exclusively on attitudes and reactions *toward* immigrants as out-group members of society.^{5,92-96} Convergent findings have further substantiated the theory that reminders of mortality often intensify derogation of out-group members. MS has led Christian participants to negatively evaluate a Jewish target, Americans to endorse blaming a foreign auto manufacturer more than one from the U.S. in a hypothetical lawsuit, and German university students to distance themselves from a Turkish target by physically sitting farther away in a waiting room.^{2,59,97} Consequently, there is much room for improvement in this arena as wider issues remain unaddressed and warrant exploration. Specifically, examining the ways in which immigrants negotiate the various aspects of their cultural worldviews to effectively procure terror management benefits is a worthwhile endeavor.

Religious Identity

While religious belief systems can offer a comforting and compelling worldview for adherents, religiosity can also represent a significant component of one's identity.¹⁵ Religious identification can be a vital force in the promotion of individual well-being, enhanced self-esteem, greater life satisfaction, and lower negative affect for those who are highly identified with their religious group.^{15,98,99} In comparison to other realms of identification, religion can offer an "eternal" group membership that transcends physical existence. Given that many religions directly confront the issue of death and offer an account of the afterlife, there has been

fervent and long-standing speculation about the functional significance of religious beliefs in helping people manage the awareness of death.^{15,84,100-102} Yet, while there is a large body of research exploring the relationship between religious beliefs and death anxiety, the TMT literature with reference to religiousness is relatively scant.¹⁰⁰⁻¹⁰⁹

Despite that, there have been modest advances in our knowledge regarding the anxiety-buffering function of religious worldviews. In particular, studies have shown that in comparison to extrinsic religiosity (i.e., instrumental use of religion to obtain other ends, such as social standing, safety, or solace), only those with intrinsic religiosity (i.e., religion itself is the principal motive, without consideration for external consequences) effectively procure the terror management benefits of religion.^{82,110} In a broader investigation that compared religious with non-religious individuals, MS failed to result in the conventional cultural worldview defense among individuals with strong religious beliefs.¹¹¹ Another investigation looking indirectly at religiousness revealed that exposure to compelling evidence in support of an afterlife (i.e., literal immortality) eliminated the effect of MS on self-esteem striving.³⁸ Taken together, evidence suggests that religious believers may be well equipped to confront death's inevitability with less anxiety, and in some cases, strong religious adherence may obviate the need to bolster distal defenses altogether.

MS has also been found to incite various facets of religious conviction such as greater self-reported religiosity,¹¹² a stronger belief in God and in the efficacy of divine intervention,¹¹² increased belief in supernatural agents espoused by other religions,¹¹² and greater confidence in the belief of an afterlife.^{113,114} However, some studies have failed to find an increase in religiosity following MS induction.^{115,116} These discrepant findings may be, at least in part, explained by interfaith disparities in the views on afterlife. For example, whereas Christian and

Islamic faiths each promote an explicit, positive afterlife (i.e., heaven) for the devout, Judaism has a more ambiguous stance toward postmortem fate,¹¹⁷ which may preclude it from operating effectively as a terror management function.¹¹⁶

Several problems within the limited literature on religion in TMT research warrant attention. First, a significant proportion of the aforementioned studies were conducted with adherents of the Christian or Jewish faith.^{68,112,114,116} Very few studies have been done with other religious groups, including Muslims, and non-religious groups, such as Atheists and Agnostics.^{39,111} Second, some studies failed to mention the religious affiliation of their participants, although they made mention of its measurement,¹¹⁴ while others failed to examine it entirely.^{38,112,115} Third, given the multifaceted nature of religious belief systems in conjunction with the dramatic growth of research in the psychology of religion within the past three decades, comprehensive and sophisticated measures of different indices of religiousness have been developed.¹¹⁸ However, with few exceptions, such measures are sorely lacking from several of the studies. The measurement of religiosity varied considerably across studies, many of which utilized a single-item index of religious affiliation (e.g., “What is your religion?”)^{111,116} or religious identification (e.g., “How important is your religion to you?”; “Do you consider yourself religious?”; “How religious are you?”).^{39,68,112} It is clear that valid and reliable measures need to be employed when studying religiosity in future studies. Additionally, despite the potential value of conceptual frameworks and religiousness scales developed and validated among Christian populations, employing such a derivative approach to examine other religious groups is likely to be accompanied by significant challenges.¹¹⁹

PART II. MUSLIM AMERICANS

Muslim American Cultural Identity

Despite variations in religious commitment, race, ethnicity, and country of origin, a coherent but fragile collective identity of *Muslim American* emerged based on shared beliefs in Islam and shared experiences in the U.S. This umbrella term has been used to categorize immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, irrespective of the degree of religious adherence. Thus, the term Muslim American conveys a cultural identity shared by people on all levels of the religious spectrum. To begin unpacking the complex identity of Muslims in the West, the influences of the sociopolitical and historical context on shaping Muslim and American identities, particularly for immigrants, must be taken into consideration.¹²⁰⁻¹²² Significant suspicion, government scrutiny, and social segregation have plagued Muslim Americans for decades. Despite significant education and economic acclimatization of Muslim Americans, a pernicious fallacy that traditional Islamic worldviews are in opposition and even a threat to Western, secular worldviews continues to have a political stronghold with the American public today. Within the context of such a pervasive and essentializing discourse, the understandable dilemma for Muslim immigrants in the U.S. may be how to reconcile and establish a worldview defense system that can effectively buffer against death anxiety and enhance self-esteem.

Immigration & Acculturation

From its inception, the U.S. has been a nation built by immigrants. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, immigrants currently make up approximately 13% of the total U.S. population (i.e., ~ 41 million immigrants).^{13,123} *Immigrant*, in this respect, refers to individuals who reside in the U.S. who were not U.S. citizens at birth. This term is inclusive of naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, certain legal nonimmigrants (e.g., persons on student or work visas), those admitted under refugee or asylee status, and undocumented persons residing in the U.S.⁷ Neither the U.S. Census Bureau, nor the records of the Immigration and

Naturalization Service, provide any information on religious affiliation of citizens or immigrants, thus the exact religious landscape of the U.S. immigrant population is a debatable issue. However, estimates of the religious backgrounds of immigrants can be derived from public surveys. Although the majority of U.S. immigrants are of the Christian faith, an estimated 10% of immigrants are Muslim.¹²⁴ The latest national survey revealed that an estimated 1% (i.e., ~3.3 million) of the U.S. population self-identify as Muslim, the majority having arrived during the last third of the twentieth century.¹²⁵ The three major groups of Muslim communities in the U.S. are of South Asian, African-American and Arab origin.¹⁴ South Asians make up the largest of the three groups, representing approximately 30% of the Muslim American population. They hail primarily from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. African-American Muslims are mostly converts to the religion and they represent the largest indigenous Muslim group in the U.S., representing approximately 25% of the Muslim-American population. Arab Americans comprise the third major group, representing an additional 25% of the Muslim U.S. population. The rest of the Muslim American population represents much more diverse ethnic backgrounds, including a very large Iranian population and much smaller immigrant groups from Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, as well as White and Latino converts.¹²⁵

The identity of an immigrant in the U.S. is engineered through various means. Most prominently, identity is shaped by homeland materials, including language, dress, and religion, and through group alignments in the host country, such as pre-existing social groups or the absence/presence of co-ethnic masses.¹²⁶ These transmuted identities are constructed in the U.S., and vary considerably from person to person, in the context of multiple factors including immigration age, generational status, length of residence, strength of ethnic and/or religious

identity, and comfort with and use of the English language. As such, the process of *acculturation* has become a centerpiece in the conversation about immigration. While it has taken on myriad forms in the literature, the term acculturation broadly encapsulates the phenomena that occur when individuals come into prolonged contact with different cultures.^{9,127,128} Acculturation is overwhelmingly recognized in the literature as a process, reflective of the resultant continuities, evolutions, and disruptions in an individual's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning that follow continued intercultural exposure.^{9,129,130} It is through the process of acculturation that immigrants negotiate social and cultural norms between two or more cultures, typically involving home (country of origin) and host cultures.^{9,129}

Of the numerous models developed to describe both the process and outcomes of acculturation, the framework proposed by Berry is perhaps the most widely adopted.^{8,9,129,131-133} In his model, Berry delineated *acculturation strategies* of immigrants based on the identification of two major issues: 1) *cultural maintenance*: to what extent are cultural identity and characteristics considered to be important, and their maintenance strived for, and 2) *contact and participation*: to what extent should they become involved in other cultural groups, or remain primarily among themselves. Berry was the first to challenge the single continuum model of acculturation, instead postulating that attitudes toward *cultural maintenance* and *contact and participation* should be measured independently, as two separate dimensions. This bi-dimensional model proposes that the perceived importance of maintaining contact with the host culture and the heritage culture, respectively, results in the adoption of four acculturation strategies and corresponding cultural identity outcomes: 1) *Integration* (high host and high heritage culture identification), 2) *Assimilation* (high host and low heritage culture identification), 3) *Separation* (low host and high heritage culture identification), or 4)

Marginalization (low host and low heritage culture identification). There is considerable evidence in the acculturation literature to suggest that a combination of strong ethnic identity and strong national identity (i.e., integrated identity) promotes the best adaptation outcome for immigrants, including positive psychological adjustment, overall well-being, and higher self-esteem.^{8,9,134}

Nevertheless, acculturation is a dynamic and complex process that is highly variable and contingent upon many factors, such as the receiving society's attitudes toward immigrants.

Acculturative stress refers to the potential challenges that immigrants are confronted with as they adapt to the larger society and negotiate differences between their home and host cultures.^{8,9,131-}

¹³⁶ Such stress occurs in the context of multiple aspects of the acculturation process, such as navigating new and sometimes confusing cultural rules and expectations, managing conflict between retaining components of the heritage culture while integrating those of the new, and coping with experiences of prejudice and discrimination. In fact, individuals may be most at risk for acculturative stress when differences between their heritage and host cultures seem greatest.⁸

The Role of Religion in Acculturation

One of the most prominent criticisms of acculturation research is that it has been myopic in scope, focusing primarily on the ethnic and host national orientations and failing to consider religiosity or religious identity as an area that both influences and is affected by acculturative changes.¹³⁷⁻¹⁴⁰ Religion seems to play a role in the construction, preservation, or abandoning either of local and ethnic/national identities or of transnational and global ones. On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that the interweaving of religious and ethnic identity often assists immigrants' incorporation into American society.¹¹ Religion itself has been characterized as a socially acceptable form through which immigrants can express, reformulate, and transmit

their ethnic culture and identities. Thus, there is evidence to suggest that religious identification and commitment to one's faith is strengthened when immigrants inhabit their new country.^{10-13,126,135,141,142} This finding is not surprising given that the certainty of religious precepts can serve as an anchor to guide immigrants as they change many other aspects of their lives and habits in order to adapt to a new environment.

Historically, immigrants have used religious institutions to recreate and reclaim important aspects of their home-country cultures.¹⁰ For instance, religious ceremonies conducted in a church, temple, or mosque provides an environment for immigrants to worship in their native language and enjoy the cultural rituals of their homelands. In fact, religious institutions in the U.S. tend toward *congregationalism*—a local, independent, and self-supporting organization that is governed by its own members.^{10,126,141} These congregations typically serve a myriad of functions beyond religious worship, including cultural, social, political, and educational activities. These organizations play an important role in the creation of community for immigrants, sometimes filling the void of the extended family, upon which many immigrants rely on for social and spiritual security. In an effort to aid the successful transition of newcomers into the U.S., congregations typically provide information about jobs, housing, business opportunities, and courses in English.¹⁴² Notably, opportunities for leadership and service within religious groups for upstanding members of the faith may offer immigrants, who may otherwise feel marginalized, a critical sense of prestige and authority.^{11,141} As a result, these congregations can provide an alternative source of respectability for immigrants, particularly for those who feel they are denied such social recognition in the U.S. Taken together, “the centrality of religion to immigrant communities can be summarized as the search for refuge, respectability, and

resources.”¹⁴² Consequently, religious identity may be of greater, even paramount, importance in the hierarchy of multiple identities that comprise an individual’s sense of self post-migration.

Muslim Americans and the Islamic Faith

Adherents of Islam constitute the world’s second largest religious group; as of 2010, there were 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. As the fastest growing major world religion, Muslims are projected to nearly equal the number of Christians by 2050.^{125,143} Broad-stroke approaches have been used to conceptualize a singular Islamic culture, yet there is the salient, yet oft-overlooked, issue of diversity *within* the Islamic culture itself. For example, there are substantial contrasts that prevail between Muslim moderates and radicals, conservatives and liberals, traditionalists and modernists.^{144,145} Like any other religious group, the beliefs and practices of Muslims vary depending on a multitude of factors. However, the most universal and widely agreed upon practices of Muslims around the world are the “five pillars.” These pillars include the belief that there is only one God (*Allah*) and Muhammad was his last and final prophet (*shahadah*), the performance of ritual prayers that are performed five times per day (*salat*), charitable giving in order to rectify social inequalities (*zakat*), annual fasting from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan (*siyam*), and a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during a Muslim’s life if health and finances permit (*hajj*).^{146 147,148} Muslims consider the *Qur’an*—the central religious text of Islam, revealed to the prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel— as the criterion of truth; the *hadith*, as the prophet’s sayings; and the *sunnah*, as the prophet’s teachings. One of the fundamental concepts of Islam is that of *Ummah*, which describes the Islamic diaspora or the “Community of the Believers” as a super-ordinate, transnational identity.¹⁴⁶⁻¹⁴⁹ In effect, *Ummah* joins all Muslims in a global community of faith that far exceeds the boundaries of any culture, race, ethnicity, or geographical setting.¹⁴⁹ Unique to Islam, evidence has shown

that the sense of universality inherent in *Ummah* is related to desirable outcomes such as positive relationships with others and purpose in life.¹¹⁹

When assessing Muslim Americans' self-reported religiosity, survey data revealed that 79% endorse religion as important and 42% reported at least weekly religious service attendance.¹⁵⁰ A study conducted in 2007 found that nearly 50% of American Muslims considered themselves to be "Muslim first," while nearly 30% identified as "American first."¹⁵¹ However, among Muslim Americans whose religious commitment was low, this pattern was reversed. More recently, the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center published the results of an opinion survey in which 2,482 adults in the U.S. were interviewed, 475 of whom self-identified as Muslim.¹⁵² The results revealed that Muslim Americans identify equally with their faith and with their country and that those who attend religious services at least once a week had higher levels of civic engagement and reported less stress and anger than do other U.S. Muslims who attend religious services less frequently.¹⁵²

Discrimination-Related Stress & Religious Coping

On a fundamental level, Muslim individuals share a culture based on the values, traditions, and beliefs of the Islamic faith. Most prominently, Islamic cultures promote conservative faith-based values, a hierarchical family structure that includes the extended family, and a collectivistic approach to relationships.^{145,148,153,154} However, more striking differences between Western and Muslim societies certainly exist, including stances on gender equality, sexual liberalization, homosexuality, marriage equality, abortion, and divorce.^{154,155} Oversimplified and seemingly incongruent features of Islamic culture have resulted in misinformation, confusion, and dissension among many in mainstream American society, buoying negative stereotypes and attitudes against Muslim immigrants. *Discrimination-related*

stress has been a particularly salient problem for Muslim Americans given the steady rise in anti-Muslim sentiment and emergence of Islamophobia.^{149,156-158} Empirical evidence has shown that perceiving oneself as a target or victim of discrimination by members of a dominant group is one of the major acculturative stressors among immigrants.^{136,156,157,159-162} In a recent poll, nearly 50% of Muslim Americans, the highest of all the major faith groups surveyed, reported personal experiences of racial/religious discrimination within the past year.¹⁶³ This is not surprising given that national surveys have reported that 43% of Americans harbor some degree of prejudice toward Muslims and believe that the religion and culture of Muslims are the principal causes of tension between Muslim and Western worlds.^{150,163} Hostile attitudes and behaviors toward Muslims existed well before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but have increased considerably since. Evidence has shown that Muslims are often associated with violence, fanaticism, and support for terrorism.¹⁶⁴ Notably, anti-Muslim rhetoric characterized the 2016 presidential election and continues to pervade much of the public discourse under the current Trump administration.^{158,165,166} President Trump has frequently drawn upon the us-them binary to distinguish Americans from Islam and Muslims, arguing that “Islam hates us.”¹⁶⁷ Trump has also put forth anti-Muslim policies and practices that are in line with his discriminatory ideology. For example, on January 27, 2017, exactly one week after being sworn into office, President Trump signed Executive Order 13769, entitled *Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States*.¹⁶⁸ Often referred to as the ‘*Muslim Ban*’, the executive order barred nationals of seven predominantly Muslim countries—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen—from entering the United States. Not surprisingly, results of the latest Pew Research Center survey of Muslim Americans found that 74% of U.S. Muslims consider Trump to be unfriendly toward Muslim Americans.¹⁶⁹

Perceptions of a hostile dominant society, experiences of discrimination, and negative representations of Muslims in the media undoubtedly influence the identity formation of Muslim Americans. Research has shown that among Muslims in the West, the effects of such stigma on one's sense of self can have pernicious psychological consequences, including depression, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal.^{12,157,159,170,171} Additionally, racial/religious discrimination can constitute a major obstacle to Muslims' national affiliation, as experiences of such stigmatization reinforce the perceived discrepancy between being a Muslim and being a member of the nation.^{14,170,171} According to the *rejection-identification model* proposed by Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey,¹⁷² experiences of discrimination can result in greater in-group identification among ethnic minority groups. As such, Muslim immigrants with higher levels of perceived discrimination may cope with such acculturative stress by increasing their religious identification, as a turn to Islam may provide a way to claim dignity in the face of the bitterness of exclusion from the dominant society.^{11,12,137,139,159,171} Still, others may respond to discrimination-related stress by further distancing and disengaging from identity-threatening domains in order to appear different from their stigmatized group.¹⁷³

In summary, as evidenced by the multitude of factors, challenges, and responses that characterize the process of acculturation and the resultant strategies and adaptations, no singular immigrant narrative or experience exists for Muslim Americans. What is clear from the literature, however, is that the influence of religious identity on the convolutions of the acculturation process cannot be overlooked or ignored in future studies.

PART III: PILOT STUDY

Impact of Acculturation on Cultural Allegiance Following MS: A TMT Study of Muslim Americans

Background

A preliminary study, guided by the well-established findings of TMT research that existential terror is assuaged by aligning with and endorsing the dominant views of one's culture and identifying with similar others (e.g., in-group members),^{2,3,31,32} was conducted with a sample of Muslims who immigrated to the U.S. The investigation focused specifically on the impact of acculturation levels on cultural allegiance following increased death awareness. Given that the cultural worldviews of Muslim Americans are likely to be shaped by their acculturation experiences, the empirical study of how alterations in one's cultural worldview impacts terror management defenses in the context of mortality concerns was undertaken. For individuals, such as Muslim Americans, who come into prolonged contact with two different cultures, the question of cultural alignment was investigated. It was predicted that highly acculturated Muslim Americans would identify with the Western culture in comparison to their poorly acculturated counterparts, who were predicted to align with their heritage culture to assuage concerns of death.

Participants

To test these hypotheses, 88 individuals who identified as Muslim and/or individuals whose parents identified as Muslim were recruited for the study. Participants were recruited from introductory psychology courses, as well as from the Queens College campus through the use of flyers. Only first-generation immigrants (i.e., individuals born outside of the U.S. and its territories) were included in the study. The psychology department's online research participation management system was used to screen student participants for inclusion. No additional exclusion criteria were set. The study took approximately one hour to complete. Participants received either research credit through their psychology courses, or were

compensated in the amount of \$12 for their time.

Procedures

Before initiating data collection, the Queens College – CUNY Institutional Review Board approved of all study materials and procedures. Participants were told that the aim of the study was to determine how people perceive others. After consenting to participate, participants were randomized into either the experimental condition (MS induction) or the control condition. Initially, all participants were asked to complete a number of questionnaires designed to assess personality, culture, and relationships, after which they were asked to complete a reaction time task to measure verbal ability and motor skills—this served as a distraction from the goals of the study. Participants were then given 5 minutes to respond to two open-ended questions, the content of which was dependent upon experimental condition (MS induction or control). As a delay, participants were asked to complete another reaction time task prior to being exposed to photographs of same-sex targets (modern and traditional Muslim Americans) and completing the worldview defense measures to assess cultural alignment. Following study completion, participants were thoroughly debriefed about the purpose of the study and references for counseling services were provided as necessary.

Measures

Demographic information. Standard demographic information regarding age, gender, and ethnic background was obtained through a brief questionnaire created by the researchers.

Acculturation. Two measures of acculturation were administered to assess preference for and

immersion in the U.S. and heritage cultures, separately. The Acculturation, Habits, and Interests Multicultural Scale for Adolescents (AHIMSA)¹⁷⁴ was developed as a brief, 8-item, self-report questionnaire. A range of behavioral (e.g., The food I eat at home is from...), cognitive (e.g., The way I do things and the way I think about things are from...), and affective (e.g., The people I fit in with best are from...) indices of acculturation is examined. The measure was constructed as a useful tool in multicultural settings. Specifically, the phrasing of each item is intended to be appropriate for anyone living in the United States, regardless of ethnic/cultural background; the response options for all items is: (a) The United States, (b) The country my family is from, (c), Both, and (d) Neither. Four sub-scores can be generated by summing the number of responses in each of the four categories: United States Orientation (Assimilation), Other Country Orientation (Separation), Both Countries Orientation (Integration), and Neither Country Orientation (Marginalization). The U.S. Orientation and Other Country Orientation subscales have been used in previous research,^{14,175,176} and were used in the current study to correspond to a social and cultural preference for the U.S. and for heritage cultures, respectively. Cronbach alphas were .69 for the U.S. Orientation subscale and .54 for the Other Country Orientation subscale. Scores on each subscale range from 0 to 8, with higher scores indicating greater levels of U.S. or heritage culture identification.

The Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS)¹⁷⁷ is a 32-item self-report multicultural instrument and was intended to assess participants' level of immersion in the U.S. and heritage societies. This measure yields scores on two scales derived through factor analyses: (1) Ethnic Society Immersion (ESI), and (2) Dominant Society Immersion (DSI). Items are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*false*) to 4 (*true*). Sample items from the ESI subscale include, "I eat traditional foods from my native culture" and "I know how to speak my native language."

Whereas for the DSI subscale, items include “I have many (Anglo) American acquaintances” and “I feel at home in the United States.” Internal consistency reliability for both subscales have ranged from .78 to .97 in previous studies.^{177,178} Cronbach alphas for the current sample were .83 and .85 for the ESI and DSI subscales, respectively.

Personality Difference Measure. The Personality Measure is a 40-item inventory designed to capture participants’ ratings of their own personalities. Each item lists a personality characteristic (e.g., “daring,” “sentimental,” “humble,” “social,” “curious,”). Participants were asked to assess the extent to which each trait describes them by circling a number from 1 (not at all) to 50 (very much). The measure contains moderately positive trait adjectives derived from Andersen and Glassman’s transference paradigm.¹⁷⁹ Following exposure to each of the two same-sex target photographs, participants were asked to give their impressions of both targets by completing the same copy of the personality measure that was used for self-ratings, instead using X’s (traditional target) and squares (modern target) to indicate trait ratings for each target. Mean absolute difference scores between self and target ratings served as the main outcome measures to assess personality differences between the participant and the target (traditional vs. modern). Internal consistency estimates were .78 for self-ratings, .80 for traditional target ratings, and .85 for modern target ratings.

Liking Measure. The Liking Measure is a questionnaire that was designed by the researchers to assess the degree to which participants have an affinity for each of the two individuals in the target photographs. The measure includes 10 statements such as, “This person’s personality seems desirable to me,” “I would like to interact with this person,” and “I would enjoy spending time with this person,” which are rated on a Likert scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree

strongly). Three of the items are reverse-coded. Higher mean scores reflected greater liking of the photographed individual. For the current sample, internal consistency reliability ranged from .85 to .88 for the traditional and modern targets, respectively.

MS Induction. The most widely used measure to increase mortality concerns, The Mortality Attitudes Personality Survey,³¹ was employed to induce MS. Participants in the MS condition were asked to respond to the following: “Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you” and “jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you physically as you die and once you are physically dead.” Those in the control condition were asked to respond to the following: “Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of having a cavity filled at the dentist office arouses in you” and “Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you physically as you have a cavity filled and what happens once your cavity has been filled.”

Cultural Worldview Defense. All participants were exposed to two photographs of same-sex targets: one target represented a traditional Muslim (i.e., traditional target) and the other represented a Westernized Muslim (i.e., modern target). The traditional female target wore a hijab (i.e., headscarf) and the traditional male target wore a taqiyah (i.e., short, rounded skullcap) to represent religious piety in accordance with Islamic culture. The modern female target was unveiled and wore a short-sleeve shirt with a logo that read *100% Halal*; the modern male target did not wear anything atop his head. Following the exposure, participants were asked to provide impressions of the targets by completing questionnaires that assessed how much they liked each of the targets and what personality traits they appeared to possess. Participants were asked to utilize the same form that they filled out to rate their own personalities for each of the two

targets.

Statistical Analyses

Descriptive statistics were generated for demographic characteristics and mean variable differences by experimental condition were analyzed by independent-samples *t*-tests or chi-square analysis. Pearson correlations were used to explore the associations between acculturation levels (i.e., SMAS and AHIMSA subscales) and the main outcome measures (i.e., personality differences between self and target ratings and liking of modern and traditional targets). To test the simple effects of mortality salience on each of the dependent variables, a one-way (i.e., MS vs. control condition) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the four outcome measures (i.e., personality difference scores for each target and liking scores for each target). Multivariable linear regression models were used to further explore the relationships between the independent variables (i.e., experimental condition, AHIMSA subscales, SMAS subscales) and dependent variables (i.e., personality differences and liking of targets). The data were tested for and met the assumptions of multiple regression. All analyses were performed using SPSS 24.0.¹⁸⁰

Results

Descriptive and Bivariate Data. Participants' demographic data are presented in Table 1. Only participants' ethnic background was found to be significantly different between the experimental groups. The correlation matrix of variables of interest is shown in Table 2. As expected, high immersion in the dominant society was associated with lower levels of ethnic society immersion, a social and cultural preference for the U.S., and lower levels of heritage culture identification. Additionally, reporting greater ethnic society immersion was associated

with less preference for U.S. culture. Those who endorsed a social and cultural preference for the U.S. also reported less favorability for their heritage culture and greater personality differences between themselves and both targets (i.e., modern and traditional). Participants who tended to prefer their heritage culture also tended to like the modern target less. Individuals who reported greater personality differences between themselves and the modern target did so for the traditional target as well. Finally, participants that reported liking the modern target also reported liking the traditional target.

Simple Effects of Group Condition. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine whether there were main effects of group condition (MS vs. control) on participants' alignment and liking of each target (i.e., personality difference assessment and liking outcome measures). However, there were no statistically significant effects of MS on any of the dependent variables, all $F_s < 2$.

Personality Difference - Modern Target. A multiple regression was run to predict personality difference between oneself and the modern target from experimental condition, preference for the U.S., preference for the heritage culture, dominant society immersion, and ethnic society immersion. The multiple regression model statistically significantly predicted personality difference of the modern target, $F(5, 82) = 2.57, p < .05, \text{adj. } R^2 = .08$. However, only preference for the U.S. added significantly to the prediction, $p < .01$. Thus, a participant's preference for the U.S. partially accounted for detachment from the modern target (i.e., greater personality differences between oneself and the modern target). Regression coefficients and standard errors can be found in Table 4.

Personality Difference - Traditional Target. A multiple regression was run to predict personality difference between oneself and the traditional target from experimental condition, preference for the U.S., preference for the heritage culture, dominant society immersion, and ethnic society immersion. The multiple regression model statistically significantly predicted personality difference of the traditional target, $F(5, 82) = 2.36, p < .05, \text{adj. } R^2 = .07$. Again, only preference for the U.S. added significantly to the prediction, $p < .01$. As such, a participant's preference for the U.S. partially accounted for detachment from the traditional target (i.e., greater personality differences between oneself and the traditional target). Regression coefficients and standard errors can be found in Table 3.

Liking - Modern Target. A multiple regression was run to predict liking of the modern target from experimental condition, preference for the U.S., preference for the heritage culture, dominant society immersion, and ethnic society immersion. The multiple regression model did not statistically significantly predict liking of the modern target, $F(5, 82) = 2.18, p > .05$.

Liking - Traditional Target. A multiple regression was run to predict liking of the traditional target from experimental condition, preference for the U.S., preference for the heritage culture, dominant society immersion, and ethnic society immersion. The multiple regression model did not statistically significantly predict liking of the traditional target, $F(5, 82) = .34, p > .05$.

Discussion

The results of the pilot study indicated that, contrary to our predictions, MS did not increase the accessibility of worldview-relevant constructs for our sample of Muslim Americans. Given the robust effects of MS reported across hundreds of studies,⁵ the lack of MS effects in our

study was quite unexpected. Results of the multiple linear regression models with all five predictors also revealed relatively unexpected findings: only a high preference for the U.S. significantly predicted greater differences in personality between oneself and each of the two targets (i.e., modern and traditional). Thus, participants who reported a greater preference for the U.S. were expected to report greater personality differences between themselves and both targets. In contrast to our prediction that highly acculturated individuals would identify more with the more modern target following MS, we found that—irrespective of experimental condition—Muslim Americans who reported higher levels of U.S. acculturation distanced themselves from both targets. Interestingly, none of the other predictors significantly contributed to the any of the dependent variables.

This study had several key limitations that merit consideration. First, although a concerted effort was made to collect data from a sample of Muslim immigrants, the study did not include a measure to assess participants' level of commitment to and practice of the Islamic faith. Given that the study aimed to identify how acculturation levels impact self-protective beliefs and terror management defenses, and that the acculturation process—particularly for Muslims who immigrate to the U.S.—is invariably shaped by religion, failing to collect such vital information yields several unanswered questions. Whether and to what degree highly or poorly acculturated participants were religious, and how that religious identity may have enacted in response to mortality concerns, is unknown. Although mixed, past research has found that intrinsic religiosity effectively buffers death anxiety and eliminates MS effects.^{82,103,105,108} Arguably, participants in our sample who endorsed low levels of acculturation to the U.S. may have had higher levels of intrinsic religiosity, and thus MS effects were not observed. However, given that we did not assess religiosity, the results of our study are largely inconclusive. In a related vein,

evidence has shown that acculturative stress also influences Muslim Americans' identification with the U.S.^{12,140,156,157} More specifically, higher levels of discrimination-related stress, in the form of religious harassment (e.g., Islamophobia),¹⁶⁴ are related to lower levels of acculturation to Western society. In terms of TMT, such threats to one's prevailing worldview and self-esteem could result in either increased derogation of threatening out-group members (i.e., Americans) or, alternatively, increased disengagement from identity-threatening domains to procure distance from the stigmatized group. Future research undertaken with Muslim immigrants should include a measure to assess discrimination, particularly in light of increased anti-Muslim sentiment in Western societies. In addition, no measure of death-thought accessibility was administered following the MS induction and subsequent delay task. Thus, while MS has reliably been shown to produce robust effects across diverse samples, a measure of death-thought accessibility would have ensured that the delay was sufficiently long for death awareness to recede from consciousness, thereby activating distal defenses. Moreover, the self-rated personality measures were given to participants prior to the MS induction. Arguably, the opportunity for participants to convey themselves in a positive light by affirming desirable personality characteristics may have inadvertently resulted in an increased level of self-esteem. Considering the centrality of self-esteem in TMT and concomitant evidence that suggests it may effectively eliminate the need to react with worldview defense following increased death awareness,^{4,58} ascertaining participants' levels may have shed light on the lack of significant MS effects. Finally, the target photographs included in the cultural worldview defense measure may not have been sufficiently threatening to the Islamic cultural worldview. More specifically, although the modern targets appeared less traditional in dress than the traditional targets, the Islamic concept of *Ummah* joins all Muslims together in a community of believers, and does not discriminate between Muslims

with varying levels of adherence. Thus, although the modern targets were intended to threaten the Islamic cultural worldview, they may not have been effective given the view of *Ummah*. Perhaps future studies could incorporate a worldview defense measure that directly confronts and undermines the validity of the Islamic faith. Moreover, given the finding that participants in our sample who endorsed a preference for the U.S. detached from both targets, the modern targets may not have been viewed as members of American mainstream society. As all of the photos were of Muslim Americans, highly acculturated participants may have considered all targets to be out-group members and thus failed to align with either target. In light of the aforementioned findings and limitations, the present investigation was conducted as a follow-up study.

PART IV. CURRENT INVESTIGATION

Present Study

The current investigation aimed to clarify the findings of the pilot study and, more broadly, extend TMT research by assessing the impact of biculturalism on terror management strategies within a considerably understudied population. Specifically, we were interested in whether Muslim Americans, with varying levels of religious commitment and acculturation to Western society, alleviated death-related cognitions differently in response to reminders of their mortality. More precisely, we examined how death thought accessibility lead to the shoring up of particular aspects of the individual's terror management system if its architecture was made up of multiple and perhaps competing ideologies, such as in the case of Muslim immigrants in the U.S.

Notably, prior research has shown that the identity negotiation process is quite gendered for Muslim Americans; that is, the reconciliation of religious and national identities appear to be handled differently in women and men.^{14,181-183} There is evidence to suggest that, compared to their male counterparts, women possess more fluid or integrated Muslim and American

identities. Although the experience and identity of Muslim American women cannot be reduced to singular, unitary narratives and descriptions, there is nevertheless a unique and pressing intersectionality of gender, race/ethnicity, and faith that demands focused attention. Muslim women come from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, maintain politically diverse viewpoints, and span the spectrum of religious adherence from staunch secularism to religious orthodoxy. However, there is an undoubtedly pervasive, falsely stereotyped, and undermining perception of Muslim American women as meek, powerless, or oppressed.¹⁸⁴ The practice of veiling—or donning a hijab/headscarf—is most often a centerpiece in the conversation on the oppression of Muslim women.^{185,186} The most common Western interpretations of Muslim women’s hijab practice allude to women’s deprivation of equal rights, autonomy, dignity, and freedom.¹⁸⁷ Although the experiences, reasons for, and practices of veiling are different for each and every *muhajabba* (i.e., woman who wears hijab), studies investigating the significance of hijab practice among Muslim women highlight marked incongruities between the perceptions of muhajabbas and the ways in which the dominant group defines them.¹⁸⁸ Thus, although it may be difficult for Westerners to reconcile hijab practice with gender equality and empowerment, the assumption that veiling is inherently anti-feminist and anti-modernist is a precarious ethnocentric tendency. For example, Jasperse and colleagues¹⁸³ found that among Muslim women, Islamic dress practice functions to preserve ties within the larger Muslim community, elicit deference and power, and grant freedom from sexual objectification. As such, the present study will employ a measure of worldview defense that centers on the issue of hijab practice and pits prevailing Western attitudes against traditional Islamic views and principles. The current study is the first of its kind to explore the impact of both religiosity and acculturation status on worldview defense systems following mortality salience among Muslim American women.

While building on the conceptual framework of the pilot study, the current investigation attempted to address and correct for many of the methodological weaknesses and limitations observed in the pilot. Specifically, key variables were assessed, including religiosity, self-esteem, death-thought accessibility, immigration status, and discrimination-related stress—none of which were measured in the pilot investigation. Efforts were also made to target a diverse sample of Muslim American women with regard to level of religiosity and immigration status (i.e., first vs. second generation). Moreover, given evidence that experiments with three-task or two-task delays between the MS induction and the worldview defense measure yield significantly larger effect sizes following MS than did experiments with a single delay task (such as the pilot study),⁵ the current experiment included three filler tasks during the delay period. Additionally, the worldview defense measure pitted the Islamic faith against American values to directly examine Muslim American females' defensive reactions towards both religious (i.e., Islamic) and secular (i.e., American) worldview threatening messages following increased death awareness.

Specific Aims & Hypotheses

Specific Aim 1. To examine Muslim American females' defensive attitudes toward worldview-supporting and worldview-threatening messages in response to MS.

Hypothesis 1. MS is hypothesized to lead to a more positive evaluation of a worldview-supporting essay and an increased negative reaction toward a worldview-threatening essay.

Specific Aim 2. To examine the impact of acculturation level on Muslim Americans females' defensive attitudes toward worldview-supporting and worldview-threatening messages in response to MS.

Hypothesis 2. Participants that are more highly acculturated to U.S. society are predicted to evaluate the pro-American, anti-Islamic essay more favorably than the pro-Islamic, anti-American essay compared to less acculturated participants, following MS.

Specific Aim 3. To examine the impact of religiosity on Muslim American females' defensive attitudes toward worldview-supporting and worldview-threatening messages in response to MS.

Hypothesis 3. More religious participants are predicted to evaluate the pro-Islamic, anti-American essay more favorably than the pro-American, anti-Islamic essay compared to less religious participants, following MS.

METHODS

Participants

Fifty-seven female participants, ages 18 and over, who self-identified as Muslim and were proficient in English participated in the current study. Four individuals were dropped from the analysis due to missing data and/or non-compliance with study procedures, yielding a final sample size of 53 participants. Participants were recruited primarily from introductory psychology courses, as well as from the Queens College campus through the use of informational flyers. The psychology department's online research participation management system was used to screen student participants for inclusion; individuals had to meet the following criteria: 1. You identify as a Muslim, 2. You identify as a female, 3. You are 18 years of age or older, and 4. You are English-speaking. Identical inclusion criteria were also stated on the flyer that was distributed across the college campus. Individuals with varying levels of religious commitment (i.e., practicing, low-practicing, and non-practicing Muslims) were encouraged to participate in order to obtain a more diverse sample. No exclusion criteria were set. The study took approximately one hour to complete. Participants received either research

credit through their psychology courses or were compensated in the amount of \$10 for their time. All study procedures were administered to participants individually by one of two Muslim American female members of the research team in a private research room.

Procedures

Before initiating data collection, the Queens College – CUNY Institutional Review Board approved of all study materials and procedures (Queens College IRB Approval Code #: 2017-0908). The primary empirical strategy employed for testing hypotheses derived from TMT is to remind people of their own death (i.e., MS) and to assess whether doing so intensifies bolstering of the psychological structures posited to protect people from their mortality concerns: their worldview and self-esteem. Thus, the current study followed in the typical way, in which participants were randomly assigned into the MS or control condition (MS condition = 26 participants; control condition = 27 participants). Participants were assured of the anonymity of their responses to all aspects of the study. As such, participants were each randomly assigned a code number, which was used throughout the study and included on the collected data. Participants were orally consented and were not asked to sign their names on any research-related documents, ensuring the privacy of their responses. Data was collected from October 2017 until January 2019. All paper-and-pencil questionnaires were converted to a computer-assisted format in October 2019 using an online survey development cloud-based software (i.e., SurveyMonkey¹⁸⁹). This change was made in an effort to avoid missing data, inappropriate skips and out of range codes, facilitate data entry, eliminate coding and scoring errors, and save time. All other study procedures were kept constant, including the laboratory setting, oral consent and debriefing, and presence of the experimenter. No changes were made to the questionnaires

themselves. The change did not extend the total time for study completion. Given that participants were not being asked to provide any identifiable information, there was no/minimal risk of privacy/security issues arising. Importantly, empirical evidence comparing paper-based vs. computer-based data collections suggests little to no effect of mode of administration on responses.¹⁹⁰⁻¹⁹⁷ Regardless of study mode administration, all participants completed the questionnaires ostensibly for the purpose of investigating the identity formation of Muslim American women. Embedded within the questionnaires was the MS induction, in which participants in the MS condition were asked to briefly write about their own death, whereas those in the control condition were asked to write about undergoing a dental procedure. The instructions given for the MS induction and dental procedure question were identical in nature: *“This open-ended questionnaire is designed as a new measure of personality, to examine your ability to imagine various events. Please feel free to write your responses in the language that you feel most comfortable. Additional blank paper will be provided at your request.”* Consistent with previous TMT work, which has shown that death-thought accessibility is low immediately after an explicit MS induction, but increases after a delay,⁴¹ three filler tasks were administered directly after the MS and control condition primes.^{5,42} After the delay tasks, a measure of death-thought accessibility was administered, to determine if death-related cognitions increased, albeit outside of consciousness. The dependent measure was subsequently administered to tap distal death defenses. Finally, measures examining self-esteem, Muslim/American collective identity, religious affiliation, religiosity, acculturation, and discrimination-related stress were administered. Participants were thoroughly debriefed after completion of the study and probed for suspicion. None of them expressed suspicion regarding the independence of the tasks or the authenticity of the essays.

Measures

Demographics. The demographics questionnaire was used to gather relevant background information, including date of birth, first/native language, level of comfort with the English language, ethnic background, birthplace, age of immigration to the U.S. (i.e., if born outside of the U.S. and U.S. territories), status in the U.S. (i.e., U.S. citizen, lawful permanent resident, temporary resident, refugee/asylee, prefer not to say), generational status in the U.S. (i.e., first-generation, second-generation, third-generation and beyond), marital status, and total combined household income.

Religious Affiliation. A brief, 4-item questionnaire created by the researchers was used to assess participants' identification as a Muslim including whether or not they converted to Islam, the branch of Islam to which they belong, and participation/frequency of religious dress. Given that the Muslim American community is not a homogenous group, capturing this information was critical in order to discern the generalizability of results.¹⁹⁸

Acculturation. The *Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS)*¹⁷⁷ is a 32-item self-report multicultural instrument that assessed participants' level of immersion in the U.S. and heritage societies. This measure yields scores on two scales derived through factor analyses: (1) Ethnic Society Immersion (ESI; 17 items), and (2) Dominant Society Immersion (DSI; 15 items). For the purposes of this study, only the score on the DSI scale was used in analyses. Items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*false*) to 4 (*true*). Sample items from the DSI subscale include: "I have many (Anglo) American acquaintances" and "I feel at home in the United States." Internal consistency reliability for both subscales has ranged from .78 to .97 in previous

studies.^{177,178} The coefficient alpha obtained for the DSI subscale in the current study was lower than anticipated (i.e., $\alpha = .68$). Accordingly, an exploration of whether the internal consistency of this measure could be improved by deleting one or more items from the scale was undertaken. There was only one item that, when removed, generated a higher alpha (i.e., from $\alpha = .68$ to $\alpha = .74$). Thus, item 4 (i.e., “I have never learned to speak the language of my native country.”) was deleted from the DSI subscale score calculation. The total score on the DSI subscale, without the inclusion of item 4, ranged from 14 to 56.

Religiosity. Religious attitudes were measured using the *Muslim Attitude Towards Religion Scale* (MARS).¹⁹⁹ The MARS is a 14-item scale that measures personal commitments to Islam. Responses to MARS items were made along a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) so that scores on the total scale have a possible range of 14 to 70, with higher scores indicating a more positive religious attitude. The MARS has been shown to correlate positively with the extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity scales developed by Allport and Ross.^{110,200} The MARS assesses multiple dimensions of Islamic adherence including personal help (“Islam helps me lead a better life.”), Muslim worldview (“I think the Qur’an is relevant and applicable to modern day.”), and Muslim practices (“I pray five times a day.”). Internal reliability coefficients have ranged from .93-.96 in previous studies.^{12,200} Cronbach’s alpha was .94 for the current sample.

Discrimination-Related Stress. The *Societal, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental-Revised-Short Form* (SAFE-Short)¹⁶² was used to evaluate Muslim American discrimination-related stress, given the current sociopolitical climate and the pervasiveness of hostility toward Muslims in the U.S.^{125,148,152,158,164,170} Discrimination-related stress is a particularly salient

source of acculturative stress for Muslim American immigrants and has been found to differentially impact religious as well as national identification. The full version of the SAFE is designed to assess negative stressors experienced by minority immigrants. In accordance with a study conducted with Arab Americans,²⁰¹ which provided evidence for construct validity and good reliability, a modified version of the SAFE was used. The 13-item version assesses experiences of and stress associated with discrimination from the dominant society (e.g., “I am upset that most people consider the Muslim-American community to be more dangerous than other groups,” or “I feel uncomfortable when others make jokes about or put down Muslims.”). Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *have not experienced*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and summed to generate a total score that ranged from 13 to 91. Higher scores indicated higher levels of discrimination-related stress. Internal consistency was .81 for the current study.

Death-Thought Accessibility. Death-thought accessibility (DTA) was measured by using a word fragment completion task, which has classically served as a measure of DTA for this purpose in past research.^{41,202} Participants were presented with a series of different word fragments (e.g., COFF_ _) and asked to complete each fragment with the first word that comes to mind and writing in the corresponding letters into the blanks. Six of the 20 words could be completed with either a death-related word (e.g., grave, dead, coffin) or a neutral word (e.g., grade, deer, coffee). The other fragments served as filler items. This task appears to be especially sensitive to the prior occurrence of a stimulus,²⁰³ thus the prior activation of the internal representation of death should, theoretically, result in high performance. The more fragments a participant completes with death-related words, the more death is inferred to be cognitively accessible and influencing subsequent behavior. The possible death-related terms were *buried*, *dead*, *grave*, *killed*, *skull*, and *coffin*. The number of death-related terms was summed to generate

a total DTA score, which ranged from 0 (none of the fragments were completed with death-related words) to 6 (all of the fragments were completed with death-related words).

Affect. Participants' mood was measured using the *Positive and Negative Affect Scales: State Version* (PANAS),⁷⁴ which is a 20-item, self-report measure. This measure was included to assess any effect of MS on affect and to provide a delay between the MS induction and measure of worldview defense.^{5,41} The PANAS is comprised of 10 positive items and 10 negative items that describe various feelings and emotions (e.g., excited; proud; hostile; irritable). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt each emotion *currently* using a 5-point scale (1= *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). The measure is divided into two subscales of positive affect (PANAS-P) and negative affect (PANAS-N). The ratings for each subscale were summed to produce scores that ranged from 0 to 40. The PANAS has been shown to have strong psychometric properties and has been used extensively in TMT research.^{5,74,204} Internal reliability coefficients obtained in the current study were .81 and .83 for the PANAS-P and PANAS-N subscales, respectively.

Self-Esteem. The *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (RSE) was used to determine self-esteem scores.²⁰⁵ This is a 10-item instrument that is a widely used measure of positive self-regard. Items were rated on a 4-point scale, such that scores ranged from 10 to 40, with higher scores reflecting higher self-esteem. Items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are inversely worded (e.g., "All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.") and were reverse scored in analyses. This instrument has been shown to be reliable and valid in a large body of studies, with ethnically diverse samples.^{5,12,205-208} Overall, an alpha range of .80 to .88 has been reported across studies. Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was .91.

Muslim/American Collective Identity. Participants' perception of Muslim group membership and American group membership were independently assessed using two "Race-specific" versions of the *Collective Self-Esteem* measure (CSE).²⁰⁹ Four components of identity were assessed, including: 1) group membership, which measures one's judgment of self-worth as a member of one's cultural group, 2) private regard, which assesses one's personal evaluation of one's cultural group, 3) public regard, which evaluates the perception of public judgment of one's cultural group and 4) identity importance, which captures how the significance of one's social group membership influences one's own self-concept. Each of the four components corresponds to four items, which are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Half of the sixteen items are inversely worded (e.g., "Most people consider my racial/ethnic group, on the average, to be more ineffective than other groups.") and were reverse scored in analyses. For each subscale, responses were summed and divided by four to yield subscale scores, which ranged from 1 - 7. The scale has been widely used with various racial, ethnic, and bi-cultural groups, including Arab students in the US.^{14,210} Previous research has provided evidence for its strong psychometric properties.^{211,212} Cronbach's alphas for the full, 12-item Muslim and American CSE measures were .86 and .80, respectively. Given the small number of items in each of the subscales, mean inter-item correlations were calculated to estimate reliability.²¹³ Mean inter-item correlations for all scales of both versions of the CSE were between .2 and .4, suggesting good reliability.

MS Induction. The *Mortality Attitudes Personality Survey*,³¹ was used to increase death awareness. Under the auspices of a task examining participants' ability to imagine various events, participants in the death priming condition were instructed to write down their responses to the

following: “Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you.” and “What do you think happens to you as you physically die and once you are physically dead?” For the control group, participants were asked to write down their responses to the following: “Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of having a cavity filled at the dentist office arouses in you.” and “What do you think happens to you as you physically have a cavity filled and once your cavity has been filled?”

Worldview Defense Measure. The most common dependent variable in TMT research has been the participants’ attitude toward the author of an essay that disagreed with their worldview.⁵ In that vein, the following dependent variable was used: participants were shown a widely circulated and publically available image by artist Shepard Fairey that depicts a Muslim woman wearing an American Flag hijab (see Appendix A). This particular image was chosen largely because: 1) the hijab often incites questions about nationality,^{150,152,153,170,171,181,188} and 2) the famous photo has stirred controversy and debate amongst Muslim American women.^{182,214} Participants were then given two essays that were ostensibly written by Muslim American women as reactions to the image. No other identifiable characteristics of the authors were revealed, including the authors’ age, level of education, socioeconomic status, etc... One essay was a pro-Islamic, anti-American response to the image, which argued that the beauty of the hijab eludes most Americans and that Islam, in its truest form, will never be wholly accepted and integrated into American culture. The pro-American, anti-Islamic essay challenged the conflation of the hijab and the American flag, arguing that the hijab represents the oppression of Muslim women whereas the American flag is emblematic of freedom and equality. Each essay was equal in length and the order of presentation of the essays was counterbalanced to control for potential sequence effects (see Appendix B). After reading each essay, participants were asked to evaluate

it with regard to the questions below, which have been used in former TMT studies.^{58,82}

1. How much do you like the author?
2. How intelligent do you think the author is?
3. How knowledgeable do you think the author is?
4. How much do you agree with the author's reaction to the image?
5. How true is what the author said?

Each question was answered on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*). The dependent measure of worldview defense was a composite of the difference of the mean evaluations of the pro-Islamic, anti-American minus pro-American, anti-Islamic essays. Higher positive difference scores suggest preference for the pro-Islamic, anti-American essay whereas higher negative difference scores suggest favorability of the pro-American, anti-Islamic essay. Cronbach's alpha for the five ratings of the pro-Islamic, anti-American essay was .97 and .93 for the pro-American, anti-Islamic essay.

Statistical Analysis

Analyses were conducted in SPSS version 25.²¹⁵ Descriptive statistics for sociodemographic characteristics were generated and cross-tabulations or independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to ensure that background variables did not systematically differ between groups. Descriptives were generated for all other variables of interest and independent samples *t*-tests were performed to determine if there were significant differences between experimental groups. Bonferroni correction was used to avoid Type-I error. Correlations between potential covariates (e.g., discrimination-related stress, collective self-esteem) and worldview defense (i.e.,

composite of the difference of the mean evaluations of the pro-Islamic, anti-American minus pro-American, anti-Islamic essays) were generated to facilitate selection of possible covariate variables. An a priori decision was made to include variables with correlation coefficients greater than .35 as a covariate.²¹⁶ Preliminary data analysis was conducted via independent samples *t*-tests to assess the impact of MS on affective state and accessibility of death-related thought, as well as to determine whether mode of study administration (i.e., paper-based vs. computer-based) had a significant impact on worldview defense. Primary data analysis employed hierarchical multiple regression models to analyze the main effect of MS and examine the unique contribution of acculturation and religiosity levels on worldview defense, while taking covariates into account. The data were tested for and met the assumptions of multiple regression. Scale scores were centered to enhance the interpretability of results and contributions of individual predictors. Given that the current sample ($n = 53$) was relatively small, 95% confidence intervals and effect sizes are used to further characterize the results of analyses.

RESULTS

Descriptive and Bivariate Data

Sociodemographic Information. Within the total sample, participant ages ranged from 18 to 52, with a mean age of 23 years (± 5.54). There was a nearly even distribution of U.S.- and foreign-born participants in the sample (U.S.-born = 52.8%). This is somewhat discrepant from population proportions, in which 42% of U.S. Muslims were born inside the U.S.¹²⁵ Of participants born outside of the U.S. and its territories, the age upon immigration to the U.S. ranged from 1 to 42 years, with a mean age of 11 (± 1.17). Nearly half of the sample reported English as a first/native language (43.4%), followed by Bengali (32.1%), Urdu (11.3%), Arabic (9.4%), and Uzbek (3.8%). The entire sample endorsed either being comfortable (i.e., can speak,

read, and write quite well) or very comfortable (i.e., native-level fluency) with the English language. The majority of the sample reported being an American citizen (81.1%), 13.2% indicated permanent resident status, and 5.7% reported temporary resident status. In terms of generational status, 52.8% were first-generation (i.e., born in a country outside of the U.S. and neither parents were U.S. citizens) and 47.2% identified as second-generation (i.e., born in the U.S. and at least 1 parent was first-generation); no participants in the sample reported being third-generation or beyond. This is surprising, given that only about 18% of U.S. Muslims are second-generation and nearly a quarter are third-generation or beyond.¹²⁵ As expected based on the U.S. Muslim adult population,¹²⁵ reported ethnic background was diverse including, Bengali, Pakistani, Egyptian, Indian, Uzbek, Afghani, Guyanese, Bosnian, Yemeni, and Indonesian. Individuals of South Asian ancestry represented the largest group in the sample (71.7%; Bengali, Pakistani, Indian, Afghani) followed by Middle Eastern (11.3%; Egyptian, Yemeni). The majority of participants reported never having been married (83.0%) and a total combined household income of \$1-\$39,999 in the last 12 months (62.3%). Table 5 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Although participants were randomly assigned to either the MS or control conditions, it is possible that the two groups may have differed with regard to important individual difference variables (e.g., citizenship or generational status, age upon immigration) that may have affected the outcome variable. Bivariate analyses revealed trivial mean differences between participants in the MS and control conditions on most background characteristics (see Table 5). Although it failed to reach significance, $t(23) = -1.556$, $p = .133$, a medium effect size, $g = .60$, suggests that the mean age of participants born outside of the U.S. in the control group (14 ± 11.05) was meaningfully different than that of the MS group (9 ± 6.11), -5.33 , 95% CI [-12.42, 1.76].

Religious Affiliation. Data gathered on participants' religious affiliation are presented in Table 6. Notably, only 1 person in the sample reported converting to Islam (1.9%). The vast majority of participants identified as belonging to the Sunni sect of Islam (79.2%), which is higher than the population estimate (i.e., 55%).¹²⁵ In terms of religious dress, 62.3% of participants reported that they did not wear a hijab/headscarf (i.e., non-muhajjaba). Of those that did cover their hair (n=20), 75% reported daily hijab practice, and 25% reported sometimes, but not daily, practice.

Primary Variables of Interest. The means, standard deviations, and ranges for primary variables of interest in this study are reported in Table 7. Notably, mean scores on the religious attitudes and acculturation measures were both well above the mid-point of the scales, suggesting that participants in the current sample are highly religious (56.81 ± 10.22) and highly acculturated to U.S. society overall (45.87 ± 5.62). These findings are generally consistent with and well supported by national survey data on U.S. Muslims.¹²⁵ Scores for discrimination-related stress were also above the mid-point of the scale (52.25 ± 12.58); an item-by-item analysis revealed that over 90% of the sample either agreed or strongly agreed with items 12 (i.e., *It bothers me when the media portrays a negative image of Muslims or Muslim Americans*) and 13 (i.e., *I am upset that most people consider the Muslim-American community to be more dangerous than other groups*). Scores on each of the four subscales of the collective self-esteem measures (i.e., Muslim and American versions) were at or above the midpoint as well, suggesting that participants in this study have high regard for both groups, which converges with findings from previous studies.^{14,125,217} Personal self-esteem was moderately high for the current sample (27.87 ± 6.48) and relatively consistent with national mean values.²⁰⁸ Independent samples *t*-

tests performed to examine differences across experimental conditions revealed small-sized effects across all mean differences (see Table 7).

Correlations

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated for the relationship between participants' composite essay scores (i.e., worldview defense) and key variables to check for potential covariates (see Table 8). The following variables met the a priori decision rule (i.e., correlation coefficients greater than .35) to include as a covariate for analyses: hijab practice (.36), Muslim membership esteem (.38), and Muslim private regard (.38). However, given that Muslim private regard and religiosity are highly correlated (.81), private regard was omitted from subsequent analyses to minimize redundancies and analytic difficulties caused by multicollinearity (e.g., inflated standard errors, deflated power in significant tests). Although not shown in Table 8, the mean age of participants born outside of the U.S. was weakly correlated with the composite essay score (-.06). As such, it was not controlled for in subsequent analyses. Thus, only hijab practice and Muslim membership esteem were retained as covariates.

Preliminary Analyses

Self-Reported Affect. Prior to testing the effects of the MS manipulation on the evaluation of the essays, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted on the negative and positive affect subscales of the PANAS to see whether the MS manipulation produced any affective reactions that may have contributed to participants' reactions to the essays. For positive affect, the difference between the means of the MS (25.23 ± 5.82) and control conditions (23.26 ± 5.52) was not meaningfully different, $t(51) = 1.265, p = .211, d = .35$. Unexpectedly, differences on negative affect scores approached significance, $2.71, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.06,$

5.48], $t(35.604) = 1.989, p = .054$, with a trend toward greater negative affect among MS subjects (16.27 ± 6.30), than participants in the control condition (13.56 ± 3.02). Notably, this difference represented a medium-sized effect, $d = .55$. Though, it is unlikely that increased negative mood could be mediating the effects on worldview defense, as negative affect was weakly associated with the composite essay score ($.04$). This finding is consistent with prior TMT research, in which the effects of MS are not explained by changes in participants' mood states.^{5,75,76}

Death-Thought Accessibility. An independent samples t -test was run to compare the accessibility of death-related cognitions between the MS and control groups. Mean scores on the DTA measure were not significantly different between the MS (1.69 ± 1.26) and control groups (1.37 ± 0.97), $.32, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.30, .94]$. As such, counter to what was expected, results showed that the MS induction had a small-sized effect on the overall DTA measure, $t(51) = 1.047, p = .300, d = .29$. Notably, this finding does not appear to be secondary to difficulties generating real words to the target items, as only 5.7% of the fragments completed were found to be nonsense/non-words. Upon further inspection of individual items, findings revealed that participants in the MS condition had significantly higher levels of DTA for only one of the death-related terms (i.e., *buried*) than participants in the control condition, $\chi^2(1) = 4.228, p = .04, \phi = -.28$ (see Figure 1). As the TMT literature supports the notion that DTA mediates defense following MS, the relationship between participants' responses on this single death-related item and the dependent variable was examined. However, only a weak association was found ($-.04$), suggesting that it was an unlikely worldview defense mediator.

Mode of Study Administration. To investigate whether or not the mode of administration (i.e., paper-based vs. computer-based) had a significant impact on the worldview defense measure, an independent samples *t*-test was performed. On average, participants who completed the paper-based study evaluated the pro-Islamic essay more favorably than the pro-American essay (2.75 ± 2.52), relative to those who completed the computer-based format (1.63 ± 4.19). However, this difference, -1.11 , 95% CI $[-.84, 3.06]$, was not significant, $t(51) = 1.146$, $p = .257$, and only represented a small-sized effect, $g = .38$. It should be noted that Hedges' g was calculated to provide a measure of effect size weighted according to the relative size of each sample (i.e., paper-based = 41 vs. computer-based = 12).

Primary Analyses

Mortality Salience as Predictor. To test the first hypothesis that MS leads to a more positive evaluation of a world-view supporting essay and an increased negative reaction toward a worldview-threatening essay, hierarchical linear regression was used to analyze the main effect. See Table 9 for full details on each regression model. The model included the composite essay score as the outcome variable and experimental condition as the predictor variable, while controlling for participants' hijab practice and Muslim membership esteem. Results of the hierarchical regression model revealed that the proportion of variance explained by the initial model ($R^2 = .185$, adjusted $R^2 = .152$) was not meaningfully different following the addition of experimental condition (R^2 change = $.002$; $R^2 = .187$, adjusted $R^2 = .137$). In other words, MS was not an important predictor of participants' composite essay scores (i.e., worldview defense). This finding is in stark contrast to prior TMT research, in which the effects of MS are typically robust.⁵

Moderating Effect of Acculturation. The second hypothesis predicted that more highly acculturated participants would react with greater defense of the pro-American, anti-Islamic essay over the pro-Islamic, anti-American essay compared with those with lower levels of acculturation, following MS. To test this hypothesis, a hierarchical linear regression model was run with hijab practice and Muslim membership esteem in Step 1, experimental condition and U.S. acculturation in Step 2, and their interaction product in Step 3. Full details on each regression model are shown in Table 10. Contrary to our prediction, U.S. acculturation did not moderate the association between MS and worldview defense (R^2 change = .011; $R^2 = .200$, adjusted $R^2 = .115$). As such, the second hypothesis was not supported.

Moderating Effect of Religiosity. The third hypothesis predicted that religiosity would moderate the link between MS and worldview defense, such that more religious participants would evaluate the pro-Islamic, anti-American essay more favorably than the pro-American, anti-Islamic essay compared with less religious participants in response to MS. To examine whether the association between MS and worldview defense varied as a function of religiosity, hierarchical linear regression was conducted using religiosity as a predictor and as a moderator in the interaction term. Findings revealed that the relationship between MS and worldview defense did not change based on participants' religiosity levels (R^2 change = .002; $R^2 = .198$, adjusted $R^2 = .113$). Thus, the third hypothesis was not supported. See Table 11 for full details on each regression model.

Exploratory Analyses

Worldview Defense Measure – Pro-Islamic, Anti-American Essay. To examine the effects of the MS manipulation on the evaluation of the pro-Islamic, anti-American essay alone, an

independent samples t-test was run to compare essay ratings between the MS and control groups. Means scores on the pro-Islamic, anti-American worldview defense essay were not significantly different between the MS (7.11 ± 1.80) and control groups (6.21 ± 2.59), $.90$, 95% CI [-.33, 2.13]. Consequently, results showed that the MS induction had a small-sized effect on the overall evaluation of the pro-Islamic, anti-American essay, $t(46.468) = 1.472$, $p = .148$, $d = .40$.

Worldview Defense Measure – Pro-American, Anti-Islamic Essay. To study the effects of the MS manipulation on the favorability of the pro-American, anti-Islamic essay between the MS and control groups, an independent samples t-test comparing participants' evaluations was performed. Mean scores on the pro-American, anti-Islamic worldview defense measure were not significantly different between the MS (4.72 ± 2.23) and control groups (3.72 ± 2.34), 1.10 , 95% CI [-.16, 2.36]. Thus, counter to what was expected, results revealed only a small-sized effect of the MS manipulation on the overall evaluation of the pro-American, anti-Islamic essay, $t(51) = 1.75$, $p = .086$, $d = .43$.

DISCUSSION

Death is the ultimate and inescapable fate of every human being. According to TMT, human beings responded to the inevitable fate of expiry by creating and adopting cultural worldviews that provide a sense of security, order, meaning, and permanence to an otherwise random and chaotic reality.^{1,2,6,31,40,47,54,81} Assuaging the existential terror of death, worldviews protect people by making salient the enduring values that will outlast them. However, worldviews are formed by multiple streams of influence. The architecture of one's worldview is made up of multiple values, goals, existential beliefs, and memberships in social groups that become differentially activated under certain circumstances and thus, impact subsequent

behavior. The multiplicity of worldviews is arguably most germane to immigrants, as migration affects many aspects of the self that demands redefinition and reconstruction of personal worldviews. Importantly, fast-paced globalization patterns in the U.S. have resulted in serious demographic transformations and the overall immigrant population continues to grow. Despite this, remarkably little work has been conducted with immigrant samples in the TMT literature. Moreover, although the U.S. population is comprised of approximately 3.45 million Muslims,¹²⁵ psychological research with Muslim American samples is startlingly low.¹⁹⁸ As such, there is a pressing need to address this substantial gap in the literature.

To investigate the multiplicity of worldview defense strategies and the constructs that are activated following reminders of death, the present study aimed to examine the defenses employed by Muslim American women against death anxiety when the opportunity to defend religious practices was presented together with the opportunity for secular cultural worldview defense. The current investigation set out to clarify the findings of the pilot study and attempt to correct for some of its methodological shortcomings. First, this study aimed to recruit a more diverse, and thus more representative, sample of Muslim Americans with respect to levels of religious commitment and practice, citizenship and generational status, and, by proxy, acculturation to U.S. society. Additionally, assessments of religiosity, discrimination-related stress, and death-thought accessibility were included in this study to discern participants' religious piety, experiences of acculturative stress, and death-related cognitions, respectively. Finally, the worldview defense measure utilized in the present study was intended to directly confront and challenge religious and secular values. This was done in an effort to heighten the accessibility of salient psychological structures that are presumed to underlie distal defense systems used to buffer against death anxiety. It was predicted that participants would diverge in

their defensive strategies based upon their levels of religiosity and acculturation to dominant society. Importantly, the purpose of this study was not to dismantle the integrative configuration of a personal worldview; rather, the intention was to gain a more refined understanding of the meaning, importance, or support that a salient aspect of worldview develops in response to death anxiety.

Summary of Main Findings

In a sample of 53 Muslim American females, results from the present study provided limited support for our hypotheses. Specifically, our first hypothesis predicted that participants randomized into the MS condition would produce more positive evaluations of a worldview-supporting message and more negative evaluations of a worldview-threatening message. Unexpectedly, our results showed that participants given the typical mortality salience prime did not subsequently engage in worldview defense. As such, there was no main effect of mortality salience on participants' essay evaluations. Our second hypothesis predicted that there would be an interaction effect between MS and U.S. acculturation levels, insofar as more highly acculturated participants in the death prime condition would favor the pro-American essay over the pro-Islamic essay than those with lower levels of acculturation. This interaction was not supported. Finally, our third hypothesis predicted that religiosity would moderate the relationship between MS and worldview defense, such that more religious participants would prefer the pro-Islamic essay to the pro-American essay relative to less religious participants, in response to MS. Counter to what was expected, religiosity did not moderate the association between heightened mortality awareness and essay reactions. In order to facilitate the interpretation of our results, a number of methodological, empirical, and theoretical factors that may have influenced and/or account for our findings must be taken into consideration.

Interpretation of Findings

Mortality Salience Hypothesis. Overall, the results of this investigation did not support TMT predictions, as: 1) participants in the MS condition did not respond with conventional worldview defense, and 2) neither acculturation nor religiosity was found to moderate MS effects. Though consistent with the lack of effects found in the pilot study, this finding is in stark contrast to the robust direct and moderated (i.e., domain-relevant) effects of MS found in prior investigations.⁵ Moreover, previous research has demonstrated a great deal of cross-cultural generality for TMT results. Although scant, there is some evidence to support the validity of the MS hypothesis with Muslim populations in particular. For example, studies conducted with Muslim undergraduate students in the Netherlands, Turkey, and Iran found that participants defended their cultural worldviews more when their own death was made salient.^{64,218-221} However, these findings are interpreted with caution given the limited number of investigations performed, regional differences (i.e., conducted outside of the U.S.), and methodological disparities (e.g., inexplicit MS manipulations⁶⁴).

Data gathered from previous studies with non-significant or null MS effects have been useful in explicating key factors that reliably diminish the effects of MS. First, there is evidence to suggest that self-esteem provides protection against concerns about death.^{3,5,22,58} Studies have shown that individuals with high dispositional self-esteem do not exhibit higher levels of worldview defense following mortality reminders. This is in contrast to those with even moderate dispositional self-esteem, who were indeed found to respond with conventional worldview defense following MS.⁵⁸ In addition, past investigations have shown that experimentally elevated self-esteem reduces the worldview defense that occurs in response to MS (e.g., via positive vs. neutral personality feedback).^{1,4,58} Such findings suggest that

increasing self-esteem facilitates the sustained suppression of death constructs, thereby eliminating the need to engage distal defense systems. As trait self-esteem was not assessed prior to the initiation of the current study, it is possible that participants in the current study had high dispositional self-esteem, which effectively diminished the threat of death. However, this explanation seems unlikely, as cross-cultural research suggests that average self-esteem levels are in the moderate range.^{206,208} Furthermore, although self-esteem was measured after the worldview defense in the present study, average scores for the entire sample reflected moderate self-esteem and the difference of self-esteem ratings between experimental groups were negligible. Finally, there was no opportunity for participants in the current study to boost their self-esteem prior to the administration of the dependent variable and measures of personal and collective self-esteem were given only after participants completed their essay evaluations. Thus, although self-esteem may have been artificially inflated prior to the MS induction in the pilot study, it seems improbable that the lack of MS effects in the current study is secondary to high trait or experimentally enhanced levels of self-esteem.

Second, opportunities to affirm a valued aspect of the cultural worldview (e.g., religious beliefs) prior to the MS induction can eliminate the effect of MS on death-thought accessibility and need for worldview defense, independent of self-esteem.^{58,82,222} This finding further supports the notion that cultural worldviews are intimately tied to the management of death-related concerns. The administration of personality, culture, and relationship questionnaires before the death prime in the pilot study may have given participants a distal defense opportunity that could account for the lack of MS effects. However, the presentation and order of measures was carefully considered in this investigation to avoid inadvertently solidifying faith in one's worldview prior to the MS induction. As such, measures assessing acculturation, religiosity,

religious affiliation, and even discrimination-related stress were administered only after the measure of worldview defense was completed. As such, it is unlikely that worldview affirmation could explain the elimination of MS effects in the current study.

Third, removal of a delay or distraction has been shown to eliminate the effects of MS on the dependent measures.^{6,40,43} This occurs in large part because, in the view of TMT, death priming via *explicit* MS induction results in an initial reduction of accessibility of death-related thoughts due to the emergence of proximal defense systems (e.g., active thought suppression). Indeed, studies using explicit death primes have demonstrated that only after a delay or distraction do death-related thoughts become more accessible and defensive reactions arise. According to the findings of Burke and colleagues,⁵ experiments with three- or two-task delays produced significantly larger effects than those with a single delay task or no delay. These effects were maintained when analyses were exclusively run on experiments that used the Mortality Attitudes Personality Survey³¹ to induce MS, as was done in the current investigation. Thus, to ensure that there was sufficient time between the management of conscious thoughts of death through proximal defenses and the subsequent activation of distal defenses, three delay/distraction tasks were administered between the MS induction and worldview defense measure in the current study. One could argue that the inclusion of only a single delay task in the pilot study may have attenuated the effects of MS; however, it is unlikely that the lack of MS effects in the current investigation is due to an insufficient delay period between the death prime and administration of the worldview defense measure.

Death-Related Cognitions. The inclusion of a DTA measure in the present study was designed to explore not only the impact of death priming, but also to better understand the psychological processes involved in going from conscious thoughts of death to worldview

defenses. Prior TMT research has reliably shown an increase in death-related thoughts following mortality salience, which is an important condition for the occurrence of cultural worldview defense.^{40,42,55,58,202} Although our results showed that participants in the MS condition had higher DTA for one of the six target items, there was no effect of MS on the overall DTA measure. As it seems unlikely that high trait self-esteem, experimentally enhanced self-esteem, worldview affirmation, or insufficient delay could account for the suppression of death-related constructs, alternative accounts for the results need to be explored.

Although far from conclusive, there is emerging evidence within the TMT literature that suggests that confidence in religious beliefs mitigates baseline fear of death.^{82,101,111} Investigations conducted specifically with Muslim samples, though sparse, suggest that high levels of religiosity are indeed associated with reduced death anxiety,²²³⁻²²⁵ though findings are mixed.^{226,227} While there are considerable variations in Muslim beliefs and practices about death and dying, some of which derive from differences within the religious tradition itself (e.g., sectarian differences) and some of which emerge from differences in national, ethnic, and folk cultures, the most commonly held views on mortality and afterlife among Islamic adherents merit reflection.²²⁸⁻²³¹ First and foremost, death is viewed as Allah's will and acceptance of that will is integral to one's faith in Islam. The underlying precept is that, upon death, the soul departs from the physical body and returns to Allah. Death is not to be resisted or fought against; rather, it is part of the overall divine plan. Secondly, death is not considered to be the end of an individual's life; it is simply the transition into a new phase of being. The emphasis placed on one's life in this world is to have lived in accordance with the prescriptions of the Islamic faith. The souls of those who lived a loyal and faithful life enter into heaven for an eternal existence of bliss and pleasure while those who lived in sin will suffer for an indefinite, though not an eternal,

period of time in the torments of hell.²³² Moreover, the Islamic tradition encourages frequent reflection upon death in daily life; it is not to be treated as a taboo subject. Given the conviction that death is the will of Allah, the belief in the continuity between this life and the afterlife, and the integration of mortality concerns in daily life, it does not seem unreasonable to expect that highly religious Muslims would indeed exhibit low levels of death anxiety. Participants in the current investigation reported high levels of religiosity overall, with over 92% of the sample scoring above the midpoint on the religiosity scale (i.e., MARS). Nevertheless, research has shown that even religious participants display increased death-related thoughts following MS unless given an opportunity to affirm religious beliefs prior to the MS treatment.^{82,111} As our experimental design precluded participants from asserting their religious beliefs prior to being reminded of death, it was expected that death-related thoughts would have increased following MS, even for the highly religious. However, our data failed to show the expected increase in DTA among those in the death prime condition.

The lack of effect of the MS manipulation on increasing death-related thoughts, as assessed by the DTA measure, insinuates that participants in the current investigation may not have been properly death primed and thus may not have needed to react with worldview defense. This line of reasoning suggests that explicit reminders of death failed to provoke death-related thoughts, even during the induction itself. To further our understanding of the ways in which participants responded to the MS induction, participants' written reactions to the manipulation questions were explored. As expected, every participant in the MS condition wrote about her own death. Whereas those in the control condition made references to pain, worry, fear, and discomfort, none of the reactions made any mention of death at all. An assessment of responses

revealed that the majority of participants in the MS condition endorsed some level of death-related anxiety, alongside other emotional states:

“The thought of my own death has a very crippling effect on me. Although it may last only a few minutes, the emotional reaction to the thought of my death is a mix of anxiety, worry, guilt, fear and sadness. The thought creates a very heavy and burdensome feeling in my chest and impedes my ability to think.”

“Scared of death, one is almost never ready for it. I feel that I haven't done all that I must have wanted or should have done. Sad, nervous.”

“I feel frightened when I think about my own death, especially when I hear about what happens to your feelings, thoughts, body, etc in the process.”

“There are a couple of emotions that arises as I consider myself dead. 1) fear: what's going to happen next? Am I going to heaven or hell? As soon as I think about my own death I'll start thinking about the sins I have done in my life. 2) State of crying: what will happen to my parents and how will they survive without me. I'm very close to them and leaving them breaks my heart. 3) Excited: I might be able to meet some of the people from my family who have died already. 4) Nervous: Will God forgive me for all the bad things I've done in my life.”

“I feel depressed thinking about death of any sort in general. My own death makes me feel overwhelmed and depressed because there is so much in life I have yet to experience and the thought of not being able to complete or live through that is heartbreaking.”

Nevertheless, in accordance with traditional Islamic views on death,^{146,228,232} some respondents in the experimental condition conveyed a sense of acceptance and peace when contemplating their own death:

“We all die, some sooner than others. Its natural so I'm not going to say I don't want to die, or that I do, but when it happens, it'll happen.”

“When I think of death in myself, I'm usually relaxed because I know God will always be merciful and forgive me for my sins. Now I try my best to pray and stop committing bad deeds so I can see my family in the afterlife. I just wish my family and I a good afterlife.”

“The thought of my own death scares me but not to the point that I live in fear. It's inevitable so I don't think too much of it and will accept it when the time comes.”

In consideration of participants' responses to the MS induction, it is reasonable to assume that participants in the experimental condition were indeed primed with thoughts of death. Thus, an alternative account for our findings is that the DTA measure itself did not adequately capture participants' heightened, yet unconscious, thoughts of death. While the DTA measure used in the current investigation has been used in a number of previous TMT studies,^{41,82,111,202,222} to our knowledge, it has not been employed in studies with Muslim populations^{64,218-220} and its validity has not been demonstrated. Thus, our ability to detect increased death-related cognitions may have been limited by the instrument used and general unavailability of valid measures to capture implicit thoughts of death within this population.

Worldview Defense. Another factor to consider in the lack of MS effects is the dependent variable itself. Research has shown that MS-instigated worldview defense is eliminated when the dependent variable is not worldview or esteem relevant to participants.^{5,47,80} Data from the current investigation found that, consistent with prior research,^{14,125,217} participants had high levels of pride in their religious and national identities alike. While our dependent variable was intended to activate pertinent worldview constructs for Muslim American women, neither religious nor secular worldviews are unitary constructs and interpretations of faith and patriotism can vary significantly within the Muslim American community. Thus, although our worldview defense measure was meant to trigger religious and secular components of identity more generally, the focus on the American flag hijab may have been too narrow in scope to elicit religious or secular defensive responses. Moreover, given that the majority of participants in the current sample were non-muhajabbas, it seems fair to assume that participants who do not veil may not be strongly identified with that aspect of the Islamic faith and may not have felt that the worldview defense measure was personally relevant. Although limited, research suggests that many unveiled women champion their religious commitment and devotion to Allah through means that do not include hijab practice (e.g., believing in one God, following the five pillars of Islam) and reject the conflation of hijab and women's piety.²³³⁻²³⁷ This is not to say that Muslim women who eschew hijab practice on a personal level criticize or demean those that have chosen to engage in a practice that diverges from their own. Nevertheless, future studies should be sensitive to the heterogeneity of hijab practice within the Muslim American female community, as it bears multiple meanings as a religious and social symbol. Future investigations should test the findings of this research with religious beliefs and practices that are more universally accepted by the majority of Muslims, such as the belief in one God.

Additionally, although research has shown strong evidence that MS affects *attitudes toward people* more than other attitudes or affect,⁵ our findings yielded no such support. This may be due, at least in part, to our decision to identify the authors of the fictitious reaction essays as Muslim American women. Despite the fact that the messages of each essay were designed to contrast with one another with respect to their religious and secular stances, participants' knowledge that the authors were *Muslim* and *American* may have effectively attenuated the threat of each essay. Participants may have felt aligned with the authors given that they were members of the Muslim community (i.e., *Ummah*), irrespective of the messages that were being conveyed. As a result, participants in the MS condition may not have needed to respond with conventional worldview defense. Though, this was not the case in a previous study conducted with Muslim university students in Iran, as the apparent authors of the contrived worldview defense essays were noted to be fellow Muslim students and conventional defense was still observed among those in the death prime condition.²¹⁹

Limitations

There are several limitations that warrant consideration. Most notably, the current study relied on a small sample of 53 participants from the same community in one borough of New York, which likely undermined statistical power. Not surprisingly, one of the most common challenges in conducting research with Muslim American populations is that of recruitment.^{178,198,238,239} Recruitment difficulties were certainly encountered throughout this investigation. Prior studies have shown that many Muslim Americans understandably have reservations about participating in psychological research, as there is always uncertainty about the ways in which data will be used and interpreted. The endorsement of religious and community leaders can certainly facilitate recruitment efforts by alleviating some of the concerns

of potential respondents; however, it has been historically challenging to obtain such support.^{198,240,241} Even researchers who were themselves members of the community have dealt with resistance from potential participants, which was the case in the present study.²⁴² Certain measures were taken to ensure that each aspect of the study was culturally-sensitive, which was felt to be particularly important given the persistent anti-Muslim sentiment. Prior research suggests that minimizing the need for identifying information with Muslim American research participants, given the high level of mistrust and skepticism regarding the intent of research, is integral to improving participant recruitment and retention.¹⁹⁸ As such, to protect the privacy of participants, all study procedures were conducted individually, in a private research laboratory. Participants provided oral consent to participate in the study and were not asked to sign their names on any research-related documents. Thus, research data/records did not contain any identifiable information to safeguard participant anonymity. Despite the aforementioned measures taken, the Muslim American community has contended with significant scrutiny and surveillance that has only been amplified since the Trump presidency.²⁴³ Given that the description of the present study included “red flag” topics, such as religion and culture,¹⁹⁸ potential respondents certainly may have shied away from becoming involved for fear of being profiled. Thus, future examinations with Muslim Americans should be considerate of the many complexities involved in conducting psychological research with this group, particularly within a hostile sociopolitical context.

In addition, although the current investigation set out to recruit a more diverse sample of Muslim Americans than the pilot study with respect to levels of religiosity, citizenship, and generational status, several aspects of the sample limit the generalizability of our results. First, just as in the pilot, fluency in English was a participation requirement. This may have excluded

individuals who could read and write in English but did not feel that their oral language skills were proficient enough for participation. This requirement likely biased the sample in favor of those who are more acculturated in terms of English language use. U.S.-born, second-generation citizens, Sunni Muslims, and individuals of South Asian racial/ethnic backgrounds were also overrepresented in the current sample relative to the proportions found in the larger Muslim American community.¹²⁵ However, the larger issue of whether and to what extent the lack of MS effects were in part due to the substantial within-group diversity of the sample merits consideration. One of the inherent challenges of conducting studies with Muslim Americans is the overwhelming heterogeneity with respect to their geographic origins, racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs and practices, socioeconomic status, and histories. Such diversity begs the question of whether generalizable research with this population is even achievable, especially from a TMT perspective. As previously mentioned, prior TMT studies with Muslims have been conducted with relatively more homogenous groups in Iran or in Turkey.^{64,218,219} As prior studies have shown, the blending of religious beliefs and ethnocultural traditions are often difficult to tease apart in studies with Muslim Americans and can produce significant variability.²⁴⁴ Such variability, alongside a small sample size in the present study, may have effectively reduced our statistical power.

Furthermore, much like prior research endeavors with Muslim participants,²⁴⁵⁻²⁴⁷ both the pilot study and the current investigation drew from student samples. While this undoubtedly limits the generalizability of results, the decision to include college students was made to preserve methodological consistency with the majority of TMT studies, which have used college samples.⁵ Moreover, prior studies have shown that MS effects have been significantly larger for college than non-college participants.⁵ Nevertheless, we found no such effects in our sample.

This is unlikely due to the inclusion of an exclusively female sample, as the strong effect of MS among college samples does not appear to be secondary to a gender or an age effect. The interpretation of our results is further complicated by the fact that the few studies conducted with Muslims that produced significant MS effects also drew from college samples.^{218,219} Thus, the limitations described above (i.e., small sample size and within-group diversity) may have attenuated the strong MS effects that would have otherwise been observed with a college sample.

Finally, the present study excluded males from the investigation. While the choice to focus solely on women may have limited our findings and generalizability, it was done in the service of enhancing our understanding of the terror management strategies of Muslim American females. The identity formation and negotiation process is thought to vary between U.S. Muslim men and women, such that the identities of men seem to be quite fractured relative to those of women, which are more hybridized.^{181,245} In light of these findings, it was considered of particular importance to conduct this investigation with only women. Moreover, given the incredible diversity of the Muslim American population, controlling for gender in the study design was also intended to reduce some of the variability.

Future Directions

Given the rise of Islamophobic perspectives in the U.S. since 9/11 and the normalization and reverberation of anti-Muslim hostility under the Trump administration, Muslim American women frequently encounter attacks on their religious beliefs as well as doubts about their place in mainstream U.S. society.¹²⁵ The anti-American subversion of the Islamic faith often promotes the false belief that being a devout Muslim disqualifies one from upholding the democratic, pluralistic, freedom fighting ideals of the secular West.^{148,153,154,164} Exposure to widespread and routine stereotypes at high levels and across multiples contexts may result in a diminishment of

emotional responsiveness to relatively less threatening anti-Muslim rhetoric, as was used in the current study. As such, future TMT investigations with Muslim American women that employ more divisive worldview defense measures may be more likely to instigate defensive reactions following increased death awareness. For example, based on our participants' experiences of discrimination-related stress, worldview defense measures that touch upon negative representations of Muslim Americans in the media or that characterize Muslim Americans as violent or dangerous relative to other groups may elicit more defensive reactions following MS. Additionally, in light of the results of the pilot study and the current investigation, future studies should use worldview defense targets that are *not* Muslim American (e.g., photos or essay authors), as members of the Muslim community may not be sufficiently threatening sources of prejudice.

Given that the vast majority of TMT studies have been conducted with Western samples and among adherents of the Judeo-Christian faith, the methodological assessment of implicit death-related thought is not well established with Muslim populations. As various religious traditions have different interpretations and ways of relating to death (e.g., Day of Judgment, afterlife), different systems and practices of dealing with mortality (e.g., mourning and grief expression, burial customs), and different spiritual resources for engaging the myriad challenges of living and dying (e.g., prayer, meditation), the development and validation of more culturally attuned measures of death-thought accessibility among Muslims is certainly warranted.²⁴⁸ In particular, participants' responses to the MS induction in the current investigation suggest that more relevant death-related constructs to assess would include concepts that pertain to one's commitment to the Islamic faith (e.g., believer, worship, pray) and to the afterlife (e.g., heaven, hell, soul, angel). In addition, though language was not considered to be a barrier in the

assessment of death-related cognitions in the current study, prior research has shown that language can selectively influence the accessibility of certain constructs for bi- or multilingual speakers.²⁴⁹ Notably, the Qur'an—the central religious text of Islam—is written in Arabic. As such, it is not farfetched to assume that death concepts likely to be triggered following death reminders would be activated in the language consistent with that in which they were learned, stored, and reinforced. Of course, future research is needed to explore the extent to which implicit thoughts of death among Muslims may be language-dependent.

In addition, measuring levels of self-esteem before and after an MS induction could help to establish whether participants' self-esteem levels are being artificially boosted by considering death as a last act within the standards of a cultural worldview. Employing implicit measures of self-esteem are recommended to minimize any unintended elevations in self-esteem that may result from more explicit assessments.

Conclusion

As reminders of death did not result in increased support for the proposed psychological structures underlying terror management defenses in either the pilot or the current investigation, the ways in which Muslim American women manage concerns of eventual death are yet to be uncovered. Our findings are interpreted with caution in light of the aforementioned limitations and methodological constraints. Nevertheless, characteristics of the sample in the present study suggest that religious and national affiliations are central components of Muslim American women's worldviews, though they may be more closely and meaningfully integrated than initially thought. It is likely that Muslim American women are quite accustomed to quickly and flexibly adapting their attitudes and behaviors in response to constantly changing situations and environments. Through continuous multicultural immersion, they may have had myriad

opportunities to challenge the ways in which they understand themselves in the context of a larger world, questioning their own assumptions, values, biases, and even arguing against their natural viewpoint to try and understand those of others. Even when confronted with existential threats of death, it is possible that Muslim American women may struggle to divorce their religious from their secular worldviews in order to bulk up or optimize defenses against mortality concerns. Future research is needed to test the credibility of these possibilities.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics and Frequency for Participant Demographics*

| | Total Sample | MS Condition (n = 45) | Control Condition (n = 43) | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Demographic Characteristics | n (%) | n (%) | n (%) | Test |
| Age (M, SD) | 21 (3.74) | 22 (4.19) | 21 (3.25) | $t(86) = .037$ |
| <i>18 – 20</i> | 48 (54.5%) | 26 (57.8%) | 22 (51.2%) | |
| <i>21 – 23</i> | 25 (28.4%) | 11 (24.4%) | 14 (32.6%) | |
| <i>24 – 26</i> | 6 (6.8%) | 4 (8.9%) | 2 (4.7%) | |
| <i>27 or older</i> | 9 (10.3%) | 4 (8.9%) | 5 (11.5%) | |
| Gender | | | | $\chi^2 (1) = .548$ |
| <i>Female</i> | 65 (73.9%) | 32 (71.1%) | 33 (76.8%) | |
| <i>Male</i> | 23 (26.1%) | 13 (28.9%) | 10 (23.2) | |
| Ethnic Origin ^a | | | | $\chi^2 (1) = .016^*$ |
| <i>South Asian</i> | 61 (69.2%) | 26 (57.7%) | 35 (81.4%) | |
| <i>Middle Eastern</i> | 10 (11.4%) | 7 (15.6%) | 3 (7.0%) | |
| <i>Guyanese</i> | 7 (8.0%) | 5 (11.1%) | 2 (4.6%) | |
| <i>Other</i> | 10 (11.4%) | 7 (15.6%) | 3 (7.0%) | |

Note. ^aDue to small cell sizes, Ethnic Origin data were collapsed to create a smaller number of cells; *Differences are significant at $p < .05$

Table 2*Pearson Correlations between Primary Variables of Interest*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|-------------------|----|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. SMAS-DSI | -- | -.210* | .418** | -.500** | .011 | .027 | .131 | .027 |
| 2. SMAS-ESI | -- | -- | -.477** | .203 | -.172 | -.185 | .082 | -.029 |
| 3. AHIMSA-U.S. | -- | -- | -- | -.461** | .293** | .340** | -0.24 | .016 |
| 4. AHIMSA-Other | -- | -- | -- | -- | -.011 | -.108 | -.261* | -.102 |
| 5. Pers Diff-Mod | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | .684** | -.194 | .033 |
| 6. Pers Diff-Trad | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -.075 | -.122 |
| 7. Liking-Mod | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | .497** |
| 8. Liking-Trad | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis: Personality Difference – Modern Target*

| Variable | <i>B</i> | SE_B | β |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Intercept | 14.076 | 6.170 | |
| Experimental Condition | 1.129 | 1.013 | .116 |
| SMAS-DSI | -1.071 | 1.309 | -.101 |
| SMAS-ESI | -.509 | 1.125 | -.053 |
| AHIMSA-U.S. | 1.061 | .383 | .367** |
| AHIMSA-Other | .357 | .400 | .113 |

Note. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE_B = Standard error of the coefficient; β = standardized coefficient; ** *p* < .01

Table 4*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis: Personality Difference – Traditional Target*

| Variable | <i>B</i> | SE_B | β |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Intercept | 14.707 | 5.266 | |
| Experimental Condition | .471 | .865 | .056 |
| SMAS-DSI | -1.299 | 1.117 | -.143 |
| SMAS-ESI | -.311 | .960 | -.038 |
| AHIMSA-U.S. | .955 | .327 | .385** |
| AHIMSA-Other | .008 | .341 | .003 |

Note. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE_B = Standard error of the coefficient; β = standardized coefficient; ***p* < .01

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics and Frequency for Participant Demographics*

| Demographic Characteristics | MS Condition (n = 26) n (%) | Control Condition (n = 27) n (%) | Test | p-value | Effect Size |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Age (M, SD) | 22 (2.65) | 23 (7.29) | $t(32.968) = -1.145$ | .260 | $d = .31$ |
| 18 – 20 | 10 (38.5%) | 12 (44.4%) | | | |
| 21 – 23 | 12 (46.2%) | 8 (29.6%) | | | |
| 24 – 26 | 3 (11.5%) | 3 (11.1%) | | | |
| 27 or older | 1 (3.8%) | 4 (14.8%) | | | |
| Born in U.S. | | | $\chi^2(1) = 2.268$ | .132 | $\phi = -.21$ |
| Yes | 11 (42.3%) | 17 (63.0%) | | | |
| No | 15 (57.7%) | 10 (37.0%) | | | |
| Age Immigrated to U.S. (M, SD) | 9 (6.11) | 14 (11.05) | $t(23) = -1.556$ | .133 | $g = .60$ |
| 1 – 5 | 7 (26.9%) | 1 (3.7%) | | | |
| 6 – 10 | 2 (7.7%) | 3 (11.1%) | | | |
| 11-15 | 3 (11.5%) | 3 (11.1%) | | | |
| 16 or older | 3 (11.5%) | 3 (11.1%) | | | |
| English as First/Native Language | | | $\chi^2(1) = .506$ | .477 | $\phi = -.10$ |
| Yes | 10 (38.5%) | 13 (48.1%) | | | |
| No | 16 (61.5%) | 14 (51.9%) | | | |
| Citizenship Status ^a | | | $\chi^2(1) = .591$ | .442 | $\phi = -.11$ |
| U.S. Citizen | 20 (76.9%) | 23 (85.2%) | | | |
| Non-U.S. Citizen ¹ | 6 (23.1%) | 4 (14.8%) | | | |
| Generational Status in U.S. | | | $\chi^2(1) = .484$ | .487 | $\phi = .10$ |
| First-generation | 15 (57.7%) | 13 (48.1%) | | | |
| Second-generation | 11 (42.3%) | 14 (51.9%) | | | |
| Ethnic Origin ^a | | | $\chi^2(1) = .687$ | .407 | $\phi = .11$ |
| South Asian | 20 (76.9%) | 18 (66.7%) | | | |
| Other ² | 6 (23.1%) | 9 (33.3%) | | | |
| Marital Status ^a | | | $\chi^2(1) = .092$ | .761 | $\phi = .04$ |
| Never Married | 22 (84.6%) | 22 (81.5%) | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------------|------|---------------|
| <i>Other</i> ³ | 4 (15.4%) | 5 (18.5%) | | | |
| Household Income ^a | | | $\chi^2(1) = .454$ | .500 | $\phi = -.09$ |
| <i>\$1 to \$39,999</i> | 15 (57.7%) | 18 (66.7%) | | | |
| \geq <i>\$40,000</i> | 11 (42.3%) | 9 (33.3%) | | | |

Note. ^aDue to small cell sizes, data were collapsed to create a smaller number of cells; ¹Lawful Permanent Resident, Temporary Resident; ²Bosnian, Guyanese, Egyptian, Indonesian, Uzbek, Yemeni; ³Married, Engaged, Separated

Table 6*Descriptive Statistics for Religious Affiliation*

| Variable | MS Condition (n = 26) n (%) | Control Condition (n = 27) n (%) |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Convert to Islam | | |
| <i>Yes</i> | 0 (0%) | 1 (3.7%) |
| <i>No</i> | 26 (100%) | 26 (96.3%) |
| Sect of Islam | | |
| <i>Sunni</i> | 20 (76.9%) | 22 (81.5%) |
| <i>Shi'a</i> | 3 (11.5%) | 3 (11.1%) |
| <i>Other</i> | 3 (11.5%) | 2 (7.4%) |
| Current Hijab/Headscarf Practice | | |
| <i>Yes</i> | 11 (42.3%) | 9 (33.3%) |
| <i>No</i> | 15 (57.7%) | 18 (66.7%) |
| Hijab Frequency | | |
| <i>Daily</i> | 9 (34.6%) | 6 (22.2%) |
| <i>Sometimes, but not daily</i> | 2 (7.7%) | 3 (11.1%) |

Table 7*Descriptives for Primary Variables of Interest Across Conditions*

| Variable | MS | Control | Possible | Test | 95% CI | Effect |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|---------------|--------------|---------|
| | Condition | Condition | | | | |
| | (n = 26) | (n = 27) | | | | |
| | M (SD) | M (SD) | | | | |
| Religiosity | 58.46 (8.96) | 55.22 (11.24) | 14 – 70 | t(51) = 1.157 | -2.38, 8.86 | d = .32 |
| U.S. Acculturation | 46.19 (4.02) | 45.56 (6.88) | 14 – 56 | t(51) = .409 | -2.49, 3.76 | d = .11 |
| Discrimination-Related Stress | 54.81 (14.34) | 49.78 (10.30) | 13 – 91 | t(51) = 1.472 | -1.83, 11.89 | d = .40 |
| American Membership Esteem | 5.16 (0.92) | 5.20 (0.88) | 1 – 7 | t(51) = -.162 | -.54, .46 | d = .04 |
| American Private Regard | 5.07 (0.97) | 4.83 (1.14) | 1 – 7 | t(51) = .805 | -.35, .82 | d = .23 |
| American Public Regard | 4.55 (0.96) | 4.46 (0.97) | 1 – 7 | t(51) = .320 | -.49, .62 | d = .09 |
| American Identity | 4.56 (1.04) | 4.00 (1.37) | 1 – 7 | t(51) = 1.669 | -.11, 1.23 | d = .46 |
| Muslim Membership Esteem | 4.88 (1.12) | 4.94 (1.42) | 1 – 7 | t(51) = -.197 | -.78, .64 | d = .05 |
| Muslim Private Regard | 6.09 (0.88) | 5.90 (1.13) | 1 – 7 | t(51) = .676 | -.37, .75 | d = .19 |
| Muslim Public Regard | 4.18 (0.95) | 4.13 (0.99) | 1 – 7 | t(51) = .199 | -.48, .59 | d = .05 |
| Muslim Identity | 5.70 (1.25) | 5.68 (1.26) | 1 – 7 | t(51) = .047 | -.68, .71 | d = .01 |
| Self-Esteem | 27.12 (5.91) | 28.59 (7.02) | 10 – 40 | t(51) = -.827 | -5.06, 2.11 | d = .23 |

Note. All p 's > .05

Table 8*Pearson Correlations for Primary Variables of Interest*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
|----|----|------|------|-----|------|------|-------|--------|------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | -- | -.11 | -.11 | .27 | -.10 | .37* | .35* | .23 | .14 | -.13 | -.04 | .11 | -.18 | .14 | .08 |
| 2 | -- | -- | .58* | - | .09 | .05 | -.03 | -.04 | -.01 | .49** | .42** | .09 | .38** | .12 | .36 |
| 3 | -- | -- | -- | - | .23 | .06 | .03 | .07 | .10 | .69** | .81** | .25 | .63** | .22 | .38 |
| 4 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -.09 | .27 | .17 | .14 | .09 | -.31* | -.36** | -.29* | -.27* | -.02 | -.21 |
| 5 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -.18 | -.31* | -.38** | .02 | -.13 | .12 | -.22 | .09 | -.25 | .03 |
| 6 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | .44** | .48** | .08 | .36** | .23 | .24 | -.09 | .35** | .14 |
| 7 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | .49** | .32* | .17 | .10 | .20 | .04 | .20 | -.09 |
| 8 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | .08 | .32* | .06 | .14 | -.07 | .50** | .09 |
| 9 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | .18 | .01 | .16 | .27* | -.04 | .04 |
| 10 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | .69** | .31* | .57** | .47** | .38** |
| 11 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | .31* | .60** | .31* | .38** |
| 12 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -.06 | .27 | .01 |
| 13 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -.02 | .22 |
| 14 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | .14 |
| 15 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |

Note. 1. Islamic Sect; 2. Hijab Practice; 3. Religiosity; 4. U.S. Acculturation; 5. Discrimination-Related Stress; 6. American Membership Esteem; 7. American Private Regard; 8. American Public Regard; 9. American Identity; 10. Muslim Membership Esteem; 11. Muslim Private Regard; 12. Muslim Public Regard; 13. Muslim Identity; 14. Self-Esteem; 15. Composite Essay Score; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 9

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Worldview Defense from Hijab Practice, Muslim Membership Esteem, and Experimental Condition

| Variable | Composite Essay Score | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
| | B | β | B | β |
| Constant | 1.974** (.964, 2.99) | | 1.529 (-1.08, 4.14) | |
| Hijab Practice | 1.378 (-.40, 3.16) | .227 | 1.419 (-.39, 3.23) | .234 |
| Muslim Membership Esteem | .630 (-.05, 1.32) | .270 | .620 (-.07, 1.31) | .266 |
| Experimental Condition | | | .285 (-1.25, 1.82) | .048 |
| R^2 | .185 | | .187 | |
| F | 5.658** | | 3.754* | |
| ΔR^2 | .185 | | .002 | |
| ΔF | 5.658** | | .139 | |

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 10

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Worldview Defense from Hijab Practice, Muslim Membership Esteem, Experimental Condition, U.S. Acculturation, and Experimental Condition X U.S. Acculturation

| Variable | Composite Essay Score | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | |
| | B | β | B | β | B | β |
| Constant | 1.974** (.964, 2.99) | | 1.594 (-1.07, 4.26) | | 1.517 (-1.16, 4.20) | |
| Hijab Practice | 1.378 (-.40, 3.16) | .227 | 1.336 (-.56, 3.23) | .220 | 1.378 (-.53, 3.28) | .227 |
| Muslim Membership Esteem | .630 (-.05, 1.32) | .270 | .601 (-.11, 1.31) | .258 | .567 (-.15, 1.28) | .243 |
| Experimental Condition | | | .262 (-1.29, 1.82) | .045 | .289 (-1.27, 1.85) | .049 |
| U.S. Acculturation | | | -.025 (-.18, .13) | -.048 | .203 (-.38, .79) | .384 |
| Experimental Condition X U.S. Acculturation | | | | | -.131 (-.46, .19) | -.446 |
| R^2 | .185 | | .189 | | .200 | |
| F | 5.658** | | 2.793* | | 2.350 | |
| ΔR^2 | .185 | | .004 | | .011 | |
| ΔF | 5.658** | | .125 | | .657 | |

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 11

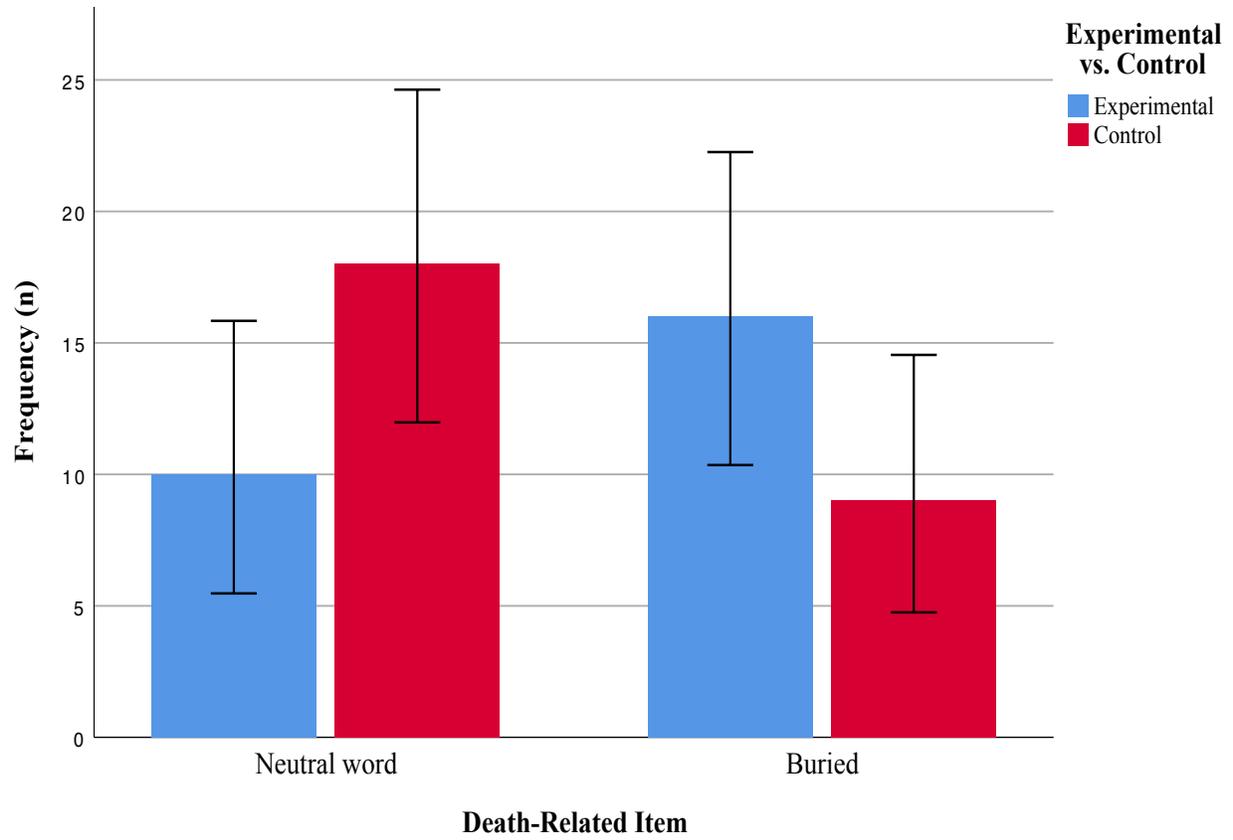
Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Worldview Defense from Hijab Practice, Muslim Membership Esteem, Experimental Condition, Religiosity, and Experimental Condition X Religiosity

| Variable | Composite Essay Score | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|
| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | |
| | B | β | B | β | B | β |
| Constant | 1.974** (.96, 2.99) | | 1.435 (-1.20, 4.07) | | 1.404 (-1.3, 4.07) | |
| Hijab Practice | 1.378 (-.40, 3.16) | .227 | 1.137 (-.83, 3.10) | .187 | 1.145 (-.84, 3.13) | .189 |
| Muslim Membership Esteem | .630 (-.05, 1.32) | .270 | .422 (-.44, 1.29) | .181 | .437 (-.44, 1.32) | .187 |
| Experimental Condition | | | .418 (-1.16, 2.00) | .071 | .423 (-1.17, 2.02) | .072 |
| Religiosity | | | .045 (-.07, .16) | .154 | .083 (-.19, .36) | .285 |
| Experimental Condition X Religiosity | | | | | -.024 (-.19, .14) | -.142 |
| R^2 | .185 | | .197 | | .198 | |
| F | 5.658** | | 2.940* | | 2.326 | |
| ΔR^2 | .185 | | .012 | | .002 | |
| ΔF | 5.658** | | .365 | | .094 | |

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Figure 1

The Effect of MS on a Death-Related Accessibility Measure Item



Note. Error Bars: 95% CI

APPENDIX A

Cultural Worldview Defense Image



APPENDIX B

Cultural Worldview Defense Essays

Pro-Islamic/Anti-American Essay

I actually despise this image. I feel like it makes America seem like it's so much more open than it really is toward Muslims. But everyone knows that Muslims are considered outsiders, regardless of how long someone has been in the U.S. and how "American" they dress, speak, or act. Americans don't understand the beauty of the hijab and what it actually represents: modesty, religious commitment, and faith in Allah. Regardless of what this image is trying to say, the hijab will never be viewed as an American symbol. The truth is, as long as Muslims don't talk about Islam, and don't support it in public, then America will put up with it. But I really don't care how America sees Islam, because I'm proud to be Muslim and always will be.

Pro-American/Anti-Islamic Essay

I honestly can't stand this picture. Obviously, the beautiful thing about America is that everyone has the right to practice their religion however they choose, but it angers me that this image is supporting, even encouraging, the Islamic oppression of Muslim women. The American flag is a symbol of hope, freedom, and equality. But the hijab symbolizes the powerlessness that so many Muslim women feel, all over the world. Wearing the hijab is not even a choice for women in some parts of the world. That's why the best part of being a Muslim woman in America is that you are free to express yourself, free to speak your mind, and free to dress however you want. That's how I feel and that's why I'm incredibly proud to be an American.

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