chology but instead surface psychological analyses would have to be done, then criti-
cized, and then redone in order to arrive at the depths of psychological subjectivity. 
Such a procedure would be taking phenomenology’s methodological self-critique
seriously.

Greenberg, J., Koole, S. L., & Pyszczynski, T. (Eds.), *Handbook of Experimental
(Hardcover).

*Review by:* Gerald L. Peterson, Saginaw Valley State University

This volume represents a collection of articles attempting to provide an integrative
framework for traditional experimental research relevant to existential concerns. Two
of the three editors, Jeff Greenberg and Tom Pyszczynski, along with Sheldon Solomon,
developed terror management theory in the 1980's which attempts to demonstrate
the impact of existential fears, chiefly death. The authors’ work derives largely
from the inspiration provided by Ernest Becker’s (1973) exploration of death denial,
with the present volume also incorporating the ideas of Yalom (1980) to yield a psy-
chodynamic existentialism that runs through many of the contributions.

A central understanding that emerged from experimental studies of social cognition
in the last decade is that subjects do not report being aware of stimuli that psychol-
gists show clearly had an impact on their thinking or behavior. When such stimuli
involve subtle priming with words dealing with death, or minutes earlier having had
to write about one’s own death, the chase is on to explore this new psychodynamic
process, and now, its existential implications. What I find interesting, from a phe-
nomenological perspective, is that the experimental stimuli, like the existential con-
cerns of death, freedom, loneliness, and meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980) which are
presumed to be terrifying, have not been found associated with much affect in the
laboratory, and like the psychotherapeutic patient, subjects seldom report being pre-
occupied by such thoughts which so captivate and reflect the concerns of the researchers
and therapists. So, of course, the experimentalists, like the psychodynamic therapist,
now assumes we are all in denial because “everyone knows” such issues are “ubi-
quitous and influential regardless of whether we realize it or not” (Chapter 1, p. 6).
While dismaying from a phenomenological psychology standpoint, this neglect of
lived experience suggests a non-falsifiable “catch-22” which seems ironic coming from
authors claiming to adhere to criteria of traditional empirical science. While this vol-
ume of some 28 articles (not including introductory and postmortem chapters) pre-
sents stimulating and thoughtful summaries of fascinating research, clearly relevant
to those of us interested in existential reflection, there is, (with some exceptions) little effort to first describe and explore the concrete, lived experiences of people actually dealing with everyday struggles of life and death.

While many of the authors discuss their research in relation to terror management theory (TMT), or at least allude to it in passing, there are a wide range of viewpoints presented dealing with religion, cultural ideologies, developmental issues, social relationships, authenticity, and motivational theory. It is to the editors’ credit that they have contributions from researchers who provide challenges and alternative conceptions to TMT. Most of the authors (not surprisingly) have little difficulty considering their research as relevant to existential thought though the degree of engagement varies. The editors arranged the articles under four major headings: existential realities, systems of meaning and value, the human connection, and freedom and will.

The first section on existential realities includes summaries of TMT and replications in different cultures, reflections on the objectification of women and disgust regarding embodiment, risk-taking in adolescence, and a chapter on confronting randomness. Florian and Mikulincer (Chapter 4) present more of a psychometric analysis of the meaning and fears associated with death, Goldenberg and Roberts (Chapter 5) write on the cultural objectification of women and denial of the body, and Janoff-Bulman and Yopyk (Chapter 7) explore the need for meaning when confronted by tragedy or uncertainty. These chapters in particular seem to presume a great deal regarding what and how people experience and grapple with the conditions of life. It is unfortunate that very little descriptive foundation in the phenomenology of lived experience is provided by these theorists who more quickly adopt a third-person attitude toward such existential issues.

As noted, most of the authors attempt to relate their views to terror management theory. According to TMT, peoples’ self-esteem and self-concept, coupled with their cultural world-view, help allay the anxieties that come when distinctively human self-awareness makes the realities of life (such as death and uncertainty) apparent. For example, when asked to describe their feelings regarding their own death and later being asked to evaluate people from different cultures or religions, participants tend to disparage dissimilar others and reaffirm their own cultural world views. Control groups asked to consider their feelings about watching television or eating a meal, do not differ in their evaluations of similar or dissimilar others. Such effects of reminding people of their mortality have been obtained using a variety of stimuli linked to death, but not stimuli associated with anxiety alone or non-death related pain. While participants fail to show any terror or emotion while pondering their death, the TMT theorists argue this is because the information serves to block the triggering of affect more basically tied to such concerns (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski, Chapter 2).