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## Globalization, religious fundamentalism and the need for meaning

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## ABSTRACT

Globalization may well be the meta-context of our time. This paper seeks to enhance a theoretical understanding of the relationship between globalization and religious fundamentalism. Previous papers [Salzman, M. (2001). Globalization, culture & anxiety. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 10(4): 337–352; Salzman, M. (2003). Existential anxiety, religious fundamentalism, the “clash of civilizations” and terror management theory. *Cross Cultural Psychology Bulletin*, 37(3): 10–16] utilized a Terror Management Theory perspective in the exploration of the interaction of globalization, culture, anxiety, fundamentalism and intercultural conflict. [Salzman, M. (2006). “Culture Wars” and intercultural conflict from three theoretical perspectives. *Paper presented at the XVIIIth international congress international association for cross-cultural psychology*] expanded this inquiry by looking at intercultural conflict through the theoretical perspectives of Social Identity Theory, Modernization Theory and Terror Management Theory. The purpose of this paper is to synthesize and extend this inquiry by specifically focusing on the phenomena of religious fundamentalism and its relationship to the processes and dynamics of globalization. This inquiry is anchored by the bedrock question of what human beings truly need and how they seek to address and satisfy real needs. This paper, then, examines the nature of religious fundamentalism, culture-threat, globalization and their interactions through multiple perspectives and considers their implications for conflict, terrorism, development and peace.

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## 1. Introduction

Globalization is, perhaps, the meta-context of our time. Human behavior cannot be accurately interpreted without a due attention to the context(s) within which that behavior is embedded and has been manifested. Attention to context is an act of intention. Such intention is required in order to comprehend the impact and likely consequences of the powerful forces unleashed by what has been called globalization. All human behavior may be analyzed in terms of person–context (environment–situation) interactions (Lewin, 1997).

A person brings an array of dispositional and acquired characteristics (i.e., traits and culture) to any situation or context. The characteristics of the person and the situation interact to produce behavior. This new context for human activity and experience has unleashed forces that overwhelm traditional sources of culturally derived meaning with its manic logic. It has its historical antecedents but is fueled by new and profound technological innovation. It has reshaped our world. It has been called a new revolution whose engine and executive power is finance capital. Its imperatives are the maximization of profit and the return on capital without regard to national identity, cultural or social consequences (Greider, 1997). Numerous

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writers have suggested that fundamentalism is a manifestation of resistance to globalization (e.g., Stevens, 2002). Fundamentalists tend to detest the homogenization of culture and the uprooting of traditional values and customs that anchor people in a meaningful and predictable world.

Crime, violence, fundamentalism and xenophobia often come to the fore in societies where the traditional patterns of family and community have been disrupted. A hegemonic global capitalism and its cultural impositions produce such disruption. These problems are exacerbated by the sense of inferiority that arises in people who perceive themselves as not living up to the standards that define value in the new system while the forces of globalization threaten their faith in traditional sources of meaning and value that cultural values and religious belief systems provide. As economic globalization has accelerated in the post-Cold War era, new categories of winners and losers have been produced along with a rise in fundamentalism, hyper-ethnocentrism and the proliferation of neo-fascist and right-wing extremist organizations (Lee, 2000). In the late 19th and early 20th century such was the case when the technology-driven revolution unleashed by the industrial revolution physically and psychologically uprooted, dislocated and marginalized millions of people. Among its products were the rise of religious fundamentalism (i.e., Protestant fundamentalism in the U.S.), alternative worldviews, and political ideologies such as fascism and communism. These worldviews were attractive to millions because they addressed unmet human psychological needs as well as promising to alleviate material deprivation and offering psychological sustenance. These belief systems and ideologies offer psychological sustenance in the form of a meaning system and are therefore, a foundation for the construction of essential self-esteem.

What do human beings really need? Can we prevent human problems by addressing real human needs? Maslow (1968) proposed a hierarchy of human needs that included the need to feel a sense of belonging and self-esteem as well as basic physiological needs (air, food, water, etc.), safety and “self-actualization.” He suggested that the higher order psychological needs (e.g., self-esteem and self-actualization) could not be realized until the lower order needs (physiological, safety and belonging) are satisfied. Becker (1971, 1973) and the empirically tested Terror Management Theory (TMT) he inspired suggest that self-esteem, a vital psychological resource, is a cultural construction. Self-esteem can only be achieved in a world of meaning.

Culture and religion infuse a persons' world with meaning. As cultures are shaken and millions are marginalized and alienated by the processes of globalization these human needs, physiological and psychological remain.

Culture and religion are related and influence each other bi-directionally. Both culture and religion provide individuals with the possibility of constructing meaning and in their lives (Becker, 1971; Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997; Hood, Hill, & Williamson, 2005). Self-esteem can only be constructed in a world of meaning and religion and culture infuse the world with meaning. Self-esteem, then is a cultural construction, which may be defined as perceiving oneself as having value in a world of meaningful action (Becker, 1971). Self-esteem, as we shall see, serves as an essential defense against existential anxiety. Therefore, culture and religion serve essential psychological functions and address real existential human needs.

Is there a relationship between *globalization* and *religious fundamentalism*? If so, what might that relationship be? How can we make psychological sense of such a relationship? This inquiry is anchored by the bedrock question of what human beings need and how they seek to satisfy these physiological and psychological needs. The relationship and tensions among the needs for physiological sustenance, development, the motive to prosper as well as the psychological need for meaning (e.g., Yalom, 1980) and self-esteem are relevant and will serve to inform this inquiry. This paper will examine the nature of religious fundamentalism, culture–threat, globalization and their interactions through multiple perspectives and to consider the implications for conflict, terrorism, development, peace and theory building.

## 2. The need for meaning, globalization and religious fundamentalism

### 2.1. Human needs: the need for meaning

Hood et al. (2005) assert that the first basic question is “What do humans need (p. 12).” They provide an answer that is consistent with a central focus of this paper, “Beyond the basic needs dictated by our biological requirements like air, food, shelter humans need and seek meaning. Religion is a meaning system (p. 12).” People seek, construct and need meaning. Frankl (1963) wrote “Man's [Sic] search for meaning is a primary force in his [Sic] life not a ‘secondary rationalization’ of instinctual drives (p. 153).” According to his logotherapy “the striving to find meaning in life is the primary motivational force in man (p. 154).” He saw that humans are “able to live and die for the sake of his ideals and values! (p. 155).”

Baumeister (1991) identified four overlapping needs for meaning. The need for meaning includes the need for purpose (seeing one's life as oriented toward some imagined goal or state); value (seeing one's actions as right or justifiable); efficacy (having a sense of control over events); self-worth (seeing one's life as having positive value). Readers are invited to consider how religious fundamentalism may address these needs.

Becker (1971, 1973, 1975) offered a compelling analysis of culture and its psychological functions. He proposed that culture provides just those rules and customs, goals of conduct, that place right actions and ways of being at the individual's disposal facilitating the construction of self-esteem that may be achieved if the person has faith in the cultural worldview prescribing those standards and sees oneself as achieving those standards. He suggested that the function of self-esteem is to give the ego a steady buffer against anxiety. A crucial function of culture, then, is to make continued self-esteem possible. “Its task, in other words is to provide the individual with the conviction that he is an object of primary value in a world of

meaningful action (p. 79).” He wrote that “One of the main reasons that cultures can be so directly undermining to one another is that, despite their many varieties they all ask and answer the same questions. So that when two different ways of life come into contact they clash on the same vital points (p. 113).” These few points are vital questions for anxiety-prone human animals to consider. His views on culture, intercultural conflict, the cultural construction of self-esteem, the anxiety-buffering characteristics of self-esteem and religion have informed the development of TMT and will illuminate this inquiry into the relationship between globalization and religious fundamentalism.

Becker (1971) cites Kluckhohn (1950) who identified six common human problems that cultures address in varying and often conflicting ways. These are: the relation of humans to nature, the innate, the types of personalities most valued, the ways humans should relate to each other, concepts of space and time, and the hierarchy of power in society and nature. These common problems are essential for human to consider. Cultures and religions address the crucial ontological questions of how to be and how to act in the world. The problem of knowing what is the hierarchy of power and determining one’s place in it is critical not only for one’s material well-being in social systems but it is ultimately a spiritual and religious issue. The ultimate power in the universe, for religious believers, is divine. Anxiety-prone humans seek to identify with the highest possible power because of the essential existential dilemma. Becker (1973, 1975) identified this dilemma as *Denial of Death*. He saw that humans, like all other life forms seek to live and continue existence. Humans, however, are cognitively capable of realizing that the primary biological motive to continue existence is impossible to satisfy because we face inevitable physical annihilation. We may believe that this is not final but on the observable level we are mortal and our existence is finite. Religion often promises literal immortality to believers.

Who adhere to its ontological prescriptions? Culture offers transcendence through its enduring symbols of a larger meaningful entity that extends beyond one’s finite life.

Becker (1975) thought that “culture itself is sacred, since it is the ‘religion’ that assures, in some way, the perpetuation of its members (p. 4)” either literally or symbolically. In this sense culture embodies the transcendence of death in some form or another. U.S. soldiers are told they are fighting to defend and perpetuate the “American Way” of life that will endure beyond the soldier’s mortal life. Becker (1971) and others (e.g., TMT researchers Greenberg, Landau, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, *in press*) have concluded that virtually all cultures are fundamentally spiritual or religious in character. Both religion and culture, in this view, provide a pathway to a perception of literal or symbolic immortality and that in most contemporary cultures, religion plays a critical role in (existential) terror or anxiety management by providing standards of value to live up to and literal forms of death transcendence to those who do live up to them.

Becker (1973) explicitly argues that that even atheistic cultural worldviews are essentially religious. He proposed that all cultural worldviews are mythical hero systems that serve to provide a feeling of primary value or unshakeable meaning. Indeed, Becker (1975) named money the new universal immortality ideology. In an ascendant system of hegemonic global capitalism this immortality ideology becomes more compelling and at the same time more threatening to those belief systems that seek immortality from invisible, supernatural forces or secular ideological systems that promise an enduring place in the current of history. Post-Mao Chinese leadership, for example declared that to be rich is “glorious” which is a marked shift from “serve the people.” Marxism and Maoism offered its believers the conviction that one is contributing to and part of the river of history that continues well beyond one’s life. If money is the new immortality ideology defined by the cultural impositions (i.e., competition as a way of being) of a hegemonic global capitalist system one wonders if most people will see themselves as “losers” rather than “winners” in this system. What will they do with the resultant inferiority feelings that are produced by failing to live up to the cultural standards of value defined by globalization?

Inferiority feelings are intolerable and people are strongly motivated to relieve them and compensate for their corrosive effects. Alternative ideologies such as religious fundamentalism may provide for a pathway out of this aversive state. Even such staunch globalization proponents as Friedman (2000) acknowledge that “Although globalization has raised the absolute standard of living worldwide it has widened the gap between rich and poor (p. 39)” both within and among nations. The psychological sustenance obtained by the conviction that one is doing God’s will must be compelling for those whose traditional sources of meaning and value have been overwhelmed by global capitalism and its cultural impositions.

Do humans require faith for good mental and physical health? Koenig, McCullough, & Larson (2001) reviewed 473 studies of the relationship between religiosity and health. Sixty-six percent of the studies reported a statistically significant relationship. Religious people had better health (e.g., less substance abuse), lived longer and received more social support. In general, they found that the more religious people had better physical and mental health than non-believers. In terms of the substance abuse as a health indicator one wonders if religion and faith in a worldview serves the same anxiety management function as the substances that many use for the self-medication of aversive affective states.

Humans transcend death by finding meaning for their lives, some kind of larger scheme into which one fits, something that endures such as God’s will, duty to ancestors or an achievement that will enrich the world. Becker (1971) called religion the “Quest for the Ideal Heroism (p. 180)” because it purports to identify, and make accessible to believers, the highest levels of power and meaning. Religious fundamentalism directly addresses core human concerns.

## 2.2. Globalization and its consequences

The overarching feature of globalization is integration and its driving motive is “free market capitalism” and its spread to “virtually every country in the world” (Pieterse, 2004, p. 9). Friedman (2000) defined globalization as “the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before—in a way that is enabling

individuals, corporations and states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before (p. 9).” It is a global economic system driven and exported by the West along with its political institutions, technologies and culture with little regard to how these impositions may be received or to the reactions they may provoke (Stevens, 2002). The system is supported by an ideology, worldview and faith that Soros (1998) calls market fundamentalism. This ideology holds that markets are self-correcting and that the common interest is best served by allowing everyone to look out for his or her own interests. It assumes that any attempt to protect the common interest by collective decision-making distorts the market mechanism. In the nineteenth century it was called *laissez-faire*. Market fundamentalism has given supreme authority to capital and its imperatives. These imperatives are producing wrenching and anxiety-generating social distress as well as changes in the politics of nations and cultures of the world’s peoples. This description corresponds to what Marsella (2005a) considered to be the construction of a hegemonic global capitalist system and its attendant cultural impositions (i.e., individualism, competition, materialism and reductionism). This system, according to Marsella, is “hegemonic” because of “its control and dominance by powerful individual, national and multinational corporations whose policies, plans, and actions are threatening cultural and biological diversity and promoting the rise of global monoculturalism (p. 15).” The extent to which globalization dislocates individuals from their socio-cultural roots and creates psychosocial distress is reflected by the magnitude and intensity of resistance to globalization. Terrorism is a violent expression of resistance that uses the mechanisms and technologies (i.e., technologies and financial networks) of globalization itself to achieve its aims.

Friedman (2000) considered the effects of globalization on traditional cultures and the psychological sustenance that they provide. He uses the metaphor of the Lexus (forces of globalization) and the Olive Tree (traditional cultures). Friedman is an enthusiastic proponent of globalization but appears to recognize the intense dynamics between these two forces. He wrote that “olive trees” (traditional cultures) are important because they represent everything that roots, anchors, identifies and locates us in the world. They provide a profound sense of belonging to entities larger and more apparently enduring than ourselves whether it be family, community, tribe, nation or religion. He suggests that “We fight so intensely at times over our olive trees because, at their best they provide the feelings of *self-esteem* [emphasis added] and belonging that are as essential for human survival as is food in the belly (p. 31).” Globalization may address the age-old human aspiration for material betterment, development and prosperity for some or many but what of the psychological needs addressed by the “Olive Tree?” Friedman accurately predicted that the contradictions produced by these dynamics could produce a powerful backlash. In a sense, terrorism inspired by religious fundamentalism may be thought of as the revenge of the olive trees.

Pieterse (2004) proposed three paradigms that address the tension between globalization and culture. The first he named as the “Clash of Civilizations” paradigm that views cultural differences as immutable. The second is the “McDonaldization” thesis, which is a universalist notion where cultures become homogenized through the impact of multinational corporations and the global spread of capitalist relations. Third, he proposes globalization as a hybridization model where cultures mix and integrate and where there is no need to give up one’s cultural identification. In this hybridization model “cohabitation is expected to yield new patterns of cross-cultural patterns of difference. This is a future of ongoing mixing, ever-generating new commonalities and new differences (p. 56).” Friedman (2000) adds that “Sustainable globalization requires a stable power structure, and no country is more essential for this than the United States (p. 464).” He favors a world stabilized by the U.S., which he considers to be a “benign superpower.” Apparently, Mr. Friedman is not bothered by such imperial presumptions.

### 2.3. Religious fundamentalism

“Inherent in my belief system is your wrongness” [Stephen Colbert, Colbert Report, May 1, 2007, Comedy Central].

Although the term “fundamentalist” was first used to describe a particular movement within American Protestantism in the early part of the 20th century, a period characterized by the dislocating power of industrialization and urbanization, it is now most commonly applied to Islam. As indicated by its defining characteristics, the fundamentalist phenomenon is not restricted to one particular religion. The consequences of the phenomenon may vary in destructiveness depending on the content of the worldview a particular religion espouses or, more likely, those aspects of the worldview made most salient at the time. Jewish fundamentalism has taken the form of religious Zionism such as that espoused by the Gush Emunim movement of settlers who see the settlement of biblical Israel as a divine promise (Hunter, 1990; Nielson, 1993). In Hinduism, perhaps the clearest case of fundamentalism is Rahitriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or the National Volunteer Society who propose that “Hindu society has degenerated because Hindus had not observed *Dharma* (Hunter, 1990, p. 61).” The *Dharma* is a code of conduct for various social categories, situations, and stages of life and its “degeneration” was held responsible for creating a vulnerability to foreign domination. The motive to recover the purity of antiquity, real or imagined, is again apparent. The search for “purity” seems related to the motive to purge the world of “evil.” These impulses (i.e., seeking racial “purity”) have visited great destruction on the world. The motive to recover or put (a sacred) history “right” seems common across various fundamentalisms as is its nature as a closed system. Indeed, Becker (1975), Fromm (1969), Rank (1958) and Lifton (1999) argued that the meaningfulness of one’s life may be enhanced by worldviews depicting one’s group as engaged in a heroic struggle against evil and thus may be especially useful in warding off death anxiety.

Fundamentalism “is unusually capable of providing meaning through giving a sense of coherence to a fragmented world (Stevens, 2002, p. 34)” by providing a unifying philosophy of life and by meeting the human need for meaning. It is only in a meaningful world that anxiety-buffering self-esteem can be constructed (Salzman, 2003). A meaning system endows life with personal significance and allows an individual to see oneself as having significance and value. Hood et al. (2005), in their Intratextual model of fundamentalism, proposed that fundamentalism differs from other religious expressions in the elevation of a sacred text to a position of supreme authority. For fundamentalists the sacred text is the sole source of meaning. All concerns are subordinated to the ultimate concern of living according to divine will as indicated in the sacred text. Fundamentalists adhere to a literal interpretation of the sacred text. The sacred text (e.g., Bible, Qu’ran) subordinates all other potential sources of knowledge and meaning. They suggest that religious fundamentalism provides a “unifying philosophy of life within which personal meaning and purpose are embedded” (p. 15).

Hood et al. (2005) contrast this Intratextual model of fundamentalist thought with an Intertextual model for the structure of non-fundamentalist thought where, instead of a firm, bounded circle, there is a broken circle, indicating that very permeable boundaries exist in the thought processes of nonfundamentalists. This principle of intertextuality assumes that many texts may be authoritative and interrelated and may be consulted in the pursuit of truth. Indeed in the intertextual model of non-fundamentalist thought “truth is more properly understood as relative truth (p. 26).” In this model, not only do relative truths extend outward to peripheral beliefs but also peripheral beliefs may filter back into the interpretive process and exert continual influence on the understanding of texts and relative truths. Hence, no single sacred text is esteemed in a dynamic process. Instead, a multiplicity of authoritative texts suggests various relative truths, each tentatively held as long as the evidence is supportive.

Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) define fundamentalism as the belief that: there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; that those who believe and follow these fundamental teachings have a special relationship with the deity (pp. 118). “So fundamentalists of all types believe that they are opposed by forces of evil that must be confronted and defeated. As Becker (1975) noted that in order to avoid and defeat evil in the world “man is responsible for bringing more evil into the world than organisms could ever do merely by exercising their digestive tracts (p. 5).” He goes on to consider the destruction caused by the motive to purge “evil” from the world. He could be speaking of the destruction visited on the world by the various wars we have waged against what we label as evil whether it is witchcraft, communism, drugs or terrorism.

For fundamentalists, then, religion is a total and all encompassing way of life. It is a closed system. Fundamentalism provides certainty and clear and accessible standards to guide one through the confusion of modern life. The notion of multiple truths or relative truths may not be particularly comforting for people with certain dispositional characteristics under conditions of threat and fear. Fundamentalism addresses the core human concerns of meaning, personal significance and even offers a pathway to immortality. It is a blueprint for living. What may happen when such a belief system and the psychological functions it serves is threatened? Friedman and Rhoads (in press), in a highly relevant recent study found that successfully challenging fundamentalist beliefs results in an increased awareness of mortality. This finding would seem to indicate the function of the belief.

Hood et al. (2005), citing Ammerman (1991) identified five central features of fundamentalism as the inerrancy of scripture, evangelism, premillennialism, separatism and biblical literalism. The authors suggest that evangelicals and fundamentalist agree on first three but vary more on separatism and biblical literalism. They assert that “confidence in the authoritative sacred text, held as objective truth, is applicable whether the text is the Bible, the Quran, the Vedas, the Torah or any other sacred text” is common across all fundamentalism. . . intratextualism is “essential to the understanding of the psychology of fundamentalism” (p. 22). The authors’ (Hood et al., 2005) conclude that the primary psychological tenet of their book is that “fundamentalism provides a source of *meaning* [emphasis added] for its adherents (p. 29).” Fundamentalism, because it demands complete allegiance to a totally authoritative text that provides a unifying philosophy of life and a personal sense of coherence is a powerful meaning system for meaning seeking anxiety prone human beings. This allure of this characteristic, especially under conditions of threat, is illuminated by TMT (see Greenberg et al., 1997), as we shall see.

Fundamentalism and orthodoxy differ. Hunter (1990) proposed that fundamentalism is orthodoxy in confrontation with modernity. Modernity, as a construct, seems inextricably bound to westernization and hegemonic global capitalism. Orthodoxy, according to Hunter as a cultural system represents what could be called a consensus through time—more specifically, a consensus based upon the ancient rules and precepts derived from divine revelation. Its authority and legitimacy derive from an unflinching continuity with truth as originally revealed truth in its primitive and purest expression. It is fair to say that fundamentalism is something else. The argument that fundamentalism emerges out of the defensive interplay between orthodoxy and modernity can be crystallized through three propositions and nearly everything else that distinguishes fundamentalism in its global contours derives from these three propositions: “All fundamentalist sects share the deep and worrisome belief that history has gone awry. What ‘went wrong’ with history is modernity in its various guises. The call of the fundamentalist, therefore is to make history right again (p. 58).” In practical terms, he asserts, this means that all fundamentalisms are characterized, to varying degrees, by a quality of organized anger.

Citing Iannaccone (1994), Hood et al. (2005) suggested that most successful religions, in terms of both growth and maintenance of membership, are those with absolute, unwavering, strict, and enforced normative standards for behavior.

Seeing one's life as having positive value (self-esteem or self-worth) is only possible in a world of meaning. Culture and religion infuse the world with meaning. Fundamentalist religion offer clear, unambiguous and achievable standards of value that allow for the construction of self-esteem. Fundamentalism is an extremely conservative ideology. It seeks the comfort of a return to a perceived, glorious historical past whether it be the return of the caliphate, a return to the "promised" land or a return to a pre-Darwinist understanding of the nature of life and the world. Threat provokes "conservative shifts" in ideologies as anxiety prone humans seek anxiety management and comfort in such motivated cognitions. Ideologies and other belief systems grow out of an attempt to satisfy the epistemic, existential and relational needs of our species. Therefore "ideology is a natural part of our psychological functioning and will always be present in one form or another ... (Jost, 2006, p. 667)." Ideology, including religious and political (e.g., dogmatic Marxism) fundamentalisms, address core human needs and concerns which become compelling in the context of certain dispositional (relative closed-mindedness, authoritarianism and cognitive simplicity) and situational (i.e., system threat and mortality salience) antecedents (Jost, 2006). Stevens (2002) suggested that resistance to globalization becomes violent under certain conditions, that terrorist "sacrifice" may be seen as a "fit of anger over group insult and group frustration" (p. 10). Furthermore, the terrorist act is in service of a cause worth dying for. It is not abstract but personal. It emerges from a view of the world that makes sense of life and death (i.e., living according to God's will) and links the individual to "some form of immortality" (p. 12).

### 3. Globalization and religious fundamentalism: theoretical perspectives

#### 3.1. *Terror Management Theory*

Terror Management Theory suggests that culture serves as a psychological defense against the terror inherent in human existence. This "terror" is identified as our awareness of our ultimate mortality and the precariousness of our existence. Furthermore, TMT theorists and researchers (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003) inspired by Becker (1971, 1973, 1975) assert:

From the perspective of TMT, the root cause of man's inhumanity to man is the existential contradiction into which we are all born: We are animals with an instinctive desire for life with enough intelligence to know that someday we will die. The potential for terror this knowledge creates lead us to seek shelter in the form of cultural worldviews that give life meaning and permanence, give us the opportunity to view ourselves as valuable, and provide some hope of transcending death. Whether these anxiety-buffering worldviews are religious or secular, they ultimately serve the same psychological function of protecting us from the "rumble of panic that lies beneath the surface and that energizes our quest for meaning in life and value in ourselves (pp. 148–149).

There is much empirical support for hypotheses generated by TMT. TMT proposes that cultures serve the vital psychological function of making anxiety-buffering self-esteem available to humans by providing worldviews and standards of value to achieve within that description of reality. Persons whose faith in that worldview is strong and who see themselves as living up to its standards of value achieve the anxiety-buffering effects of self-esteem needed in an existentially terrifying world. Self-esteem, then, is seen as a cultural construction. When faith in belief systems is shaken or threatened or if the standards of value prescribed by the believed (faith intact) worldview are not achieved or achievable the resultant unbuffered anxiety creates an aversive affective condition that requires "terror management" responses that may be quite destructive (i.e., the tendency to derogate, demonize, or seek to harm the "other"). The "other" may be those who do not uphold one's worldview especially under conditions of threat. Religious fundamentalism offers very clear standards for the achievement of a sense of transcendent value and self-esteem but one must believe.

Over 350 empirical studies in fourteen countries have tested hypotheses generated by TMT. The first central hypothesis derived from TMT (the anxiety-buffer hypothesis) is that if a psychological structure provides protection against anxiety, then augmenting that structure should reduce anxiety in response to subsequent threats. Specifically since self-esteem serves as a buffer against anxiety strengthening self-esteem would be expected to reduce anxiety and anxiety-related behavior in response to threat (mortality salience). A large body of evidence is consistent with this idea (for a review, see Greenberg et al., 1997; Pyszczynski et al., 2003). The second central hypothesis (the mortality salience hypothesis) derived from TMT is that, if faith in the cultural worldview and self-esteem function to protect people from anxiety about death, then reminders of this primary fear should increase people's need for these psychological structures. The bulk of these studies have demonstrated that mortality salience increases positive reactions to those who uphold or validate the individual's worldview and negative reactions to those who violate or challenge the individual's worldview (Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, & Breus, 1994; Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Chatel, 1992; Ochsman & Mathy, 1994; Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989). Therefore, if one considers subjective culture ("the culture in our heads") to be a psychological structure (see Triandis, 1972), then the perception of threat would motivate people to defensively augment that structure (subjective culture) in response to threat. Fundamentalism may be such a defensive augmentation and our defenses against anxiety can be deadly.

The findings that conditions of mortality salience produce the tendency to distance, derogate or demonize those who do not support one's worldview (cultural and/or religious) was illustrated by the American reaction to France's opposition to the War on Iraq. Since 9/11 undoubtedly established the condition of mortality salience for Americans, France's refusal to support the American worldview that Iraq war was justified (because of 9/11) provoked an extremely negative reaction to

France to the point of people pouring delicious French wine into the streets and the absurdity of renaming French Fries to “Freedom Fries.”

Although this short summary of TMT findings illustrates that mortality salience affects a wide range of different areas in human life one should note that this only applies to worldview relevant domains. At least one study (McGregor et al., 1998) demonstrated mortality salience effects on subject's willingness to engage in direct aggression toward those who threaten important aspects of cultural worldviews. In this study moderately conservative and moderately liberal subjects were given the opportunity to allocate varying amounts of hot sauce that they believed would be consumed by subjects who strongly criticized either liberals or conservatives and who claimed not to like spicy foods. The results showed that mortality salient subjects (but not exam salient control subjects) administered substantially greater amount of hot sauce to subjects if the target criticized their preferred political position. This suggests that mortality salience effects on people's reactions to dissimilar others are not confined to derogation or physical distancing but may enhance the probability of pain inducing aggression.

The TMT findings cited support the proposition that culture serves as a psychological defense against the terror inherent in human existence and that cultures' varying answers to core existential concerns may provide for the potential for murderous intercultural conflict when mortality concerns are salient. Is there any reason for optimism? Can the shadow side of that great human adaptation called culture be managed? At least four studies suggest a way out of this dilemma. Mortality salience effects may be mediated by personality variables and primed cultural values. Greenberg et al. (1990) found that negative reactions to an attitudinally dissimilar other occurred only among high authoritarians. Low authoritarians did not exhibit the expected effects indicating that value systems that emphasize tolerance (as with low authoritarians) may be less likely to engender a negative reaction to dissimilar others and may actually encourage greater tolerance of difference. Greenberg et al. (1992) found that, under the mortality salience condition, subjects did not react negatively to the critic when the value of tolerance was primed and highly accessible. In sum (Jeff Greenberg, personal communication, June 21, 2002) “we know that high self-esteem, low authoritarianism and secure attachment style go along with resistance to negative effects of mortality salience (MS) whereas depression, low self-esteem and authoritarianism are associated with strong mortality salience effects such as the derogation of those who do not uphold the relevant cultural worldview.” So there appears to be a significant interaction between dispositional and situational factors in the worldview defense response under conditions of the specific threat of mortality salience.

In the light of Vice President Cheney's 2007 saber rattling visit to a U.S. aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf two recent TMT studies seem highly relevant. The studies were published under the interesting (in the light of Becker, 1975) title of “Mortality Salience, Martyrdom, and Military Might: The Great Satan versus the Axis of Evil.” Becker (1975) wrote “the most violence perpetrated in history has been to eradicate evil. Evil then must be understood as a symbolic displacement rather than a rational process (p. 127).” Pyszczynski et al. (2006) investigated the effect of mortality salience on support for martyrdom attacks among Iranian college students. Participants were randomly assigned to answer questions about either their own death or an aversive topic (control condition) unrelated to death and then evaluated materials from fellow students who either supported or opposed martyrdom attacks against the United States. The control participants preferred the student who opposed martyrdom, the subjects who were reminded of death preferred the student who supported martyrdom and indicated they were more likely to consider such activities themselves. So much for the efficacy of saber rattling. Militaristic saber rattling and threat make mortality salient. Once blood begins to flow mortality salience conditions are manifest. Perhaps that is why wars are so easy to start and so difficult to stop. Once one sees the “other” as evil there would appear to be little room for peacemaking, empathy, compassion or compromise. Indeed, in their TMT analysis of the events of September 11th Pyszczynski et al. (2003) concluded, among other recommendations that that “we need to reduce the salience of mortality (p. 187).”

A second study examined the effect of MS on American college students' support for extreme military interventions by American forces that could kill thousands of people. Under the MS condition support for such measures increased among politically conservative but not politically liberal students. The events of 9/11 undoubtedly created the MS conditions for Americans and the American response to 9/11 certainly created MS conditions for the objects of the indiscriminate American military response. So it seems that the content of the existing worldview is bolstered under MS conditions. Herein lies some reason for optimism. The power of mortality salience to elicit destructive terror management defenses may be attenuated by priming the higher, more tolerant and more humane impulses and teachings resident in most, not all religious-cultural worldviews.

Greenberg et al. (1992) primed the value of tolerance for half the subjects under mortality-salient or control conditions for half the subjects (U.S. citizens). The subjects then evaluated a target person who criticized the United States under MS or control conditions. Under the mortality salience condition subjects did not react negatively to the critic when the value of tolerance was primed and highly accessible. In a recent yet unpublished study (Tom Pyszczynski, personal communication, May 15, 2007) the priming of compassionate values reverses the effect of mortality salience on support for extreme military tactics among Americans and eliminates the effect of mortality salience on anti-U.S. attitudes among Iranians. The U.S. study primed quotes from Jesus from the Bible or non-religious words of wisdom. In all conditions but one religious fundamentalism (Altemeyer scale) was associated with higher support for extreme militarism; but when reminded of death and Jesus's compassionate teachings, the relationship between religious fundamentalism reversed and became negative. In addition, in the mortality salience plus the “compassionate Jesus” led to decreased support for extreme militarism. In a follow-up study, mortality salience increased anti-U.S. attitudes when Iranians were primed with compassion in a secular

way but mortality salience decreased anti-U.S. attitudes among Iranians primed with the value of compassion as teachings from the Quran.

### 3.2. *Social Identity Theory*

Another theoretical perspective offers insight into the dynamics of globalization and religious fundamentalism. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that humans derived the vital psychological resource known as “self-esteem” through their identification with and belonging to groups. Although Social Identity Theory (SIT) does not seem to indicate why people seek and need self-esteem it acknowledges the centrality of the self-esteem motive. SIT holds that there is a strong tendency in people to divide the social world into “us” and “them.” SIT proposes that individuals seek to enhance their self-esteem by identifying with specific social groups and that self-esteem is enhanced only to the extent that the persons involved perceive these groups as distinct and somehow superior to other competing groups. Therefore the homogenizing effects of globalization may threaten the distinctiveness of important groups (i.e., clan, tribe, nation, and religion) through which people seek to enhance the vital psychological resource known as self-esteem. When the distinctiveness and presumptive superiority of one’s group is threatened a strong defensive reaction is likely. Humans apparently need something larger than self to belong to and identify with. Group identification, then, is both the foundation of intergroup conflict and a primary source of self-esteem. Although SIT recognizes the power of the self-esteem motive it does not seem to explain why we need this psychological resource whereas TMT demonstrates that self-esteem serves as a psychological defense against the terror inherent in the human condition and clear implication is that, consistent with the mortality salience hypothesis, religious fundamentalism may represent the augmentation of cultural/religious worldviews under the condition of threat as represented by globalization and its homogenizing and dislocating effects.

### 3.3. *Motivated cognitions and religious fundamentalism*

Jost (2006), based on his research, suggested that ideologies and other belief systems grow out of an “attempt to satisfy the epistemic, existential and relational needs of our species (p. 667). They are, then, motivated cognitions that are responses to real and perceived human needs. Therefore ideologies meet psychological needs. Ideology is related to meaning, religion and culture are related to meaning and fundamentalism is related to meaning. Humans need a world of meaning to act in order to construct the perception that one has value and one’s life has value.

Bonanno and Jost (2006) found that heightened perceptions of uncertainty and threat in the aftermath of 9/11, generally increased the appeal of conservative leaders and opinions. Jost and colleagues found that predictors of conservatism were system threat and fear of death. Both of these predictors were elicited by the events of 9/11. Is fundamentalism a conservative response to system threat and/or fear of death? System threat has been identified as an antecedent condition for an ideological “conservative shift (Jost, 2006, p. 663).” SIT suggests, as previously indicated, that the homogenizing effects of globalization may threaten the distinctiveness of important groups (i.e., clan, tribe, nation and religion) through which people seek to enhance the vital psychological resource known as self-esteem. Globalization and its cultural impositions may represent a “system threat.” That is, a threat to the system of meanings associated with culture and the psychological sustenance they provide. Gelfand, Nishi and Raver (2006) investigated “culture tightness and looseness.” They defined this construct as consisting of two key components: the strength of social norms, or how clear and pervasive norms are within societies, and the strength of sanctions, or how much tolerance there is for deviance from norms within societies (p. 1227). “Citing McKelvey (1982) they suggest that, as a general rule, organizations in all societies that deal with conditions of great threat, danger, and vulnerability are expected to be tighter (stronger norms, less tolerance for deviance from norms) regardless of societal culture context. So it seems reasonable that, across cultures, environmental, systemic and mortal threat would motivate fundamentalism across cultures and religions. Religious fundamentalisms tend to have very strong norms, strict standards, and little tolerance for deviation from those norms. The culture–threat represented by globalization may well be a primary antecedent condition and motivation for a fundamentalist response.

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

What do we know or think we know about the relationship between globalization and religious fundamentalism and what are the implications?

Human beings are confronted with (at the core) common problems and needs. Humans seek for better or worse to address these problems and satisfy their needs. Cultures offer different solutions based on perception and ecologies to satisfy needs and solve problems. Marx (2000) may have been wrong about many things but this inquiry indicates that he was correct in his famous dictum “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” Marx focused on economic needs and largely ignored human psychology and the psychological needs (i.e., the need for meaning and value) described in this paper. Religion and culture serve as primary resources enabling people to construct lives of meaning and value but they have a dark side. As noted by Marsella (2005b) and others, it is clear both from history and an analysis of our current realities that violence in the name of religion presents a grave threat to human survival.

So, this paper has been anchored by the question of what do humans truly need? What are the core needs, physiologically and psychologically, of this problematic species. Can human problems be prevented by adequately addressing and satisfying core human needs?

Clearly, globalization is a source of anxiety because it threatens traditional sources of meaning and value. Furthermore it has, for many serious analysts, now become a principle source of global injustice, inequity, corruption and violence (Nasser, 2005). Although one is ultimately responsible to construct a life of meaning and value, social and economic conditions may facilitate or impede this process. A globalization process that impoverishes and marginalizes masses of the world's people inhibits people's efforts to see their lives as having meaning and value. A globalization process that truly enhances development and opportunity would facilitate these efforts.

Human relations based on mutual respect for religious and cultural differences would not threaten existing religious and cultural worldviews and would not provoke anxiety and destructive anxiety reduction defenses. The Social Identity Theory perspective proposes that individuals derive self-esteem from groups they identify with or belong. Insult and disrespect that derogate the very sources of value (the religious and cultural groups) that people depend on for psychological sustenance provoke defensive response and our defenses can be dangerous and even result in a greater perception of threat. Human and intergroup relations based on mutual respect and social equality would serve to decrease destructive responses to the threat posed by the insults. Mutual respect can be a challenge when we viscerally disagree with particular decontextualized religious beliefs and cultural practices. Education may assist us in, at least understanding the context of such beliefs and practices and enhancing our understanding that all people are seeking to address their common human needs as best as they can in the circumstances and history such beliefs and practices are located. A healthy respect for diversity as well as an open exchange of information and possible solutions that varied cultures and religions bring to common human problems would benefit all because no people, culture or religion have all the ideas and solutions needed to address the complexities of human existence (Marsella, 2005b).

Fundamentalism is an anxiety driven response (Salzman, 2003). Religious fundamentalism, as an alternative ideology, may be seen as an anxiety driven response to find meaning and a sense of self-value in a worldview that offers people clear and accessible standards of value that if achieved provide an anxiety-buffer against the terror inherent in human existence. The religious martyr is promised literal heroic death transcendence, which may be a compelling motive for those experiencing humiliation and live lives devoid of accessible sources of the self-esteem.

Recall that a principle and well-tested hypothesis of TMT (anxiety buffer hypothesis) states that if a psychological structure provides protection against anxiety, then augmenting that structure should reduce anxiety in response to subsequent threats. Specifically since self-esteem serves as a buffer against anxiety then strengthening self-esteem would be expected to reduce anxiety and anxiety-related behavior in response to threat (mortality salience). When psychological resources provided by religion and culture is threatened by the forces of globalization and its cultural impositions people are motivated to both increase their faith in these worldviews and to seek clearer and more accessible standards of behavior and being that would enable them to see themselves as being of, in Becker's words (1971) of "primary value in a world of meaning (p. 79)." In TMT terms, faith in the religious and/or cultural worldview and the perception that one is living up to its prescribed standards of value are essential components of what we have called "self-esteem" which is constructed differently across cultures.

What to do? We can work to build just world based on a "just globalization" that would provide people with the possibility of meeting their physiological and psychological needs. We can work, in our communities, nations and world to construct and provide positive pathways to significance and to a "constructive heroism" because people strive for significance whether through altruism, providing for one's family, contributing to a better global future or suicide bombing. We can, through education and enlightened representatives of our diverse humanity, make salient the affirmative, humane values existent in all religions and cultural traditions. We can work to make salient the "higher angels of our nature." The affirmative and high values of mercy, justice, love, and compassion exist and find correspondence across belief systems. It is these we must make salient from the pulpit to the school. There is some evidence cited previously that when mortality is made salient it is the salient or primed values within the worldview that are activated and may attenuate destructive defensive responses. We can work to oppose, imperialism, militarism and saber rattling because they induce mortality salience and all of its negative effects. We can connect the "new" to existing structures in belief system thereby making the "new" (i.e., a "just" globalization) less threatening to existing systems. Although all cultures do not support materialistic, greedy, and competitive values it is most likely that all cultures place high value on supporting and providing for one's family. On this we agree.

We must beware of fear and its induction by demagogic leaders. Fear and threat produce cognitive simplicity, intolerance, derogation and demonization of the "different other" who adheres to a different belief system and worldview. We can teach children and ourselves to recognize and beware of fear mongers, suspect them of demagogic manipulation and learn how to deconstruct fear-inducing messages. We can work to base our relations, to the greatest degree possible, on the principles of mutual respect and social equality. If we really listen we will find that people, the world over are seeking respect and dignity as well as material sustenance.

Is there cause for optimism? Can we prime our higher natures and cultural values so that when such massive mortality salience producing events such as September 11th occur we will not descend to good and evil dichotomies that demonize the culturally and religiously different in order to assuage our existential dilemma. The theoretical perspectives and empirical findings presented in this paper clearly indicate that we have the power to nourish our higher natures if we possess the intention to do so.

This inquiry has identified substantial theoretical and experimental work that has indicated that culture, ideologies and religious belief systems serve as a psychological defense against the anxiety and terror inherent in the human condition. As such, this psychological defense must be addressed carefully and respectfully because of the anxiety and associated behavioral responses that may be aroused when threatened. Humans have a range of potentials from the murderous to the magnificent. This paper suggests that, with a full appreciation of the range of ontological prescriptions that exist within any cultural or religious belief system, we can prime the highest and least destructive elements of people's cultural and religious worldviews through education, religious institutions and media. By nourishing our higher potentials and natures and we make their expression more **probable**.

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