Terror Management Theory assumes self-esteem is an important psychological mechanism in unconscious avoidance of death-related anxiety. I posited that Terror Management Theory encapsulates existential motivations for self-forgiveness; that is, I suggested self-forgiveness might buffer self-esteem reductions secondary to guilt and shame. Indeed, accumulated research supports people strive for self-forgiveness to cope with the detrimental effects guilt and shame have on wellbeing through a dual-process of interpersonal (i.e., perceived forgiveness, conciliatory behaviors) and intrapsychic (i.e., perceived offense severity, effort) means. Reasoning from existing Terror Management and self-forgiveness theory and research, the current study sought to establish a meditational link among death awareness, unconscious death-thoughts, and self-forgiveness. The study tested (1) if unconscious death-thoughts mediate the relation between increased death awareness and self-forgiveness (i.e., mediation), (2) if this mediated relation is moderated by offense severity, conciliatory behaviors, perceived forgiveness, or effort (i.e., moderated-mediation), and (3) if
these relations are most observable for people who freshly experience death awareness relative to
dental pain (i.e., interactional moderated-mediation). The current study tested these hypotheses
with a randomized post-test only blind comparison-group design. In order to clarify the
mediation and moderated-mediation, there also was a measurement-of-mediation and
moderation-of-process procedure. Specifically, after recalling recent interpersonal offenses and
filling in related measures, participants wrote about either inevitable death (n = 112) or dental
pain (n = 113), spent time filling in distraction measures, and then reported their levels of self-
forgiveness. The results of bootstrapped path analyses, one-way ANOVA, and one-way
MANOVA did not support the mediation, moderated-mediation, or interactional moderated-
mediation hypotheses. I conclude with implications for theory, research, and practice.