

EXPLORING THE TERROR MANAGEMENT
FUNCTION OF BASIC NEED-SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

Self-determination theory suggests that experiencing autonomy, competence, and relatedness are basic psychological needs. Drawing from terror management theory, the present research considers whether need-satisfaction helps protect individuals against the awareness of death. After death reminders, those with higher need-satisfaction displayed lower worldview defense (Study 1) and lower death-thought accessibility (Study 2). Death reminders also increased the desire to experience need-satisfaction (Study 3) and influenced motivation to approach, or avoid, an environment based on whether it was perceived as more, or less, need-supportive than the status quo (Study 4). A fifth study showed that death reminders increased worldview defense among those valuing extrinsic, but not intrinsic (need-satisfying), goals. Study 5 also demonstrated that this effect was eliminated when extrinsically oriented participants were given need-satisfying feedback. Together, these studies demonstrate that need-satisfaction, including need-satisfying social environments and goal orientations, is capable of serving a terror management function. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed.