

Death-Thought Accessibility and Worldview Defense Following Variable Time Delays

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Introduction

Terror management research has shown that, following mortality salience (MS), death-thought accessibility (DTA) and distal worldview defenses appear after a delay. However, to date, delay times for DTA and worldview defense activation have differed, with longer periods being better. While the time course is theoretically understood (Arndt, Greenberg, & Cook, 2002), the optimal time to assess DTA and worldview defense seem to differ between studies. Two experiments varied the time following MS to see when DTA (Study 1) and worldview defense (Study 2) should ideally be assessed. Participants, in both studies, were assigned to either an MS or control prime and then to one of four delay conditions (0 min, 5 min, 10 min, & 15 min). In Study 1, DTA was assessed with a lexical decision task and demonstrated strongest DTA effects at 10 min. In Study 2, worldview defense was assessed using the Moral Transgression Scale, which demonstrated that worldview defense was strongest after at 15 min. The current research is important for better understanding how to appropriately conduct TMT research, as well as clarifying potential errors with other studies.

Method

Study 1

- 180 (120 female) participants were analyzed
- Ages ranged from 18-37 ($M_{age} = 20.12$, $SD = 2.29$)
- Participants either completed the typical mortality salience (MS) manipulation, or a neutral control before being randomly assigned to 1 of 4 variable time delays
- Following the delay, all participants completed a lexical decision task with 6 embedded death words
- Dependent variable was reaction time in milliseconds to death related words

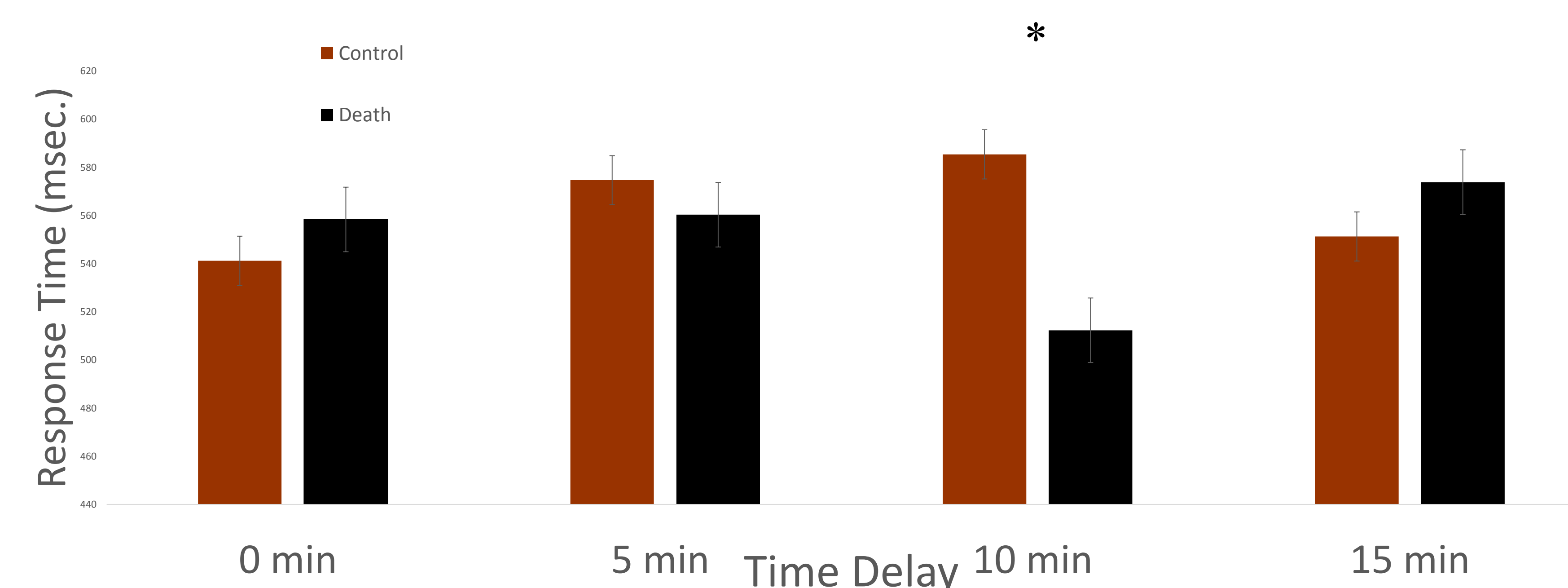
Study 2

- 148 (79 female) participants were analyzed from Mturk
- Ages ranged from 18-70 ($M_{age} = 36.89$, $SD = 12.04$)
- Study design was identical to Study 1 except for the DV, which was switched to the Moral Transgressions Scale

Results

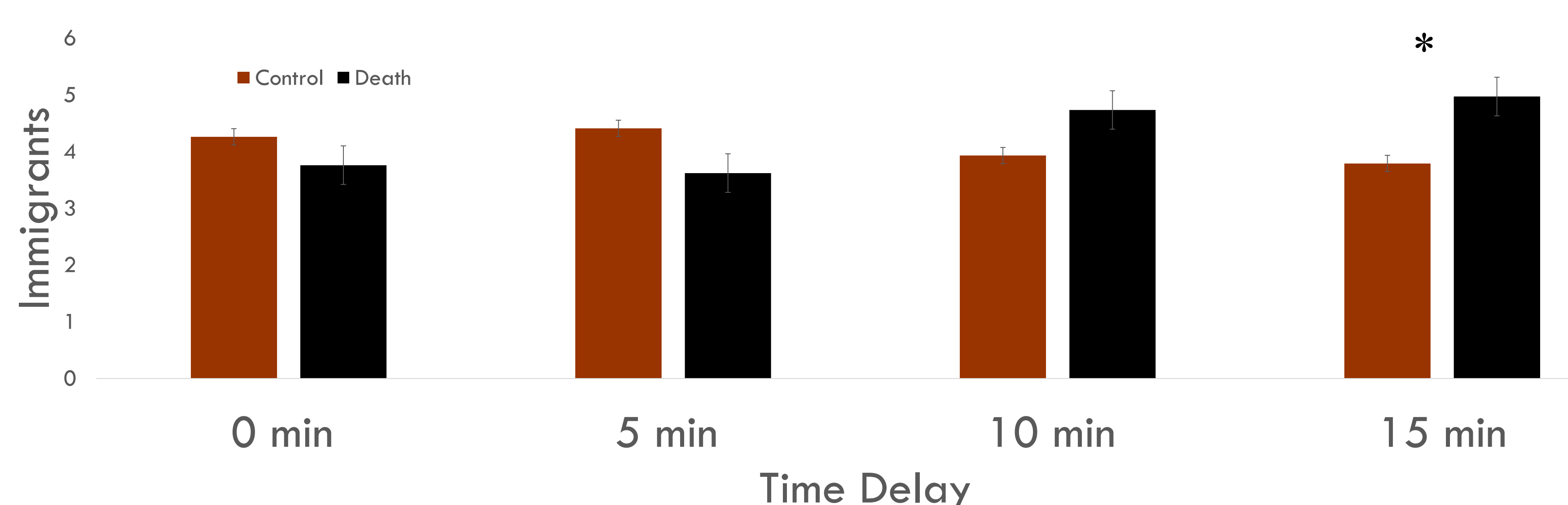
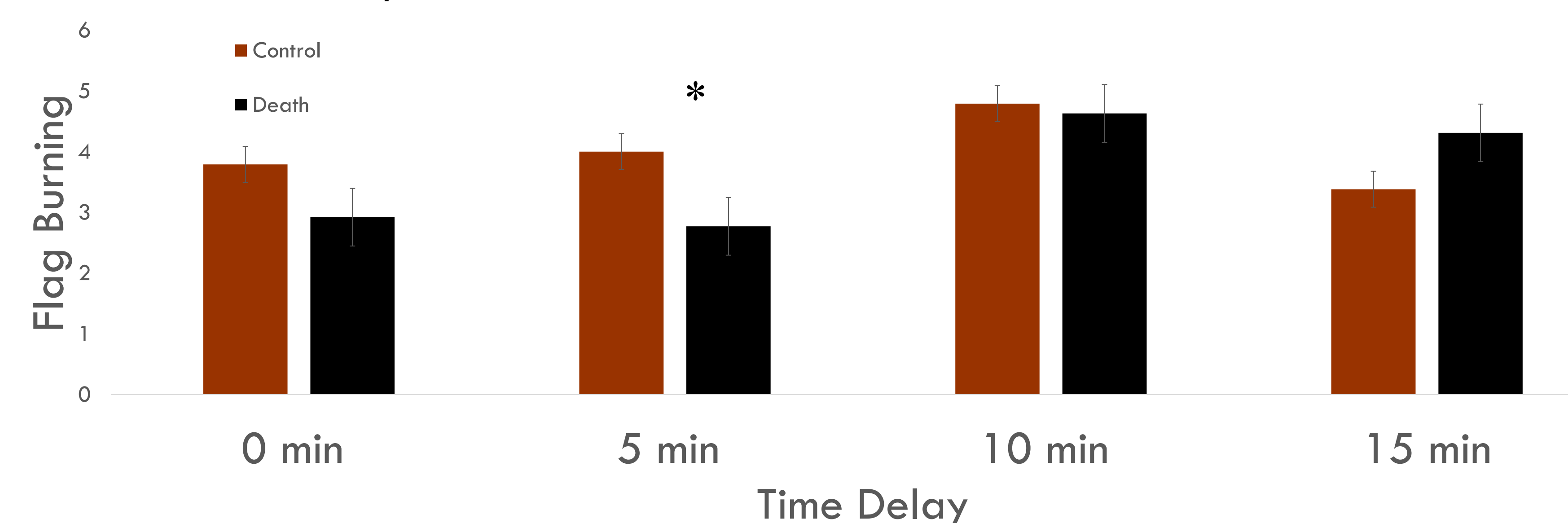
Study 1

- Following previous research (Arndt, Cook, Goldenberg, & Cox, 2007) results were analyzed using a 2(MS) x 4(Time delay) ANCOVA with neutral words as the covariate
- While there were no significant main effects there was a significant interaction between MS and Time, $F(3, 171) = 4.50$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .04$
- The covariate was also significant, $F(1, 171) = 140.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .43$



Study 2

- There were significant interactions on two of the four subscales dealing with flag burning, $F(3, 139) = 2.64$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$, and immigration, $F(3, 140) = 2.96$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .05$



Discussion

- Study 1 demonstrated a significant increase in DTA after a 10 min delay
- Study 2 demonstrated greater punishment for moral transgressors when dealing with immigrants after 15 min delay
- However, Study 2 also demonstrated that MS led to decreased punishment assessments for flag burning following a 5 min delay, although there was a main effect of time that showed increases in distal defenses following longer delays
- Overall, results support previous research (Burke, Martens, & Faucher, 2010) that has found that longer delays lead to greater TMT effects
- Results have significant implications for Terror Management research as many studies utilize brief delays of variable times
- The current studies suggest that the most pronounced distal effects occur after 10 min delay when DTA spikes
- Future research should utilize longer delays when assessing both DTA and distal defenses

References

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