Pacific
University
Oregon

ORAL PRESENTATION   **Open Access**

To Celebrate or to Mourn: Death Perspectives, Religious Practice, & Life Satisfaction

Majestik De Luz and Tyler Burnett
Presented to Research Methods, Dr. H. Island, Pacific University, Forest Grove, OR. May 3rd, 2022

Introduction

Millennials and Generation Z are the two youngest adult generational cohorts and collectively comprise the bulk of the United States population (Statistica Research Department, 2021). These two generations share several common characteristics that contrast from older generations. For example, they are similar in their views of family and societal changes such as support for gay and interracial marriage and single-mother families (Parker & Igielnik, R., 2022). Despite positive commonalties, these two cohorts have also faced unique struggles. Analyzing data from the CDC and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration from 2005 to 2017, Twenge and her colleagues (2019) found symptoms of major depression increased by 63% in adults 18-25 and 52% in adolescents 12-17. For anxiety, a 2021 survey with over 100,000 respondents indicated that 31% of college students have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (Elflein, 2022). Also, a 2020 survey of over 10,000 people found that 71% of millennials and nearly 79% of Gen Z respondents report feeling lonely (Cigna). Lastly, a study of over 35,000 people in the U.S., found that Christianity and Catholicism comprise 70% of religious affiliations; but, only 17% of Christians and 17% of Catholics are within the 18-29 age cohort (Pew Research Center, 2020). While this reduction of happiness can be attributed to different factors, it is brought up with the concept death because of how death itself is an experience that is shared throughout all religions and cultures (Gire, 2014). For the first time in recorded history, less than half of adults in the U.S. regularly attend church and this largely has to do with the lack of religious affiliation (Jones, 2021). This shift in religious perspective has resulted in a loss of traditional communities which help to conceptualize and provide support when death occurs (Breen et al., 2020). During the pandemic, Sirrine and her colleagues (2021) collected a sample of 162 undergraduate and graduate students in the U.S. and found that students reported feelings of grief and loss while 82% felt a loss of social connection. With this confrontation of loss and dying, it is important to discuss how death is handled in our culture and to recognize that it should not be a secret or unforeseen occurrence, rather, it should be understood as a certain and somewhat planned experience (Carr, 2012).

Empirical Question

Is there a significant relationship between life satisfaction scores and religious perspectives and/or perspectives of death and dying?

Participants

The participants for this study will be solicited from Pacific University College of Arts and Sciences undergraduate students. Pacific University's undergraduate demographics show the average age of the population is 21 years old, females represent over 60% of the population based on the demographic data on the Pacific University website. The demographic ethnic identities of the population reported through College Factual (2021) are 10.5% Hispanic, .5% black or African American, and 11% Asian.

Proposed Method

The materials for this study included a standard demographic measure as well as the following published, cited measures:

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SLS) measures a person's own self-awareness of their life though five items on a seven-point Likert-like scale (Diener et al., 1985).

Meaning of Life Questionnaire (MLQ) is a ten-item measure on a seven-point Likert scale consisting of two subscales, the Presence of Meaning, measuring respondents' current feelings of meaning and fulfillment, and the Search for Meaning, measuring how motivated respondents are in finding meaning and understanding (Steger et al., 2006).

Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale – General (PANAS-GEN) measures mood through the distinct subscales of positive and negative affect through a list of 20 emotions measured by a five-point Likert scale (Watson et al., 1988).

Death Transcendence Scale (DTS) assesses an individual's desire to transcend death and to be remembered as individuals measured by a four-point Likert Scale with 5 modes, each containing five items (Vandecreek & Nye, 1993, p. 283).

Death Attitude Profile – Revised (DAP-R) is a seven-point Likert-like Scale which investigates an individual's attitude towards death (Wong et al., 1994, p. 121-148).

We will use convenience sampling to gather a desired sample sized of 100 through flyers, social media, and announcements, as well as snowball. In this ABA experimental design, the first phase (A) is a survey through Qualtrics® titled "Death Perspectives, Religious Perspectives, and Life Satisfaction" including all materials listed and demographic questions. This establishes a baseline for the dependent variables of death perspectives, categorized as mournful or celebratory and evaluated through the DTS and the DAP-R; and life satisfaction, measured through the Satisfaction with Life Scale, PANAS-GEN, and the MLQ. For the second phase (B), the independent variable of religious/spiritual practices will be manipulated. Participants will be randomly assigned to four conditions, including a control. In three conditions, participants will be assigned to a religious/spiritual practice (i.e., gratitude reflection, body scan meditation, or Yin yoga). Appropriate statistical analyses will be completed using SPSS®.

Proposed Results

The results will be interpreted using paired t-tests and MANOVAs. For significant main effects and interactions, we will conduct effect size estimates and a post-hoc Bonferroni adjustment. Internal consistency for each measure will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient analysis.

Conclusion

We anticipate the results will demonstrate that incorporating types of religious practices, separated from religious affiliation, increase life satisfaction scores in our experimental group. Additionally, those who hold a more celebratory view of death will have higher life satisfaction scores than those who hold a more mournful approach. Lastly, we expect to see a correlation between both Fear of Death and Death Avoidance and low life satisfaction scores.

*Pacific University, Department of Psychology,
Forest Grove, OR 97116, Email: delu9181@pacificu.edu

References

Breen, L. J., Kawashima, D., Joy, K., Cadell, S., Roth, D., Chow, A., & Macdonald, M. E. (2020). Grief literacy: A call to action for compassionate communities. *Death Studies*, *46*(2), 425–433.

Carr, D. (2012). Death and dying in the contemporary United States: What are the psychological implications of anticipated death? *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 6(2),184–195.

Cigna. (2020). *Loneliness is at epidemic levels in America*. Cigna Newsroom. Retrieved April 17, 2022, newsroom.cigna.com/loneliness-in-america

College Factual. (2021). *Pacific University Diversity: Racial Demographics & Other Stats*. College Factual. Retrieved November 22, 2021

Diener E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985) The Satisfaction With Life Scale, *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49(1)*, 71-75, DOI: 10.1207/s15327752jpa4901_13

Elflein, J. (2022, March 3). *Percentage of college students with mental disorders U.S. 2021*. Statista. Retrieved April 17, 2022, www.statista.com/statistics/1126287/percentage-of-college-students-with-mental-disorders-us/

Gire, J. (2014). How death imitates life: Cultural influences on conceptions of death and dying. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, *6*(2). https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1120

Jones, J. M. (2021, November 20). *U.S. church membership falls below majority for first time*. Gallup.https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx.

Parker, K., & Igielnik, R. (2022, April 1). *On the cusp of adulthood and facing an uncertain future: What we know about gen Z so far*. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. Retrieved April 17, 2022, www.pewresearch.org/socialtrends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/#fnref-28453-1

Pew Research Center. (2020, September 9). *Religious Landscapes Study*. https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/

Sirrine, E. H., Kliner, O., & Gollery, T. J. (2021). College student experiences of grief and loss amid the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 003022282110274. https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228211027461

Statista Research Department. (2021, September 10). *U.S. population by generation 2019*. Statista. Retrieved April 17, 2022, www.statista.com/statistics/797321/us-population-by-generation/

Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The meaning in life questionnaire: Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *53(1),* 80–93.

Twenge, J. M., Cooper, A. B., Joiner, T. E., Duffy, M. E., & Binau, S. G. (2019). Age, period, and cohort trends in mood disorder indicators and suicide-related outcomes in a Nationally Representative Dataset, 2005–2017. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *128*(3), 185–199. doi.org/10.1037/abn0000410

Vandecreek, L., & Nye, C. (1993). Testing the Death Transcendence Scale. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 32(3), 279. https://doi.org/10.2307/1386666

Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(6), 1063–1070. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.6.1063

Wong, P. T. P., Reker, G. T., & Gesser, G. (1994). Death Attitude Profile – Revised: A multidimensional measure of attitudes toward death (DAP-R). In R. A. Neimeyer (Ed.), Death anxiety handbook: Research, instrumentation, and application (pp. 121-148). Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis

*Pacific University, Department of Psychology,
 Forest Grove, OR 97116, Email: delu9181@pacificu.edu