This talk will provide an overview of a theoretical perspective and program of research that explores how human aggression and conflict can be understood, in part, as a response to the existential predicament of the human condition. Building upon the ideas of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker, terror management theory examines how people try to symbolically transcend their own mortality by identifying with enduring cultural beliefs. Such efforts to feel like we are significant contributors to a meaningful cultural drama can have unfortunate, and often violent, consequences for those outside the belief system. Research will be presented that shows how this analysis helps us to understand different facets of human conflict and what it suggests for promoting more peaceful forms of coexistence.

Arndt received his bachelor’s degree in psychology from Skidmore College, and his master’s degree and doctorate in psychology from the University of Arizona. Arndt’s research examines how the motivational and existential dynamics of the human condition shape violence, aggression and intergroup conflict, as well as how these dynamics can be harnessed to reduce these problems. Arndt has written or co-written over 75 publications, the majority of which have appeared in the top journals in his field. His research has been funded by the National Cancer Institute and widely featured in the media, including the Los Angeles Times, USA Today, and Elle magazine, as well as on the Discovery Channel in the award-winning documentary, Flight from Death. Arndt is an accomplished teacher who received the 2003 MU Provost’s Junior Faculty Teaching Award.

For more information, please visit events.psych.missouri.edu/lecture-series/