Am I the Master of My Fate?: The Impact of Mortality Salience and Self-Efficacy on Leadership Perceptions

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Abstract

Terror Management Theory proposes every human is driven by the need for immortality. An individual's need for immortality is confounded by the reality that he or she will one day die, creating anxiety. To defend against death-related anxiety, humans develop buffers against existential threat by adhering to cultural worldviews and identifying with groups that instill their lives with meaning. Because group identity is often determined by a leader, this study specifically examined the impact of mortality salience on follower's perceptions of charismatic, task-oriented, and relational leadership. Terror Management Theory also suggests that an individual will label something as a death-salient threat if it is perceivably beyond his or her ability to control or handle the situation. Self-efficacy, as a marker of perceived capability to succeed, may influence the group identifiers individuals use to make their lives meaningful. If an individual believes he or she is capable of handling an existential threat, it is possible they may not need a specific type of leader to help them defend against existential anxiety. This study examined the ways in which death-anxiety, self-efficacy, and state emotion, act as implicit influencers on voter perceptions of charismatic, task-oriented, and relational leadership within the political context. Participants were undergraduate students at a small university in the Midwest. Students were recruited through psychology classes, and surveyed online through SurveyMonkey. It was hypothesized that death-anxiety would increase preference for a charismatic political candidate, and that self-efficacy would act as an implicit buffer against the stress of mortality salience. These hypotheses were not supported. Positive emotion was found to be strongly correlated with voter self-efficacy. It was also found that task-oriented candidate ratings were strongly correlated with voter efficacious beliefs. The possible influence of personality traits, as well as potential improvements on mortality salience methods, are discussed.

Keywords: Leadership, Mortality-salience, Self-efficacy

1. Introduction

What affects United States citizens' votes more during a presidential election: each candidate's political prowess or their public speaking abilities? Based on recent research regarding Terror Management Theory[1,2] and Alfred Bandura's concept of self-efficacy[3], the answer may not be as simple as voters think. Political and psychological inquiries into the external influencers of voter behavior have contributed to greater awareness of the political marketing strategies used by candidates to shape voters' perceptions of candidate and party policy[4]. While most voters are aware of various outside influences that can affect their perceptions of candidates, very little attention has been given to the internal (e.g., cognitive, emotional) influences that determine how individuals view leadership. Greater research is needed to determine to what extent internal influences determine follower evaluation of leadership ability.

  Terror Management Theory (TMT) discusses the role death-salience plays in influencing an individual's perception of the outside world and the threat the outside world presents[1,2,5-7]. If an individual perceives a survival-related threat

in his or her environment, TMT argues the individual will try to defend against threats to his or her feeling of immortality. TMT suggests that an individual will label something as a death-salient threat if it is perceivably beyond his or her ability to control or handle the situation Additionally, an individual's self-efficacy could serve as an internal influence on voter perceptions of political leadership. Self-efficacy, as a marker of perceived capability to succeed[3], may influence the group identifiers individuals use to make their lives meaningful[8]. Individuals with low self-efficacy could rely more on key group identifiers, such as centralized leadership or leader ideology, to provide meaning and enhance their perceived capability to affect outcomes; those with high self-efficacy may be less reliant on group identity and be confident of their success.

There has been extensive research on the impact of mortality salience and self-efficacy on leadership perceptions[9-12]. However, most of the studies devoted to these topics focus on how mortality salience and self-efficacy influence a leader's interaction with followers -- a top-down perspective on leadership influence[11,12]. The few studies that focus on follower perceptions of leadership have approached this relationship from a business or organizational standpoint[9,10]. Through this study, researchers hope to fill the a gap presented in the current literature by addressing the impact of death anxiety and self-efficacy on follower-specific perspectives of leadership within a political context.

2. Review of Literature

Terror Management Theory has inspired research on death-related anxiety in relation to a variety of psychological concepts, including self-efficacy and leadership prototypes. This study emphasized the roles of death-anxiety and self-efficacy as implicit influencers of follower perceptions of political leadership.

2.1. Leadership Styles

Leadership prototypes are preliminary models of behavior that can be used by observers to assess an individual's leadership style or ability. Leadership styles can become prototypical in schema development, and are used by an individual to determine the success of a leader given a certain situation[13]. Leadership prototypes also allow researchers to clearly define the specific group of traits being modeled for participants in a given study.

While there are numerous leadership prototypes that can be used by researchers to identify specific styles of leadership, this study focused on three frequently researched prototypes: charismatic, task-oriented, and relational leadership. Charismatic leaders are described as visionaries, who eloquently encourage individual identity within group purpose[14]. Furthermore, charismatic leaders are often described as influential public speakers who provide a sense of security during times of uncertainty[15]. Task-oriented leadership is characterized by "setting high, yet achievable goals and effectively achieving those goals by efficiently allocating resources and delegating responsibilities"[14]. Lastly, relational leaders emphasize communication, relational-wellness, and interpersonal relationships to achieve group goals and inspire group identification[14,15]. Together, these leadership prototypes represent three distinct domains of traits that are relevant to political situations and can be easily understood by research participants within the context of an experimental manipulation. Specifically, this study examined whether death anxiety affects participant perceptions of these leadership models within a political situation.

2.2. Mortality Salience

Terror Management Theory (TMT) proposes that death-related anxiety is associated with survival instinct and the human tendency to pursue immortality by affirming the culturally-influenced values used to give meaning to an individual's worldview[1,2,7,16]. According to TMT, self-reflections on the finiteness of human life lead an individual to become more aware of his or her own mortality. This awareness then leads an individual to have an instinctual, emotional response that can manifest itself as fear, or terror[16]. Prior research suggests that death-related anxiety is related to a temporary increase in negative emotion states. This is commonly assessed with brief self-report measures of state affect[17], and increased salience of death-related stimuli, frequently assessed with implicit measures such as sentence completion tasks[18,19].

To cope with death-related anxiety, individuals develop anxiety buffers. These buffers assuage death-terror by providing an individual with a sense that his or her life has significance in the present and after death[16]. Through their Integrated Model of Mortality Salience, Lancaster and colleagues[7] argue that when an individual perceives a life-threatening event, state fear interacts with death-salience, causing the individual to react instinctively and

maladaptively. Because this instinctual, implicit response is the result of life-threatening or worldview-threatening circumstances, this study investigates how another implicit trait, namely self-efficacy, can affect responses to death-anxiety.

2.3. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is an implicit trait defined by Alfred Bandura as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that "affect their lives"[3]. Self-efficacy has also been described as "the belief that one can master a situation and produce favorable outcomes"[20]. Albert Bandura's self-efficacy scales have been adapted in numerous studies to determine individual ratings of perceived capability[11-13,21]. High self-efficacy indicates an individual's belief that he or she is capable of handling a given situation with an expected level of success. Lancaster's Integrated Model[7] proposes that self-efficacy interferes with the terror induced by death salience and promotes a more adaptive response when an individual is confronted with thoughts of his or her own death. Through this study, researchers hoped to develop further understanding of how self-efficacy interacts with death-anxiety, specifically when followers are asked to rate leadership ability.

2.4. Impact of Mortality Salience and Self-Efficacy on Leadership Perceptions

Death-related anxiety impacts worldview perceptions and therefore can alter an individual's perception of leadership. Previous research has demonstrated that the anxiety buffers and worldview defenses developed by an individual can create a need for a particular leadership prototype[14]. According to Bandura, "People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided"[3]. Self-efficacy provides an individual with a sense of capability; low self-efficacy could create a greater need for anxiety buffers and worldview confirmation. Because leadership capability is determined by follower assessment, the successfulness of a leadership prototype can be determined by the follower's perception of the type of leader needed during an anxiety-causing situation: a perception heavily influenced by follower self-efficacy. Charismatic leadership, specifically, may be heavily influenced by follower self-efficacy. Because charismatic leadership emphasizes group identity and meaningful follower-participation, charismatic leaders may be used by anxious followers to affirm self-worth and value[14,22]. Voters with low self-efficacy may become more reliant on leadership-driven identity if faced with death-related anxiety[14].

3. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to evaluate the role death anxiety plays in influencing follower-specific leadership perceptions and to determine whether self-efficacy is an intervening factor within a mortality salience manipulation. It was hypothesized that participants exposed to a mortality salient scenario would be more likely to prefer a charismatic leader profile than participants exposed to a control scenario. It was also hypothesized that participants who report higher self-efficacy would be less susceptible to the effects of a mortality salience manipulation.

4. Research Methodology

This study implemented a cross-sectional, between-subjects design to measure the effect of death-anxiety and self-efficacy on follower leadership perceptions.

4.1. Participants

Research participants were undergraduate and graduate students from a small, liberal arts university in the Midwest. Students were contacted through psychology classes and via email and social media accounts to complete an online survey generated through SurveyMonkey. Participants were required to be 18 years or older and were randomly

selected for control ($n = 52$) and experimental ($n = 43$) conditions.

Of the 107 total participants, the data from 12 were excluded: six participants failed to fully complete the online survey, and six participants did not attend to the survey instructions. Of the remaining 95 participants, 31 were male and 64 were female. Age of participants ranged from 18 to 42 ($M =21.242$, $SD = 4.151$). Seventy-eight percent of participants identified as White/Caucasian/European-American, 8.4% as Hispanic/Latino, 4.2% as Black/African-American, 4.2% as Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic, 2.1% as Asian/Asian-American, and 2.1% as Native American/Alaskan Native.

Of the 95 participants, 94 were current, full-time students; one participant was part-time. The current year of school among participants was divided into 6 parts: first year (36.8%), second year (20.0%), third year (29.5%), fourth year (6.3%), fifth year (5.3%), and graduate-level education (2.1%). The minimum cumulative GPA of participants was 1.10, and the maximum was 4.00 ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.55$).

When asked which political party best fit their political affiliation, 55.5% of participants identified with the Republican Party, 11.6% identified with the Democratic Party, 1.1% with the Libertarian Party, and 29.5% identified as Independent, with no party affiliation. Another 2.1% declined to state their political affiliation or expressed a disinterest in politics.

4.2. Measures and Procedure

4.2.1. self-efficacy evaluation

When completing the consent form, participants were told they were completing a three-part study on personal attitudes, writing styles, and leadership. This was done to conceal the mortality-salience measure and prevent participant suspicion. Upon giving consent, participants were told they were beginning part one of the study, which assessed attitudes toward self and God.

This study utilized Schwarzer and Jerusalem's 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)[23] to measure participants' self-rated self-efficacy across situations. This scale is consistent with Bandura's[21] recommendations regarding self-efficacy scale development and has high internal consistency. Participants rated items on a four-point, Likert-style scale (1 = *Not true at all*, 4 = *Exactly true*). Participants also completed five questions from the Defensive Theology Scale[24]. Items from the Defensive Theology Scale were rated on a seven-point, Likert-style scale (1 = *Disagree Strongly*, 7 = *Agree Strongly*) and were included to determine if further research on defensive theology and leadership perceptions is viable.

4.2.2. mortality-salience manipulation

Upon completing the Defensive Theology Scale, participants were informed they were entering the second portion of the study, in which researchers were interested in writing styles and emotions. Participants were asked to "Please respond to these two questions with your first, natural response. Write your gut level reactions to these questions." Participants responded to a two-question writing prompt characteristic of the mortality-salience manipulation techniques of Terror Management Theory[5,8,14,25]. The experimental group was asked to, "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 as you physically die and once you are physically dead." Participants in the control group were asked the following questions about an upcoming exam: "Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of an upcoming exam arouses in you" and "Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you as you physically begin the exam and after you complete the exam."

Mortality salience has shown to be a more effective influence on death-related anxiety after a delay[26]. As implemented in prior research, two additional measures were presented after the mortality salience manipulation to ensure a delay[6,18]. After participants in the experimental and control groups responded to their writing prompt, each completed Watson's (1988) Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-20)[27] to measure for mood manipulation and emotional arousal. Participants rated items such as "distressed," "determined," and "afraid" on a five-point, Likert-type scale (1 =*Very Slightly or Not at All*, 5 = *Extremely*). By measuring for positive and negative affect, researchers sought to determine if the mortality salience manipulation resulted in differences in state emotion experienced by participants in the experimental and control groups. Negative state emotion is suggested to be one possible mechanism that might influence decision-making[28]. An increase in negative affect following mortality salience could influence participant decision-making and processing skills, and, consequently, perceptions of leadership prototypes.

Participants also completed a 25-item, fill-in-the-blank word completion task, used in previous studies to provide a delay and measure for death-thought-salience[18]. Of the 25 incomplete words, only six were possible death-related fragments. For example, the fragment KI_ _ ED could be completed as KILLED (a death-related word)[18]. By scoring participants on their completion of the fragments with death-related words (1 = death-related, 0 = neutral), researchers sought to measure the implicit, death-salient response of participants and provide a check for the integrity of the mortality salience manipulation.

4.2.3. measurement of leadership perceptions

Next, participants were informed they were entering part three of the study, and that researchers were interested in attitudes towards political candidates. Participants were told to "Please read the following political candidate profiles. Answer the questions at the end of each profile." Participants were then given the dependent measure: three counterbalanced leadership profiles featuring charismatic, task-oriented, and relational leadership prototypes. This study implemented profiles used in previous studies on the same leadership models[14]. After each candidate profile, participants were asked to answer the following questions on a 5-point Likert scale (*1= Not at all*, 5 = *A great deal*): a) "How much do you believe this candidate can contribute to society?"; b) "How much would you enjoy living in this state if this candidate were elected?"; c) "How much do you admire this candidate?"; d) "How much do you find this candidate's beliefs in agreement with your own?"; e) "To what extent would this candidate be an ideal governor?" This five-item rating scale of candidate likeability and effectiveness had excellent internal consistency reliability in the current sample (i.e., charismatic α = .94, task-oriented α = .93, relational α = .93). After rating the third candidate, participants were asked "Which of these three candidates would you vote for in an election?"

Finally, participants completed a demographics questionnaire, which included two questions from the Biblical Conservatism Measure[29], rated on a five-point, Likert-type scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*), as well as questions regarding participants' political affiliation and candidate preference for the United States' 2016 presidential election. Upon completing the demographics questionnaire, participants were thanked for their participation.

5. Results

Below, the results of correlational analyses and tests of group differences are presented, followed by the main statistical analyses.

5.1. Bivariate Correlations

5.1.1. state emotion, implicit death salience, and candidate ratings

To determine if the emotions aroused by the mortality salience manipulation impacted participant ratings of candidates, researchers performed several Pearson correlations. Positive affect was mildly correlated with charismatic leadership ratings, $r(93) = .22$, $p = .01$, and moderately correlated with task-oriented candidate ratings, $r(93) = .31$, $p = .002$. Correlational analyses were also performed to determine if participants' state emotion impacted their temporary death-thought salience and subsequent candidate ratings. Positive affect did not significantly correlated with death-thought salience. Negative affect was correlated with participant's implicit death-thought salience, $r(93) = .34$, $p = .001$.

5.1.2. general self-efficacy, state emotion, and candidate ratings.

Within this sample, self-efficacy scores and positive affect were strongly correlated, $r(93) = .55$, $p < .001$. Participant's self-efficacy scores were also mildly correlated with task-oriented candidate ratings, $r(93) = .20$, $p = .05$.

5.1.3. correlations between candidate profiles

Participants tended to rate each of the three candidate profiles with similar valence, regardless of experimental or control group. Accordingly, participants' ratings of the charismatic leadership profile were moderately correlated with ratings of the task-oriented, $r(93) = .45$, p < .001, and relational candidate profiles, $r(93) = 0.34$, $p = .001$. Participants' ratings of the task-oriented candidate profile were mildly correlated with ratings of the relational candidate's profile, $r(93) = 0.28$, $p = .007$.

5.2. Tests of Group Differences

5.2.1. general self-efficacy

Participants in the experimental and control groups rated their own ability to handle opposition and problem-solve during adverse circumstances. There was no significant difference between the control ($M = 32.19$, $SD = 4.70$) and experimental ($M = 32.67$, $SD = 4.24$) group's general self-efficacy scores, $t(93) = -.52$, $p = .60$.

5.2.2. emotional arousal and death-thought salience

Participants completed the PANAS-20 to measure for emotional arousal and to determine if the mortality salience manipulation produced a significant emotional difference between groups. There was not a significant difference between the control ($M = 28.77$, $SD = 9.29$) and death-salient ($M = 30.21$, $SD = 8.19$) groups' positive affect, $t(93)=-.79$, $p = .43$. Additionally, there was no significant difference between the negative affect of the control ($M = 18.29$, $SD = 7.45$) and experimental ($M = 19.44$, $SD = 7.32$) groups, $t(93) = -.76$, $p = .45$. Both groups also completed a fill-in-the-blank word completion task to measure for death-thought salience. There was no significant difference between the mean scores for the control ($M = 1.94$, SD = 0.998) and experimental ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.15$) groups, $t(93) = .37$, $p = .71$.

5.2.3. candidate ratings

Separate independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to explore whether exposure to a mortality salience condition would predict significant differences in mean ratings of the three candidates, using five-item rating scales of candidate likeability and effectiveness. There was no significant difference between the control group ($M = 18.31$, $SD = 3.98$) and the mortality salience group ($M = 17.28$, $SD = 4.62$) in charismatic candidate ratings, $t(93) = 1.17$, $p = .25$. There was also no significant difference between the control group ($M = 17.02$, $SD = 4.11$) and mortality salience group ($M = 17.63$, $SD = 4.00$) in task-oriented candidate ratings, $t(93) = -.71$, $p = .48$. Finally, there was no significant difference between the control group ($M = 19.01$, $SD = 4.13$) and the mortality salience group ($M = 18.02$, $SD = 3.997$) in relational candidate ratings, $t(93) = 1.26$, $p = .21$.

5.3. Main Analyses: Mortality Salience and Self-Efficacy as Predictors of Candidate Preferences

In addition to completing a five-time rating scale for each candidate, participants completed a forced-choice item in which they selected which of the three candidates they would choose in a gubernatorial election. To test the hypothesis that participants exposed to a mortality salient condition would be more likely to prefer a charismatic leader profile than participants exposed to a control condition, a multinomial logistic regression analysis was used. Whether participants were in the mortality salient condition did not significantly predict which of the three candidates they would vote for in an election, $\chi^2(2) = 1.19$, $p = .55$.

Before testing whether participants who reported higher self-efficacy would be less susceptible to a mortality salience manipulation, separate simple linear regression analyses were conducted to explore whether self-efficacy would be related to mean ratings of the three candidates. Greater general self-efficacy significantly predicted higher ratings of the task-oriented candidate, $\beta = .20$, $t(93) = 2.00$, $p = .048$, and explained a small yet significant proportion of variance in task-oriented candidate ratings, $R^2 = .04$, $F(1, 93) = 4.00$, $p = .048$. However, participants' general self-

efficacy did not significantly predict ratings of the charismatic candidate, $\square$ = .15, $t(93)$ = 1.50, p = .14, or explain a significant proportion of the variance in charismatic candidate ratings, R^2 = .02, $F(1, 93)$ = 2.25, p = .14. Participants' general self-efficacy did not significantly predict ratings of the relational candidate, $\square$ = .02, $t(93)$ = .18, p = .86, or explain a significant proportion of the variance in relational candidate ratings, R^2 = .00, $F(1, 93)$ = .03, p = .86.

To test the hypothesis that participants who reported higher self-efficacy would be less susceptible to a mortality salience manipulation, a multinomial logistic regression analysis was used, with mortality salience entered as a factor and general self-efficacy score entered as a covariate. Participants' general self-efficacy scores did not significantly predict which of the three candidates they would vote for in an election, $\square^2(2)$ = .42, p = .81. Additionally, when participants' general self-efficacy scores were taken into account, the mortality salience manipulation did not significantly predict candidate selection, $\square^2(2)$ = 1.26, p = .53. In this model, the interaction of self-efficacy and mortality salience was not a significant predictor of candidate selection.

6. Discussion

6.1. Experimental Manipulation

Before the control and experimental groups underwent the exam or morality salient writing prompts, both groups demonstrated similar self-efficacy scores. This increases the researcher's confidence that significant differences between groups following the manipulation are not the result of differing baseline self-efficacy scores. Following the manipulation, the experimental and control groups demonstrated similar levels of negative and positive emotional arousal, death-thought accessibility scores, and candidate profile ratings. Therefore, it can be determined that the mortality salience manipulation did not have a meaningful impact on participants' implicit death-anxiety and subsequent leadership perceptions.

One possible explanation for why the experimental manipulation failed to yield significant differences between groups is religion salience and its effect on anxiety defense. This study implemented five items from the Defensive Theology Scale (DTS) to perform exploratory research on defensive theology and leadership perceptions. Rating items from the DTS, such as "God controls every event around us, down to the smallest details," was the last task completed by participants before encountering the exam or mortality salience prompts. Van Tongeren and colleagues[30] suggest that religion provides a source of meaning and symbolic immortality that influences anxiety management. Research on religiousness and terror management has demonstrated that greater levels of intrinsic religious identity decreases the need for worldview defense and death-anxiety following a mortality salience manipulation[30,31]. Many of the participants' written responses following the mortality salience prompts can be characterized by words with highly religious connotations, such as "heaven," "eternity," and "God." It is possible that the DTS primed participants to reflect upon their religious identities, thereby making religious narratives salient and creating a means of "death transcendence,"[31] which allowed participants to defend against their existential anxiety.

The impact of religious priming on worldview defense may be particularly relevant to the current sample. Ninety-eight percent of the participants self-identified as Christian, 69% reported a high level of commitment to religious services (i.e.,. attends every week or several times a week), and 65% reported a high level of commitment to prayer (i.e., prays once or more a day). It is possible that the sample's relatively high level of religious commitment reflects a means by which the participants defend against existential anxiety, thereby decreasing negative emotional affect, death-thought accessibility, and the need for worldview defense through candidate choice.

6.2. Predictors of Candidate Ratings

The purpose of this study was to explore the role existential anxiety plays in leadership perceptions, and to measure the influence intrapersonal mediators (i.e. self-efficacy, state emotion, and death-thought salience) have on followers' responses to political leadership prototypes following a death-salience manipulation. Researchers hypothesized that participants in the mortality salience group would be more likely to "vote" for a charismatic candidate than participants in the control group. However, mortality salience was not a predictor of candidate preference following a forced-choice measure. Moreover, participants in the mortality salience condition and exam salience condition rated the three candidates similarly using a Likert-style scale.

It was also hypothesized that participant's general self-efficacy would act as a buffer against death-related anxiety and effectively predict candidate preferences. Greater reported self-efficacy was shown to be a predictor of task-

oriented candidate ratings; the higher participants' self-efficacy scores, the higher their ratings of the task-oriented candidate. However, self-efficacy was not a predictor for charismatic or relational candidate ratings. Researchers did find that participants who rated one candidate profile higher tended to rate all of the profiles higher, regardless of experimental group or general self-efficacy score. Researchers also found participants' positive emotional states following mortality salience were strongly correlated with their general self-efficacy scores.

Self-efficacy and positive affect have been shown to play a mediating role in individual responses to stress, adversity, and social-context security[32,33]. According to Fredrickson[32], positive affect aids in adaptive behavior by prompting an individual toward environmental engagement. Continued affect-inspired engagement encourages the development of an action pattern that helps build resilience, and influences an individual's coping strategies during adversity[32]. As a representative of "people's confidence to cope with stress and mobilize resources to meet situational demands"[33], self-efficacy has been shown to encourage positive affect states and adaptive responses to adverse or stressful circumstances. As potential mediators of stress, it is possible participants' self-efficacy and positive affect influenced their responses to the stress of the mortality salience manipulation. Self-efficacy and positive emotion, as well as other aspects of participants' personalities, could have impacted participants' ratings of the candidate profiles, providing a multifaceted route through which individuals make decisions about candidate preferences. This may provide an explanation for the failure of the mortality prompt to result in clear group differences in candidate preference and may highlight the need for a more nuanced approach to understanding the emergence of leadership preferences.

6.3. Limitations and Future Directions

Previous discussion highlighted two unique limitations of this study: the failure of the experimental manipulation to produce group differences, and the possible influence of participant personality characteristics on leadership perceptions. This study also features several limitations in its methodological processes and the measures used to determine participants' general self-efficacy and leadership preferences. These limitations highlight opportunities for further research on leadership-perception measurement, terror management methodology, and self-efficacy dynamics.

To measure the influence self-efficacy has on participants' perceptions of the charismatic, task-oriented, and relational candidate profiles, this study implemented five Likert-style questions used by participants to rate candidates on likeability and effectiveness. The Likert-style questions contained considerable internal consistency reliability (*a* = .93-.94). After rating each candidate profile, participants were also asked which candidate they would be most likely to "vote" for during an election. When collapsed across the groups, participant self-efficacy was shown to be related with task-oriented candidate ratings. However, the correlation between self-efficacy and task-oriented candidate ratings was not consistent with results using the forced choice measure. Self-efficacy did not predict which leader participants would be most likely to vote for during an election.

The lack of consistency between voter perceptions (i.e. the Likert-style scales), and voter preferences for political candidates (i.e. the forced-choice measure) provides evidence for the significance of question framing in perception-related research. It is possible there are meaningful differences between affective-based candidate ratings and voting behavior.

Another limitation of this study was the method used to induce mortality salience in the experimental group. The online survey method used for this study differs from the more traditional means of mortality salience induction used in the majority of terror management research. When a writing prompt is used to enhance existential anxiety, many studies require participants to physically write their response to the prompt on paper provided by the supervising investigators[1,14,25]. It is possible the attention-level required for a hand-written prompt may differ from the level of a typed-response. Research on the most effective induction method for capturing participant attention and enhancing death anxiety could provide further insight into the internal processes of death-related anxiety.

This study implemented Schwarzer and Jerusalem's General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)[23] to measure participant's belief in their ability to produce meaningful outcomes. Researchers were unable to support the hypothesis that self-efficacy provides a buffer against existential anxiety. According to Pajares[34], self-efficacy is task- or situation-specific, and is subject to contextual influences. The measurement of general, rather than context-specific, self-efficacy may impose a limitation on this study's ability to link participants' self-efficacy and leadership perceptions. Further research on self-efficacy measurement is needed to determine the best means of measuring voters' perception-influencing, efficacious belief within the political context.

7. Conclusion

This research has provided additional perspective on the roles emotion and self-efficacy play in influencing voters' perceptions of political leadership. The recent shift in organizational psychology from top-down perspectives on leadership to follower-oriented research has provided new insight into the follower-related dynamics of organizational behavior. This study addresses gaps in current research on leader-follower dynamics by examining the roles implicit traits, such as death-anxiety, self-efficacy, and emotion, play in follower perspectives within a political context.

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