Millennials: Matter of Life and Death

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Donnavieve Smith Ph.D.
**Introduction**

**Millennials**

The Millennial worldview has been described as one that focuses on living life from ‘moment to moment’ with little regard for conforming to more traditional worldviews related to work ethic, beliefs about how life should be lived, etc. One of the most often associated behaviors of millennials is their tendency to focus on “self,” on account of which they are sometimes referred to as the “me” generation. Joel Stein pointed out that “the incidence of narcissistic personality disorder is nearly three times as high for people in their 20s as for the generation that’s now 65 or older, according to the National Institute of Health” (Stein). Similarly, millennials have been withdrawing from the kinds of communities that were basic to identity formation in earlier generations. According to Pew Research Center, millennials have been detaching themselves from larger institutions such as religion, marriage, and political parties for some time (Jiang).

In her excellent book, *Generation Me*, Dr. Jean Twenge writes that she doesn’t find any evidence of “attachment to duty or to group cohesion” among the Millennial generation, echoing both Stein’s point of emphasis on the ‘self’ and the Pew Center’s findings. Instead, she argues, Millennials “have been consistently taught to put their own needs first and to focus on feeling good about themselves” (6-7). However, not all assessments of the Millennial generation have been negative. In *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, Neil Howe and William Strauss make a more positive counter-argument, contending that the Millennial generation is “more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse” than any other generation in living memory. “More important,” they add, “they are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct” (Howe & Strauss 4).
Making up 25% of the overall population, Millennials are an important target market for businesses. As such, researchers and marketers are striving to identify and utilize a range of tools to communicate effectively with this generation. Millennials are vastly different from other generations in that they are more concerned about sustainability, philanthropy, and other pro-social practices. What market researchers are finding is that more than half of Millennials are willing to buy from companies if their purchase is supporting a cause. Furthermore, they’re willing to pay a higher price for socially conscious goods and services. Marketing research is also finding that Millennials seem to crave adventure more than previous generations; they’re traveling more, both domestically and internationally, and their consumption patterns appear to be reflecting this wider worldview (“Who Are Millennials”).

The Millennial generation are referred to as “digital natives” because they were the first generation to grow up in front of personal screens and they continue to spend several hours a day in front of them. In fact, studies show that up to 42% of their day is spent on a smartphone or other personal device (Schmall). Being born just after the introduction and commercialization of the internet has resulted in members of this population having a high proficiency for adopting and utilizing digital products and services. A 2018 Pew study reported that “more than nine-in-ten Millennials (92%) owned smartphones” and “the vast majority of Millennials (85%) say they use social media” (Jiang). Smartphones and devices are now the primary platform through which people communicate, perform work-related activities, find entertainment, access news stories and more. In fact, a recent Pew Research study concluded that over 85% of adults in the U.S. receive their news on mobile devices (Morris).
Consumption of News via Digital Platforms

Broadcasters are using every medium possible to reach their audiences and share news. Access to digital media has skyrocketed, and with it, a dramatically increased exposure to violence and death-related media. Violence and death from both human and natural causes are topics that historically have been covered by the news, but with the sharp increase in the amount of media exposure, and the ease of hearing news repeated on various social media platforms, one wonders whether it might be too much. Susan Moeller, author of *Compassion Fatigue*, suggests that “compassion fatigue” is the cause for the “media’s preoccupation with crisis coverage.” If “images of starving babies worked in the past to capture attention for a complex crisis of war, refugees and famine, then starving babies will headline the next difficult crisis” (Moeller 2). “At times, it seems as if the media careen from one trauma to another, in a breathless tour of poverty, disease and death. The troubles blur. Crises become one crisis” (Moeller 1). Journalists are pressured to cover something “more dramatic or more lethal” than the last story, and as a result, the media is berating viewers with an unceasing barrage of stories centered on violence and death. It makes one wonder how, if at all, this media that is relentlessly being fed to the millennial generation has changed individuals’ relationship with death.

Perceptions of Death

There is a historical tradition of “calling to mind” mortality, or “mindfulness of death,” that has been developed in several philosophical and religious traditions. This “calling to mind” can happen both voluntarily and involuntarily. With respect to the former, many philosophers and religious thinkers recommend the deliberate practice of meditating on death, especially on the truth of human mortality, as a spiritual exercise that contributes positively to one’s flourishing. With respect to the latter, thoughts of death and of human morality can be imposed on a person or
community against their will, as is the case when a tragedy happens before one’s eyes. Since our world has become modernized, and screens have become ubiquitous, the way death is called to mind is happening differently and, in most cultural contexts, more frequently. This study explores the relationship between Millennials, mindfulness of death, and the formation of values. How might the increasing exposure to stories of violence and death be shaping the values and worldviews of Millennials? Are there both positive and negative effects of such exposure? And in what ways might the historical resources on “mindfulness of death” in philosophical and religious traditions illuminate the contemporary experience of Millennials?

In what follows, we respond to these questions through the use of a mixed methodology. First, drawing from a range of philosophical and religious sources, we provide an overview of “mindfulness of death” as a deliberate, or voluntary, practice. Drawing from the work of Pierre Hadot, we describe “mindfulness of death” as a “spiritual exercise” that carries a set of commonly experienced effects upon practitioners. Then, complementing this humanities research, we analyze the results of a survey we conducted with a population of Millennials. The aim of the survey, which included both qualitative and quantitative elements, was to provide a snapshot of the experiences of Millennials related to death and media, and of the values and beliefs Millennials hold. By combining historical concepts and teachings on mindfulness of death with self-reported data from individuals from the Millennial generation, we have found valuable insights into the motivations driving Millennial behavior and have identified promising areas for further study.
Review of Relevant Literature

Practices of Mindfulness

We can begin by considering what these spiritual exercises look like in practice as well as the intended effects on one who practices. Many philosophers and theologians have come to the conclusion that humanity is experiencing a skewed relationship with death. As a result, the historical tradition of voluntarily “calling to mind” mortality has been developed in several philosophical and religious traditions as a spiritual exercise designed to realign this skewed relationship. These spiritual exercises are often referred to as the practice of mindfulness of death. Mindfulness is defined as “purposeful, nonjudgmental, present-moment awareness, and is the psychological state brought on by meditation” (Park & Pyszczynski 101). Mindfulness of death can happen both voluntarily and involuntarily. “Every intentional state that has some type of death as its object is an instance of ‘remembrance of death’” (Hamalis 85). Intentionality is the key in distinguishing the two forms; one can involuntarily become aware of death or one can voluntarily ‘call to mind’ thoughts of death resulting in a practice, or spiritual exercise, of mindfulness of death. Voluntary mindfulness of death is used in several religious traditions for positive moral transformation.

Voluntary Mindfulness

One of the earliest traditions involving the practice of voluntary mindfulness of death is that of the Stoics. Stoicism is often associated with the rejection of passion and the adoption of indifference to pain and pleasure through mindfulness and meditation. These ideas are somewhat consistent with Epicurus’ goal of achieving “freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind” (Choron 60). Stoicism has been criticized for its unwillingness to mourn or grieve. Christian values, in particular, contradicted these teachings. Central to Christianity are ideas of
“the goodness of creation, the positive role of emotions in the moral life, and the importance of relationality” (Scherz 8). One of the criticisms related to Stoicism is that it devalues relationships with others. Scherz defended stoicism in his article, “Grief, Death, and Longing in Stoic and Christian Ethics”, arguing that the more important aim in ancient Roman Stoicism is “to help individuals relate better to the divine and to others through an understanding of death that would allow a focus on present obligations of care by dissipating anxiety about the future” (Scherz 8). In other words, developing a comfortability and an understanding of the inevitability of death created an emphasis on the present and relieved anxieties related to the future. This understanding comes not from the “ability to repeat doctrine”, as an act of memorization, but through “a lifetime of meditation and ascetic exercises” through which the central teachings of Stoicism formed a person’s entire worldview (Scherz 10).

Another way to understand these practices is through the lenses of ancient Greek and Christian philosophy. Evagrius, an early Christian philosopher, talked of humanity being created to “contemplate God”, a practice to which he likened “contemplation of the Trinity,” which was synonymous to the “practice of death.” He described this practice as a model for the “monk’s self-unification through withdrawal and ascetic practice” (Zecher 68). St. John Climacus similarly constructed a practice of “contemplation of death” through ascetic withdrawal as a means to mimic the state of death and resurrection, thus bringing one further into union with God (Zecher 70). Christians through the ages have adopted Climacus’s teachings of taking up one’s cross, in other words, dying to one’s own will, to follow Christ. From a Christian perspective, those who do this will experience the joy of God’s will being carried out in their lives.

Nicole Kelley, in her work titled: “Philosophy as Training for Death: Reading the Ancient Christian Martyr Acts as Spiritual Exercises”, writes that ancient philosophy “can be described as
an exercise in learning to regard both individuals and society from an objective point of view” (735). People who could master such a point of view were expected to be able to live independent of needs and desires related to human existence such as pleasure, pain, wealth, success, etc. and attain a perspective of objectivity and universality – in other words, be able to see the ‘bigger picture’ – in turn, understanding that death is a natural part of that bigger picture. She points out that a similar idea is expressed in relation to Christian martyrdom: that martyr acts “tend to emphasize God’s control over heaven and earth” (735) or the idea that individuals are not in control and should adopt a more universal lens or viewpoint. We see these ideas present in modern day Christianity as well. Many Christians understand death to be part of God’s will for people – a part of life. When death or suffering takes place, many Christians hold to the belief that God is in control and the will of God is being carried out.

The ancient tradition of Buddhism provides us with additional context of what it looks like to practice mindfulness of death and what effects are expected. According to Shonin and Van Gordon in *Mindfulness of Death*, Buddhist suttas on mindfulness include important emphasis on “cultivating mindfulness of death and impermanence” (464). This practiced state of enlightenment then allows one to transcend worries associated with the mortal life and dwell in a state of harmonious relationship to the people and things in one’s life as well as death. Park and Pyszczynski echo that the practice of mindfulness “reduces suffering by keeping people aware of the transitory nature of experience” and encourages them to withhold judgement or the urge to withdraw from it. (103) In other words, practicing mindfulness of death should decrease suffering such as anxieties or fears related to death.

Studies in modern psychology have inquired about the ways in which we find happiness and shape our worldviews as well. A study published in 2010 concluded that one’s priorities shifted
“toward more emotionally enriching human relationships” and away from professional ambitions, wealth aspirations, etc. when on the brink of death. Additionally, participants considering the meaning of ‘time’ were more inclined to choose spending time with loved ones and focusing on enjoying daily life (Mogilner 773). One could argue that practicing mindfulness of death involves heavy consideration of the meaning of ‘time’ and upon practice would result in one choosing to invest more time in relationships and daily enjoyment and less in professional ambitions or wealth acquisition.

**Involuntary Mindfulness**

Involuntary mindfulness of death is a more complicated form. Involuntary mindfulness of death can happen in response to historical events, such as the attacks of September 11, 2001 or the death tolls of school shootings in America, such as Sandy Hook. Exposure to these types of events can take over one’s consciousness and may lead one to reflect on their own death or the possible death of those near them (Hamalis 87). Another known form of involuntary mindfulness can happen where one is overcome by a supernatural or mystical state, experiencing insights that are generally described as ‘gifts’ from God (Hamalis 95). In most forms, one experiences involuntary mindfulness of death when deliberately faced with ideas of death, or tragedy happens before one’s eyes.

Involuntary mindfulness can also happen more subliminally. A study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* pointed out that certain defenses can arise in a person when they “consciously contemplate their mortality” but these defenses are delayed or become distant. In other words, conscious contemplation of mortality can create a despondency or desensitization to death where one’s defenses become less and less apparent. However, defenses related to bolstering world-view arise immediately “when death reminders are presented
subliminally” or when “thoughts of death are on the fringes of consciousness.” These findings suggest that people tend to turn to building up their respective worldviews when thoughts of death are “highly accessible but not in current focal attention” (Park & Pyszczynski 102). These findings could also support the behavior of reflecting upon or working to better one’s worldview in response to frequent exposure to death-related media. For example, if one were to begin the day watching a news story of a bombing in Iraq followed by reminders of other death-related happenings throughout the day, they may be likely to have existential thoughts, consider their worldview or spend time turning to their respective faith. One could then begin to imagine the potential effect of factoring in the frequency of this cycle of events in today’s age of media.

Since the attack on the World Trade Center, troops have been in Afghanistan, bombs have decimated cities, and world hunger and poverty remain rampant. Millennials have been raised during a death-stricken era uniquely portrayed by the media. Though many have experienced direct exposure (i.e. school/neighborhood shootings), the majority are being exposed indirectly through ever-accessible personal technology. Thus far, research has been done on Millennials, general death perceptions, and media consumption as individual factors, but there is limited research or conversation happening around the combination of these factors. That said, the aim of the present research study is exploratory. It seeks to begin the conversation about the implications of heightened death-related media exposure on young people. Is it possible that Millennials are experiencing detachment and desensitization to death as a result? Or if exposure to death-related media is considered an involuntary form of mindfulness of death, is the Millennial generation experiencing the positive effects of an enlightened relationship with death similar to that of voluntary forms? Perhaps having death on the ‘fringes of consciousness’ is causing Millennials to rethink or bolster their worldviews. We conducted a survey to gain insight into these questions.
Methodology

A survey was used to procure data on the attitudes and behaviors of millennials in relation to death and media exposure. Participants of the survey were solicited via email and social media over several weeks (see Appendix A for samples of the communications as well as the survey). A link to the survey was shared and re-shared on multiple social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Emails were pushed out to Faculty of North Central College with an invitation to share the survey with people within the targeted age group.

Sample

Data was collected from 86 respondents. Targeted participants were members of the Millennial generation. Oxford dictionary defines the millennial generation as “people reaching young adulthood in the early 21st century.” Several researchers define it specifically as those born between 1981 and 1996. Therefore, eligible data included responses of those ages 22-37. Due to sharing capabilities via social media, some data was submitted from outside of the United States, however that data was not eligible for inclusion.

Measures

The survey includes demographics of age, sex, education level, occupation, marital status, and country of residence. Remaining items on the survey were adapted from existing Likert scales measuring attitudes towards death and some items were open-ended questions. Quantitative data was then analyzed using Qualtrics. Open-ended questions were analyzed for trends or common themes by three independent readers. Qualtrics was used for the survey and automatically de-identified all participants, providing an anonymous database.
Limitations and Future Research

A potential limitation of the study was that of the population surveyed, the vast majority were female, many of which currently had occupations in the medical field. This factor could represent a bias in the study. It would be beneficial for future researchers to secure a more diverse group of participants. Given more time and resources, a researcher could perform this study over several generations or incorporate factors of religiosity.
Results Pt. 1

In the following section, we present the most pertinent results from the survey. Among the presented results are questions that were analyzed with this frame in mind: are millennials experiencing effects of involuntary mindfulness similar to the expected effects as laid out by philosophers and those that practice mindfulness of death, (i.e. emphasis on relationships, new perspectives on time and meaning, detachment and desensitization of death, etc.)?

The following survey results (Figures 1-4) used scales developed by Eric Petty, et al. to measure death perspectives. The complete table of results can be found in the appendices (Appendix B). Each figure is followed by discussion connecting the results to the larger framework present in this study.

Death Perspectives

Figure 1.

The above scales suggest that all participants agree, at least to an extent, that death is a natural part of life. The majority believe that death is not inherently evil. Almost all participants
generally agree that death is not evil and that it’s natural – one may conclude that participants seem to have a healthy and somewhat comfortable relationship with death.

**Death and Relationships**

**Figure 2.**

The above three scales have to do with attitudes about relationships and death. The first scale suggests that most participants agree that death brings people together – they recognize the element of relationality in events of death. The second two scales have to do with participants’ worldviews in relation to death and the value of relationships. The majority believe their life is valued by the relationships they have with others. An even larger number of participants believed their last days should be spent with loved ones. Results suggest that a strong relationship exists between people’s perceptions of the value of life and death – relationships seem to bring value to
both. These results appear to be consistent with Mogilner’s study, suggesting that a consideration of mortality and time leads one to place more value on human relationships (Mogilner).

**Comfortability with Death**

**Figure 3.**

The above scales suggest that participants are more comfortable thinking about their own death than the death of loved ones. It would be interesting to learn if participants think about death in terms of natural causes such as old age, or in terms of a ‘premature’ death such as a homicide or car accident and how, if at all, that would affect their responses. These results could also suggest characteristics of selflessness among participants, which is contrary to the image of Millennials as the “me” generation. One might expect the data to show a self-protective instinct, resulting in a majority of participants strongly avoiding thinking about their own death – something personal that people generally fear.
Death and the Media

Figure 4.

Most participants disagree that the media should not show images of death and dying. This suggests a level of comfortability with the subjects of death and dying and further suggests people see both a need and a potential to normalize such subjects through use of media. Perhaps upon reflection, participants recognize a change in their own level of comfortability with death in relation to the amount of death-related media to which they have been exposed, the response to the survey question then dependent on whether the change was positive or negative.
Results Pt. 2

The following set of results (Figures 5-8) are based on open-ended survey questions we developed to provide context and insight beyond what could be extracted from the scales.

Figure 5.

Question 25: “Do you believe exposure to death related media has influenced your life in any way? (Goals, behaviors, thoughts, habits, etc.) Please explain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories Used for Trend Analysis:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death Awareness</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time/ Meaningful</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caution/ Fear</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desensitized</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on Relationships</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to the question, 20 people discussed having a greater general awareness of death or the possibility of it, while 16 said exposure has not influenced their life. In 13 of the responses, the individual discussed a desire to make the time they have more meaningful or valuable. We saw some overlap in the “Time/ Meaningful” category and the “Emphasis on Relationships” category with five individuals noting a greater focus on relationships and loved ones and four of those five desiring to make time more meaningful or valuable. In terms of fear-related influence, 11 people discussed being more fearful or cautious in their everyday lives. And overall, seven individuals reported becoming desensitized to death-related media due to heavy exposure.

This question prompts discussion related to the study looking at “when death reminders are presented subliminally” or when “thoughts of death are on the fringes of consciousness” (Park & Pyszczynski 102). The study concluded that when this happens, people tend to build up their
respective worldviews or work to better them. Our findings seem to echo these results, that in addition to a general awareness of death or the possibility of death, many found themselves wanting to shift attention and time to more meaningful things in their lives. It is likely people experienced a desire to build their worldview as well, perhaps as a defense mechanism or as an effect of an enlightened state.

**Figure 6.**

Question 21: “Which events from the news do you remember most clearly?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories Used for Trend Analysis:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shootings</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Disasters</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a Famous Person</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive News</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note* This question was asked towards the end of the survey; therefore, participants were primed with thoughts of violence and death by previous questions – possibly influencing their memory recall of events they remember from the news.

Of the events people remembered most clearly from the news, there were strong themes of death and tragedy. The attack of September 11th, for example, was an event listed by well over half of participants. People connect to these events emotionally and often find that their memory recalls them most easily. It makes one wonder whether news companies incorporate this into tactics to keep the attention of the viewer.
Many respondents had not witnessed an event first-hand, though some had witnessed a violent event of a physical nature or been affected by a school shooting. As noted earlier, much of the exposure Millennials is happening indirectly via media platforms. It is important here to contemplate the power of digital media and the differences between witnessing a violent event first-hand versus through the screen. It would also be interesting to see if participants who have witnessed a violent event first-hand showed variations in their attitudes about death. Furthermore, it would be fascinating to conduct this research across multiple generations and study the differences in first-hand exposure to violence.

Many participants reported that they had at least heard of the practice of mindfulness and in a previous question, proved that they understood the typical effects of such practice. Almost all
participants either agreed that practicing mindfulness of death could help them feel more comfortable with death or were open to the idea. These results suggest a possible desire among participants to become more comfortable with their own death. It would be interesting to study if participants believe that becoming comfortable with death is important or even desirable and if they, upon recognizing the value of practicing mindfulness of death, would implement the practice of voluntary mindfulness of death into their lives.
Conclusion

Millennials seem to understand that being exposed to death-related media is changing their relationship to death. Our results suggest that Millennials are more aware of death and the possibility of it in their everyday lives and that they are making positive changes in response to this increased awareness. Much research has been conducted on the Millennial generation over the last several years. Within this research, many studies have sought to identify and understand the purchasing and spending habits of Millennials, the kinds of things that appeal to them, the best ways to manipulate or respond to their consumption patterns, etc. Furthermore, many have theorized about the behavior of Millennials, making claims about parenting styles or the use of technology; however, there seems to have been little thought given to the less obvious factors. Perhaps technology alone is not what’s effecting today’s young adults but instead the content being produced and poured out of it.

Humanity has long sought to understand matters of life and death, and, historically, philosophical and religious traditions have made death a central theme. In Plato’s dialogue, the Phaedo, Socrates famously states that “all of philosophy is training for death” (Zecher 66). Modern Western thought has largely cast aside these matters to be explored and explained through the lens of religion or popular culture, leaving many in the western world to be without discourse or regular exposure to more positive views of death. With media consumption at an all-time high and an increased concentration of death-related content, it may be time we start asking an age-old question again, along with its contemporary follow up questions: how does awareness of death shape human life? How is increased exposure to death-related media affecting peoples’ perceptions of death, and how are those perceptions affecting worldviews, consumption patterns, aspirations, happiness, etc.? Is the phenomenon something we should be trying to understand at a deeper level? Perhaps,
with further research, the “me generation” will reveal insights valuable to us and to generations to come.
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Appendix

A. Survey

Start of Block: Welcome & Informed Consent

Welcome to the research study! Thank you in advance for your participation.
The purpose of this study is to provide a snapshot of the relationship between one's perceptions/attitudes towards death and media consumption. You will be presented with questions that aim to explore those relationships. I ask that you answer the questions as thoughtfully and truthfully as possible. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential as they are de-identified through Qualtrics.

Please understand that you may become uncomfortable at some point in the survey due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions and reserve the right to not respond to a given question and to stop participating at any time. You are encouraged to seek out a mental health resource if you become uncomfortable with the survey questions.

For North Central students, faculty, and staff, Dyson Wellness Center is available. Counseling will only be provided to students enrolled at North Central College. Non-North Central students, as well as faculty and staff, who wish to participate in counseling are encouraged to seek services in their respective locations as needed. If you have any other questions/concerns or wish to follow up upon completion of the survey, please contact Dr. Perry Hamalis.

Dyson Wellness Center
Phone: 630.637.5550
Fax: 630.637.5554
Location: 455 S. Brainard Street Naperville, IL 60540
2nd floor of Benedetti-Wehrli Stadium

Dr. Perry Hamalis
Email: pthamalis@noctrl.edu
Professor of Religious Studies
North Central College 30 N. Brainard St. Naperville, IL (USA) 60540 630-637-5318

This survey should take between 7-15 minutes to complete.

Contact: Kaylee Lessen
Email: kalessen@noctrl.edu

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your
participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

- I consent, begin the study (1)
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (2)

Q1.2 What year were you born?

________________________________________________________________

Q31 In what country are you currently residing?

________________________________________________________________

Q1.3 What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school degree (1)
- High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED) (2)
- Some college but no degree (3)
- Associate degree in college (2-year) (4)
- Bachelor's degree in college (4-year) (5)
- Master's degree (6)
- Doctoral degree (7)
- Professional degree (JD, MD) (8)
Q1.4 What is your sex?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)

Q1.5 What is your occupation?

________________________________________________________________

Q1.6 What is/was your major?

________________________________________________________________

Q1.7 What is your marital status?

- Married (1)
- Widowed (2)
- Divorced (3)
- Separated (4)
- Never Married (5)

End of Block: Welcome & Informed Consent

Start of Block: Attitudes about death
Q15 Please indicate your response to the statement using the provided scale.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I believe that my death will take away opportunities to achieve my goals. (1)</th>
<th>Strongly agree (1)</th>
<th>Agree (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (3)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (4)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (5)</th>
<th>Disagree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe there are many things I will miss out on when I die. (2)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often think of life in terms of time left until death. (3)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that my death will leave my loved ones emotionally stranded (4)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that death marks the end of my relationships with loved ones. (5)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that death is something evil. (6)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I believe I will unite with God or another higher power after I die. (7)

I believe God or a higher power awaits my loved ones after they die. (8)

I believe that death is a natural part of life. (9)

I believe that death brings people together. (10)

I believe that life is honored by death. (11)

When I think about my death, I am often concerned about the things I may have not yet achieved. (12)

I try not to think about my death or dying. (13)
I try not to think about the death of my loved ones. (14)

I believe that the media should not show images of death and dying. (15)

I believe that advances in technology should focus on protecting people from natural disasters. (16)

I would appreciate the opportunity to express my experience of dying with others. (17)

I regularly think about how I will distribute the meaningful tokens of my life when I die. (18)
I believe that the value of my life is measured by my relationships with others. (19)

I believe that my last days should be spent with family and friends. (20)

I believe that I would be open to discussions with loved ones concerning their experiences of dying. (21)

---

End of Block: Attitudes about death

Start of Block: Voluntary
Q16 Do you follow anyone on social media battling terminal illness? If yes, which of these reasons is closest to why you follow that individual?

- I know them personally (1)
- They are an acquaintance (2)
- I don't know them personally but I enjoy following their journey (3)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree (1)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (2)</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (4)</th>
<th>Disagree (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I tend to seek out more news media when a tragic event happens. (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to distance myself from news media when a tragic event happens. (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I watch more violent television now than I did a year ago. (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I watch less violent television now than I did a year ago. (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel less bothered by violent or death-related material than I did a year ago. (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more bothered by violent or death-related material than I did a year ago. (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lessen
I am aware of the possibility of a shooter coming into my school or workplace. (7)

I frequently think about violent events that have happened. (8)

Q18 What kind of events prompt you to seek additional news media? Check all that apply.

☐ Sports (1)
☐ Elections (2)
☐ Natural disasters (3)
☐ Mass shootings (4)
☐ Other (5) ________________________________________________
Q19 What kind of events prompt you to distance yourself from news media? Check all that apply.

- Sports (1)
- Elections (2)
- Natural disasters (3)
- Mass shootings (4)
- Other (5) ________________________________________________

End of Block: Voluntary

Start of Block: Involuntary

Q20 How often was the news on in your house growing up?

- Never (1)
- Rarely (2)
- Sometimes (3)
- Often (4)
- Very Often (5)
- Always (6)

Q21 Which events from the news do you remember most clearly? (Please list)

________________________________________________________________
Q22 On a scale of 1-5, how much of the material was death or violence related? (1 being none and 5 being almost all)

- 1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)

End of Block: Involuntary

Start of Block: Open-Ended Questions

Q23 Have you witnessed a violent event first-hand? Please describe the situation.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q24 Have you experienced the death of a loved one in the last 3 months?

________________________________________________________________

Q25 Do you believe exposure to death related media has influenced your life in any way? (Goals, behaviors, thoughts, habits, etc.) Please explain.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
Q26 Have you heard of "practicing mindfulness"? If yes, in what context?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q27 In your own words, what do you think "mindfulness" is?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q28 Have you ever practiced mindfulness?

________________________________________________________________

Q29 Do you believe practicing mindfulness of death might help you feel more comfortable with the subject of death?

________________________________________________________________
Q30 Thank you for participating in this survey. Your response is sincerely appreciated! Your response will help provide more of an understanding of the way individuals think about death and death-related media. I hope through participation of this survey you were able to practice self-reflection and begin to think about positive ways you can become more comfortable with the subject of death. If you became uncomfortable by any content in this survey and wish to consult Dyson Wellness Center or Dr. Perry Hamalis, please do so through the following contact information:

**Dyson Wellness Center**
**Phone:** 630.637.5550  
**Fax:** 630.637.5554  
**Location:** 455 S. Brainard Street  
Naperville, IL 60540  
2nd floor of Benedetti-Wehrli Stadium

**Dr. Perry Hamalis**
**Email:** pthamalis@noctrl.edu  
Professor of Religious Studies  
North Central College  
30 N. Brainard St.  
Naperville, IL (USA) 60540  630-637-5318
### B. Survey Results from Question 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I believe that my death will take away opportunities to achieve my goals.</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.26%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>10.26%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I believe there are many things I will miss out on when I die.</td>
<td>21.79%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31.62%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15.16%</td>
<td>11.16%</td>
<td>11.16%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I often think of life in terms of time left until death.</td>
<td>5.13%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.56%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.51%</td>
<td>16.36%</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I believe that my death will leave my loved ones emotionally stranded</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.41%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25.84%</td>
<td>20.62%</td>
<td>6.41%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I believe that death marks the end of my relationships with loved ones.</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.36%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15.36%</td>
<td>12.61%</td>
<td>6.41%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I believe that death is something evil.</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.41%</td>
<td>6.41%</td>
<td>10.26%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I believe I will unite with God or another higher power after I die.</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20.51%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>6.15%</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I believe God or a higher power sees my loved ones after they die.</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>15.36%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>6.15%</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I believe that death is a natural part of life.</td>
<td>60.26%</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.28%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I believe that death brings people together.</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42.31%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td>21.16%</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I believe that life is honored by death.</td>
<td>12.82%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25.64%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>25.64%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>When I think about my death, I am often concerned about the things I may have not yet achieved.</td>
<td>10.26%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>25.64%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I try not to think about my death or dying.</td>
<td>15.36%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20.51%</td>
<td>16.22%</td>
<td>12.82%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I try not to think about the death of my loved ones.</td>
<td>32.05%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24.36%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24.36%</td>
<td>19.52%</td>
<td>8.97%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I believe that the media should not show images of death and dying.</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.13%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.97%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I believe that advances in technology should focus on protecting people from natural disasters.</td>
<td>15.36%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35.90%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20.51%</td>
<td>16.79%</td>
<td>21.79%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I would appreciate the opportunity to express my experience of dying with others.</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21.79%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.95%</td>
<td>14.79%</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I regularly think about how I will distribute the meaningful tokens of my life when I die.</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.51%</td>
<td>16.22%</td>
<td>12.82%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I believe that the value of my life is measured by my relationships with others.</td>
<td>25.64%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.87%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>15.64%</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Number</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I believe that my last days should be spent with family and friends.</td>
<td>61.54%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I believe that I would be open to discussions with loved ones concerning their experiences of dying.</td>
<td>29.49%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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