The impermanence of all things: An existentialist stance on personal and social change

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In M. Mikulincer & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *The social psychology of meaning, mortality, and choice*. Washington DC: APA Press.

This work was partially funded by an Israel Science Foundation (ISF) grant awarded to the first author.
Change is a given. Be it due to external forces or internal psychological processes, people are in a constant state of flux, confronted with various challenges and threats on an ongoing basis. Change is also inextricably linked to the human existential plight as our very existence is part of a cycle, a process. Every day thousands of people die and thousands more are born. Within a mere century the entire population of the planet will have been replaced. Yet, people seem relatively oblivious to these dramatic facts, and strive to achieve a sense of permanence and stability in their life (Levine & Levine, 1982). It would be incorrect, however, to conclude that people are generally resistant to change. In fact, change is a celebrated value in contemporary societies and is equated with progress and improvement. Lack of change signifies stagnation and decay. Thus, the sands of time may be a threatening reminder of the emptying hourglass of life, and change may signify the loss of youth and vitality. Permanence, however, may be equally threatening because it is through progress and rejuvenation that people achieve meaning which may enable them to transcend the ephemeral nature of their physical existence.

This chapter will attempt to understand how change may pose both an existential threat and remedy from the perspective of terror management theory (TMT: see Greenberg this volume). We will review the terror management and existentialist literature through the lens of change, and will then present a series of new studies examining the relationship between the prospect of change and existential concerns. These studies examine change in three different domains: vocational, interpersonal and political to illustrate that the relationship between change and existential threat can be attributed to change per se, and is not confined to a specific change domain. We will also discuss the role of existential concerns in facing the
most prominent personal manifestation of change – aging, and examine how the anti-
aging industry capitalizes on the desperate need to cling to the fleeting moment of 
youth. We will conclude with a discussion of how an existentialist perspective on 
change may be instructive in addressing the various social and political challenges 
confronting contemporary societies.

Reactions to change

Change is a transformation from one state into another and involves the 
interruption of a given state of affairs (Fox, 1998). The momentary disequilibrium 
resulting from change may be experienced as an aversive state that destabilizes 
psychological equanimity. Humans, as any living organism, strive at the basic 
biological level to maintain a stable and constant inner state – Homeostasis (Cannon, 
1935). This biological imperative is mirrored at the individual and social level as 
stability is considered a basic component of the need for security and safety (Maslow, 
1970). Personal daily routines and cultural rituals and traditions are but examples of 
the ways by which stability is preserved against the constant reality of change in each 
aspect of life.

Among the central reasons for negative reactions to change are a decreased 
sense of control and heightened uncertainty (Fox, 1998). Resistance to change (RTC) 
is defined as a negative attitude towards change which includes affective, behavioral 
and cognitive components (Oreg, 2006). Change is a central ingredient in modern life 
and for an organization to be successful it must react quickly and efficiently to a 
rapidly changing and dynamic environment. A recent survey, however, found that 
only 41% of the changes implemented in over 1,500 companies could be described as 
successful, and that psychological, not technological reasons best explained the
failures in implementing change (IBM, 2008). The growing understanding that human resistance to change stands as an obstacle to personal, social and organizational change has prompted the publication of popular books such as "Who moved my Cheese? An amazing way to deal with change in your work and in your life" (Johnson, 1998) which attempt to illustrate that resistance to change is a strategy bound to fail, whereas accepting change and accommodating to it provides rewards such as wealth and prosperity. Resistance to change, however, may not just be an attitudinal problem that can be argued away, but may reflect more enduring dispositions that may be resistant to rational persuasion.

Prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) provides an example of the cognitive determinants of resistance to change, and demonstrates that people's attitudes toward risks concerning gains may be quite different from their attitudes toward risks concerning losses. For example, when people are given a choice between getting $1000 with certainty or having a 50% chance of getting $2500 they may well choose the certain $1000 in preference to the uncertain chance of getting $2500 even though the mathematical expectation of the uncertain option is $1250. This attitude described as risk-aversion may reflect a universal human predisposition towards resisting change, especially change that is associated with risk and with potential losses.

A resource model of reactions to change

The cognitive model of risk aversion afforded by prospect theory seems to also be reflected in physiological reactions to change. Novel situations loaded with uncertainty and unpredictability may elicit a stress response which is manifested in autonomic, hormonal, and immunological functioning (e.g., Lovalo & Thomas, 2000).
This physiological response, however, depends on the cognitive appraisal of the situation, such that the stress response will be triggered only when the individual appraises the situation as one that he or she does not have adequate resources to deal with (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to the resource and perception model (Harber, Cohen, & Lang, 2007) reactions to stress are moderated by psychosocial resources. When people feel that they have resources such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), perceived control (Seligman, 1975) and attachment security (Shaver & Mikulincer, this volume) at their disposal they are likely to appraise a situation as an opportunity and a challenge. When they feel that their resources are depleted, however, change will most likely be perceived as a threat and the stress response will be exacerbated (Blascovich & Mendes, 2000).

The existential meaning of change

"If you don't get what you want, you suffer; if you get what you don't want, you suffer; even when you get exactly what you want, you still suffer because you can't hold on to it forever. Your mind is your predicament. It wants to be free of change. Free of pain, free of the obligations of life and death. But change is law and no amount of pretending will alter that reality" -- Socrates

The cognitive, physiological and psychosocial models of change explain how people react to change, which types of change are more aversive to people, and how psychological resources influence the acceptance or resistance to change. It is not entirely clear from these perspectives, however, why change poses such a fundamental human problem. In the current chapter we argue that change is perceived as a threat because it is inextricably linked to the passage of time, to a transition from a younger state to an older state, and to a realization that one is
inching closer to death. The idea that change signifies death or that death is a form of change is a major pillar of Socratic philosophy (Vlastos, 1971).

The Buddhist tradition (Rinpoche, 1992) seems to compliment the Socratic view and claims that one of the reasons people experience so much anguish facing death is because they ignore the reality of impermanence. People desperately want everything to stay the same and change is experienced as loss and suffering. Change acts as a daily reminder of the unavoidability of death and of the temporary state of being. Each and every change is a continuous "small death" and constitutes an unsettling reminder that time flows, and attempts to grasp on to the here and now are futile "changes…are the pulse of death, the heartbeat of death" (Rinpoche; 1992 pp. 46). The Buddhist tradition contends that only if we liberate ourselves from our flawed and destructive illusion of permanence, and accept that quite ironically impermanence is the only real thing we can hold on to, will we be able to confront death without fear.

**Terror management and resistance to change**

The philosophical contemplation of existence and impermanence, which is only briefly and incompletely discussed in this chapter, is matched with psychological theory and research that attempts to understand how the transient nature of being affects human behavior. In his essay *On Transience* (1916) Freud recalls a walk he took with the poet Ranier Maria Rilke. It was a beautiful summer day and Freud was happy to be outdoors. Rilke, however, was somber and seemed incapable of enjoying the leisurely stroll. In Freud's words Rilke felt that "all this beauty was fated to extinction, that it would vanish when winter came, like all human beauty and all the beauty that men have created or may create." Freud, however, was unsympathetic to
Rilke's response and contended that the hallmark of psychological health is the ability to appreciate life and beauty regardless of how fragile and transient it may be.

On the basis of Freud's psychoanalysis, Ernest Becker (1973, 1975) wrote many years later that the human inability to contend with the problem of death and impermanence is not just dysfunctional for individual mental health, but has detrimental social consequences as well. Becker's writings lay the foundations for experimental investigations into the psychology of death and impermanence through the framework of terror management theory (TMT: Greenberg, this volume).

Terror management research has dealt, directly and indirectly, with the problems of change and impermanence. In the most direct examination to date of permanence as a terror management defense, Landau et al. (2004) demonstrated that priming thoughts of personal death (mortality salience: MS) increased preference for a more benign, representative, consistent and orderly cognitive structuring of the social world. This seemed to hold true primarily for participants who scored high on the need for personal structure (PNS) scale suggesting that these individuals typically perceive uncertain and unstable situations as threatening. The results of this research suggest that significant change is linked to death by the mere disruption of the orderly state of affairs, but that change is not uniformly threatening. Whereas some individuals responded to MS with greater clinging to familiar social constructions, other did not.

These individual differences in the effects of death on change were reflected in other research. In a prospective study of political change, Hirschberger & Ein-Dor (2006) examined reactions to the 2005 disengagement from Gaza among Gaza strip settlers and their supporters three months before the withdrawal took place. They
found that MS increased support of violent means to sabotage the disengagement plan (i.e., violent resistance to change), but that this effect was obtained only among settlers who were unable to come to terms with the unfolding reality and coped with denial. Others who opposed the plan, but did not deny that it would take place did not show this effect.

Links between existential concerns and resistance to change were also evident in research on the terror management function of close relationships (Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003). In one study, participants expressed high levels of intimacy strivings towards a relationship partner who harshly criticized them (Hirschberger, Florian & Mikulincer, 2003). The study suggests that when death is salient the need for security and stability increases to the extent that people are willing to endure some insult and pain for emotional closeness. Similarly, thoughts of change and instability in close relationships led to an increase in the cognitive accessibility of death-related thoughts (Florian, Mikulincer, & Hirschberger, 2002; Mikulincer, Florian, Birnbaum, & Malishkevich, 2002). These findings indicate that stable close relationships satisfy among other things a need for permanence, and when this need for permanence is disrupted, people experience a surge of death concerns.

*Terror management or managing uncertainty?

Several scholars have recently challenged TMT claiming that it is uncertainty, and not death that is the main driving force underlying terror management findings (Van den Bos, 2004). This contention deserves special attention when considering the existential implications of change and impermanence because the change literature has spent a great deal of attention on the role of uncertainty in resistance to change. Uncertainty, defined as the individual's inability to predict events, behaviors or
components of the environment accurately (Milliken, 1987), has been established as a central variable in reactions to change in organizational settings (Fox, 1998), educational projects (Waugh & Godfrey, 1995), political attitudes (Jost et al., 2003) and psychotherapeutic settings (Eagle, 1999).

The humanistic approach argued that uncertainty and change undermine stability, which is one of the safety needs (Maslow, 1970). Social-cognitive theories have emphasized the motivation to perceive the world and predict the future with the highest degree of certainty (Kelly, 1955). According to uncertainty management theory (UMT; Van den Bos, 2001), people have an inherent need to feel certain about their world, their place and their future in it and try to avoid, eliminate or at best manage the uncertainty in their lives. Van den Bos (2004) argues that managing uncertainty accounts for the reactions to mortality salience, because the awareness of death induces great uncertainty which in turn activates and mobilizes the defense mechanisms described by TMT.

Terror management advocates respond to these claims and maintain that it is not just that terror management effects cannot be explained by uncertainty, but that certainty is not a fundamental human motivation. Ample evidence suggests that not all people at all times are trying to reduce the level of uncertainty in their lives. Landau, Greenberg and Kosloff (2010) point to numerous instances in which people make choices that increase rather than decrease uncertainty. Research supports this contention and shows that at times primes of death may promote cognitions and behaviors that increase uncertainty rather than reduce it. For example, MS increases risk-taking (e.g., Taubman-Ben-Ari et al., 1999), and increases support of violent solutions to political conflict (Hirschberger et al., 2009; Pyszczynski et al., 2006) which arguably would lead in both cases to more dangerous and less certain
environments. Further, a recent meta-analysis of MS effects has verified that the
effect is unique to death and cannot be accounted for by other factors such as
uncertainty (Burke et al., 2010).

The terror management literature has thus far provided support for the
contention that change is existentially threatening, and that MS typically leads to
resistance to change. It seems, however, that this effect is not uniform and that some
individuals find change more existentially threatening than others. In the next section
we will describe some new research that sheds further light on the relationship
between change and death. The first group of studies examine whether change elicits
greater concerns about death than a condition with no change, and whether this effect
is moderated by individual difference variables. The second group of studies examine
the impact of MS on resistance to change, and the third group of studies focus on a
common and inevitable human change -- aging and examine the effects of MS on the
appeal of anti-aging products and treatments.

*Does change elicit death-related cognitions?*

Most terror management research has focused on the mortality salience
paradigm and has examined how primes of death influence social cognitions,
emotions and behaviors. However, a significant body of terror management research
has examined the terror management process from the opposite direction and has
examined whether destabilizing or threatening terror management defenses leads to an
upsurge of death-related cognitions (see Hayes et al., 2010 for a recent review). This
research paradigm known as the death-thought accessibility (DTA) hypothesis is
based on the reasoning that if a construct serves to protect individuals from thoughts
of death, threatening its validity should compromise its defensive function and lead to an increase in the accessibility of death-related cognitions.

In our research we used the DTA paradigm to examine whether the prospect of change compromises the need for stability and certainty and would thus induce an increase in thoughts of death. We examined this hypothesis in three different domains, interpersonal, vocational and political to increase our confidence that our results speak to change in general and are not confined to a particular domain.

Because the extant research on terror management and processes of change suggests that change is existentially threatening only to some individuals, we predicted that reactions to change would be moderated by individual difference variables. Specifically, on the basis of resource models of reactions to change (e.g., Harber et al., 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), we suggested that the effects of change would depend on the perceived psychological resources at the disposal of the individual confronting change. The perception of resources would be associated with acceptance of change, whereas the lack thereof would be associated with resistance to change. Applying this reasoning to the current research we hypothesized that change would elicit death-related cognitions only among those low in psychological resources and not those high in resources. We further speculated that those high in psychological resources may perceive change as an opportunity for progress and that for them stability would connote stagnation and decay. If this reasoning is correct, we would expect that among these individuals DTA would be higher in the stability condition than in the change condition.

In the first study in this series we focused on a domain of change that may elicit the stress of uncertainty, but is usually perceived as a positive change -- the
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prospect of spending an academic year abroad. In this study we had first year undergraduate participants either read a scenario formatted as a newspaper article reporting that the minister of education decided to keep everything in the forthcoming year as planned (no change condition), or an article describing a new one-year mandatory study abroad program in which students would be required to spend one year abroad at the same cost of their studies in Israel (change condition). The accessibility of death-related thoughts was assessed by a Hebrew version of the word-completion task, which had been constructed in English (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1994) and successfully used in Hebrew (e.g., Florian et al., 2002) on an Israeli sample. In our study, the task consisted of 19 Hebrew word fragments that participants were asked to complete with the first word that came to mind by filling in one missing letter. Eight of the 19 Hebrew fragments could be completed with either neutral or death-related Hebrew words. For example, participants saw the Hebrew fragment – VEL and could complete it with the Hebrew word HVEL (cord) or with the death-related Evel (mourning). The possible death-related words were the Hebrew words for death, mourning, cadaver, grave, killing, dying, grief, and skeleton. The dependent measure was the number of death-related Hebrew words with which a participant completed the fragments. This score could range from 0 to 8. We also measured participants’ need for cognitive closure (NFC: Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) as a moderator because NFC indicates to what extent participants need a stable and structured world and how they deal with uncertainty. We hypothesized that change would lead to higher DTA only among those high in NFC.

The results of this study partially supported the hypotheses and indicated that participants high in NFC tended to show an increase in DTA in the change condition compared to the no-change condition. However, people low in NFC exhibited the
opposite trend and had lower DTA in the change condition compared to the control condition. Although uncertainty management theory does not have specific predictions for DTA, the finding that change (with the uncertainty it entails) was existentially soothing for participants low on NFC, and that lack of change or stagnation was existentially threatening for them seems to violate the assumption that avoiding uncertainty is a central human motivation.

In the second study, we attempted to replicate these results in the context of political change -- a peace agreement between Israel and its neighbors. Although Israel has much to gain from peace, it also has much to lose (e.g., land, settlements). According to prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), people are more reluctant to lose what they already have than to gain something that they still do not have. Therefore, we predicted that political change will elicit higher levels of DTA after controlling for political orientation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two scenarios: The first scenario was a political change scenario which suggested that Israel was about to sign a comprehensive peace agreement with Syria and the Palestinians that would include a withdrawal from territories. The no-change scenario described a continuation of the status quo between Israel and these two parties with no significant change expected in the near future. The results of this study replicated the academic relocation study findings and indicated that participants high on need for closure reacted to political change with significantly elevated DTA, whereas people low on NFC reacted to the change scenario with lower DTA (at marginal significance) compared to the no-change condition after controlling for political orientation. The results of this study enable us to generalize the results of the first study to other domains of change, and support our contention that the results reflect a reaction to change, and not a reaction to a specific change domain. These
results also suggest that reactions to political change are not just a function of political ideology but of psychological reactions to change and uncertainty.

Following the first two studies on academic and political change we examined whether we could extend our findings to the interpersonal realm. Specifically, marriage constitutes a significant life change that is often perceived as positive, but entails certain costs, such as the loss of freedom and the sacrificing of potential opportunities. In this study, we examined whether thoughts of relational change (marriage) compared to a control condition (continued singlehood) would influence DTA. In addition to manipulating the occurrence of change we also manipulated judgments of change such that half of the participants read a passage suggesting that change is good, and the other half read a passage suggesting that stability is good. Because this study focused on close relationships we examined whether attachment orientations (See Shaver & Mikulincer, volume) would moderate the effects of relationship change on DTA as attachment orientations have been established as important predictors of processes in close relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Results indicated that whereas participants low on attachment avoidance showed low levels of DTA when presented with relational change and primed with pro-change values, participants high on attachment avoidance responded to these conditions with elevated DTA. Thus, people low on attachment avoidance seem to find existential comfort in close relationships as Mikulincer et al. (2003) have shown. People high on attachment avoidance, however, respond to the prospect of marriage with an upsurge of death-related cognitions. For them, not only does the prospect of marriage fail to provide a sense of security in the face of existential threat, it seems to be the very source of stress that amplifies their existential concerns.
These first three studies on change and the accessibility of death related thoughts supports our prediction that change is existentially threatening. However, our results indicate that this holds true only for individuals low in psychological resources. People high on the need for cognitive closure responded to academic and political change with elevated death-related cognitions. People high on attachment avoidance responded to changes in close relationships with elevated death concerns. Those high on psychological resources (low NFC and low attachment avoidance), however, exhibited the opposite trend and responded to change with lower DTA. These individuals displayed higher levels of death cognitions in the no-change condition. It seems that for them lack of change is existentially threatening, whereas the prospect of change quells their existential concerns. The results of these studies raise doubts about the claim of UMT that uncertainty poses the greatest human threat and that uncertainty can explain mortality salience effects. These three studies suggest that change and uncertainty are existentially threatening, but only for some individuals. For others, the prospect of change, with all of the uncertainty that it entails, was experienced as existentially comforting.

*Does MS always increase resistance to change?*

In the next step of our investigation we examined whether priming thoughts of personal death would influence resistance to change in the same three domains of the first three studies. We reasoned that if change is perceived by some as an existential threat and by others as an existential remedy, as suggested in the first three studies, MS would not be expected to have a uniform effect on resistance to change and would increase resistance to change in some cases and decrease it in others. In the first study examining this hypothesis we randomly assigned participants to either an MS or pain salience condition, asked them to read the academic relocation vignette after which
they completed a resistance to change (RTC) scale (Oreg, 2006) which was modified to relate to academic relocation. To better understand the role of uncertainty in these effects we constructed a measure of perceived uncertainty and examined whether it moderated the MS effect. Results revealed a significant interaction between MS and perceived uncertainty indicating that in the control condition persons high on perceived uncertainty were more resistant to change than those low on perceived uncertainty. However, MS reduced resistance to change among the highly uncertain individuals to the level of individuals low on uncertainty. These results indicate that highly uncertain individuals are typically resistant to academic relocation. MS, however, reduces their resistance to change in this domain.

In the next study we replicated the design of the first MS study and replaced the academic relocation scenario with the political change scenario. Here the results were slightly different. As in the first study, individuals who were highly uncertain were more resistant to change than individuals low on uncertainty. In this study, however, MS did not reduce RTC among highly uncertain individuals as in the academic change study. Rather, MS increased resistance to political change among those who were low on uncertainty to the level of those high on uncertainty. These effects were obtained after controlling for political orientation.

Following the first two studies we examined reactions to relational change. In this study (Segal, 2011), however, we examined older single men (>30) who were not involved at the time in a long-term relationship. To examine reactions to change we asked them to indicate when they would like to marry on a scale ranging from 1 "never" to 7 "sometime in the next year." We measured attachment orientations as moderating variables. Results indicated that MS increased the desire to get married in the near future among men who were low on attachment avoidance. Men who were
high on attachment avoidance, however, responded to MS with a significant decrease in the desire to get married.

The three studies conducted on MS and resistance to change compliment the three studies on change and DTA and indicate that MS may either increase or decrease resistance to change. These studies suggest that individual differences moderate the relationship between existential concerns and reactions to change.

Although the findings generally replicate from one change domain to the other, these studies also suggest that the nature of the change domain is a significant factor in determining resistance to change. Specifically, the results indicate that participants high in uncertainty were more resistant to change compared to participants low in uncertainty in both the academic and political domains. The effects of MS, however, were opposite in each one of these domains. In the academic domain MS reduced the resistance to change of highly uncertain individuals to the level of those low on uncertainty. In the political domain MS increased the resistance to change of those low on uncertainty to the extent that they became as resistant as highly uncertain individuals. Although we cannot be sure about the reasons for these differences, they can be explained from the perspective of prospect theory. The political change we examined seems to be associated with greater losses than gains (Gayer, Landman, Halperin, & Bar-Tal, 2009) and this can explain why the political change scenario primarily increased DTA and why MS increased resistance to change. The academic relocation scenario, on the other hand, may have elicited some anxiety, but the benefits of studying abroad were probably more salient than the costs as studying abroad is valued in Israeli society (ref). This may explain why the academic change scenario significantly decreased DTA among some individuals and why the effects of MS in this case were to decrease resistance to change.
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"The idea is to die young as late as possible" -- Ashley Montagu

The research we presented on academic, political and interpersonal change illustrate the role of existential concerns on reactions to change. Spending an academic year abroad, experiencing historical political transformations, or committing to a close relationships are events we may or may not experience in our lifetime. If we only live long enough, however, we are bound to experience an inescapable universal transformation -- the process of aging. Although aging is a natural and inevitable part of the life cycle, it is perceived negatively in many societies and older people often suffer from discrimination (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002). Terror management research on aging has indicated that older people elicit high levels of DTA compared to young people, and that MS leads to the derogation of older people and to distancing from them (Martens, Greenberg, Schimel, & Landau, 2004). Because aging is so strongly associated with impermanence and death, we postulated that when death is salient people would be motivated to fight the aging process. The anti-aging industry successfully capitalizes on the desire to stay forever young, and markets products that enjoy much popularity in spite of their questionable effectiveness. In a series of two studies Lazovsky-Feine (2010) examined whether MS would increase the appeal of anti-aging products.

In the first study female participants were randomly assigned to MS or pain salience conditions and then completed a questionnaire assessing the appeal of different cosmetic treatments, some of which pertained directly to anti-aging (e.g., Botox, facial lift), and some that were not related to aging (e.g., hair removal, manicure/pedicure). Results indicated that MS significantly increased the appeal of
anti-aging treatments, but had no significant effects on the other cosmetic treatments.

The second study was an attempt to replicate the results of the first study using a behavioral paradigm. In this study, research assistants randomly distributed fliers to women walking through a university campus. The fliers which served as the MS prime included either mention of death or back pain. This MS procedure has been successfully used in previous research (Hirschberger, Ein-Dor, & Almakias, 2008). Then, these women were solicited by another research assistant standing at a booth to try some new anti-aging cream, *Toujour Lisse*, which they were told had been scientifically proven to slow down the aging process of the face and skin. Participants were presented with a jar of cream that had been weighed prior to the experiment and were asked to apply the cream on the face of a mannequin, as if it were their own face. Then, they were asked to answer questions on their interest in anti-aging products. Results indicated that in the MS condition the jar was significantly lighter than in the control condition indicating that when death was salient participants applied more cream. This effect occurred primarily among participants who were not college educated. MS also increased participants' self-reported interest in anti-aging products.

The results of these two studies on the appeal of anti-aging products as an existential defense, indicate that primes of death increase the motivation to fight the natural aging process and to stay young for as long as possible. These findings are in line with the other studies we presented on change and further support the role of existential concerns in reactions to change. Although the results of the research presented here portrays a general picture of the effects of MS on reactions to change - a picture that emphasizes individual differences in resources, there are also some notable differences between the change domains. It seems that the change domains of
academic relocation and marriage elicited not only existential fear and resistance to change, but also acceptance of change among some individuals. The political and aging domains, however, seemed to elicit greater existential fear and resistance to change. We suggest, on the basis of prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), that marriage and relocation may be associated with gains for many individuals. A political settlement between Israel and its neighbors seems to be primarily associated with loss, and aging is associated in the eyes of many people with degeneration and decay which also connotes loss. In accordance with prospect theory, the results indicate that for domains associated with gains MS decreases resistance to change, however for domains associated with loss, MS increases resistance to change.

Conclusion

"The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise -- with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country."

— Abraham Lincoln

December 1, 1862 in Message to Congress

The writing of this chapter takes place during turbulent times in the Middle East. Mass protests are spreading like fire throughout the region. Some of the dictatorship regimes are collapsing, others are using brute force against their people to hold on to power; all are unstable. At this point in time, uncertainty abides as no one can be sure about the outcome of this geopolitical earthquake. What seems to be certain, however, is that the people of the Middle East are desperate for change. They evidently prefer the uncertainty of political upheaval to the certainty of living in a
dictatorship, and they are willing to make great sacrifices to advance the change they desire. These events constitute a real-life demonstration of one of the central points of the research on terror management and change – when change conveys personal meaning, when it is consistent with personal values and beliefs, and when it holds the promise of a better future it will provide greater existential reassurance than would stability and permanence.

The results of the research presented here suggest that both contextual and individual difference factors determine whether change is experienced as existentially threatening or comforting. Change that reflects cultural or religious values and beliefs will likely quell existential anxiety because cultural worldviews serve as terror management mechanisms (Greenberg, this volume). When change does not bolster cultural worldviews, however, and when losses loom larger than gains it is likely to be experienced as existentially threatening and will elicit greater resistance to change.

Some people shrink in the face of change. For them, the passage of time feels like being washed down a river with little control over what lies ahead. Resistance to change may temporarily assuage their existential concerns and provide a comforting illusion of safety and stability. But, as long as the wheels of time keep turning so will the prospect of permanence and stagnation fail to provide existential solace. The unrealistic desire for permanence leads to desperate attempts to slow and reverse the effects of time (i.e., anti-aging), but these useless efforts are doomed to fail. Others, who realize that they cannot resist the powerful flow of the river, attempt to take control, keep balance, and seize the opportunity for making meaningful personal decisions in the inevitable process of continuous transformation.
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