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Death-as-Life-Affirming: Development and Validation of the Death Mindsets Measure

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The present research validated the Death Mindsets Measure (DMM), which assesses the mindsets people hold about death. While existing psychological frameworks and measures focus on death as anxiety-inducing, this measure identifies an overlooked perspective—that death can be a basis for living more presently and meaningfully.

The creation of the DMM comprises three sequential studies: qualitative analysis, scale development, and scale validation. For Study 1, the first author facilitated group discussions about death across the U.S. with 130 diverse participants. The qualitative data from these discussions were coded for key themes about the nature and workings of death. Study 2 determined the measure's structure. Items corresponding to the themes generated from Study 1 were developed and piloted with a sample of 282 online participants. Through factor analyses, the key mindset that "death-is-life-affirming" emerged. For Study 3, the finalized DMM was administered to 381 online participants during a global pandemic, during which death was especially salient. The DMM showed high internal consistency and was a distinct construct. Critically, the death-as-life-affirming mindset related to fewer depressive symptoms, lower health anxiety, greater life satisfaction, and greater positive affect over and above existing measures of death attitudes—particularly among participants grieving deaths from COVID-19.

Biography

Michelle Chang received a BA in Psychology from Stanford University. She is a current U.S.-Norway Fulbright scholar at the University of Bergen engaging in cross-cultural research on bereavement, and she hopes to eventually pursue a Clinical Psychology PhD in the U.S.

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